



DESIRE ON THE ROAD: A PSYCHOANALYTICAL READING OF “THE LAKE ISLE OF INNISFREE” AND “STOPPING BY WOODS ON A SNOWY EVENING”

G. M. Javed Arif

English Discipline, Khulna University, Khulna-9208, Bangladesh

KUS: 988: 31052023

Manuscript submitted: May 31, 2023

Accepted: June 06, 2023

Abstract

W. B. Yeats’s “The Lake Isle of Innisfree” and R. Frost’s “Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening” contain various kinds of similarities and dissimilarities in several ways. Both the poems can be analyzed in order to explore how the poets are exploiting symbols in order to reveal the speakers’ dream states, how the speakers are moving between conscious and unconscious states of mind, and how their ids, egos, and superegos are working in relation to the desires in their minds. In order to examine all these related issues that the poems embody to thrill their readers, the relevant literary theory is psychoanalysis. A comparative study of these two poems using Freudian psychoanalytic criticism reveals that in both the poems, the poets/speakers are not only somehow on the road, but they are also constantly engaged in handling their desires which are hard to satisfy, yet difficult to repress. Desire in both Yeats’s and Frost’s poems appears to be overwhelming and always in the process of satisfaction though satisfaction finally seems unachievable. Such a psychoanalytic reading can help the readers appreciate these two poems in a new light.

Keywords: Poetry, literary theory, psychoanalytic criticism, Freud, desire, symbol

Introduction

W. B. Yeats’s “The Lake Isle of Innisfree” and R. Frost’s “Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening” are fairly accessible to students because they are short in length and express their subject matters in a simple language and a rather straightforward manner. Because a lyrical poem is mostly subjective it has the ability to express some deep emotions or thoughts in the poet’s mind which may have universal appeals. Discussion of these two poems by Yeats and Frost using psychoanalytical theory and a comparative study can shed some light on common human desires which may be the poets’ own too.

About the reasons why psychoanalysis can be applied to the criticism of these two poems, the importance of Freudian psychoanalysis in literary criticism should be mentioned at the very beginning. Firstly, it should be noted that “Like literary theory, psychoanalysis is a mode of textual analysis”, where “the texts of the self” are analyzed and the analysis goes beyond “conscious hermeneutics of the *cogito* of classical and Enlightenment philosophy” (Martin, 2023, p. 3). As for the importance of psychoanalysis in literary criticism, it should be remembered that “thematic and conceptual spectrum” of Freud’s work “coherently captures, summarizes, and carries forward a group of themes and problematilities that remain with us as salient to life” (Marcus 2014). H. Bloom (2001) contended that “Freud’s Unconscious is itself a powerful trope, and as a representation is painfully effective”; and Bloom also asserted that Freud’s “insights about what it means to be human, continue to enlighten and inform” (as cited in Johnson, 2019, p. 147). H. Hillenaar (1999) in this regard maintained that psychoanalysis will continue to help literary criticism by providing it with “the theory about inner reality, about the core of all reality.”

Methodology

Freudian psychoanalytical criticism may rely on either psychobiographical approach or the textual approach, or both. Freudian criticism can, on the one hand, consider a “psychobiographical perspective” that explores which “unconscious elements of the text express the fantasies” of a writer or “important events in his or her life”; on the

*Corresponding author: < gmjavedarif@eng.ku.ac.bd >
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.53808/KUS.2023.20.02.988-ah>

other hand, and more importantly, such a criticism can leave aside the writer and ask: “What is the unconscious meaning of this text?” (Bayard & Bourgeois, 1999). Freud (1907/1959) himself pointed to these two types of criticism, as in “Creative Writers and Day-dreaming” he spoke of the writer’s creation of characters and stories that conform to his or her own hidden desires as well as of the “choice of his literary material” (p. 152). Freud knew that “literary form (figuration) was the ‘sugar-coating,’ the disguise that got unconscious content past the mind’s censor” (Perri, 1984). Artistic creation, according to Freud (1907/1959), thus occasions in the writer a great “pleasure arising from deeper psychical sources” and generates for the reader a “purely formal – that is, aesthetic – yield of pleasure” (p. 153).

Some critics wanted to lay more emphasis upon the text than upon the author who created the text. K. Burke (1939), for example, observed that psychoanalytical factors related to the writer and his characters do not “encompass the totality of a communicative structure” until “the imagery and transitions of the poem itself” are considered. P. Brooks (1987) highlighted the connection between formal aspects of poetry with its emotional content, and thus, he argued, the critic has to “respond to the erotics of form, that is, to an engagement with the psychic investments of rhetoric, the dramas of desire played out in tropes.” Likewise, D. Laferriere and J. Dickson (1972) emphasized only the intrinsic factors for literary criticism: “A poem’s psychoanalytic structure, for example, is no less inherent in the ‘poem itself’ than are its linguistic, tropological, thematic, and other structures”. N. Holland (1975) also advised a kind of reading by bringing “the details of a text or a self into convergence around a centering theme”. H. Bloom (1975) also called for a rhetorical criticism based on the poetic elements in the text of the poem: “psychoanalysis is more a psychic fact than a formulation of psychic facts. Similarly, the reading of strong poetry is just as much a poetic fact as is the writing of such poetry. Strong poetry is strong only by virtue of a kind of textual usurpation”.

Both psychobiographical and textual approaches will be explored in the present study; however, the textual approach proves to be more applicable since the poems’ textual elements like the symbols and their patterns can reveal much about the psyches of the poems’ speakers.

Discussion

W. B. Yeats wrote “The Lake Isle of Innisfree” in 1888, a few years before Freud made his ideas of the unconscious popular. Yet Yeats’s poem, especially because of its last phrase “the deep heart’s core”, speaks of something immensely deep and hidden as if it was not usually possible to “hear” or fathom it. Freud too said that the unconscious is completely hidden, which can be accessed through dreams, or through slips of the tongue or slips of the pen, called parapraxes or Freudian slips. If Yeats’s speaker hears something in his “deep heart’s core”, he can be said to be experiencing it through a dream. Dreams, according to Freud, contain elements of desires which are somehow left unfulfilled, and as such he calls dreams processes of wish-fulfillment, which is but partial fulfillment. Yeats’s speaker too experiences a dream repeatedly; and at every time his wishes are left partially unfulfilled, as a result of which the dream always comes back:

I will arise and go now, for always night and day
I hear lake water lapping with low sounds by the shore;
While I stand on the roadway, or on the pavements grey,
I hear it in the deep heart’s core.

Yeats has already started the poem with the desire to fulfill a desire, as he has said in the beginning of the poem: “I will arise and go now, and go to Innisfree”. And, according to the speaker, it is this desire that is always coming to the surface of his mind, of which he is but vaguely aware. After the dream, after the pause, after the “stand[ing]”, there is the vague recollection of a dream, which is why he is “always night and day” hearing the call of the lake in his mind, the deep unconscious making the desire accessible to the preconscious part of his mind, not to the fully conscious part.

Freud divides the human psyche in three parts: the id, the ego, and the superego; these parts are only to be taken figuratively as Freud’s structural model of the mind is often pictured as an iceberg to show how amorphous it is and how most of it lies hidden under water (Karlsson, 2010, p. 1). Such an analogy between the mind and the iceberg on water is not unrelated to a psychoanalytic discussion of this poem by Yeats, and to interpret the poem using psychoanalysis, the parts of the mind need to be understood clearly. According to psychoanalysis, the three parts of human mind work on three different principles: the id working on pleasure principle, the ego on reality

principle and the superego on morality principle. As the id is the reservoir of all human drives and instincts, both emotional and biological, it always seeks satisfaction of the needs and the desires. But as desires cannot be always fulfilled because most of them have irrational and unacceptable contents, desires are often suppressed consciously in order to go by the dictates of civilization. Such desires are also unconsciously repressed and sent back to the id by the conscious parts of the mind, the ego and the superego, of which the ego is conscious of the reality on the ground, i.e., the environment or the situation, while the superego, developing from the ego, is concerned with internalized moral and ethical values that have been adopted through an educational process by the parents and parental figures since the inception of the id in the child.

Thus, Yeats's desire, because it still lurks in "the deep heart's core", can be conceived as quite unconscious while it occasionally finds expression in dreams which subsequently make the speaker aware of the desire. Even after scanty details are supplied in the poem, it can be said that the city with its "gray" reality connotes troubles and problems, and it is the city itself that is forcing the person to dreams and also preventing him from fulfilling his desires, whatever they are. The presence of a superego is not emphatic in the poem; in fact, the poem uses rationalization for satisfaction's purpose, not for anything else; the first instance of rationalization can be seen in the second stanza when the speaker reasons, with the use of the word "for": "And I shall have some peace there, for peace comes dropping slow". Even in this reasoning, the image used is one of a liquid falling and that too through a slow process as if satisfaction is not to achieve so fast. In the second instance of his reasoning, "I will arise and go now, for always night and day / I hear lake water lapping with low sounds by the shore", the speaker is again in an imaginative or dreamy state of mind and is rationalizing only in terms of unconscious symbols purported to transport him deeper into his dream state.

If the speaker is regarded as a male person, though there is no such indication of gender in the poem, it can be assumed that Yeats's or his speaker's desire to "live alone" reveals a lot about their psyche. Why is the desire moulded as such? Why is there this misanthropy, i.e., dislike of other human beings? Or is it simply a fear of a woman or women in general? Is Yeats's speaker someone not unsimilar to his contemporary poet T. S. Eliot's speaker in "The Love-Song of J. Alfred Prufrock", which was written around 1910 and published in 1915? Where Prufrock is diagnosed often as a neurotic who at the end of the poem dreams of wading into the sea (Halverson, 1968), can Yeats' speaker also be conceived as possessing a similar inability to connect with women, which may be the reason why he wants to leave the city and live in nature quite alone?

Though there are no presence of women, let alone another man in "The Lake Isle", there are a few words, which, though apparently insignificant, can provide some possible clues as to why the dream is recurring and what is the nature of the desire to live alone. With some general certitude it can be deduced that other human beings, at least one, and most possibly a woman, is responsible for the desire that Yeats's speaker possesses, or the desire that possesses the speaker. Yeats's speaker employs a reference to "veils", which certainly has a connotation of a woman's dress, that naturally signifies a desire to hide identity or beauty, or in this case possibly a desire to hide the desire itself.

As he imagines that "peace comes dropping slow, / Dropping from the veils of the morning", it shows that the early morning is imagined to be in the veil of a woman when the darkness is not yet gone but still reminds of the preceding night, where perhaps there was the presence of a woman. Imagining a woman in a veil can point to a memory that is repressed, or it can also indicate a dream where a woman is desired but whose face is still unclear (as "veil[ed]"), still not transparent, and thus more enigmatic, more attractive and more desirable. Therefore, it can also be indicative of the speaker's desire to fulfill the sexual desire that the woman's clothes, and thus the woman herself, evokes in his body and mind. Women's clothes thus symbolize a libido that has inescapably possessed the mind and the imagination of Yeats's speaker.

Was there in Yeats's speaker or the poet himself a rejection of a romantic proposal or a sexual overture, or is it simply a fear of such a rejection as in the case of Eliot's Prufrock? Was there a "honey" who now first appears to be a "honey-bee" and then a "bee" only, who may have stung him recently or in childhood, i.e., who may have rejected her proposal of love before? Freud says that in a dream there are the processes of condensation, displacement, and symbolization. Likewise, it is not irrelevant to say that in "The Lake Isle" the beloved woman, or the woman of sexual desire, is displaced into a different image or a symbol, the "honey-bee" and the "bee", and that the whole desire of living with that woman is condensed into the desire to "live alone in the bee-loud glade".

Certainly the speaker is not wishing to live alone as a misanthrope; he says he only wishes to live with the "honey-bee". Most remarkably, the poet has used here the singular form of honey-bee instead of the honey-bees. And though "honey-bee" still suggests a lot of these creatures in "the hive", the fact is that the poet has used the singular form of the noun. And though "honey-bee" has helped him to rhyme with "Innisfree", such a singular use is unmistakable. Is it to be assumed that the speaker wishes to live with a single creature only? If so, this desire is important, and this desire may be said to have been "veil[ed]" or disguised/displaced with the symbol of "honey-bee" as if in a dream. Condensation of disparate images symbolizing different aspects of this sexual desire to live with one single woman becomes more evident in the addition of the images of singing creatures like "the cricket" and "the linnet", where certainly plural forms could be used which might naturally express the natural environment more clearly. Is it that the poet's purpose was not to express the nature's look more distinctly? It can then be assumed that his intention was to point instead to his own mental landscape where single creatures take on a special, though subdued, significance which points to his primary desire for the woman who is called with the endearing term "honey" and who is presented here as disguised (veiled), in the image of a romantic night coming to an end when days break.

Such kinds of dream processes are what Freud has called primary process thinking, unlike the secondary process thinking which involves reasoning. Such a dream process can also be seen in the use of the apparently arbitrary "nine", which is certainly an odd number that goes well with the unconscious. The speaker is engrossed in thinking in odd numbers, and is surprisingly using the singular number always, never an even number. Thus in his dream "midnight's all a glimmer, and noon a purple glow", and more than that like the bee, the cricket that sings in his dream and that can satisfy him with her song is only one, and the linnet too is one: as peace is "Dropping from the veils of the morning to where the cricket sings" and "evening" becomes "full of the linnet's wings". It seems unmistakably clear that Yeats desired to embrace only one single entity for a companion when he could simply use a plural noun with the cricket and the linnet, both singing to his heart's content, which would not have altered his intended rhythmic pattern of the poem's language.

From all this it can be inferred that the speaker in his unconscious is desiring the love and company of one single beloved, who is still kept undefined in her mind, or who may have caused such anxiety in his mind that his neurotic mind will not allow her to be either imagined or expressed in unambiguous terms. It can also be assumed that this woman can come only in a symbolic disguise, in a process of displacement and in a condensed form, in poetic recreation with amply suggestive images.

Or is the speaker's isolation from women or men in general to be regarded not as a symptom of neurosis, but of perversion, possibly narcissism, since his ego is investing all the libido in his own self, with enumeration of some need-satisfying objects like food and shelter, "bean-rows", honey and cabin? It is not impossible that the unconscious desire for an object of sexuality can be displaced into an expressive action that is opposite in nature and thus becomes acceptable to the conscious mind since regression into an infantile mental state occurs with thoughts of satisfaction of the basic instinctual or biological needs.

Whether it is narcissism, or a repressed and unconscious sexual desire for a woman, or misogyny, or misanthropy, that excites in the speaker's mind a deep-laid thought of escape from the conventional society, it is evident that his desire to interact with the single creatures and his desire for food expressed in the symbols of "bean" and "honey" is not showing any sign of *thanatos*, i.e., the death instinct – "the drive to return to the inanimate state" that can occupy human mind (Rycroft, 1995, p. 96). Instead, what all this points to is the presence of *eros*, the life instinct – the sexual or reproductive and self-preservative instincts of biology, which are fully expressive of a libido that is attached in this poem to objects in mind like "honey-bee" and "cricket", and is invested with human qualities like sound, music, and color besides the connotative "veils" of a woman and her "purple glow".

Thus what is unmistakable in "The Lake Isle" is the poet's/the speaker's libidinal attachment to a woman, which is represented as displaced and is expressed through symbolic objects in nature. Such a displacement points to the repression of a sexual desire which may have been conceived by the person as illicit or unrealizable and which is partially fulfilled through a recurrent dream that brings it to his conscious mind. Even though the speaker may not yet be diagnosed as neurotic, the recurrence of the erotic, i.e. libidinal and pleasurable, dream and his desire to depart from the city people suggest that he might be experiencing a neurosis which commonly affects the city dwellers who find it difficult to satisfy their erotic desires because excessive demands of a complex life make people unresponsive to others' desires.

If Yeats evinces that such erotic desires can be sublimated through a romantic dream that he incorporates in a poem of the Romantic spirit and expresses through beautiful phrases that describe nature, he also suggests that city people experience a dreary dullness, a total loss of *eros* and color, which he expresses through the singular phrase, “pavements grey”. Does he not then suggest that art can be a method of sublimation? As all “sublimations depend on symbolization” (Rycroft, 1995, p. 176), and as Freud considered creative activity a neurotic daydreaming that executes sublimation by symbolizing the hidden contents in order to pass the censorship of the ego and the superego, it can be assumed that W. B. Yeats as a poet is creating in “The Lake Isle” his characteristic speaker and his particular symbols in an aesthetic way so that he can escape from the power of his conscious mind and satisfy his unconscious desire through sublimation.

If a psychobiographical criticism of Yeats’s “The Lake Isle” is to be attempted after the textual criticism above, the question is: had Yeats really experienced such a frustrating romantic experience at the time of writing this poem or before then, which might have moved him to sublimate his desires through poetic imagery? Though, according to his *Autobiographies*, Yeats possibly did not have a romantic relationship with some woman, which might have been frustrated at the time of the composition of the poem, as his memoir suggests, it nonetheless must have had some kind of influence upon him that may have triggered his desire to escape from the “gray” city where lived some woman dear to his heart.

In fact, Yeats knew of Freud’s psychoanalysis as well as the possibility of its application to poetry. In a 1916 recorded conversation Yeats “talked of Freud & Jung and the subconscious self, applying them to art; said the great thing is to reduce the conscious self to humility, as by imitation of some ancient master, leaving the unconscious free to work” (Marcus, 2013). And in 1931 he said that “[t]he thing that gets you over the horrible business of beginning is the momentum of the subconscious. The subconscious is always there, lying behind the mind, ready to leap out” (Marcus, 2013).

But what role did a woman or some women play in the poet’s unconscious mind? Speaking of Yeats’s beloved in his poetry, J. Ramazani (1993) argues that Yeats, “often implies that the beloved must be absent, incapable of reciprocating or receiving his desire, so that he may work up the poetry’s desire in language”. Yet if one thinks of Maud Gonne, Yeats’s famous fiancée, who had such a dramatic and psychological impact on his life and writings, then one has to agree with T. Eagleton (1985) who contended that this woman caught Yeats on his “sorest psychoanalytical spot”, and was for him “at once unity of being and what destabilises all such unity”. Eagleton also believed that if a childhood connection of Yeats to his mother is sought, Yeats’ mother too like Maud Gonne is “a terrible beauty”, “bringer of peace, love and security to her restless progeny, but only because bearer, also of death” (Eagleton, 1985).

And to speak of Yeats’s beloved’s role in “The Lake Isle of Innisfree”, one can look at not only how the poem was composed, but also, and more importantly, when. In fact, Yeats “had been sitting on the manuscript for almost two years”, and in a letter of 21 December 1888, he included “an incomplete and rather labored early draft” of the poem, which was a by-product of his prose fiction *John Sherman* (1891), begun earlier that year: “In my story I make one of the charecters [sic] when ever he is in trouble long to go away and live alone on that Island – an old day dream of my own. Thinking over his feelings I made these verses about them” (McDonald, 1999). “The early two-stanza draft is, in effect, a lyric version of Sherman’s narrative recollection of his childhood fantasy”; and the version published in “late 1890 was radically improved and expanded” with noon having “a ‘purple glow’ and ‘midnight’s all a glimmer’, not the other way round; and, most importantly, a third stanza, sketching in the speaker’s immediate urban context and the profoundly Romantic source of his longing, has been added”.

To locate this Romantic source of Yeats’s desire, one can of course look back at Yeats’s legendary fiancée, Maud Gonne, whom he met on January 30/February 1, 1889, the day his tragedy began, if one takes into account what Yeats in a romantic spirit declares in *The Trembling of the Veil: Four Years, 1887-1891*: “We begin to live when we have conceived of life as tragedy” (as cited in Khan, 2002).

This analysis of Yeats’s poem shows that a psychobiographical interpretation is not inevitable, though possible; however, a psychobiographical analysis can be avoided for an analysis of Frost’s poem “Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening” though several cases of psychological illnesses in Frost’s family make him vulnerable to such an analysis.

It should be remembered that "a late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century fascination with the science of psychology was a significant part of the cultural milieu in which Frost's art developed, and Freud's formulation of the structure and processes of the mind was pervasive in its presence" (Sheehy, 2014, p. 359). Frost too, like Yeats, was not unaware of psychoanalysis, as he told that he knew Freud, though "out of the tail of my eye" (Waggoner, 1941). It is therefore not insignificant that a knowledge of "the poet's private family life can deepen our understanding of his poetics" (Sheehy, 2014, p. 360), as Frost felt the "possibility for insanity in himself – after all, it ran sadly through his family". Frost did occasionally refer to her mother's "incipient insanity" (Parini, 1999, p. 9), and had an "intimate knowledge" of what attends "paranoid schizophrenia, depression, and suicide" (Sheehy, 2014, p. 360); for example, in the summer of 1920 a worsening schizophrenia led Frost's sister to be hospitalized. So it is not unlikely that Frost's "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening" written in 1922 and published in 1923 may have resonances of these psychological illnesses.

Because "Freud's formulation of the structure and processes of the mind was pervasive in its presence" in Frost's art of poetry (Sheehy, 2014, p. 359), the present study of "Stopping by Woods" will focus on Freud's analysis of the id, ego, superego, and their related processes, together with the poetic element of symbols, which is also a part of psychoanalytic study of mind. Like Yeats, Frost too called himself a mystic and posited his profound belief in symbols. Frost "himself often implied that poetry was his way of getting in touch with and managing the great unmanageable", and said that "I believe in symbols. I believe in change and in changing symbols"; and "by manipulating symbols he achieved not only great poetry and national acclaim but the warding off of his deepest fear" (Holland, 1975).

In "Stopping by Woods" the concept of enigmatic beauty certainly suggests that a work of art too can be an object of contemplation because of its particular beauty, however momentary it may be; moreover, such an art object can also be a method of sublimation of unfulfilled desires. In this poem Frost's rider ultimately realizes that the woods cannot provide him with the complete satisfaction of his desires, but just showed a manner of satisfaction in nature's beauty, in the very symbolic act of the woods filling up with "snow"; and therefore, he decides to move away in order to fulfill his desires more effectively. What he wants is a complete satisfaction, not a mere wish-fulfillment that Yeats's speaker sought.

Does the very act of filling up have any sexual connotation, as it is the only process that is shown as associated with nature and that is presented as making nature so spellbindingly beautiful or attractive? The lake has already filled up with ice, and the snow that is filling up the trees now is like the "downy flake" that moves with an "easy wind"; both of these images symbolize some softness and some lack of resistance, which may exhibit some sexual or erotic connotations.

Like Yeats's city dweller Frost's horse rider apparently shows little interest in other human beings, while in Yeats's poem this amounts to misanthropy ("live alone"); however, in both the poems this dislike of people is camouflaged under symbols. Frost's rider does not know much about the owner of the woods except that he lives in a village, perhaps the same village. The rider knows that he is getting satisfaction from watching the beauty of a thing that belongs to someone else, and such a knowledge shows that there is something illicit about this beauty, and he knows that too.

The rider's unconscious id seeks to assist him in satisfying his desires even in a questionable situation and at an unusual time. He has some duties to attend to as well as some kind of mental desires, which may be of illicit nature and so not worthy of fulfillment in a conventional, rational, and morally acceptable way. This shows how his situation is precarious, which is expressed symbolically through the "darkest" time of his life; nevertheless, the rider chooses to satisfy his desires, and in the process of this satisfaction, he becomes aware of the external world as well as the inner reality.

He stands between the woods, which are "lovely, dark and deep", and the lake, which is already "frozen". This situation may even suggest the predicament of his choice of a sexual object – one is frozen already and the other not yet, which makes the latter one all the more attractive. This then suggests a conflict between two choices: sexual frigidity and sexual responsiveness, between which the rider is precariously poised. Is not it more than riding, when riding itself suggests a sexual act? Furthermore, it is not impossible to attribute sexual connotations to "My little horse". The act of gratification "without a farmhouse near" also suggests gratification of desire at an unusual place and of an illegitimate nature. If Frost's images have such sexual connotations, it is not unlikely that this

remembrance of “promises” may indicate a commitment to a partner, which perhaps is a marriage vow. Remarkable suggestiveness through extraordinary choice of ordinary objects shores up all these possibilities.

It is certainly possible to interpret these images in other manners when employing psychoanalytic criticism. Even then, the woods, which are called “lovely, dark and deep,” would not lose their attraction as a symbol of erotic quality, or as an object of satisfaction. It is not very easy to divest the woods of all kinds of sexual connotations when as a symbol of desire it can easily engender sexual meanings besides other possibilities. The poem starts with the rider having already stopped by the woods and having started to satisfy his desire by enjoying the beauty of the woods. It shows that the rider is either consciously or unconsciously fulfilling his desire whatever its nature is. The presence of the unconscious is more strongly evident in the fact that the rider later becomes conscious of what he has been doing, which can be seen in his utterance, “But I have promises to keep”.

Though the gender of the rider is not mentioned, it is quite possible to assume that the speaker’s gender is male while the female gender cannot be completely discarded as a possibility. If the rider is conceived of as a male person, and a heterosexual, then feminine qualities can be conventionally attributed to the woods, which is here the symbolic object of desire. Even then the aim here regarding sexuality and satisfaction remains the same – the act of looking. According to Freud, there are “sexual sources”, e.g., the “erotogenic zones, or bodily centers of arousal”, sexual aims, i.e., sexual “acts, such as intercourse and looking, designed to achieve pleasure and satisfaction” while there is of course the sexual object, which is the object of sexual pleasure that can possibly provide sexual satisfaction (Neu, 1991, p. 176). Therefore, since the woods in Frost’s poem are described as “lovely, dark and deep”, which demonstrates some feminine qualities, this can be regarded as the sexual object, and for that matter a desirous look can be the act/aim of sexuality here.

If the rider here is considered as satisfying his desire unconsciously through his act/aim of looking, then it should be noted that the poem’s beginning is also the beginning of his process of becoming conscious that he is engaged in an act of wish fulfillment:

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.

The way the rider indicates his awareness and knowledge of the owner of the woods as well as the village people evinces that he is no longer in his unconscious process of satisfaction, but is slowly becoming aware of the realities; he is now in the preconscious state of mind until he will become aware of his horse’s reaction, which will bring him almost to full consciousness. The unconscious, irrational, and instinctual id of the rider has been working on the pleasure principle, whereas his ego has now begun to act on reality principle, and when he finally remembers the “promises” which must be fulfilled before “sleep” comes, which symbolizes rest or death, his superego can be said to have acted successfully by working on the morality principle: “But I have promises to keep, / And miles to go before I sleep”.

Poised between the captivating object of desire, i.e., the “lovely, dark and deep” woods, on the one hand, and, on the other, the realities expressed in the symbol of the “frozen lake”, the rider becomes aware of the predicament he is facing. This awareness comes to him because of the intervention of his reality-driven ego, which is presented here in the symbol of the intelligent little horse that belongs to him and that suggests his ego:

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.

Therefore, it can be argued that the secondary process thinking is now slowly emerging and gaining momentum in the rider’s conscious mind, unlike the previously dominating primary process thinking of the irrational id that worked through condensation and displacement using symbols to make acceptable what was morally unacceptable. It is the horse, though little, on which the rider/Frost’s speaker projects his own thoughts. According to psychoanalysis, a creative writer’s “self and object representations and their interaction” in the writer’s “relevant unconscious phantasy” are “projected into the characters he portrays in his work, a process that was well recognized by Freud” (Sandler, 2013, p. 75). Here then Frost can be thought as using the figure of speech of

personification for his psychoanalytic act of projection of his own phantasy onto the horse: "He gives his harness bells a shake / To ask if there is some mistake."

In "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening" the role of the ego and the superego are strikingly conspicuous while in "The Lake Isle of Innisfree" ego and superego seem to be conspicuous through their absence. In "The Lake Isle" a dream state is shown as something very prominent that recurs "always night and day", as if its hallucinatory effects pervade the mind of the neurotic speaker, who is almost fixated in his dream state, who is unwilling to repress his desire for his beloved, whether his desire is sexual or not, and who is thus trying to find satisfaction in an obsessive manner. But in "Stopping by Woods" the rider's thought process is displayed as working rather more actively, rising at the beginning of the poem from a deep unconscious state of satisfaction and becoming more and more engaged till the superego in the last stanza takes almost a total control of the mind, reminding him of the "promises", the social and/or ethical demands.

The rider's social or moral concerns are important materials for his superego which attaches more importance to the ethical commitments that he makes to another person, or other persons, if not to himself ("But I have promises to keep"). Frost's representation of a romantic and ethical lover is completely opposite of how Yeats represents a city dweller, or rather a passionate lover, who is averse to the city people because he is fearful of rejection, and who perceives the world, both nature and the city, in his neurotic reaction formation. In fact, the whole of "Stopping by Woods" is a masterful exercise of the ego and the superego whereas "The Lake Isle" is completely a dream manifestation with instances of rationalization that occur in the unconscious mind and is intended to symbolically satisfy the desire.

While in "The Lake Isle" repression is finally shown to be absent because it is deemed ineffective, ego and superego in "Stopping by Woods" are manifested as working together, and the rider's slow awakening to consciousness reveals that repression is beginning and gaining force. Frost's poem starts with the rider's gradual understanding/acknowledgement of the situation ("Whose woods these are I think I know"). And the rider's sense of guilt, suggested through his avoiding of the owner's eyes ("He will not see me stopping here"), may even connote a sexual perversion like voyeurism since he is supposed to know that the act of appreciating nature's beauty, while not trespassing into someone's territory, involves no crime in itself. Then the question that rises is: what is causing this sense of guilt, i.e., why is he avoiding the owner's gaze? Is he appropriating, i.e., misappropriating, another's object of desire?

The awakening of the rider's consciousness, which is the sign that his repression is working, becomes more prominent immediately as the little horse, which is the symbol of his ego, is thinking it "queer" ("My little horse must think it queer / To stop without a farmhouse near"). If the horse is presented as a symbol of the ego which is making the rider conscious of the reality he is experiencing, it is also asking about the justification of stopping in an unusual place, and thus by extension the horse can also be considered as a symbol of the superego, trying to force the rider into justifying his choice of an object of desire; and it is pertinent here to add that Freud considered the superego as an extension, a later development, of the ego as it acquires moral dictates and principles.

The activities of the rider's ego and the superego continue in the next stanza: "He gives his harness bells a shake / To ask if there is some mistake". If the "harness bells" suggests an attempt to awaken the rider into reality, they also show that some act of rationalization is happening in the rider's mind. What the horse is doing is but a reflection of the slow process of the rider's conscious mind in its journey from the realm of reality to the realm of morality, from the ego to the superego. And thus starts the asking of the question about the right and the wrong, the possibility of a "mistake". The journey from the preconscious stage of mind to its conscious stage is almost complete. From the first line's somnambulistic and vague recollection/acknowledgement ("I think") to a perception of the "queer", and then to the query of a "mistake", the rider's is a journey in the terrains of human psyche. Even then a full onset of the superego is not visible yet, as the mistake is only a possibility ("if there is"), nothing but "some mistake", whose nature is still not clear in the rider's mind. This shows that the rider is still not in his conscious state of mind and that his superego has not yet fully grasped the moral weight of the situation, and therefore the superego cannot still fully demand that it should first judge whether the desire is acceptable before it can allow his voyeuristic act of satisfaction.

In every stanza it is evident that the rider's desire is continually rising from and dipping into the "deep" realm of the satisfaction seeking id. Whenever the rider endeavors to become conscious of the situation in order to know the desire and measure its satisfaction so that he can ascertain whether to continue or desist, he immediately

becomes engulfed by the desire itself and becomes immersed in its satisfaction, its “lovely” nature. He knows that the desire is also dangerous, intense, and unacceptable (“dark and deep”); yet his inability to repress the desire is all too apparent. As his desire is crossing the threshold of his consciousness repeatedly, it is but a constant journey of the desire from the conscious to the unconscious parts of his mind, the ego and the id, in both directions.

It is primarily the object of desire that is so intensely attractive to the rider, which he terms “lovely, dark and deep”; and it is this desire for the object which soon proves to be so overwhelmingly powerful that it is described thus. Consequently, no amount of conscious attempt can suppress the desire effectively to the hidden depth of the id, which is also its place of origin. Such is the nature of this continuous back-and-forth journey of the desire in the rider’s mind that in each of the first lines of the first three stanzas his ego shows the start of his consciousness: “Whose woods these are I think I know”; “My little horse must think it queer”, “He gives his harness bells a shake”. However, in each of these three stanzas this consciousness, which is represented through the rider’s ego, slowly plunges into the unconscious realm of his id, where both desire and related distress lurk, and the last lines of these stanzas show this amply: “To watch his woods fill up with snow”, “The darkest evening of the year”, “Of easy wind and downy flake”.

However, in the last stanza of the poem this back-and-forth journey of the rider’s desire takes on a different look as his superego finally becomes active enough and overpowers the id and thereby achieves some kind of emotional insight. This success of his superego happens when it attaches some social meaning to the “woods”, which is the symbol of his desire and the most important symbol of the poem. Thus the rider becomes able to interpret his desire in the context of social responsibilities (“But I have promises to keep”), responsibilities which must overcome the context of his present reality (“And miles to go before I sleep”).

It should also be noted that every time the ego and the superego try to suppress the desire, the id attempts to resurface the desire in a manifest content of symbols in order to achieve some kind of satisfaction through bypassing the censorship of the superego; and all this is most remarkably evident in how Frost describes nature in each stanza. At the beginning of the first stanza the rider attempts to recollect or describe the owner of the woods very feebly because it is the woods that is important, as it is both his symbolic object of desire and the symbol of his desire. And when he attempts to overcome the dictates of his ego and superego by remaining unwatched in the process of gratification of the supposedly illicit desire, he begins to describe how he sees the woods filling up with snow, which is a symbolic act of gratification for the rider, enough to engulf his mind and enough to show the depth of his passion.

And when the horse, which Frost presents as a symbol of the ego and the superego, is described as weighing whether such an act of gratification is “queer”, in both the senses of being unusual and deviant, i.e., pervert, the poet describes how the woods are providing this satisfaction in the “darkest” moment. And when the horse is asking questions about the efficacy and ethicality of the “mistake”, i.e., this illicit method of satisfaction and/or satisfaction of such an illicit desire, there come the symbols of the “easy wind and downy flake”, with all the sexual and erotic connotations. This particular image is an important sexual symbol as it shows that the pleasure principle of the id succeeds partially in the voyeuristic act of looking, which is illicit and also a partial hallucinatory wish-fulfillment. The id’s partial satisfaction in the instinctual tension of sexuality, however, paves way for the superego’s calm insightful approach to desire as described in the next and last stanza.

Thus, it is in the last stanza that the pattern of the first three stanzas is reversed. It is the id that is first seen in the first line of this stanza, not the ego or the superego. And though desire (re)surfaced at the end of the previous stanzas, in the final stanza it is the id’s desire that is first mentioned – the “lovely, dark and deep” desire or the “lovely, dark and deep” object of desire, i.e., the symbolic “woods”. The mention of the desire/object of desire has but continued from the end of the third stanza. But now there is the full presence of the superego, with its harsh reminding of the “promises”, which may either be the ethical dictates of human relationships or the parental introjects that refer to the Oedipal period of the fictional speaker or the poet himself. Thus when the line, “But I have promises to keep”, expresses the control of the superego, this control has to be made stronger to suppress the desire successfully. Therefore, after “promises” is expressed, it is emphasized in the next two lines,

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

This refrain shows the burden of the social duty as opposed to the personal desire, which seeks satisfaction through an illicit voyeuristic act.

This repetition of the third line of the stanza, “And miles to go before I sleep”, as the last line of the poem also evinces that the superego has not been able to completely suppress the desire by pushing it back to the depth of the id even at this instant of the rider’s journey. The last line also indicates that this journey of the desire, i.e., its pattern of surfacing, suppression, and resurfacing, has been a difficult one and that the journey is neither accomplished nor completed. This is undoubtedly a somnambulistic repetition of the line, uttered from the depth of the rider’s mind; and it shows that the mastery of the superego, seen at the beginning of the stanzas, cannot completely efface the trace of the deep unconscious, where desires are always lurking and always trying to get satisfaction through symbolic wish-fulfillment. The repetition of “sleep” in this way and at the end of the poem also suggests an awareness of the possibility that the desire may once again slip into the deep unconscious state of sleep. And since sleep too is fervently sought, though not as much fervently as the present symbol of the woods, it can be assumed that the rider covets an unconscious state of mind more than the waking hours since it is in the unconscious state of the mind that he can reach his desire and satisfy it even though as a partial wish-fulfillment.

The unconscious is not shown as fully conquered in either of the poems, “The Lake Isle” and “Stopping by Woods”, as if the poems offer the message that the unconscious cannot be completely conquered as it has to engage with the conscious mind’s desire for control. Moreover, both the poems show that the unconscious has such a power that it cannot be entirely effaced. There is no violent repression of desire in either of the poems. The symptoms that appear in Yeats’s poem point to a neurotic man, who is a romantic but who shows signs of misogyny or misanthropy as a defense mechanism. In Frost’s poem too there is the presence of a neurotic, who shows signs of voyeurism and a lack of intimacy or attachment to people at the beginning but who at the end decides to connect with the people whoever they are. Just as in Frost’s poem, the speaker’s superego in Yeats’s poem is shown as active more than once: at the beginning of the poem as well as at the end, saying “I will arise and go now”, though in both cases the id rules immediately after. Thus, Yeats’s speaker at the beginning of the poem is seen as conscious and engages in rational thinking, which is evident in the use of the word “for” in the first line of each of the first two stanzas, but immediately afterwards he begins to absorb himself in the romantic reverie, and at the end of the poem he slips back into his unconscious state, his “deep heart’s core”.

It is quite remarkable that both Yeats’s “The Lake Isle” and Frost’s “Stopping by Woods” show a repeated waking from and a prospective receding into a dream state. However, in Yeats’s poem the speaker’s final urge is to slip back into dream state and remain there forever whereas in Frost’s poem the rider finally wants a break from the dream state though it is so difficult. In these two poems there is neither a complete satisfaction of the desire nor a complete mastery of the superego. Moreover, the differences that the two poems reveal regarding dream and the id-ego-superego connection make the two poems a good pair to study together using psychoanalytical criticism. In Yeats’s poem the dream state suggests a neurotic symptom, almost an unconscious obsession, but in Frost’s poem the dream is mastered to the extent that the rider’s ego and the superego are more conspicuously operative.

Remarkably, both the poems engage in images of depth, e.g., “dropping”, “lake”, water, and “honey” in Yeats’s poem, and “lake”, though “frozen”, and the “dark and deep” woods in Frost’s poem. Both the poets have used symbolic words and images of depth in order to show the nature of the deep unconscious. Both the poets show how their speakers move between conscious and unconscious states of mind, how their egos/superegos and their ids deal with their specific desires, which in Yeats’s case is a woman, disguised in symbolic terms of veil, honey, and “purple glow”, and in Frost’s poem is left more unclear even after a more powerful symbol of the “lovely, dark and deep” woods. In both the poems there is a constant journey of the desire from the unconscious part of the mind to its conscious part; however, in Frost’s poem this journey is more prolonged and more complex.

Conclusion

“The Lake Isle of Innisfree” ends where it started; the speaker is psychologically on the road (“the roadway, or pavements gray”), but he is never on an actual journey that would realistically satisfy his desire, and thus his desire moves between the conscious and the unconscious parts of his mind. Likewise, in “Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening” there is a continual journey of the desire in the rider’s mind. Both the speakers are on the road, where they are standing mesmerized, their minds experiencing the deep unconscious in powerful ways with feeble attempts to wake up and ratiocinate about their specific desires. However, in Yeats’s poem, it is always a standing on the road

now and the satisfaction will “always” be postponed as the desire is always repressed whereas in Frost’s poem it is a momentary though powerful stopping, and the speaker’s journey will soon start again, though for another desire, which has not started yet. So both the poems show a continual journey of desire, between the conscious and the unconscious parts of mind, between ratiocination of the ego/superego and the partial wish-fulfillment of the id.

In both the poems the speakers seek to justify their desires as well as to satisfy them; however, their desires do not get the satisfaction they seek. The desire in both the poems is always on the road, as if for the speakers of the two poems it is a desiring on the road, the path of life or *eros*, whether one is fixated or not, whether one is “always” on “the roadway, or pavements gray”, or whether one becomes barely conscious about the “miles to go before I sleep”.

Conflict of Interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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