

Throughout the poetry of Robert Frost, including A Further Range, we confront a speaker who routinely withdraws himself from society to seek the solace of the wilderness. This speaker does not leave never to return. Even in the emptiness of the wilderness the work of others can be seen signifying a presence. For example, in “The Wood-pile” the speaker is technically alone in the wilderness but the drama of the poem centers around the presence of a marker (a pile of chopped wood) the tangible result of the labor of another and a symbol of community. In other words, even when the speaker is alone, he isn’t. This is similar to how a reader of a poem may be physically alone but enters into a community with the poet and the other readers of that poem when they encounter the labor.

Commented [ATS1]: Here I am making a claim about the text.

Commented [ATS2]: This connects the textual claim to a broader claim. This is the last thing you will do during a close reading. Even though it appears in the first paragraph there is no way to know how significant your textual analysis is until you complete it.

It was a cord of maple, cut and split
And piled--and measured, four by four by eight.
And not another like it could I see.
No runner tracks in this year's snow looped near it.
And it was older sure than this year's cutting,
Or even last year's or the year's before.
The wood was grey and the bark warping off it
And the pile somewhat sunken. Clematis
Had wound strings round and round it like a bundle.
What held it though on one side was a tree
Still growing, and on one a stake and prop,
These latter about to fall. I thought that only
Someone who lived in turning to fresh tasks
Could so forget his handiwork on which
He spent himself, the labour of his axe,
And leave it there far from a useful fireplace
To warm the frozen swamp as best it could
With the slow smokeless burning of decay.

Commented [ATS3]: This is a part of the whole poem. I use just this section to set the reader's attention on the literary elements my close reading focuses on.

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http://www.gutenberg.org/files/3026/3026-h/3026-h.htm#link2H_4_0016

Commented [ATS4]: I connect my claims directly to the text

Textual clues, such as the complexity of the act of cutting and piling the wood and the play on the word cord, suggest an analogy between the speaker's attempt to explain the presence of the woodpile and the reader's attempt to make sense of the poem. For example, the physical shape of the wood is reminiscent of a poem that is also deliberately measured (“four by four by eight”) and the laborer who creates it (the poet) is also never found near his work. Frost is suggesting that there is a link between the poet who creates the poem and the reader who finds the poem and struggles to interpret it; the link is to be found in the labor associated with the act of creation and the act of interpretation.

The analogy suggests more about the social nature of the relationship between the poet, poem and reader. A “cord” refers not only to the dimensions of the cut wood but is a homonym with the word “chord”. When we read the former we hear the latter word and must reconcile that sound with our analysis of the poem. As a noun it describes a harmony that is created when multiple notes are played simultaneously. As a verb the word means to bring agreement or to reach an accord. All of these variations are implied in the one word both acting as a chord and demanding the reader come to some accord with it.

Commented [ATS5]: I take deep dive into the meaning of some of the words to explore the nuances of it.