Frost’s Fulfillment on his Footpath

We are faced with decisions on a daily basis. Some might be as easy as choosing what shirt to wear, where we don’t even have to think twice. However, others might be more challenging, such as choosing a major. And sometimes what appears at first to be a minor decision might lead a significant difference in your life. Robert Frost provides an example of what seems like a minor decision in “The Road Not Taken.” While walking in the woods, Frost comes across two paths and must choose what road to take to continue his journey. Most people assume that the Frost chose the road not taken, as he gives many indications of staying off the beaten path. In spite of this, a number of clues in this easily misinterpreted poem suggest that perhaps the Frost did not take the road less traveled.

Many experts agree that the poem was actually written about Frost’s friend Edward Thomas. Thomas and Frost used to take frequent walks as friends, and Thomas often had a hard time making decisions. In addition, Thomas often had trouble making choices in life. Their friendship and Thomas’s difficulty making decisions suggest that perhaps Frost wrote this poem as a joke to make fun of Thomas. After Thomas read the poem, he enlisted to fight in World War One. Clearly that is a significant change in one’s life.

The poem sparks debate about what it means to take the road less traveled. When Frost writes, “I took the one less traveled by,” it casts the him as a unique individual who goes against the expected behaviors. At the same time, many people point to the second stanza where the poet says, “Though as for that the passing there / Had worn them really about the same.” These two lines signify that the two roads are about the same in terms of the number of people who have traveled them. There is also speculation as to whether the choice is all that significant: “Oh, I kept the first for another day! / Yet knowing how way leads on to way, / I doubted if I should ever come back.” In these lines, the Frost explains that even though he did not travel the other road, he knows where it ends up. Which is essentially the same place as the road he took.

The poem explores whether and how the choices we make define us. The whole poem is really just an extended metaphor for the choices we make in everyday life. The Frost examines both paths, and then must decide. Choosing to take the road less traveled, signifies that he wants to stand out from everyone else. Another theme in this poem is the idea of uncertainty. Frost writes that even though the paths look the same, he knows that they will ultimately lead him to two separate places. The only problem is that he doesn't know what is ahead and which path will lead where. This is a metaphor for the choices we make in life, as we do not know what will come next. This sentiment is amplified by the last two lines where the writer says, "I took the one less traveled by, / And that has made all the difference." By saying this, Frost acknowledges that choices have consequences. In this case, the suggestion that "it has made all the difference" implies a sense of relief and satisfaction with his decision.

Personification is one of the figures of speech that sheds light on the two paths. In line 8 the author says, "Because it was grassy and wanted wear." In this case, Frost explains that the road is wanting more people to travel on it. This is an example of personification as the road cannot “want.” In addition, Frost uses the roads in a figurative sense rather than meaning it literally. These roads are options we are given in life, and we must choose which to take. Sathi Reddy explains that the narrators in Frost’s poems, “are viewed as the real people with real struggles in real life.” As referenced earlier, this poem deals with the struggle of life’s choices. Frost’s poems are often helpful to young children in explaining real life problems through situations they understand. This is just another reason why his poems are so famous.

The tense Frost uses in different stanzas is a key aspect of this poem. In the first three stanzas, Frost is using a form of past tense with words such as looked and kept. This changes in the last stanza when he switches to the future tense: "I shall be telling this with a sigh." Here we see what the poet if thinking from the future, as he looks back on the choice he has made. Most people would say that the sigh in the last line indicates that he is unhappy with his choice as he is regretting the decision he has made. However, at the same time, the sigh can be a sigh of relief, suggesting that the Frost is glad that he chose the second path instead of the first. This ambiguity presents the choices laid out in the poem back to the reader. For people who are optimistic, such as myself, I would say that this is a sigh of relief. In contrast, people who are pessimistic will likely say that he is regretting his choice. Just like Reddy describes that the poetry of Robert Frost is meant to be interpreted in many different ways and in many different settings by the same reader. This is what Frost intended to do as he draws a variety of ideas into his poems. When looking at a wider range of interpretations, it makes the audience wonder if Frost ended up taking just one road or was it both.

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