

# The Road Not Taken

“The Road not Taken” by Robert Frost is a four-stanza poem published in 1916 in *Mountain Interval*. Being one of the most popular works of the author, it is also very hard to understand, for it contains many symbolic elements which could be interpreted in different ways.

The poem is the author’s reflection about which of the two roads in the wood to take. Both of them seem to be equal, and yet he has to choose only one. The choice is rather difficult, and for some time he immerses into contemplations considering characteristics of each road. The speaker opts for the route which is more travelled by, and the second stanza justifies his choice with the words, “Because it was grassy and wanted wear”. He knows that someday he may follow the not taken one, as well, but he also knows it is unlikely. The author describes the settings very clearly: he stays in a “yellow wood” which means that it is autumn now; it is early in the morning, therefore no one has walked the paths today and there is a clear indication of this in the text, “no step had trodden black” and they are.

The poem is, by no means, very symbolic and its primary attraction is the archetypal quandary which is identified by each reader, for everyone has faced it plenty of times in their lives. Fork in the road is an easily recognized metaphor which indicates the necessity to make a stark choice between two options. Interestingly, but one can never be absolutely sure whether this is fate or a person oneself that actually makes this choice, for one does not know beforehand what he or she is now really choosing from. Therefore, there is a possibility that having prioritized, one will continue thinking of the not taken option, and will be trying to guess what would happen if the choice would have been different.

As to the mood of the poem, it is rather gloomy. It becomes clear from the first

lines that the narrator has a feeling of remorse, because he cannot walk two roads simultaneously, “and sorry I could not travel both.” As he makes a decision, the speaker already knows that in the future he will be thinking of the other road, and moreover, he might regret his choice, “I shall be telling this with a sigh / Somewhere ages and ages hence”. He also admits that he “doubted” if he could have another chance of coming back. All this makes the reader think that the choice he made was inevitable and he knew it beforehand.

The author gives the poem a title which may be a key to its interpretation. It is absolutely significant to the poem’s meaning for it reveals the speaker’s regret right away, and it becomes clear that the author prefers the “not taken” road, otherwise, he would have dedicated the title to the road he actually took. Therefore, the author concentrates his thoughts on the opportunities he has lost. He tries to predict how his life would be different if he had followed the other way. The title, more than any other part of the poem, suggests that the narrator speaks of his regrets and the chances he did not take in his life.

As to the rhyme, it is masculine and has abaab scheme, which means that only two of the five stanzas rhyme. It has iambic and anapestic feet, so there are either one or two unstressed syllables followed by a stressed syllable. The poem is written in iambic tetrameter which is unusual for poetry. It is also very symbolic, because it seems that the rhythm deviates from the norm, just as the narrator does (“I took the one less travelled by”). To make his poem more symbolic and interesting, Frost uses multiple literary devices. The first one is antithesis. In the beginning of the poem, the narrator says he would like to follow both routes, but at the same time, he realizes he cannot do that. In the second stanza, the writer suggest that the first road is “the better claim / because it was grassy and wanted wear”, so he says it is less travelled by. Next, he contradicts his own words saying that the passersby “had worn them really about the same”. In the third stanza, Frost again employs antithesis. He first presumes that he “marked the first for the other day”, but later, he “doubted” if he ever comes back.

Generally, antithesis more than other devices helps reflect the author's inner struggle.

Apart from antithesis, there are other figures of speech which help convey the narrator's thoughts. Firstly, it is onomatopoeia – "sigh". This word is essential in the poem, because it suggests that the author is depressed. The thirteenth line "Because it was grassy and wanted wear" is the example of personification, because, obviously, a road is not animate and consequently, it cannot want anything. Apart from that, Frost makes a wide use of metaphors. Primarily, the road itself is a metaphor and it means a life path. Moreover, it is an extended metaphor because it is present throughout the poem. The fork stands for the difficulty of choice. Additionally, nature is a metaphor of the author's life – he speaks about taking a major decision walking through the forest. Moreover, he does not mention any other people in the forest which also suggests that this choice which "has made all the difference" depends only on him.

The speaker makes the impression of a very doubtful person. This is largely achieved through the use of such words as "sorry", "perhaps", "doubted". He doubts before making the choice and after that. Having chosen the road, he still hopes that he will have a chance to do it once again. Moreover, the narrator seems to be somewhat disappointed by the life path he once decided to follow, and in the end he says, "I shall be telling this with a sigh".

In conclusion, "The Road Not Taken" symbolizes the difficulty of choice every person someday faces in his or her life. The poem contains many stylistic devices, such as metaphors and antithesis, which make it both interesting and hard to understand. Still, the author describes the settings clearly and the reader has no problem of following the narrator's actions: after considering two options, he finally makes a decision. Nevertheless, he seems to be not happy with that and says that somewhere in the future, he will be speaking of his actions "with a sigh".

# References

Frost, R. The Road Not Taken. *PoemHunter*. Retrieved from:  
<http://www.poemhunter.com/poem/the-road-not-taken/>

