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The Road Not Taken by Robert Frost

The poem “The Road Not Taken” by Robert Frost invites the reader to think about choices in life, whether to go with the crowd or ride it alone. This resembles that life is a journey that consists of free will. There are two roads in the woods that are separating off which can be the result of the one road splitting. The author, Frost, had nothing else to do but to choose one of the roads and continue his life journey. The main points that are being covered in this poem are the themes of individual paths, free will, inevitability, and regret. All of these themes are being illustrated knowing there are many views on this poem. Readers can interpret views on this poem in all different ways and they could be correct. On one hand, there are going to be many choices going on to the next step in life, but it will all work out at the end. On the other hand, there should be no regret in the choices one makes.

In “Clearing a path to truth; Robert Frost's 'The Road Not Taken' is a poem that's loved for the wrong reasons,” David Lehman surveys all the different views on Frost’s poem. Lehman argues that the poem has been misread: “You will find it in any good poetry anthology. In its wizardry, the poem deserves the highest accolades. The irony is that it has often been loved and quoted for the wrong reasons. The further irony is that this misunderstanding itself testifies to the subtlety and genius of its creator” (Lehman). Lehman notes that generations of commencement speakers have quoted ‘The Road Not Taken,’ because of its message being received. These commencement speakers are all saying, “Avoid the common route. Go your own way. Be a maverick, a nonconformist in the great American tradition of Emerson and Thoreau” (Lehman). This is saying that these speakers have used quotes from Frost’s poem and have elaborated on them. These people say to go your own way and to learn from experience. Now Lehman’s opinions start to come in the article, “But now go back to the second stanza. As far as the traffic on them, the two roads are ‘really,’ Frost acknowledges, ‘about the same’" (Lehman). In Robert Frost’s, “The Road Not Taken”, the second stanza reads, “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” (Lines 6-10). Lehman’s questioning of the non-conformist message makes sense because Frost does make it seem like both of these roads are very similar and there are not many differences between them. If they are the same it cannot be non-conformist because there is no opportunity to go against the norm.

Inevitability is the quality of being certain something is going to happen. Lehman continues, “One thing it is about is the inevitability of regret. You cannot ‘be one traveler’ and take both paths. At any crossroads you must choose, and though you may keep alive the hope that you'll return someday, you know deep down you will never get a second chance” (Lehman). Inevitability is being shown by saying there will be something new that Frost will have to come across instead of going back to the crossroads and doing it differently. The last stanza from Robert Frost’s poem reads, “I shall be telling this with a sigh” (Line 16). The speakers sigh is being represented as a sign of relief knowing he cannot do anything about it anymore knowing that there is no point in regretting. Another line from Frost’s poem is “Yet knowing how way leads on to way, I doubted if I should ever come back” (Line 14-15). When Frost had to pick out which road he wanted to go on, he knew he would not go back and try the other road.

It is possible to read the poem in a different way. More insights into the role of choice in the poem can be found in "Potential Ambiguity in Robert Frost's The Road Not Taken” by Sayyed Rahim Moosavinia and Morteza Shahrakzadeh. They state, “‘The Road Not Taken,’ though ostensibly about free will, encompasses signs that leave a trace of determinism on its way down to the final lines. In the title of the poem, the word not represents a sense of regret in the persona, and this regret, while without believing in a free choice there is no sense in being regretful looking back in retrospect, is a sign of free will” (Moosavinia). This says that the theme of free will counters the sense of regret. Frost is not regretting the choice he made in the poem because he knows there is not going to be a wrong choice. His choice was completely up to him. The author talks about free will in the poem. Free will is using one’s thoughts and choosing your own direction. A quote from the poem is, “Then took the other, as just as fair” (Line 6). Frost had the option to pick from two roads and his free will led him to picking the one he did.

Another theme that adds on to free will is the theme of individualism. Frost is alone at his travels and had to make the difficult choice by himself. Both roads are similar in most ways, and their differences are unknown at the time when he had to choose a path. Throughout the poem, the speaker would rather be an individual than follow the crowd like the others. A line from the poem is “I took the one less traveled by, and that made all the difference” (Lines 19-20). This further explains why the speaker is trying to be an individual. This comes down to being able to choose between the two roads, which was a hard decision for the author to make at the time. That point in life is what one will decide for themselves.

The poem mostly represents that every person who makes a choice in life deals with the human nature to expect the "What if..." question to themselves. Frost’s poem is not about taking the road less travelled. This poem is more about the road being taken the road as well not taken. Frost did an excellent job making this poem about having no regrets and to keep accepting new challenges. At the end of the poem, Frost leaves it up to the reader if the road he chose was the right one.

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