

Everyone is a traveler, choosing the roads

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Everyone is a traveler, choosing the roads to follow on the continuous journey of life; there exists not a path that leaves one with but a sole direction in which to advance. In his poem, "The Road Not Taken", Robert Frost exhibits insight and perception in using poetic techniques to communicate this message. The piece depicts a man's regret at not being able to travel two roads, and having to make a choice between the two. The importance of making decisions is disclosed in the narrator's assertion that his choice "has made all the difference."

The first few lines of the poem introduce the elements of Frost's primary metaphor and symbol, the diverging roads. The use of the road suggests that life is a journey that the narrator is traveling. The "two roads diverged" symbolize the points in this journey where one must make choices. As the narrator contemplates his decision, wishing that he could take both paths at the same time while knowing there is no possibility in that, the reader is able to glimpse the strength of Frost's symbolism- every person must make decisions with the knowledge that going back and changing them is impossible, because one has already traveled too far down the chosen path to turn back.

The setting, along with imagery, assists in developing the key symbols of the poem. The piece opens with the narrator taking a walk in the woods during the autumn season, when he is suddenly confronted with a diverging path. The central image of "two roads diverged" helps to convey the theme of having to make choices in life. The "yellow wood" corresponds to the autumn season, a period that is often related to the end of the annual cycle

in flora and foliage. Autumn may be perceived as a state in limbo between the vivacity of summer and the chill of winter.

The speaker examines one path to the best of his ability: ". . . and looked down one as far as I could to where it bent in the undergrowth". His vision, however, is limited because the path bends, and a certain amount of undergrowth obscure the destination of the road. The description of the paths indicates that although the speaker would like to acquire more information, he is prevented from doing so because of the nature of his environment. The road that will be chosen leads to the unknown, as does any choice in life. The concept of "two roads diverged in a yellow wood" illustrates an interval between two phases in life, and helps convey the theme of one having to inevitably choose between digressing paths.

The ironic tone is inescapable: "I shall be telling this with a sigh / Somewhere ages and ages hence." The speaker anticipates his own future insincerity. He knows that he will be inaccurate, at best, or hypocritical, at worst, when he holds his life up as an example. In fact, he predicts that his future self will betray this moment of decision as if the betrayal were inevitable.

This realization is ironic and poignantly pathetic. But the "sigh" is critical. The speaker will not, in his old age, merely gather the youth about him and say, "Do what I did, kiddies. I stuck to my guns, took the road less traveled by, and that has made all the difference." Rather, he may say this, but he will sigh first; for he won't believe it himself. Somewhere in the back of his mind will remain the image of yellow woods and two equally leafy paths.

Ironic as it is, this is also a poem infused with the anticipation of remorse. Its title is not "The Road Less Traveled" but "The Road Not Taken." Even as he makes a choice (a choice he is forced to make if does not want to stand forever in the woods, one for which he has no real guide or definitive basis for decision-making), the speaker knows that he will second-guess himself somewhere down the line--or at the very least he will wonder at what is irrevocably lost: the impossible, unknowable Other Path. But the nature of the decision is such that there is no Right Path--just the chosen path and the other path. What are sighed for ages and ages hence are not so much the wrong decisions as the moments of decision themselves--moments that, one atop the other, mark the passing of a life. This is the more primal strain of remorse.

It is observed that the title of the poem, "The Road Not Taken," may be intended to serve as a subtle hint, an insinuation of the narrator's dissatisfaction with the decision he made. What about "the one less traveled by"? Neither of the roads was less traveled than the other. He less traveled both roads because this was the first time the narrator had come upon these paths. Leaves covered the ground, and since the time they had fallen no one had yet to pass by on this road; both were worn about the same "in leaves that no step had trodden black." Nevertheless, the speaker is unhappy that he took the path that he chose, and yearns to go back and take "The Road Not Taken." Time, however, does not allow second chances.

"The Road Not Taken" is an ironic commentary on the autonomy of choice in a world governed by instincts, unpredictable contingencies, and limited possibilities. It parodies and demurs from the biblical idea that God is the " <https://assignbuster.com/everyone-is-a-traveler-choosing-the-roads-research-paper-samples/>

way" that can and should be followed and the American idea that nature provides the path to spiritual enlightenment. The title refers doubly to bravado for choosing a road less traveled but also to regret for a road of lost possibility and the eliminations and changes produced by choice.

" The Road Not Taken " reminds us of the consequences of the principle of selection in all aspects of life, namely that all choices in knowledge or in action exclude many others and lead to an ironic recognition of our achievements. At the heart of the poem is the romantic mythology of flight from a fixed world of limited possibility into a wilderness of many possibilities combined with trials and choices through which the pilgrim progresses to divine perfection.

The reader finds, at the literal level, the narrator expressing his regret at his human limitations, at not being able to travel two roads; he must make a choice. The choice is not easy, since it took him a long time to come to a decision: " . . . long I stood and looked down one as far as I could". He examines one path " to where it bent in the undergrowth", but his vision is limited because the path bends and is covered over. He describes the second path as " just as fair" as the first rather than more fair, and that the paths are " really about the same".

This ambiguous evaluation of the paths reveals his search for a clear and logical reason to decide on one path over another-- only that reason is unavailable. When the narrator finally makes his decision, he tries to persuade himself that he will eventually satisfy the desire to travel both paths, while simultaneously admitting that such a hope is unrealistic: Oh, I kept the first for another day! Yet knowing how way leads on to way, I
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doubted if I should ever come back. At the end of the poem, in the future, the narrator will claim that the paths were actually different from each other, and that his choice "has made all the difference."

The last lines of the poem suggest that life would have been different had the speaker taken the other path: "I took the one less traveled by, and that has made all the difference." The fact that the speaker says the entire last stanza "with a sigh" works together with the title to show that the speaker is disappointed with the choice he made. Once the entire poem is read, it may be realized that this is not an inspirational piece about why one should be different from everyone else. Rather, it reminds the reader of the consequences that follow a decision, and the manner in which one choice can shape one's life.

In his poem, Robert Frost conveys his notion of life as a journey that every person must travel, a journey laden with diverging roads, many decisions, and occasional sighs; the piece demonstrates the poet's belief that it is the road that one chooses that makes him or her the person who he or she is. "The Road Not Taken" leaves its readers with many different interpretations. In any case, however, it is Frost's clever use of poetic techniques to express the theme that opens the door for analysis, and allows all readers from different backgrounds to relate to the poem.