



## Amid love and duty: A perplexed journey in Shakespeare's how heavy do I journey on the way and Frost's stopping by Woods on A Snowy Evening

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### Abstract

The human psyche becomes confused when faced with a difficult situation. An instinctive temperament instigates a man to contemplate before acting on a decision. Sigmund Freud develops the 'theory of personality' to discuss how one's behavioral characteristics are expressed under the direction of the 'driving forces' (i.e., id, ego, superego). These 'forces' perform a crucial role in maintaining equilibrium between two diametrically opposed possibilities, and they aid in navigating the 'anxiety.' To substantiate the argument, the paper delineates a comparative study between William Shakespeare's *How Heavy Do I Journey on the Way* and Robert Frost's *Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening*, where they depict two different kinds of 'love' (desire) and 'duty' (responsibility) through the journey(s) of the poets. These poems bring the nuances of the characters and their psychological complexity to light in the midst of two options and how they surpass their 'dilemma' by making one decision.

**Keywords:** Love, duty, desire, responsibility, dilemma, pain, pleasure, id, ego, super-ego

### Introduction

There are numerous levels to address in the intricate field of human psychology. They serve various purposes and have different psychological effects on human behavior. Monte (1877) <sup>[16]</sup> writes, "Psychoanalytic theories assume the existence of unconscious internal states that motivate an individual's overt actions." In his analysis of Psychoanalytic theory, Sigmund Freud (1923) states that the human mind comprises three components, viz. id (the unconscious), ego (the Conscious), and superego (the conscience) (Lapsley and Stey, 2011) <sup>[13]</sup>. William Siegfried (2014) writes, "As humans our behavior, our thoughts, and actions, are the product of our psyche. In order to have an understanding of why we behave as we do, it is necessary to identify the formation and structure of the human psyche (1)." The origin of all psychological energy is the 'id,' driven by pleasure Principles, and seeks instant satisfaction of needs and desires. It always seeks pleasure and happiness by avoiding pain and suffering (Bano and Bhatnagar, 2021 <sup>[2]</sup>; Liang, 2010 <sup>[14]</sup>; Lapsley and Stey, 2011) <sup>[13]</sup>. The 'superego' represents our moral sense, which directs us toward societal commitment through its positive aspirations (Bano and Bhatnagar, 2021) <sup>[2]</sup>, whereas the 'ego' is the highly rational part of the human personality. It helps to maintain a clear balance between the demands of the 'id' and the principles of the external world. Each person is different and has a complicated and varied psychological pattern. These distinctive and comparatively constant thought, feeling, and behavior patterns make up a person's personality (Hockenbury and Hockenbury 2001). Moreover, everyone is seen to face unbearable psychological trouble in the decision-making process at any moment in life when he has to choose any single option. A continual conflict between the id, ego, and superego lasts until death. (Navaneethan, 2011) <sup>[17]</sup>. When the ego fails to keep the id and ego in balance, the state produces 'anxiety.' However, in most cases, the ego (mediator between the conscious and the unconscious mind) suppresses the id (representative of the primitive instincts of an individual) and opts for the

indisputable option of responsibility, which is discerned by the conscious state of our mind. "Following on from Freud, the ego is viewed as a composite sub-set of the instinctual drives (ego-drives), whereas those drives cut off from expression form the id. The nature of the "self" is developed in terms of identification, and the possibility of multiple personalities is also established" (Boag, 2014) <sup>[3]</sup>. When one is forced to decide between duty and love in a given situation, the same type of tension sets in. To understand the dilemma, the paper will take a step to study two poems, *How Heavy Do I Journey on the Way* (sonnet no. 50) and *Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening* (printed in *New Hampshire*). Baohua Qiu (2010) writes about the ambivalent nature of human beings. He says, "In our daily life, we are often ambivalent --- of two minds, sometimes of three or more--- about what we do. Often two desires are in conflict" (146). The conclusions of the poems will explain the reason behind the popularity of the poems.

### Understanding the Ideas of Love and Duty

However, before analyzing the poems, we must understand what is 'love' and 'duty.' Moreover, how have the concepts of love (desire) and duty been portrayed in Shakespeare and Frost? Love itself encompasses a wide variety of forms and intensities of emotion, including romantic love, family love, spiritual love, and paternal love, love for all living things, including humans, animals, and objects, as well as love for oneself, sexual love, etc. (Ellis, 1954). Ancient Greek philosophers expounded on eight types of love, viz. *Eros* (romantic or passionate love), *Philia* (affectionate love or love for a friend), *Storge* (familial love, love for kinship), *Agape* (selfless universal love, love for Nature or God), *Ludus* (playful love), *Pragma* (enduring love), and *Philia* (self-love). Love is an emotion that includes a strong sense of attachment and deep affection for someone or something. Furthermore, 'Duty/Responsibility' is a task or action one is supposed to perform as part of one's job. It is challenging to balance the appeal of love and the burden of obligation at a time. If we go through Shakespeare and Frost, we find the

different colors of their love and duties. Shakespeare's love might be mentioned as *Philia* because he has expressed his infatuation for his friend, which resists him from going forward. This is one instance of passionate love that justifies "A state of intense longing for union with another" and "is a complex functional whole including appraisals or appreciations, subjective feelings, expressions, patterned physiological processes, action tendencies, and instrumental behaviors. Reciprocated love (union with the other) is associated with fulfillment and ecstasy. Unrequited love (separation) with emptiness, anxiety, or despair" (Hatfield & Rapson, 1993). On the other hand, Frost explains a passionate love where he is mesmerized by the beauty of Nature and is tempted to forget his 'promises' and neglect his urgent responsibility. The journey of 'I' illustrates the psychological conflict that ordinary men experience between carrying out their obligations and being mesmerized by the beauty of the natural world (Ankit Tyagi, 2015) [23]. His love might be classified as *Biophilia*. Eric Fromm, an American psychoanalyst, used the term 'biophilia' in "The Anatomy of Human Destructiveness" (1973), which defined it as 'the passionate love of life and of all that is alive' (Mahrous et al., 2022) [15]. Later, Edward O. Wilson popularised the term (biophilia) in his book *Biophilia* (1984). According to biophilia, humans have an inbuilt need to interact with nature and other living things (Kellert et al., 2008) [22].

### Representation of 'Love' and 'Duty' in *How Heavy Do I Journey on the Way*

William Shakespeare, the Bard of Avon, is a prominent sonneteer who will be remembered for his artistic contribution "so long as men can breathe or eyes can see." He is credited with having penned 154 sonnets. In which his remarkable sequence of the sonnet (sonnet no. 1-126) has addressed to an unnamed 'fair youth.' Shakespeare has expressed his worshipful love for this young man. Saraswathy R. Murthy asserts, "The theme of love is certainly the predominant theme of the sonnets of Shakespeare. This theme is the basic spirit of all sonnets of him. His treatment of love has something divine quality" (Murthy, as cited in Yadav 5). Shakespeare's sonnet (sonnet no. 50) remembers an unnamed horseback journey in which he was leaving his buddy (perhaps Mr. W.H. / Henry Wriothsley) behind to go elsewhere. The trip was 'heavy' and full of extreme disappointment since he was not unwilling to take a leave from his friend (love). Shakespeare painted the burden of his heart with the line, "Thus far the miles are measured from thy friends." He could not endure the heavy pain of separation. He genuinely conveyed his anguish;

How heavy do I journey on the way,  
When what I seek (my weary travel's end)  
Doth teach that ease and that repose to say,  
Thus far the miles are measured from thy friend  
(*How Heavy do I Journey on the Way*, line1-4)

He depicted an emotional bond between himself and the horse he was riding with his spectacular capacity for expression. He used the rhetorical tone of "Pathetic fallacy," in which the horse (an inanimate object) can discern the same affliction and anguish as the poet. To clarify this condition, he wrote, "Thus the beast that bears me, tired with my woe, / Plods dully on to bear that weight in me."

The psychological sadness of the poet turned into the dismay of the horse;

The bloody spur cannot provoke him on  
Sometimes anger thrusts into his hide,  
Which heavily he answers with a groan,  
Sharper to me than spurring to his side  
(*How Heavy Do I Journey on the Way*, line 9-12)

Even the sorrow reached its highest peak when he could correlate his agony with the horse's agony; "For that same groan doth put this in my mind." The poet could not leave his 'love,' yet he has to carry out his 'duty.'

In 'New Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis' (1933), Freud equated the Ego and Id to the rider and the horse, respectively (Lapsley et al., 2011 [13]; Zhang, 2020 [28]; Wiesner, 2014) [25]. Equipped with its own internal combustion engine, a horse can travel anywhere it wants to. However, the rider provides the horse's appropriate direction and instruction to follow the right course. He exclaimed-

One might compare the relation of the ego to the id with that between a rider and his horse. The horse provides the locomotor energy, and the rider has the prerogative of determining the goal and guiding the movements of his powerful mount towards it. But all too often in the relations between the ego and the id, we find a picture of the less ideal situation in which the rider is obliged to guide his horse in the direction in which it itself wants to go.

(New Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis, 1933)

However, at last, he could overcome the 'id' with his 'go' and utters "My grief lies onward, and my joy behind," and showed his respect for his Ego. His ego became the guide and dragged him toward his prior responsibility. Sigmund Freud writes-

The functional importance of the ego is manifested in the fact that normal control over the approaches to motility devolves upon it. Thus, in relation to the id, it is like a man on horseback, who has to hold in check the superior strength of the horse; with this difference, the rider tries to do so with his own strength while the ego uses borrowed forces.

(The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, 1961)

In the end, he had chosen to fulfill his obligations and uttered, "My grief lies onward, and my joy behind." This condition reminds us of his poem *The Road Not Taken* (1916), where he described the speaker's arrival at a specific juncture where he had to choose one path by leaving the other behind. This is not a personal problem but rather a universal dilemma. He wrote,

I shall be telling this with a sigh  
Somewhere ages and ages hence:  
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—  
I took the one less traveled by,  
And that has made all the difference.  
(*The Road Not Taken*, line 16-20)

Shakespeare also had to choose between two options, and he did so by putting his love aside in order to fulfill his obligations. The philosophical idea of 'duty' was conveyed by Lord Sri Krishna on the battlefield of Kurukshetra (in the epic Mahabharata), where he offered his sermon to human beings that duty is more important than love. He gave Arjuna advice to "Fight for the sake of duty, treating alike happiness and distress, loss and gain, victory and defeat". (Chapter 2, Verse 38). Though the contexts are different, the significance of 'duty.'

### Depiction of 'Love' and 'Duty' in *Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening*

Robert Frost, a luminous halo in the firmament of American poetry, is acclaimed for *Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening* (It was published in 1923 in his *New Hampshire* volume). In one of his lectures, he said, "Read it over a hundred times: it will forever keep its freshness." The poem's surface level is simple to grasp, but implicitly it bears a complex explanation by containing many symbolic layers. This poem described his journey 'on a snowy evening' through a charming woodland where he was stopped for a moment. He was tempted by the mesmerizing scenario of the snowy evening. His love/desire for Nature made him bound to worship her. His heart was filled with joy and pleasure that made him forget his duty/responsibilities. The horse, the representative of his mind, had reminded his task by its shaking. He wrote, "My little horse must think it queer/To stop without a farmhouse near/Between the woods and frozen lake" (deceptive calmness) and "gives his harness bells a shake/To ask if there is some mistake." This scenario implicitly signified a rhetorical construction of "Pathetic fallacy" that implied the poet's self. This ambit of duty (promise) forced him to leave his love (Nature). He said, "The woods are lovely, dark and deep/But I have promises to keep." Songling Zhang (2010) writes;

"This small contradictory actually stands for a bigger one of human's life. On one hand, the character "I," impressive and sagacious, hopes to be drunk with the natural beauty. On the other hand, "I," with a sense of responsibility, knows that he has many heavier tasks and responsibilities to shoulder and he must keep his promises. In our life, it is common for us to make choices, and yet, usually, we can only choose one of them in the end, although in the process of making decisions, we may hesitate and reconsider them many times". (pp. 45)

In his personal life, Frost was going through the hardships of life. He managed his family's responsibilities while working as a farmer. He lost his child, and even he tried to commit suicide (which can be narrated as a death drive/Id in psychology). However, he understood that because he is accountable for caring for his wife and four children, it is his first job to mull over his task rather than indulge his impulses. Although he was tempted to stay longer, the pressure of his commitments and the great distance pushed him to leave the woods. (Consciously, he made an unerring decision). On the other side, he was seriously suffering from obscurity as a poet, and instead of paying heed, the American publishers rejected his poems. Frost had to sell his farmhouse in Derry, New Hampshire. So, he had put his

wishes/desires aside and began his journey to attend to his responsibilities by saying;

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.  
(*Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening*, lines 13-18)

This poem explores the limitations that people must live under and that prevent them from deviating from their path of responsibility. We find the same tone in Erika Fitzpatrick's poem *Admiring Light on a Sunny Day* where she writes,

Sunlight is happy arose  
But I have assignments to close,  
And pages to rove before I doze  
And pages to rove before I doze:  
(*Admiring Light on a Sunny Day*, lines 13-16)

This conflict between 'duty' and 'imagination' (love) is one that Frost frequently brought up in his other poems, too, such as *Birches* (1915) and *The Sound of Trees* (1916).

### The Dilemma(s) and Freud's Theory of Personality

New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis, published in 1933, is where Freud introduces the id as a "dark, inaccessible part of our personality." Furthermore, dissatisfaction brings stress and mental agony if these desires and needs are not satisfied. The ego represents the conscious mind, and it is based on the reality principle. It works as a safety valve in a realistic way for dealing with reality. The superego maintains internalized moral standards. It provides fundamental guidelines by judging our sense of right and wrong. "One should balance his id, ego and superego in order to maintain a healthy personality" (Gupta, 2020)<sup>[9]</sup>

The allure of beauty and the lovely white nature in Frost's *Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening* represents the poet's addiction to pleasure. Nature forced him to forget his duty (several responsibilities). By shaking his head and asking, "If there is any error," the horse plays the part of the poet's alter in this poem and forces him to recall his responsibility. The horse would instead keep him conscious of his vows, while the Id would have forced him to remain and take pleasure in the temptation. "And miles to go before I sleep/A miles to go before I sleep." In *Freud Along the Ganges* (2020), Salmon Akhtar writes:

The conscious aspect of the ego is the "executive organ" of the psyche, responsible for the integration of perceptual data and decision-making. The unconscious aspect of the ego contains mechanisms, such as repression, which are necessary to counteract the powerful drives of the id  
(Akhtar, p. 361)

In *The Wisdom of the Ego*, George Vaillant rightly elucidates how Plato's horseman and Freud's ego analogy are related. Vaillant (1995)<sup>[24]</sup> explains this-

Goaded by the selfish impulses of the id, hemmed in by the moral constraints of the superego, and rebuffed by reality, the ego struggles to cope and to reduce the forces

that work on it to some kind of harmony. The ego institutes delay in our instinctual behavior: Look before you leap.

(Vaillant, p. 7)

By placing themselves in the struggle between love and duty, William Shakespeare and Robert Frost are able to describe the internal struggle between the id and ego (the conscious and subconscious mind). Finally, they overcame the subjugation of the id (represented as desire/love) by following the conscious guidance of the ego (represented as obligation or responsibility). It is rightly said that;

The ego takes on a number of functions. It commands voluntary movement. It has the task of self-preservation, and must therefore master both internal (id) and external stimuli. The ego masters external stimuli by becoming “aware,” by storing up memories, by avoidance through flight, and by active adaptation. Regarding internal drive stimuli, it attempts to control the demands of the instincts by judiciously deciding the mode of satisfaction, or if satisfaction is to be had at all. Indeed, the ego attempts to harness instinctual libidinal drives so that they submit to the reality principle

(Lapsley et al, 2011)<sup>[13]</sup>

## Conclusion

As a result, it may be concluded that the comparison of *How Heavy Do I Journey on the Way* and *Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening* shows the analogue since they both depict the internal struggle between love and duty. Love can be described as the id of human psychology, and duty has been acclaimed as the ego of the human mind. Dr. Divya Gupta (2020)<sup>[9]</sup> writes, “One who is guided by ego acts rationally and logically. According to Freud, the ego is like a rider of the wild horse (id). Societal norms and facts are taken into consideration while making a decision. Ego is a negotiator and mediator who controls the id’s irrational demand and Superego’s idealism. Ego is a faithful counselor of any person.” Although the poet’s outside journeys are essential, Freud’s “Psychoanalytic Theory of Personality” may be studied more effectively by focusing on their interior journeys. Shakespeare and Frost chose duty by denying the sensual pleasure of attractions of the ‘id.’ The horses were not merely represented as beast-of-burden but very symbolically; they had been appointed as the pathetic fallacy who perform the ‘alter ego (s)’ role of the poets. Despite their sadness, the poets started their trip again by shattering the ‘id’ trepan.

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