



## POSTMODERNIST ANALYSIS OF 'STOPPING BY WOODS ON A SNOWY EVENING' BY ROBERT FROST

### Literature

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### ABSTRACT

One of the romantic precursor's slogan is: 'God made the country and manmade the town' and a succeeding romantic poet Wordsworth says: 'God dwells in Nature and when a man loves Nature the communion is held between God and man'. But it seems quite different in the case of Robert Frost. He is not inclined to believe that God is omniscient, omnipresent and omnipotent. He seems to be withdrawn from the universe all pervading. His oceanic existence is denied. He seems to be cut off from the rest of the world. This is the obvious evidence that his presence is not felt in the woods where the poet stops.

Man has lost his faith in nature which, in the romantic age, was supposed to manifest God's power. This modern phenomenon is gradually unfolded in Robert Frost's poem 'Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening' and the present paper analyses the post modernist approach thereof.

### KEYWORDS

Postmodernism, Romantic Age, Nature, God, Snowy Evening

### INTRODUCTION:

Postmodernism is characterized by Lyotard as 'incredulity towards meta narratives or grand narratives of human progress, human perfectibility, wholeness and unity among all'. As such Meta narrative harbors the hope of progress in all aspects of life inherent in the enlightenment that cherishes the ideal of liberty, fraternity and equality as well as justice to all irrespective of class and race discrimination. This ideal has never been translated into action. It remains static, abstract and immobile. The postmodernists raise protest against the dominance of the few elites supposed to be highly rational. The aim of their search for the truth is simply the expansion of power. It divides the world into two blocks i.e., the powerful and authoritative and powerless, voiceless and weak. Scientists, technicians and governing machinery have failed to establish law and order. Chaos prevails everywhere. Therefore W. B. Yeats aptly says:

"Things fall apart; the Centre cannot hold;  
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world".

- The Second Coming

Brutality, war, loss of innocent human lives and blood-shed are the order of the day. The hope of universal peace and progress has been shattered into pieces. Instead of wholeness, perfectibility and unity are nothing but unrealized dreams. Man feels divided, disintegrated fragmented and alienated. Man has lost his faith in nature which, in the romantic age, was supposed to manifest God's power. This modern phenomenon is gradually unfolded in Robert Frost's poem

'Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening':  
Whose woods these are I think I know  
His house is in the village through;  
He will not see me stopping here  
To watch his woods fill up with Snow.

One of the romantic precursor's slogan is: 'God made the country and manmade the town' and a succeeding romantic poet Wordsworth says God dwells in Nature and when a man loves Nature the communion is held between God and man. But it seems quite different in the case of Robert Frost. He is not inclined to believe that God is omniscient, omnipresent and omnipotent. He seems to be withdrawn from the universe all pervading. His oceanic existence is denied. He seems to be cut off from the rest of the world (Universe). This is the obvious evidence that his presence is not felt in the woods where the poet stops. Moreover God is not omniscient that is why he says further: "He will not see me stopping here".

It implies that God does not pay any heed towards what he has created and has totally withdrawn Himself from all his responsibilities towards the Universe. In spite of this fact the poet is not much allured and seduced by the lovely, dark and deep woods. His stopping in the woods is temporal and momentary. He is not so much entrapped and bewitched by the lovely beauty of nature. The languid phenomenon of Nature does not induce him to have rest in the woods. The reason is quite obvious in the following stanza:

"My little horse must think it queer  
To stop without a farmhouse near  
Between the woods and frozen lake  
The darkest evening of the year".

The poet is caught up between the metaphorical world of spiritual harmony and similarity and the metonymical world of difference in the sameness as well as disintegrity. James Joyce discards romanticism as a false attitude in his novel "Ulysses". Idealism is the ruins of man as he turns his back to the reality lived upon the earth. That is why Shelley has to say: 'We look before and after and pine for what is not'. It does not mean that Frost prefers an easy going life like Tennyson's Lotus Eaters or Sailors who are enamored of languid island where they are estranged. These sailors say unanimously:

"We will return no more  
.... they sang, 'our island is home"

Because they all are escapists and are prone to redemption from the endless toil of life. But the Poet (Frost) is not inclined to stop his journey though he is placed in the same predicament. Both the protagonists of Tennyson and Frost are caught up in the languid, dreamy, toxicant and immutable surroundings of Nature. In Tennyson's 'Lotus Eaters' Nature is described as:

Most weary seamed the sea, weary the oar,  
Weary the wandering fields of barren foam,  
Then same one said, "We will return no ore  
----they sang, "Our island is home".

On the other hand, the protagonist of Frost stops or takes a momentary pause to watch the snow-covered woods and the conflict arises in his mind. His little horse is a part of his conscious awareness that the place 'between the woods and frozen lake' is not his destination though his unconscious mind is allured to stay because to stop breathing is not life. There is immutability and immobility. The flow of life is frozen. It needs pulsation, sensation, throb and beat. It is an endless flow. Frost's protagonist has "an equal temper of heroic heats like that of Tennyson's 'Ulysses'. He longs for action and work to give meaning to life. He is just like the....

"Swan" of the French poet Mallarme:

Immobility and static condition of nature implicitly revealed in 'Between the Woods and frozen lake' reminds us of Stephan Mallarme's sonnet 'The Virgin living and lovely day' where the magnificent bird attempts to free itself entrapped and stuck up in the frozen lake. It also fails to sing of the living land due to being caught up in the congealed ice of the lake, it can neither take a heavenly flight nor sing the song of liberty:

"Magnificent yet struggling hopelessly  
Though not having sung a livable loveable (Country)  
From the radiant boredom of winter sterility".

Thus the eternal and all pervading whiteness and immutability renders

the Swan's singing and flying quite futile. But Robert Frost's protagonist does not want to stay as he has to perform his duty hence he wants to move and move till he reaches his destination. This fact is suggested in the concluding stanza:

The woods are lovely, dark and deep,  
 But I have promises to keep,  
 And miles to go before I sleep,  
 And miles to go before I sleep.

The poet rather than resigning himself to eternal immobility suggested by the frozen lake, responds to the inner voice that he hears in the gentle breeze and the ringing bell in the harness of the horse, as it is an inner urge to quick action. The bell is rather a call to new vibrant life. It resounds affirmation of sensation, motion to go ahead till our life lasts. Instead of wasting so much time in thinking he should be prompt in action. The rider on his horse back in just like Tennyson's Ulysses. He, too, longs for action and work to give meaning to life.

To sum up the interpretation of Frost's poem "Stopping By Woods on a Snowy Evening" from the post structuralist point of view the polarity that exists with regards to binary opposition between static fixed and immobile state of nature suggesting eternal, absolute and universal concept of truth mentioned by 'Frozen lake', 'Dark and Deep' and 'Sleep' images on the one hand and on the other hand 'a shake of harness bell's sweep of easy wind and downy flakes' are the images that form a binary opposition between frozenness, immobility, fixing, passivity slashed by motion, movement, mutability and changeability. This fact is emphatically reiterated in the following concluding lines:

.....  
 .....  
 "And miles to go before I sleep  
 And miles to go before I sleep".

In the poetic diction 'go' and 'sleep' we find the same polarity, say, and movement/dormancy.

The reference to 'darkest evening' is very symbolic. When we say night (dark) there is no light at all but evening is a meeting place of light and darkness. The slash disappears and opposition dissolves into unity.

It refers to two different segments of mind – the Conscious and Unconscious mind. The rider seems to be a split personality. His conscious mind stops to "Watch his woods fill up with snow". His senses are lulled to sleep but his unconscious mind asleep now awakens. The inner urge of his unconscious mind prompts him "to go" not to "sleep".

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