

Theme analysis literature review example

[Art & Culture](#), [Symbolism](#)



Introduction:

For this paper, the two literary works selected are the road not taken and I used to live here once. The theme of symbolism of the journey will be analyzed for both pieces of literature. Below is a critical analysis that compares and contrasts how the theme has been portrayed in both works.

Road Not Taken:

The poem Road Not Taken by Robert Frost was published in 1916. It has been described as one of the best known poems worldwide. The setting of the poem is unique; it immediately engages the reader and captures their attention from the start. It is one of his best works to date. However, the poem has also earned a reputation as being one of the most misunderstood poems in literature. Many readers have different interpretation of the poem. The poem does not have a lucid conclusion and this has always left readers to make their own interpretation. This paper will examine the literal meaning of each stanza and come up with a symbolic theme that reinforces the symbolism of the journey described by the author.

The poem has a deep emotional influence attached to it. The poem presents an ongoing theme that affects human being every day. The split road and the journey in the poem are not only literal they have a symbolic meaning. The symbolism of the journey and the spilt road is meant to portray the significance of choices that are made throughout the human lives. The poem also portrays the fact that all choices have consequence. The poem portrays the powerlessness of human beings have to avoid choices or avoid making mistakes and wrong decisions at a particular point in their lives. The poem

describes the vulnerable nature of life based on the choices people make. The split road symbolizes the difficulty involved with making choices. It discourses the fact that accepting taking up one choice means abating another choice. For every path taken, there is always going to be another path that won't be taken. This leaves humans in a precarious position where they will forever wonder about the possible outcomes of the other road that they did not take (Johnson, 2007).

In the first stanza, Robert Frost is talking about two roads that are spilt at the middle. The yellow wood presents a clear picture of autumn. He goes on to describe how he could not possibly go down both roads and still be alive. This is because he would have had to split himself into two in order to travel through both roads; this is impossible. He stands at the middle of the spilt road and take a long look at one of the roads. He looks as far as he can but cannot see the end of the road as it bends into the undergrowth obscuring his vision. The first stanza symbolically represents the situation faced by the author and human beings every day. The split road is a metaphor. It represents two choices. The author is facing two very difficult choices or options. He stands back at takes time to think which decision has the best outcome. The use of autumn in the poem is symbolic. It suggests that the author wrote this poem during the " fall". This can be interpreted to mean that when most people start to take a closer look at their lives, they reflect back at the choices they made and the consequences of these choices. They also reflect at the choices they did not make, and start to wonder the possible outcomes that they may have left out of their lives.

In the second stanza, the author examines the second road and concludes

that the second road is just as good as the first. The second road looked more appealing to the author. It was grassy and it seemed to be urging the narrator to walk towards it (Johnson, 2007). In reality, both roads were similarly worn out. Although the second was grassy, the author describes it as having been walked on as much as the first road. The author wanted to go down the road that seemed less travelled. This is because it was grassy and therefore, had "better claim". This can symbolically mean that when making choices, human beings tend to make choices that seem appealing to them. They search for new or exciting things in their lives. The road that seemed less travelled seemed to portray an image of numerous opportunities. On further examination, the author realizes that whichever path he chooses, he would still have the same outcome.

In the third stanza, the author describes how both roads were not equally walked on the morning he was there. There were leaves on the ground, but there was no evidence of anyone having passed through. The author chooses the second road and decides he will travel on the first road another time. Immediately, he suspects that may not be possible since taking one path will lead him to more paths in the future. It is unlikely that he will ever come back to see where the first road would have led him. This stanza symbolizes human nature. After picking one option, people are always left wondering what would happen if they had taken the other option. They wish they will come back and experience the outcome of the option they did not pick. However, this does not always happen since making choices has consequences (Frost, 1993).

In the fourth stanza, the author describes how he will remember the decision

he took. He will be reminiscing about the split roads and how he took the one that was less travelled. He will also reminisce how this decision changed his life. The author describes how the decision he took made all the difference. However, he does not clarify whether the differences were positive or negative. Also, when the author describes how he would be narrating his decision with a sigh, he does not specify if it will be a sigh of relief or a sigh of disappointment (Erkut, 1996). The author leaves the reader to make their own interpretation. This symbolizes the extreme difficulty human beings face every day when making choices that affect their life. They are troubled by what awaits them in the future. They are always left wondering if different choices have different outcomes or in the end their decisions will lead them toward the same outcome (Johnson, 2007).

I used to live Here Once:

The theme of symbolism of the journey is used in the short story “ I Used to Live Here Once” more than once. Symbolism involves the use of certain phrases or objects to represent hidden meanings. “ I Used to Live Here Once” is a story about a woman on a journey. The location in which she moves about in is a familiar place to her that has undergone changes. The use of terms and phrases that showed her comparison of the state of the place then and how she remembered it suggests that it had been a long time since she visited the place. The meaning of the short story is revealed at the end of the narration. It is at the end that the reader realizes that the she referred to in the story is actually dead. From there, the reader can piece together why the tone of the short story is as it is. The whole short story is symbolic of the journey people take at the end of their mortal lives (Frickey,

1990).

The use of a natural setting is symbolic of the natural nature of the journey in the narration. The journey in which the woman is involved in is the journey of life. The term “ journey of life” is explored in a literal manner in this short story. How the woman travels on foot is also symbolic of how one has to live their own life or access memories from their lives. No technology or assistance can be involved in these processes (Gregg, 1995).

The crossing over is also another point of symbolism. The phrase symbolizes the process of crossing from life to death. However, it is implied that the woman crossed over back into the world of the living. It is also implied that she is unable to communicate with the living because she is dead and therefore invisible. Symbolism is also applied when the children run into the house because of the cold that was outside. This happened as soon as she got close to them. This can be symbolic of paranormal activity. Sudden cold outbursts are always associated with paranormal activity in the environment. Death and cold are always associated with chilling cold because of loss of life in the body. (Gregg, 1995).

The name of the female character is not disclosed to the readers. When one dies, religion dictates that the spirit leaves the body. This can be symbolic of the loss of worldly identification for the woman in question. Her existence in the narration is purely spiritual. It also shows how people in the living world lack a sense of know how concerning the world of the dead. This is because the author gets numerous opportunities to refer to the woman by her name. However, he chooses to refer to her as “ she” throughout the story. How the woman in the short story outstretches her hands instinctively to embrace the

playing children is symbolic of her need to reconnect with the world of the living. This is especially so because the children are complete strangers to her. Her need to reconnect is highly overwhelming that she stretches out her hands to them despite having clear indications that they did not hear the first two times she called out to them (Frickey, 1990).

The phrase “ the road was much wider but the work had been done poorly” is also full of symbolism. The woman’s journey is presented to the readers as a journey down memory lane. As such, the author demonstrates the woman’s opinions with regard with how her life unfolded. She noticed that the road was wider; however, the widening process was poorly done. This shows that the woman was seeing the areas of her life that she had potential to turn out much better

The woman also remembered that despite the poor work, she had always been happy. This is symbolic of how content the woman had been while alive. That statement shows that she had always been happy despite the imperfections that were present in her life. It is also symbolic of how people live below their achievement potential comfortably. The author may have been challenging the readers to live their lives to full potential. This can be demonstrated in the short story by the woman’s line of thinking. The one expressed implies that the road would have been more appealing if the work had been done excellently (Gregg, 1995). The narration in the short story is from a limited omniscient stand. This way, the author expresses the observations and thoughts of one character. This reflects limited knowledge and awareness. The author used this style of narration to make the reader feel as if they also have a limited omniscient stand on the narration.

Conclusion:

The main difference in the two pieces is how symbolism of the journey is portrayed. In the case of "The Road not taken", a choice of two roads is used to signify the character's journey. In the poem, the character is faced by choices and decides to pick one out of the two roads to complete his journey. On the other hand, in "Used to live here once" there are no choices to be made. The narrator is simply on a journey that allows her to cross a river and reach the other side safely. Therefore, Frost presents life as a journey with choices while Rhys does not examine the choices in life's journey.

The symbolism of the journey portrayed in "The Road not taken" leaves the readers to make their decision as to whether the author was someone who was satisfied with the choices he made in his life or he live a difficult life of regrets (Erkut, 1996). The symbolism of the journey portrays the difficulties of human life, and the choices he faces daily. It leaves the reader to think their critically about choices in life. From a different point of view, the poem is likely to suggest that no matter which path people choose in life, the road will lead them towards a similar outcome (Frost, 1993).

On the other hand, the symbolism of the journey portrayed in "I Used to Live Here Once" symbolizes a woman's naivety and innocence throughout the narration. This is shown by how the woman does not indulge in analyzing why she comes through the changes that she witnesses. She does not seem to question the things that she notices are out of place. This is especially the case for the sky. She noticed a glassy appearance to it. Glass is always associated with reflection and a manipulated sense of space and view. This

naivety is finally changed when the woman realizes she is dead. The readers are forced to assume the woman realizes why she came across those changes and why some things were out of place. This is symbolic of how little the woman knew. It also shows that the woman was in a familiar but unfamiliar environment. The readers are able to know the reason behind the unfamiliar environment when the reader realizes that the woman was dead (Frickey, 1990).

References:

- Erkut, E. (1996). The road not taken. *OR/MS Today*, 23(6), 22-28.
- Frickey, P. M. (1990). *Critical perspectives on Jean Rhys*. Washington, D. C: Three Continents Press.
- Frost, R. (1993). *The road not taken, and other poems*. New York: Dover Publications.
- Gregg, V. (1995). *Writing the creole: Jean Rhys's historical imagination*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.
- Johnson, D. (2007). Critical Companion to Robert Frost: A Literary Reference to His Life and Work. *Booklist*, 104(3), 82.
- Mordecai, P., & Wilson, B. (1989). *Her true-true name*. Oxford: Heinemann International.