

An analysis of tone in the road not taken, a poem by robert frost



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Robert Frost's work *The Road Not Taken* conveys a very simplistic, yet introspective theme. The poem describes the dilemmas and choices one must make in life, and how those specific decisions affect that person. Frost establishes this theme with an allegorical illustration of two paths in the woods. Later in the poem, the author reveals the attributes and personality of the main character as he or she contemplates past life choices. This characterization helps to bridge the gap between the reader and the character, allowing the poem to communicate a deeper resonance. Frost strengthens the reader's figurative presence in the poem by presenting such emblematic diction and setting. The use of such devices again aid to the connection between the reader and the character-forcing Frost's message to become even more insightful. Robert Frost portrays a very pensive and impactful tone in his poem *The Road Not Taken* through means of symbolic imagery, representative setting, thorough characterization, and powerful diction, in order to encourage the reader to reflect upon his or her own life choices.

One of the most significant elements of this poem is Frost's use of imagery. In the opening lines of the poem, the main character stops at a forked path in the forest, pondering which direction he or she will go. This part, being one of the most vital, symbolizes a choice needing to be made, most likely in life. Roads in literature often correlate with travel or a migration from one place to the next. So, the character's consideration about which road to take reveals a self-reflection the character has about which direction to go in life. Secondly, before the character continues his or her journey, he or she notes that the end of the first trail is covered by a sort of "undergrowth",

metaphorically indicating the perplexity of life and the inability to predict the consequence of life choices. The poem unmistakably exhibits this analysis in the first stanza, “ Two roads diverged in a yellow wood, / And sorry I could not travel both / And be one traveler, long I stood / And looked down one as far as I could / To where it bent in the undergrowth...” (lines 1-5).

Furthermore, it can be said that Frost’s use of these figurative images are centralized to exemplify his tone of self-reflection and cogitation, as they boldly depict the importance of lifestyle decision-making.

Another literary aspect Frost utilizes to express his tone is setting. In the poem, he writes, “ Two roads diverged in a yellow wood...” (line 1). The phrase “ a yellow wood” may be an indication of the color the trees radiated. This suggests that the story takes place in the middle of autumn, most likely, contributing to the sense that time is running out-as in life-for the character. Here, Frost again outlines his tone as he demonstrates the character’s rational contemplation and, eventually, regret. The author further establishes the setting as he indicates that the paths were not worn, even stating that one was grassy, providing a location of serenity and aesthetic beauty. This rendition of the setting applies a philosophical aspect to the poem, as it represents a life of innocence and potential. The forked trail could symbolize maturation and development, as the character is forced to choose which direction he or she wants to take his or her life. In the second stanza, it states, “ Then took the other, as just as fair, / And having perhaps the better claim, / Because it was grassy and wanted wear...” (lines 6-8). In this part of the poem, it almost seems as if the character foolishly expected life to desire him or her to enter it, as the poem suggests the grass wanted to be worn

down. This is probably one of the reasons why the character emotes regret later in the work. Again, Frost communicates his solemn and contemplative tone by familiarizing the reader with the character's experiences.

Frost draws the reader into the story as he characterizes the man or woman standing in the woods. The character evidently appears conflicted throughout the story as he or she faces a dilemma and eventually has mixed emotions when one of the options were chosen. As the second stanza begins, the character states that he or she hastily chose the grassy trail which, according to the theme, is not wise. The author seems to suggest that the character is highly impulsive, while also adventurous, considering that he or she is wandering through the forest, almost aimlessly. As the story progresses, however, the character seems to be regretful of the choice he or she has made. For instance, as the character walks, he or she begins to seem fearful that the opposite path may have been more alluring or aesthetic. This becomes evident in the third stanza, stating, "...And both that morning equally lay / In leaves no step had trodden black. Oh, I kept the first for another day! Yet knowing how way leads on to way, / I doubted if I should ever come back." (lines 11-15). Understanding the character's feelings again strengthens the relationship between the reader and the character, making the author's reflective tone and solemn message become even more compelling.

The final figurative element Frost incorporates into the poem is diction. This becomes prominent in the final stanza, as it reveals the character's regrets.

" 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
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has made all the difference.” (lines 16-20). With use of the word “ sigh”, Frost delineates the character’s dissatisfaction with his or her choice. In the conclusion of the poem, the character, realizing that he or she had made the wrong choice, suggests that if the other path had been taken, he or she would have made the better choice. This ties in with Frost’s tone as it is represented in the character’s regrets.

Robert Frost’s short poem The Road Not Taken proves its literary merit through an intensely developed theme, as well as tone. Frost organizes an exceedingly philosophical and contemplative piece, through use of numerous literary devices. One of the most eminent include metaphorical imagery, such as autumn, a forest, and paths. He further exemplifies the tone as he employs setting and characterization. With these instruments, the poem is able to appeal to the reader, as it seemingly allows an immersion into the text. Finally, the author’s application of diction contributes to what makes the text so captivating, as it lets the reader delve into the mind of the character. The poem The Road Not Taken by Robert Frost illustrates an insightful, yet regretful tone through use of setting, characterization, imagery, and diction, for the sole purpose of making the reader aware of the haste and intricacy of life.