

# An Analysis of Robert Frost's Poem "The Road Not Taken"

Tantri Sundari/ 147835098

## A. Introduction

"The Road Not Taken" is one of Robert Frost's most familiar and most popular poems. It is made up of four stanzas of five lines each, and each line has between eight and ten syllables in a roughly iambic rhythm; the lines in each stanza rhyme in an *abaab* pattern. The popularity of the poem is largely a result of the simplicity of its symbolism: The speaker must choose between diverging paths in a wood, and he sees that choice as a metaphor for choosing between different directions in life. Nevertheless, for such a seemingly simple poem, it has been subject to very different interpretations of how the speaker feels about his situation and how the reader is to view the speaker. In 1961, Frost himself commented that "The Road Not Taken" is "a tricky poem, very tricky."

Frost wrote the poem in the first person, which raises the question of whether the speaker is the poet himself or a persona, a character created for the purposes of the poem. According to the Lawrance Thompson biography, *Robert Frost: The Years of Triumph* (1971), Frost would often introduce the poem in public readings by saying that the speaker was based on his Welsh friend Edward Thomas. In Frost's words, Thomas was "a person who, whichever road he went, would be sorry he didn't go the other."

There are plenty literary devices in this poem to be discovered. This paper is about to analyze the "The Road Not Taken" is one of Robert Frost based on it literary devices.

## B. Analysis of “The Road Not Taken” by Robert Frost

“The Road Not Taken” is one of Robert Frost’s most familiar and most popular poems. It consists of four stanzas of five lines each, and each line has between eight and ten syllables, the lines in each stanza rhyme in an *A-B-A-A-B* pattern. Frost wrote the poem in the first person, which raises the question of whether the speaker is the poet himself or a persona, a character created for the purposes of the poem. According to the Lawrence Thompson biography, *Robert Frost: The Years of Triumph* (1971), Frost would often introduce the poem in public readings by saying that the speaker was based on his Welsh friend Edward Thomas. In Frost’s words, Thomas was “a person who, whichever road he went, would be sorry he didn’t go the other. It was about a friend who had gone off to war, a person who, whichever road he went, would be sorry he didn’t go the other. He was hard on himself that way.

The first line of the first stanza sets the scene for the literal and metaphorical fork in the road that the speaker faces. “Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,” the road splitting in the woods is a metaphor for a choice. Wherever the speaker’s life has taken him so far, he has come to the point where, to go any farther, he needs to make a choice that takes him down one path and avoid him from taking the other. Because the fork in the road is a metaphor for choices throughout the poem, it’s called an extended metaphor. This line also gives us the setting of the poem. The speaker tells us the woods are yellow, so we can conclude that it’s autumn. The metaphorical significance of this poem taking place in autumn could be that the speaker is making this choice in the fall of his life, when he’s beginning to grow old. “And sorry I could not travel both. And be one traveler, long I stood,” The speaker wants to go down both roads at once, but since it’s impossible to walk down two roads at once, he has to

choose one road. The speaker is sorry he can't travel both roads, suggesting regret. Because of the impossibility of traveling both roads, the speaker stands there trying to choose which path he's going to take. Because he's standing, we know that he's on foot, and not in a carriage or a car. He regrets that he cannot follow both roads, but since that is not possible, he pauses for a long while to consider his choice. "And looked down one as far as I could. To where it bent in the undergrowth," the speaker really wants to go down both paths – he's thinking hard about his choice. He's staring down one road, trying to see where it goes. But he can only see up to the first bend, where the undergrowth, the small plants and greenery of the woods, blocks his view. This is where we start to think about the metaphorical meanings of this poem. If our speaker is, as we suspect, at a fork in the road of his life, and not at an actual road, he could be trying to peer into his future as far as he can. This description of the road is a metaphor for the future. Just like we can only see a path in the woods for so far, we can only see the consequences of our decisions for a short while into our future. We find out here that these woods must be pretty thick, because a road can disappear in the undergrowth. Metaphorically, the undergrowth could represent aspects of the speaker's future that are unclear.

The second stanza tells about "then took the other, as just as fair." Here, the speaker decides that, even though he's spent a long time looking down one road, he's going to take the other, which seems just as interesting. This is probably a metaphor for a sudden decision – when we think about doing one thing, like, we finally buy a new handphone that we've been dreaming about, but then we just decide to buy a new one. We don't know why we did it, other than that we thought we'd be just as happy with one choice as the other. "And having perhaps the better claim. Because it was grassy and wanted wear." The speaker still seems pretty uncertain when he explains

that this second path is better. It is only perhaps better. Then the speaker tells us why the path is better – it seems like it hasn't been walked on very much, because it's grassy and doesn't look worn. The speaker is biased in favor of nature. He thinks one path could be better because fewer people have worn it down. These lines are not just about nature, but are a metaphor for a decision that is less commonly made. “Though as for that the passing there. Had worn them really about the same.” The speaker of this poem really can't seem to make up his mind! Just when we think we've got a declaration about which path is better, he changes his mind and admits that maybe they were equal after all. The "as for that" refers to the path being less worn. "The passing there" refers to traffic, probably on foot just like our speaker, that may have worn the paths down.

The third stanza explains “And both that morning equally lay. In leaves no step had trodden black.” The autumn imagery continues, and we find out that it's morning. We also see a contradiction of the earlier claim that one path is less worn than the other. This line shows us that the leaves have freshly fallen – perhaps masking which path was more or less traveled the day before. So, metaphorically, this line points out that sometimes there's no way to tell which decision is better. “Oh, I kept the first for another day!” The speaker seems like he's already regretting his decision. He is rationalizing his choice of path by saying he'll come back to the one he missed later. With an "Oh" at the beginning and an exclamation point at the end, this line is emphatic. The speaker feels strongly about what he's saying here. “Yet knowing how way leads on to way, I doubted if I should ever come back. The speaker realizes that his hopes to come back and try the other path may be foolish. The speaker wants to be able to take both roads, but realizes that the nature of these roads is such that he probably will never be able to come back to this place. This is a

metaphor for a decision that changes everything – once you've made it you can never go back.

The last stanza the speaker resumes his initial tone of sorrow and regret. He realizes that he probably will never return to walk the alternate path, and he considers how the choice he must make now will look to him in the future. “I shall be telling this with a sigh. Somewhere ages and ages hence.” He'll be telling it with a sigh, though, which is interesting because sighs can be happy, sad, or merely reflective – and we don't know what kind of sigh this is. So, we know that this choice is probably going to be important for the speaker's future, but we don't know if he's going to be happy about it or not. “Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—“ This repetition helps to bring the poem to a conclusion. It reminds us what's important in the poem – the concept of choosing between two different paths. Then, we get the hesitation of "and I" and the dash. This lets us know that whatever the speaker is about to say next is important. “I took the one less traveled by. And that has made all the difference” In line 19, one of the roads is being affirmed as less traveled, even though the narrator seemed unsure before. And then we get the famous line "and that has made all the difference," which solidifies the figurative level of this poem by saying that taking the road that the speaker took, making the choice that he made, has changed his life.

The content of poem “The Road Not Taken” tells about someone’s life, and show how difficult for somebody to decide which path of live is good for him. While based on the form, there are plenty literary devices in this poem to be discovered. One of these is paradox. When the traveler comes to the fork in the road, he wishes he could travel both. Within the current theories of our physical world, this is a non possibility (unless he has a split personality). The traveler realizes this and

immediately rejects the idea. Yet another little contradiction are two remarks in the second stanza about the road less traveled. First it's described as grassy and wanting wear, after which he turns to say the roads are actually worn about the same. When reading this poem a reader can empathize with the narrator's decision: having to choose between two paths without having any knowledge of where each road will lead. Moreover, the narrator's decision to choose the "less traveled" path demonstrates his courage. Rather than taking the safe path that others have traveled, the narrator prefers to make his own way in the world. It means that this poem have an equal portion between content and form.

### **C. Conclusion**

The literal meaning of this poem by Robert Frost is pretty obvious. A traveler comes to a fork in the road and needs to decide which way to go to continue his journey. After much mental debate, the traveler picks the road "less traveled by." The figurative meaning is not too hidden either. The poem describes the tough choices people stand for when traveling the road of life. The words "sorry" and "sigh" make the tone of poem somewhat gloomy. The traveler regrets leaves the possibilities of the road not chosen behind. He realizes he probably won't pass this way again.

### **D. Reference**

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