

**LIFE’S PHILOSOPHY, EMOTION, ENGLISH MANNERISM AND  
SYMBOLISM IN ROBERT FROST’S POEM:  
“STOPPING BY WOODS ON A SNOWY EVENING”**

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**Abstract**

Robert Frost is one of the most influential, and renowned American poet and is well known for writing beautiful poems, about nature, and spiritual man's relationship with the beauty, which has been bestowed upon man by God. Frost's famous poem " Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening" is a wonderful example of his ethos and philosophy of life. It also draws from various spiritual experiences that Frost had. “Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening” was the favourite poem of India's first prime minister Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, who used to read it every day before going to bed. This paper aims to unravel the beauty of this marvellous poem, and explore it from various perspectives, and in all its glory, mysticism and splendid wonders.

The poem ‘Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening’, by the American poet Robert Lee Frost (1875-1963), is an example of simple rustic composition that begins with an ordinary situation to reach a sublime philosophical, profound thought at the end of the poem.

Robert Lee Frost was born in San Francisco, California. He is one of the finest, twentieth century, pastoral poets. Nature and its rural surroundings were a constant source of inspiration for him; images like woods, stars, houses, brooks are taken from everyday life and used beautifully by him to express life’s philosophy, in an emotional and symbolic manner. He was awarded the Pulitzer Prize four times. Frost was admitted as a special student to Haward University where he studied Latin, Greek and Philosophy.

The present poem begins with

“Whose woods these are I think I know,  
His house is in the village though;

He will not see me stopping here  
To watch his woods fill up with snow.”<sup>1</sup>

The person who is the owner of this farm land lives far away in the village, unaware of the season that has set in his woods, Little knowing that his woods are covered with snow now. Here Frost relates the scene with the busy life of the people. They have no time to take care of their belongings. The fresh breeze is blowing, the snow is falling, the season has changed its course, but the owner is unaware of these happenings or maybe he is disinterested.

In the second stanza the picture changes:

“My little horse must think it queer  
To stop without a farm house near  
Between the woods and frozen lake,  
The darkest evening of the year.”

The animal finds it queer that his master has halted at a place where there is no farmhouse nearby, the woods have turned dark and deep, the lake has frozen and the time is running. An easeful, leisurely, English life style is shown, here in the background, where people, even in picnic and outings, crave for comfort and delicacies. Even the animals are accustomed to joyful celebrations, arrangements and noise. Here the horse feels strange, just the hush of wind, the whispering sound of nature and nothing else; darkness and deepening of situation.

“He gives his harness bells a shake,  
to ask if there is some mistake.”<sup>1</sup>

The horse shakes his rope and rings the bells so as to ask the rider if by some mistake he has halted at some wrong place.

The horse, the harness, the bells are symbolically used by the poet. Ringing of bells is a signal of time, the horse refers to the race in life ; the hustle the bustle of life ; life’s competitions ; fast changing circumstances of the world ; running out of opportunities of the hectic modern world.

“The only other sound’s the sweep,  
of easy wind and downy flake. ”<sup>1</sup>

The atmosphere is calm and still. The rider hears the sound of sweeping wind and slow sliding down of flakes of snow. He feels the cold wind, the coldness of night, a feel of the lonely grave, there is an end to every life. No more of running around caricatures, collecting money and material. A stand – still position. Is death so calm and cold? So sweet, no pain no pulse, like a dream, a relaxation into the limitless? The answer is again the ringing of bells; to get up, speed up, and catch up with time:

“The woods are lovely, dark and deep,  
But I have promises to keep. ”<sup>1</sup>

Here we can picturize the life of an ordinary American human being, who, before death, has ample work to complete ; his wife, his children, their studies, payment of bills, weddings of relatives, other engagements, responsibilities, no end to errands ! He shares his responsibility towards the society as well, and owes gratitude towards the old members of the family. You see he’s a good man. What about the ‘society meeting’? Have they collected funds for the function, what the hell is, ‘Ladies Club’ doing? Have all the children, planned for the fancy dress competition !? Where are the clothes, where are the dresses for the function, Oh! The crowd uncountable.....

“And miles to go before I sleep,  
And miles to go before I sleep.”<sup>1</sup>

Man is not yet ready for death. Let him pack and unpack certain things. The famous lines of Bible come to mind “Lord make me to know mine end, and the measure of my days, what it is; that I may know how frail I am.”(Psalm 39 :)<sup>2</sup>

Yah! No end of wishes. Well I’m satisfied. I’ve done my best A long journey symbolic of getting into a train journey. The train has picked up its rhythm, leaving behind all worries of mind. The destination is clear now, I’m heading towards it. It is a long, long way to go; it’s heavenly to reach our destination. My loved ones are waiting for me at the station. Let me rejoice, celebrate and feel homely at my home.

In the words of Henry Vaughan (1622 – 1695) , “from the collection of ballads and songs”, the following lines from his poem, ‘Peace’ can well express Frosts’ views on Souls journey towards the Almighty :-

“My soul, there is a country  
Far beyond the stars,  
Where stands a winged sentry  
All skilful in the wars,  
There above noise and danger  
Sweet Peace sits crown'd with smiles,  
And One born in a manger  
Commands the beauteous files.  
He is the gracious Friend,  
And (O my soul, awake!)  
Did in pure love descend  
To die here for thy sake,  
If thou canst for but thither,  
There grow the flower of Peace,  
The Rose that cannot wither,  
Thy fortress, and thy ease;  
Leave then thy foolish ranges;  
For none can thee secure,  
But One, who never changes,  
They God, thy life, thy cure.”<sup>3</sup>

[By Henry Vaughan (1622 - 1695), From “PEACE” ]

The poet wishes to forget himself in the beauty and darkness of the woods, but his immediate duties do not allow him to lose himself in the divinity of nature. Frost once said, “A Poem begins in delight and ends in wisdom,” and “Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening,” expresses this very sentiment perfectly.

The wisdom that we receive at the end of the poem is, that after all passions are over, we stand bare footed, face to face with God. The reality of life is; of the things we boasted are lost in vain, our wealth, our popularity and fame; ‘all fleeting joys’ are over now. All emotions of love have turned into emptiness. The soul now stands at the threshold of leaving the old, and entering the new. The soul is hungry, crying like a child, at being snatched away, from his comfort zone, to discomfort again. But this discomfort is the way to reach its eternal home. The soul had journeyed a long way from birth till death. It has played well, its part on the world – stage, the time has come to give account of duties now. The sun is setting, the cloud has covered up the past, now the boat has to row to new destinations :-

“The seas are quiet when the wind give o’er ;  
So calm are we when passions are no more ;  
For then we know how vain it was to boast  
Of fleeting things so certain to be lost.  
Clouds of affection from our younger eyes  
Conceal that emptiness which age describes.

The soul’s dark cottage, battered and decayed,  
Lets in new light through chinks that time hath made ;  
Stronger by weakness, wiser men become  
As they draw near to their eternal home :  
Leaving the Old, both world at once they view  
That stand upon the threshold of the New.”<sup>3</sup>

[By Edmund Waller (16069 – 1687) From, “DIVINE POEMS”.]

### **WORKS CITED**

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