Once By The Pacific Essay, Research Paper

Interpretations of “Once by the Pacific”

It is odd how even recent history can be an obscure and tangled mess of biased opinions and here-say. Yet the future can be vaguely foretold in a dark and simple poem.

Robert Lee Frost was no doubt a magnificent poet. As the saying goes, to be great is to be misunderstood. His varied poetry reflected his life, because he used his life as inspiration. We find Frost’s spectrum ranging from simple observances to profound philosophical assumptions in his personal life and American society, as well. “Once by the Pacific” could reflect upon several different things.

Nature is a part of nearly every one of Frost’s poems. He was an individualist and believed that people could have their own personal relationship with God in nature. “Once by the Pacific” could also be interpreted as a distinct warning to society that dark times lie ahead. The image in the first four lines of this poem show waves tumbling over each other, almost fighting to get to shore and “do something . . . that water never did before” (Frost 1134). It is like a contest to see who can change or do the most destruction to the land. The waves represent the people of society clawing and fighting to the best, and in turn, fading in self-destruction. Yet they, just as the shore in the poem, are comforted by a sense of false security. “The shore was lucky in being backed by a cliff, the cliff backed by a continent” (1134). We as Americans are vain. We feel that we are indestructible. We are the superpower of the world. This may be true, but who shall save us from ourselves? Frost wants seems to think that it is inevitable that we will self-destruct. That the “someone” who had better be prepared for rage should read “We” as Americans. Again, it is ironic that just a year later following this poem the stock market crashed, sending our country and its infrastructure into an uproar and nearly tearing our society apart. And history has shown that we as Americans have continued this attitude that Frost may have been referring to. Nuclear weapons, violence, poverty, pollution, and the list go on of ways that we are slowly self-destructing. In my opinion, this is as big a challenge to “social order” that Frost could have possibly offered.

Robert Frost’s poetry was simple at first glance. Just as Frost was a simple man on the outside. He was a farmer. He traveled a bit, but nothing outrageous until his later years when he became a sort of diplomat. His poetry spoke of simple feeling and simple subject. However, underneath these simple words and this simple man lay an interwoven mass of complexity. He wrote about his own experience. His motives are just as obscure as his method. No one could know why he wrote what he did, except of course Frost himself. However, that is what makes him so fascinating. We, nearly half a century later, can relate to this man’s writing however we deem it necessary. After all, it is poetry. Many loved him, some pitied him, and others disagreed with his dark personal life. No doubt about it, though, all respected him and his elegant use of words. Maybe we should also respect his warning, “before God’s last Put out the Light is spoken” (1134).

Work Cited

Frost, Robert. Once by the Pacific. The Norton Anthology Literature. Vol. 2. 5th Edition. Ed. Nina Baym et al. New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1998. 1134.