

Discussion

Frost claims that he wrote this poem about his friend Edward Thomas, with whom he had walked many times in the woods near London. Frost has said that while walking they would come to different paths and after choosing one, Thomas would always fret wondering what they might have missed by not taking the other path. About the poem, Frost asserted, "You have to be careful of that one; it's a tricky poem - very tricky." And he is, of course, correct. The poem has been and continues to be used as an inspirational poem, one that to the undiscerning eye seems to be encouraging self-reliance, not following where others have led. But a close reading of the poem proves otherwise. It does not moralize about choice; it simply says that choice is inevitable, but you never know what your choice will mean until you have lived it.

First Stanza – Describes Situation

The poem consists of four stanzas. In the first stanza, the speaker describes his position. He has been out walking the woods and comes to two roads, and he stands looking as far down each one as he can see. He would like to try out both, but doubts he could do that, so therefore he continues to look down the roads for a long time trying to make his decision about which road to take.

Second Stanza – Decides to Take Less-Traveled Road

The speaker had looked down the first one "to where it bent in the undergrowth," and in the second stanza, he reports that he decided to take the other path, because it seemed to have less traffic than the first. But then he goes on to say that they actually were very similarly worn. The second one that he took seems less traveled, but as he thinks about it, he realizes that they were "really about the same." Not exactly that same but only "about the same."

Third Stanza – Continues Description of Roads

The third stanza continues with the cogitation about the possible differences between the two roads. He had noticed that the leaves were both fresh fallen on them both and had not been walked on, but then again claims that maybe he would come back and also walk the first one sometime, but he doubted he would be able to, because in life one thing leads to another and time is short.

Fourth Stanza – Two Tricky Words

Those who interpret this poem as suggesting non-conformity take the word "difference" to be a positive difference. But there is nothing in the poem that suggests that this difference signals a positive outcome. The speaker could not offer such information, because he has not lived the "difference" yet. The other word that leads readers astray is the word "sigh." By taking "difference" to mean a positive difference, they think that the sigh is one of nostalgic relief; however, a sigh can also mean regret. There is the "oh, dear" kind of sigh, but also the "what a relief" kind of sigh. Which one is it? If it is the relief sigh, then the difference means the speaker is glad he took the road he did; if it is the regret sigh, then the difference would not be good, and the speaker would be sighing in regret. But the plain fact is that the poem does not identify the nature of that sigh. The speaker of the poem does not even know the nature of that sigh, because that sigh and his evaluation of the difference his choice will make are still *in the future*. It is a truism that any choice an individual makes is going to make "all the difference" in how our future turns out.

The Road Not Taken***By Robert Frost***

*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;*

*Then took the other, as just as fair
And having perhaps the better claim,
Because it was grassy and wanted wear;
Though as for that, the passing there
Had worn them really about the same,*

*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.*

*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 has made all the difference.*

The Road Not Taken

By Robert Frost

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*And both that morning equally lay
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Oh, I kept the first for another day!
Yet knowing how way leads on to way,
I doubted if I should ever come back. 15*

*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 has made all the difference. 20*

The speaker stands in the woods, considering a fork in the road. Both ways are equally worn and equally overlaid with un-trodden leaves. The speaker chooses one, telling himself that he will take the other another day. Yet he knows it is unlikely that he will have the opportunity to do so. And he admits that someday in the future he will recreate the scene with a slight twist: He will claim that he took the less-traveled road.

One of the attractions of the poem is its archetypal dilemma, one that we instantly recognize because each of us encounters it innumerable times, both literally and figuratively. Paths in the woods and forks in roads are ancient and deep-seated metaphors for the lifeline, its crises and

decisions. Identical forks, in particular, symbolize for us the nexus of free will and fate: We are free to

<i>"... having perhaps the better claim, Because it was grassy and wanted wear ..."</i>	choose, but we do not really know
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beforehand what we are choosing between. Our route is, thus, determined by an accretion of choice and chance, and it is impossible to separate the two.

This poem does not advise. It does not say, "When you come to a fork in the road, study the footprints and take the road less traveled by." Frost's focus is more complicated. First, there is no less-traveled road in this poem; it isn't even an option. Next, the poem seems more concerned with the question of how the yellow woods, grassy roads covered in fallen leaves will look from a future vantage point.

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—his need, later on in life, to rearrange the. 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. Somewhere in the back of his mind will remain the image of yellow woods

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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, 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. Thus, to add a further level of irony, the theme of the poem may, after all, be "seize the day." But a more nuanced *carpe diem*, if you please.

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First Stanza - Describes Situation

- Speaker describes his position
- Walking the woods and comes to two roads
- Stands looking as far down each one as he can see
- Likes to try out both, but doubts he could do that
- He continues to look down the roads

Second Stanza - Decides to Take Less-Traveled Road

- Decides to take the second path, because it seemed to have less traffic than the first
- They actually were very similarly worn

Third Stanza - Continues Description of Roads

- Cogitation about the possible differences between the two roads
- Noticed that the leaves were both fresh fallen on them both and had not been walked on
- He would come back and also walk the first one sometime, but he doubted he would be able to, because in life one thing leads to another and time is short

Fourth Stanza - Two Tricky Words

- Sigh leads to two rules of thought: positive and negative
- The poem does not identify the nature of that sigh
- The sigh and his evaluation of the difference his choice will make are still in the future
- It is a truism that any choice an individual makes is going to make "all the difference"

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"The Road Not Taken" consists of four stanzas of five lines. The rhyme scheme is ABAAB; the rhymes are strict and masculine, with the notable exception of the last. There are four stressed syllables per line, varying on an iambic tetrameter base.

One of the attractions of the poem is its archetypal dilemma, one that we instantly recognize because each of us encounters it innumerable times, both literally and figuratively. Paths in the woods and forks in roads are ancient and deep-seated metaphors for the lifeline, its crises and decisions. Identical forks, in particular, symbolize for us the nexus of free will and fate: We are free to choose, but we do not really know beforehand what we are choosing between. Our route is, thus, determined by an accretion of choice and chance, and it is impossible to separate the two.

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http://kacabiru.files.wordpress.com/2010/08/yellow_wood.jpg

<http://www.suite101.com/content/robert-frost-s-tricky-poem-a8712>

<http://www.sparknotes.com/poetry/frost/section7.rhtml>