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# THE INFORMANT

An interdisciplinary newsletter distributed by the Department of Linguistics at Western Michigan University to provide information about developments in linguistics to students, staff, and friends in the field.

## Mystery Character

The first person to identify the mystery character in the following essay will be sanctified in the next issue of THE INFORMANT. Contact the Secretary, Department of Linguistics, 410 Sprau Tower, (38)3-0064.

THE MAN WITH THE HO HO HO:

A SEMANTIC PARALLEL ANALYSIS OF ROBERT FROST'S

"STOPPING BY WOODS ON A SNOWY EVENING"

The narrator of Robert Frost's "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening" has halted his sleigh on a winter evening between a dark woods and frozen lake to watch the silent snowfall and admire the peace and beauty of the countryside. His deep reverie is interrupted by the harness-shaking of his little horse, who is impatient to move on to the next village. The narrator yields reluctantly to his responsibilities and resumes his journey.

## The Symbolism

Such a description of the superficial experience of the poem is insufficient, of course, to justify the high esteem in which the work has been held. Obviously the utterance must do more than report a stopping by woods on a snowy evening: it must furnish a profound interpretation--a symbolism, perhaps. The horse, the village, the woods, the narrator--all may be symbolic of some other meaning. One of the jobs of the analyst is to expose these symbols and reinterpret the poem in the light of the new evidence.

The job of analyzing and reinterpreting Frost's poem has been performed convincingly by John Ciardi in How Does a Poem Mean? (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1959, pp. 671-72). Ciardi regards "Stopping" as a universal statement of the predicament of modern man. The narrator, the man in the sleigh, is a kind of Everyman (though Ciardi does not use this term). He is tugged by opposite forces: his social responsibilities, duties, and obligations (symbolized by the village) and his personal desire for beauty, peace, and, possibly, death (symbolized by the lovely-dark-deep-silent woods). The inner conflict is resolved by a neutral force (the horse), which is neither social nor personal, neither man nor nature, though it possesses some of the features of both. Faced with reality (the horse), Everyman (the narrator) abandons his death-wish (the woods) and returns to life (the village).

### The Imagery

Ciardi's interpretation accounts for all of the symbols in the poem and provides a much more profound reading; but the analysis would be incomplete without an examination of the imagery in the poem as well. Imagery, unlike symbolism, works in front of the scenes rather than behind them; or more exactly, it sets the scenes themselves. Instead of providing abstract meanings for concrete settings (the woods is a symbol of death), imagery provides a clearer picture of the settings. For example, in "Stopping," Frost has done more than tell us that there is a woods. It is "lovely, dark, and deep"; it is isolated from farmhouses and the village; it stands near a frozen lake; it is filling up with snow. The description allows us to "see" the woods as the narrator sees it, to focus on it in our mind's eye, so to speak. Frost sharpens our view of the horse (little, harnessed to a sleigh, used to stopping at farmhouses, impatient to get to the destination) and to some extent the village (distant, housing the owner of the woods, the apparent destination of the narrator); but, partially because the poem is a first person narration, Frost tells us practically nothing about the narrator. The reader is left without a definite image of the central figure in the poem. Why?

### The Self-Image

The reason could hardly be that Frost himself was unable to form an image of Everyman. (Michelangelo, faced with an even greater challenge, drew a remarkable likeness of God.) No, Frost must have wanted his narrator to be formless, nameless, and ageless. He must have wanted us to supply a form and a name and an age from our own experience. In short, he must have wanted us to create an Everyman in our own image. And he must have known that we would do so. After all, symbols are very nice, but they simply do not drive horses in the night between the woods and frozen lake. The narrator may be Man, but he is also a man. Each of Frost's readers will paint his own picture of this man, but the resulting portraits will probably bear a strong resemblance to each other. An examination of these characteristics which men attribute to themselves may help us get at the identity of the narrator.

One would expect man's image of himself to be favorable to himself--flattering. Everyman would be mature rather than immature, generous rather than greedy, happy rather than sad, good rather than bad, masculine rather than feminine, kind rather than cruel, sympathetic rather than unsympathetic, attractive rather than unattractive, intelligent rather than stupid, strong rather than weak, responsible rather than irresponsible. What sort of mature, generous, happy, good, masculine, kind, sympathetic, attractive, intelligent, strong, responsible person would be driving at night in the snow between a woods and frozen lake? A country doctor, perhaps; or an itinerant preacher; or a circuit-riding judge; or a visiting teacher; or a rural mailman; or a traveling salesman; or a wandering poet. Did Frost have one of these stereotypes in mind?

### Semantic Parallel Analysis

The key that may unlock the identity of Frost's Everyman-narrator is semantic parallel analysis. Semantic parallel analysis was developed in 1959 by Archibald A. Hill in an article entitled "Principles Governing Semantic Parallels" (Texas Studies in Literature and Language, vol. I, Autumn, 1959, pp. 356-65; summarized in "Linguistic Principles for Interpreting Meaning," College English, vol. XXII, 1961, pp. 466-73). In the 1959 article Hill

considered the possibility of imagery in two couplets from Frost's poem "Bereft":

- (1) Leaves got up in a coil and hissed  
Blindly struck at my knee and missed.
- (2) Where had I heard this wind before  
Change like this to a deeper roar?

The question was, did Frost intend a "snake" image in couplet (1) and a "lion" image in couplet (2)? Hill's position was that "there was indeed a snake, but ... the lion was unnecessary" (1959, p. 356). The remainder of his article is "an attempt at a justification of this position, together with an exploitation of its theoretical consequences" (1959, p. 356).

Hill accepted the "snake" image but rejected a "lion" image on the basis of the Joos Law, the first law in semantics: "In seeking a translation or paraphrase for a given item, that meaning is best which adds least to the total meaning of the context" (Martin Joos, "Towards a First Theorem in Semantics," a paper delivered before the Linguistic Society of America on December 29, 1953; 1959, p. 356). In other words, don't posit imagery unless you are forced to. What does it take to force acceptance of an image on an interpreter? Hill discovered that an unordered collection of six or more parallel items establishes the significance of an image, and that a minimum of three ordered parallels also renders a significant image--regardless of the larger context. It was on the basis of the ordered parallels that Hill was forced to accept the "snake" image in the first couplet: coiled, hissed, struck, missed. The second couplet ("roared") lacked a sufficient number of either ordered or unordered parallels to force recognition of a "lion."

#### Semantic Parallels in "Stopping"

The application of the ordered type of semantic parallel analysis to Frost's "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening" is hampered by a minimum of action in the poem. The narrator is either stopping his horse or has already stopped his horse when the utterance begins. As he narrates his thoughts to us, the woods is filling up with snow--an action which began before the stopping and will presumably continue afterwards. The horse gives his harness bells a shake; the easy wind sweeps the downy flake. The narrator decides to drive on, though he does not necessarily do so during the course of the utterance. Thus, the action is restricted to stopping (the horse), watching (the narrator), filling (the snow), shaking (the horse), sweeping (the wind), and perhaps thinking (the narrator). No actor performs more than two actions, and no semantic parallels suggest themselves.

On the other hand, the poem contains a sufficient number of static, unordered items to establish a significant image of the Everyman-narrator. Consider the following:

1. The time of day is evening (line 8).
2. It is dark (line 8), and the woods is dark ("The woods are [sic] lovely, dark, and deep," line 13), though there is enough light for the narrator to appreciate the beauty of the woods.
3. The time of the year is late December, when the nights are the longest, and consequently the darkest ("The darkest evening of the year," line 8).
4. It is snowing ("fill up with snow," line 4; "downy flake," line 12).

5. It is cold—the lake is frozen ("frozen lake," line 7).
6. The animal is a little horse ("My little horse," line 5)—perhaps not a horse at all.
7. The animal is accustomed to stopping at houses ("must think it queer/To stop without a farmhouse near," lines 6, 7).
8. The animal is male ("He gives his harness bells a shake," line 9).
9. The animal is harnessed (line 9), indicating that the narrator is not riding him but is riding in a sleigh.
10. The harness bells jingle (line 9).
11. The night is silent ("The only other sound's the sweep/Of easy wind and downy flake," lines 11, 12).
12. The narrator has promises to keep ("But I have promises to keep," line 14)—promises to people, including children?
13. The narrator has miles to go (all around the world?) before he can sleep (the rest of the year?): "And miles to go before I sleep" (lines 15, 16).

### A Reinterpretation

Who drives a sleigh with jingling bells, pulled by a tiny male animal (or animals), through the dark (possibly moonlit), cold, snowy, silent night of late December in order to keep promises to residents of all ages in farmhouses and villages all over the world? \_\_\_\_\_, of course—the mature, generous, happy, good, masculine, kind, sympathetic, attractive, intelligent, strong, responsible figure who is known by all who love Him. The significance of the image is established by—not six, but twice that number of semantic parallels. (If you doubt this, I suggest that you re-read Clement Moore's "'Twas the Night Before Christmas.") Whether consciously or unconsciously, intentionally or unintentionally, Frost has put \_\_\_\_\_ in the driver's seat.

Though it hurts a little to accept this interpretation, the poem need not suffer emasculation because of the new evidence. In fact, such a reading can actually increase the depth of Frost's statement: The poem no longer simply reflects the predicament of us mortals; it also reflects the predicament of our immortals. Man, at least, has a choice between life and death; \_\_\_\_\_—the great gift-giver to whom petitions are sent and bribes are offered—has no choice in this respect at all: He was created by man and can be destroyed only by man. Whereas man can fulfill his death-wish at will, \_\_\_\_\_ can die only if man allows Him to (or, of course, if man himself dies). Man can elect to carry out his responsibilities to his fellow man; \_\_\_\_\_ has no fellow, and He is disenfranchised. For man, the lovely-dark-deep woods symbolizes an attractive and possible way out of life and responsibilities; for \_\_\_\_\_ the woods also symbolizes an attractive "out," but not a possible one. Man can stop his world-sleigh and get off. \_\_\_\_\_ can also stop His sleigh, but He can't get off.

### Conclusion

Frost's consciousness of his \_\_\_\_\_ imagery is another matter. If Frost were alive today, he would most certainly reject it, just as he rejected (by way of ridicule and misunderstanding) Ciardi's interpretation of the woods as death and the hesitation of the driver as a death-wish: "That raises the question lately raised by a friend of mine very much in public as

to whether it's a death poem. And I said to him, 'You could make that out of it, I suppose: "The woods are lovely, dark, and deep,/But I must be getting to Heaven"' (Laughter)" (Yale Series of Recorded Poets, YP320, New Haven, Carillon Records). Ciardi doubted that Frost was conscious of any of his symbolism: "What is the 'something else' these symbols stand for? Hundreds of people have asked Mr. Frost that question in one form or another, and Mr. Frost has always turned the question away with a joke. He has turned it away primarily because he cannot answer it" (How Does a Poem Mean?, p. 673). If Frost could mistake the dark-deep woods for life, and the friendly village for death, he could not possibly be expected to find a \_\_\_\_\_ in his sleigh.

Semantic parallel analysis has not, however, exposed a great hoax in an otherwise sincere work of art; it has not turned "Stopping" into a practical joke. Instead, it has revealed something important about a poem which its author and its foremost interpreter had missed completely. Rather than disintegrating on the operating table, the poem has gained a new stature. Of this, Frost would approve: "That's all right with me if you want to cut it up that way, if you don't drag the poem down, if you lift it up. Why not, you know: go up, up, up--keep on up" (Yale). The task now remains for students of literature to subject other works with puzzling features to semantic parallel analysis--hopefully with the same degree of success. (Have you ever noticed how often the ghost of Hamlet's father says HO! HO! HO! ?)

R.A. Palmatier

### Mystery Word

The Homeogonomy puzzle in the April 1971 INFORMANT was just too easy--that's all there is to it. Everybody we know got the right answer, including students' wives (e.g. Mrs. Peter Greenquist, who was the first to call in), secretaries (e.g. Jeanne Brown of the College of Education and Linda Webster of the Foreign Student Office), deans (e.g. James Zietlow, Associate Dean for Sciences in the College of Arts and Sciences), assistants to deans (e.g. Ted Marvin, Assistant to the Dean of the College of General Studies, and Administrative Assistant Nancy deZwarte), colleagues in other departments (e.g. John Phillips, English, and Robert Erickson, Speech Pathology)--and everybody on the fourth floor of Sprau Tower (including Mrs. Sue Timmer and Mrs. Monica Snyder, secretaries in the Department of Modern and Classical Languages).

The mystery feature triggered response from as far away as the State of California--Santa Monica, to be exact. On April 12 and April 13 our Secretary received letters from two employees of the RAND Corporation, only one of whom--as far as we know--had been supplied with an official copy of the newsletter. Though these documents are highly confidential, we feel that our readership has a right to view their contents. So here goes:

4/7/71

Dear Mrs. Vani:

At 5:00 p.m. on April 6, I determined the Mystery Word in the homeogonomy game (The Informant, Vol. III, no. 2) to be  
FLIRT.

I may not be the first person with the correct answer, but I believe myself to be the farthest. And I didn't peek, either.

Malcolm Palmatier, RAND



9 April 1971

Dear Mrs. Vani:

FLIRT.

You supplied three times as many clue words as were required. Just

SWAMP	0
JUNKY	0
SKIRL	3
FRUMP	2
TACKY	1
THUMP	1

would have been enough.

Love and kisses,  
Thomas A. Brown, RAND

There--we did it, and we're glad.

### Pluses and Minuses

1. Everybody knows that Linguistics majors are smart, but now we can prove that they're good-looking too. Take DaVeena Johnson, for example. DaVeena, a 20-year-old junior from Kalamazoo, with a double major in Linguistics and Psychology, was the second runner-up in the Miss Black Kalamazoo contest last June. Fortunately for DaVeena, the first runner-up was on a modeling tour in Europe when the Miss Black Michigan pageant was held in Detroit, so DaVeena accompanied Miss Black Kalamazoo to the contest. The Kalamazoo Gazette's picture of the two girls on July 18 shows DaVeena, in hot pants, getting ready for the ceremony. Now that's the kind of publicity we like.

2. Western Michigan University placed rather well in the 1968 "Statistical Profile of the American Language Sciences Core Community," prepared by Susan Paulus and Harry Gilbert for the Center for Applied Linguistics. American linguists earned nine degrees from Western, which ties us with U.S.C. and puts us ahead of such distinguished universities as Pitt (7), San Jose State (6), Puerto Rico (5), California State (4), Ball State (3), Colorado State (2), and Duquesne (1). Western Michigan University is only one degree behind Purdue (10), two behind George Washington (11), and three behind Missouri (12). The University of Michigan led the entire list (with 347), and the other Michigan colleges fared as follows: M.S.U. (63), Wayne (15), and Eastern Michigan (2).

3. During the Winter semester a number of Linguistics students were honored by being named to the Dean's List. The only trouble is that we don't know who they are (and we don't know which dean makes up the list). The best we can do is to cite the students from the Kalamazoo area whose names were published in the Gazette. They are: Susan Holaday, a double major in Linguistics and English; James Ek, a major in German and minor in Linguistics; and Linda Czuhajewski (from Paw Paw) and Anne Ware (from Hickory Corners), both English majors with minors in Linguistics. The Winter semester commencement (in April) also graduated two Linguistics minors--Darryl Salisbury (German major) and Patrick Welch (English major)--and two M.A.'s who teach in the Linguistics Department: Joseph Muthiani (our Swahili teacher) and Yasuko Whitmore (our Japanese teacher). Congratulations, all!

4. The Linguistics Department did it again, graduating another student with honors: Mary Nolan, a Home Economics major and Linguistics minor, took her B.S. cum laude on August 13. At the same commencement, Connie Pattinson, a major in Linguistics, took a B.A., and the following minors also took bachelor's degrees: Janet Baraszu (B.A., English major), Ross Boersma (B.S., English major), and James Ek (B.A., German major). Several friends of the Linguistics Department received master's degrees in August: Liga Abolins (M.A.), Mary Berry (M.A.), Neil Kirschner (M.A.), Patrick Nichols (M.A.), Silvia Cañadas (M.S.), and Friday Mulenga (M.S.). We congratulate all of these new graduates!

5. Two new sections of Studies in Linguistics and Related Disciplines (Ling. 550, 3 hrs.) will be offered in the winter semester. Computational Linguistics (HA, TTh, 3:00-4:15 p.m., Herrick) will include an introduction to linguistic theory; a comparison of programming languages; an application of linguistic theory to language problems; and the writing and running of individual programs. The prerequisite of a computer language (preferably Fortran IV) can be satisfied in a special, after-class workshop from 4:15-5:00. This class should be of special interest to students of linguistics, librarianship, and mathematics. Sociolinguistics (KA, Tues., 6:30-9:10 p.m., Dwarikesh) will consist of a systematic study of the linguistic correlates of social behavior and the influence of society on the nature of language. There is no prerequisite other than permission of the instructor. This section should be of considerable interest to sociology and anthropology students, as well as linguistics majors and minors.

6. The year 1971 has been a 'visible' one for the full-time faculty of the Linguistics Department. During the winter semester an article by Dr. Daniel Hendriksen, "From Paradigm to Practice in Linguistics," appeared in the Papers of the Annual Meeting of the Michigan Linguistic Society (Volume 1, No. 2, pp. 34-51), published by the English Department at Central Michigan University. During the spring session Dr. D.P.S. Dwarikesh successfully defended his dissertation, "The Syntax of Participial Constructions in Modern Hindi," at the University of Chicago and was awarded the Ph.D. degree in Linguistics. And in June, the March issue of the Journal of English Linguistics (Vol. 5) carried a review (pp. 145-149) by Dr. Albert H. Marckwardt of Dr. Palmatier's book, A Descriptive Syntax of the Ormulum (The Hague: Mouton, 1969). As the bishop warned the priest about teaching at Georgetown: "Publish or parish!"

7. You've heard of wire-tapping, but how about 'student tapping'? Janet Lowry, a double major in Linguistics and French, was secretly elected to Mortar Board, an honorary group for outstanding senior women, last winter. At the group's Spring Breakfast, which she was tricked into attending, Jan was 'tapped' for the Board. The Linguistics faculty are proud to have been among those who recommended her. Last summer James Ek, a Linguistics minor and German major, was 'tapped' for the job of teaching with Dr. Hendriksen in the Japanese Summer Study Program on campus--again as a result of our recommendation. Jim is now Director of the Language Laboratory in Brown Hall. And this fall John Zellers, a minor in Linguistics and major in French, was 'tapped' for the presidency of the French Club, succeeding Gary King, another French major and Linguistics minor. Our department can certainly not be accused of failing to 'tap' its student resources.



8. The annual fall reception for Linguistics majors, minors, students, faculty, and friends was held on Tuesday, September 28th, in the Faculty Lounge of the Student Center. The publicity for this event advertised "attractive student receptionists--borrowed from another department," but the Linguistic Analysis class took issue with this indictment and 'tapped' five of its members to serve. The following girls worked for at least an hour at the reception: Pat Richmond (minor), Kathy Schooley, DaVeena Johnson (major), Chris Pabreza (minor), and Sara Wright (minor). Some of the guests wondered why we served donut holes (and tea and coffee)--rather than whole donuts. Well, when you're the second smallest department on campus, you can't afford to buy the whole donut, so you settle for the hole. That's the story of our life.

9. The increases in enrollment in Linguistics classes for Fall 1971 are very encouraging. The overall enrollment has jumped 22% over Fall 1970, with increases in both general linguistics and critical languages. The general linguistics totals are 37% higher, and the critical languages numbers are up 4% (but with only five classes now rather than the seven of 1970, so the average per class is higher). The largest class is Linguistic Analysis, with 27 people originally scheduled for a room that holds 24. (You guessed it: there have been three 'drops'.) Last summer's Latvian language enrollments totalled 73, which amounted to about a 200% increase over Summer 1970. And both the Spring and Summer 1971 enrollments in general linguistics courses were higher than those of the previous year. The Linguistics Department is alive and well.

10. Basic Serbo-Croatian (505) will be started again in the Winter semester--along with Intermediate Serbo-Croatian, of course. Though it is against the policy of the Linguistics Department to start a language in the Winter, an exception has been made in this case in order to provide eligibility to students who wish to apply for Yugoslav study grants in 1972. Dr. Palmatier, who has performed this task before, will supervise the class, and Mrs. Sophia Vanov--wife of Dr. Svetislav Vanov, the regular instructor--will serve as teaching assistant. Any student above the freshman level is eligible to enroll in 505 in the Winter, but he must remember that he will not be able to take Intermediate Serbo-Croatian (506) until Winter 1973. If he is awarded a Summer grant, however, he would be ready for Advanced Serbo-Croatian (507) next Fall. Confusing? You should try it in Macedonian.

11. The Department has signed up five new Linguistics majors and eight new Linguistics minors since the last issue of the Informant (April 1971). The new majors are: Susan Hansen, a sophomore in General Curriculum minoring in Anthropology and Dance; DaVeena Johnson, a junior in General Curriculum, also majoring in Psychology; Ron Ochala, a junior in Secondary Education from Livonia, also majoring in English; Kris Pyrski, a junior in Secondary Education from Warren, also majoring in English; and Barbara VanderMark, a junior in General Curriculum from Grand Rapids, also majoring in English. The new minors are: Sally Calvert, a sophomore in Secondary Education from Jackson majoring in Spanish; Lynn Daugherty, a junior in Liberal Arts with a double major in Anthropology and German; Susan M. Kelly, a sophomore in Secondary Education from Caledonia with a major in English; Suzanne Ormsby, a junior in General Curriculum from Ferris, majoring in French and also minoring in English; Patricia Richmond, a sophomore from Flint, with a major in English; Diane Scott, a senior in General Curriculum from Fresno State with a major in English; Sally Vaughn, a junior in Secondary Education from Livonia with a major in English; and Pam Weaver, a junior in Secondary Education with a major in French. Welcome!

12. The elections for Undergraduate Major Representative and Part-Time Faculty Representative to the Linguistics Department Executive Committee have been completed, and in both cases the incumbents were reelected. Miss Caroline Houston, a senior major in Linguistics and Anthropology, who has served on the Committee from its inception last February, received the most votes in the mail balloting by undergraduate majors and minors. Caroline was out of the hemisphere at the time of the election (accompanying her mother on a visit to their relatives in the Philippines), so we couldn't schedule any public debate between her and her worthy opponent, Miss Kristina Pyrski. The Part-Time Faculty Representative is again Mr. Joseph Muthiani, a member of the faculty since Fall 1969 and our long-time (third year) Swahili teacher. Joe, who is one of the proud parents of a brand new son, Kyalo (the other is Kyalo's mother, Betty), was elected by voice vote at a faculty reception at the Chairman's home on October 23. Congratulations to both of you!

13. Akkadian anybody? Mr. Ira Spar, an instructor in the History Department, is recruiting students for a study of Assyro-Babylonian cuneiform. He has in mind the reading of the Code of Hammurabi (2000 B.C.) for three or four hours a week. The group would be formed right away and the work would start this semester (Fall). Then the students could sign up during advance registration for Linguistics 598 (Readings in Linguistics) and receive 3 to 4 hours credit during the Winter semester. For information, call Mr. Spar at (38)3-6621 or see him at 4025 Friedman.

14. The Linguistics Department often receives requests for tutors in critical languages other than those offered on campus. Usually, we refer the caller to the Office of Foreign Student Affairs, but sometimes we know of a local resident who has the proper credentials. Someone who comes to mind for Turkish is Mr. Taner Varganon, 119 W. Dutton Street. Mr. Varganon is an experienced teacher of Turkish and a permanent resident of the United States. He is a graduate of the Teachers College in Ankara and of Western Michigan University (English and Speech). From time to time we will publicize other qualified tutors of critical languages who take the time to let us know of their availability. Eventually we may become a clearinghouse for this sort of information on campus.

#### Homeogonomy Again

The mystery word is a five-letter English word that has no S inflection and is not solely a proper name. We have supplied your guesses for you and indicated the number of letters each word has in common with the mystery word--not which letters or which position, just how many. You will wind up with an anagram, which you must then rearrange as an English word.

(No credit for this game, but if you want to check your answer, call the Linguistics Department Secretary at 383-0064.)

<u>Your Guesses</u>	<u>No. of Letters in Common</u>
PARTY	0
ALONE	0
SCAMP	3
SOUND	2
PUFFY	1
PIANO	1