

## The Road Not Taken

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

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# The Poem

"The Road Not Taken" is one of Robert Frost's most familiar and most popular poems. It is made up of four stanzas of five lines each, and each line has between eight and ten syllables in a roughly iambic rhythm; the lines in each stanza rhyme in an *abaab* pattern. The popularity of the poem is largely a result of the simplicity of its symbolism: The speaker must choose between diverging paths in a wood, and he sees that choice as a metaphor for choosing between different directions in life. Nevertheless, for such a seemingly simple poem, it has been subject to very different interpretations of how the speaker feels about his situation and how the reader is to view the speaker. In 1961, Frost himself commented that "The Road Not Taken" is "a tricky poem, very tricky."

Frost wrote the poem in the first person, which raises the question of whether the speaker is the poet himself or a persona, a character created for the purposes of the poem. According to the Lawrance Thompson biography, *Robert Frost: The Years of Triumph* (1971), Frost would often introduce the poem in public readings by saying that the speaker was based on his Welsh friend Edward Thomas. In Frost's words, Thomas was "a person who, whichever road he went, would be sorry he didn't go the other."

In the first stanza of the poem, the speaker, while walking on an autumn day in a forest where the leaves have changed to yellow, must choose between two paths that head in different directions. He regrets that he cannot follow both roads, but since that is not possible, he pauses for a long while to consider his choice. In the first stanza and the beginning of the second, one road seems preferable; however, by the beginning of the third stanza he has decided that the paths are roughly equivalent. Later in the third stanza, he tries to cheer himself up by reassuring himself that he will return someday and walk the other road.

At the end of the third stanza and in the fourth, however, the speaker resumes his initial tone of sorrow and regret. He realizes that he probably will never return to walk the alternate path, and in the fourth stanza he considers how the choice he must make now will look to him in the future. The speaker believes that when he looks back years later, he will see that he had actually chosen the "less traveled" road. He also thinks that he will later realize what a large difference this choice has made in his life. Two important details suggest that the speaker believes that he will later regret having followed his chosen road: One is the idea that he will "sigh" as he tells this story, and the other is that the poem is entitled "The Road Not Taken"—implying that he will never stop thinking about the other path he might have followed.

## History

Frost spent the years 1912 to 1915 in England, where among his acquaintances was the writer Edward Thomas. Thomas and Frost became close friends and took many walks together.

### Analysis

Frost's biographer Lawrence Thompson is cited as saying that the poem's narrator is "one who habitually wastes energy in regretting any choice made: belatedly but wistfully he sighs over the attractive alternative rejected." According to the Thompson biography, *Robert Frost: The Years of Triumph* (1971), in his introduction in readings to the public, Frost would say that the speaker was based on his friend Edward Thomas. In Frost's words, Thomas was "a person who, whichever road he went, would be sorry he didn't go the other."

While a case could be made for the sigh being one of satisfaction, the critical "regret" analysis supports the interpretation that this poem is about the human tendency to look back and attribute blame to minor events in one's life, or to attribute more meaning to things than they may deserve. In 1961, Frost commented that "The Road Not Taken" is "a tricky poem, very tricky," implying that people generally misinterpret this poem as evidence of the benefit of free thinking and not following the crowd, while Frost's intention was to comment about indecision and people finding meaning in inconsequential decisions. A New York Times Sunday book review on Brian Hall's 2008 biography *Fall of Frost* states: "Whichever way they go, they're sure to miss something good on the other path."

**Robert Lee Frost** (March 26, 1874 – January 29, 1963) was an American poet. He is well known for his realistic writings of rural life and his use of American informal (slang) speech. His poems were often set in rural life in New England in the early twentieth century, and used these settings to look at complex social and philosophical themes. Frost has often been quoted by other people. He was honored often during his lifetime, receiving four Pulitzer Prizes for Poetry.

Robert Frost was born in San Francisco, California, to journalist William Prescott Frost, Jr., and Isabelle Moodie.

Frost's father was a teacher, and later an editor of the *San Francisco Evening Bulletin* (later the *San Francisco Examiner*), and an unsuccessful candidate for city tax collector. After his death on May 5, 1885 the family moved across the country to Lawrence, Massachusetts.

In 1894, Frost sold his first poem, "My Butterfly: An Elegy", for fifteen dollars. It was published in the November 8, 1894, edition of the *New York Independent*. Proud of this accomplishment, he proposed marriage to Elinor Miriam White. She waited, wanting to finish college before they married. Frost then went on a trip to the Great Dismal Swamp in Virginia. After returning he proposed again to Elinor. Because she had then graduated, she agreed. They got married on 19th December 1895.

He attended liberal arts studies at Harvard for two years, but left to support his growing family. Shortly before dying, Robert's grandfather purchased a farm for Robert and Elinor in Derry, New Hampshire; and Robert worked the farm for nine years, while writing early in the mornings and producing many of the poems that would later become famous. His farming was unsuccessful and he returned to education as an English teacher at New Hampshire's Pinkerton Academy from 1906 to 1911, then at the New Hampshire Normal School (now Plymouth State University) in Plymouth, New Hampshire.

In 1912, Frost sailed with his family to Great Britain, living first in Glasgow before settling in Beaconsfield outside London. His first book of poetry, *A Boy's Will*, was published the next year. In England, he made some important friends, including Edward Thomas (a member of the group known as the Dymock Poets), T.E. Hulme, and Ezra Pound. Surrounded by his peers, Frost wrote some of his best work while in England.

As World War I began, Frost returned to America in 1915 and bought a farm in New Hampshire, where he started a career of writing, teaching, and lecturing. This family homestead was the Frosts' summer home until 1938, and is used today as The Frost Place, a museum and poetry conference site. During the years 1916–20, 1923–24, and 1927–1938, Frost taught English at Amherst College in Massachusetts, notably encouraging his students to account for the sounds of the human voice in their writing.

For forty-two years – from 1921 to 1963 - Frost spent almost every summer and fall teaching at the Bread Loaf School of English of Middlebury College, at its mountain campus at Ripton, Vermont. The

college now owns and maintains his former Ripton farmstead as a national historic site near the Bread Loaf campus. In 1921 Frost accepted a fellowship teaching post at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, where he resided until 1927; while there he was awarded a lifetime appointment at the University as a Fellow in Letters. The Robert Frost Ann Arbor home is now situated at The Henry Ford Museum in Dearborn, Michigan. Frost returned to Amherst in 1927. In 1940 he bought a 5-acre (2.0 ha) plot in South Miami, Florida, naming it *Pencil Pines*; he spent his winters there for the rest of his life.

Harvard's 1965 alumni directory says Frost received an honorary degree there. Although he never graduated from college, Frost received over 40 honorary degrees, including ones from Princeton, Oxford and Cambridge universities; and was the only person to receive two honorary degrees from Dartmouth College. During his lifetime, the Robert Frost Middle School in Fairfax, Virginia, and the main library of Amherst College were named after him.

Frost was 86 when he spoke and performed a reading of his poetry at the inauguration of President John F. Kennedy on January 20, 1961. He died in Boston two years later, on January 29, 1963, of complications from prostate surgery. He was buried at the Old Bennington Cemetery in Bennington, Vermont. His epitaph quotes a line from one of his poems: "I had a lover's quarrel with the world."

One of the original collections of Frost materials is found in the Special Collections department of the Jones Library in Amherst, Massachusetts. The collection consists of approximately twelve thousand items, including original manuscript poems and letters, correspondence, and photographs, as well as audio and visual recordings.

### **Neprehojena pot**

Dve poti sta se razhajali v rumenem gozdu  
in žal mi je bilo, da nisem mogel prehoditi obeh.  
Popotnik le ene poti sem dolgo stal  
in zrl v daljavo, kolikor daleč je neslo oko  
do tam, kjer je zavila v podrast.

Potem sem zakoračil po drugi,  
prav tako pravi in lepi,  
ki pa je morda ponujala več,  
ker je bila travnata in je vabila, naj hodim po njej.  
Sicer pa so ju popotniki izhodili približno enako.

Tisto jutro sta obe ležali enaki  
v listju, ki ga koraki še niso poteptali.  
Ah, prvo sem prihranil za kak drug dan!  
Čeprav sem vedel, kako pot se k poti vije,  
sem dvomil, ali se bom še kdaj vrnil.

Vzdihujoč bom o tem pripovedoval  
nekje čez mnogo, mnogo let:  
dve poti sta se v gozdu razšli in jaz -  
jaz sem izbral manj izhojeno,  
in to je bilo tako pomembno.