

Dust of Snow

- Robert Frost

Theme of the poem

The theme of Robert Frost's poem "Dust of Snow" is nature's capacity for transformation, including how it can alter one's attitude and viewpoint. The crow and the Hemlock tree, both considered inauspicious, alter his mood from that of regret to joyous.

Paraphrase for first stanza

The poem is set in a scene where the poet is in a bad mood and is walking by a tree, a hemlock tree. Hemlock tree is a poisonous tree. As he passes by, a crow happens to throw some snow dust on him. Whether it falls on his head or shoulders is unknown as there is no specific mention in the poem. Also, the readers are left in doubt about the bird's specific action. Whether the crow was landing, shivering with cold, re adjusting itself on the branch or taking off, it happened to send some particles of snow upon the author. Here, the two agents of nature, the hemlock tree and the crow are signifiers of sadness and gloom just like the poet's mood was in the opening scene.

Paraphrase for second stanza

For reasons unknown, the author was having a terrible day. But the falling of the snow on his head lifted his mood instantly. He had already spent his day in a bad mood but the rest of it was saved by the crow and the hemlock tree. Generally, hemlock tree and crow are used for negative references but the poet used them beautifully to portray that inauspicious things can bring joy and happiness too. One must not take things for granted and should be open and accept whichever way the nature chooses to bless us.

Literary Devices

1. **Rhyme Scheme-** abab cdcd
2. **Alliteration-** The occurrence of the same letter or sound at the beginning of adjacent or closely connected words.
Example: 1. Has given my hear
 2. And saved some part
3. **Inversion-** When the structure of a sentence is changed by the poet to create rhyme, this poetic license is called inversion.
Example: In stanza 1, inversion can be seen.
4. **Enjambment-** When the same sentence continues to the next line without the use of any punctuation marks, it is called enjambment. It has been used throughout the poem.

Thinking about the poem

1. What is a "dust of snow"? What does the poet say has changed his mood? How has the poet's mood changed?

Answer: "Dust of snow" refers to the tiny particles of snow. The particles are so small that poet referred to them as "dust". The poet was in an awful mood when particles of snow had fallen on him. This changed the poet's frame of mind instantly and his day got a lot better.

Q 2. How does Frost present nature in this poem? The following questions may help you to think of an answer.

- (i) What are the birds that are usually named in poems? Do you think a crow is often mentioned in poems? What images come to your mind when you think of a crow?
- (ii) Again, what is "a hemlock tree"? Why doesn't the poet write about a more 'beautiful' tree such as a maple, or an oak, or a pine?
- (iii) What do the 'crow' and 'hemlock' represent — joy or sorrow? What does the dust of snow that the crow shakes off a hemlock tree stand for?

Answer:

- (i) Birds like sparrow, nightingale and peacock are more than often named in poems. Unlike these birds, crows are often seen as the indicators of doom and fear. They are often used for negative references.
- (ii) Trees are also seen as mighty creatures imparting wisdom as they're too old. They give out oxygen and absorb the carbon dioxide which is connected with absorbing all the negative energy. But there are trees that are poisonous too, like a hemlock tree. The poet does not mention a more 'beautiful' tree such as maple, oak or pine because he wants to indicate a sad scene. Being poisonous, a hemlock tree is considered bad and so, he refers to it.
- (iii) Both crow and the hemlock tree represent sorrow. Frost has used both the negative creatures (crow and the hemlock tree) as the carriers of positivism and strength that transformed his day for the better. By not using birds like sparrow and nightingale and trees like maple, oak or a pine, the poet has tried to break down all the preconceived notions we have about certain agents of nature. He has tried to make us understand that we see the world not as how it is, but as how we want to see it. Thus, the crow sitting and a hemlock tree together made his day better. The dust of snow stands for joy.