

The Road Not Taken

by Robert Frost

5 Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,
And sorry I could not travel both
And be one traveller, long I stood
And looked down one as far as I could
To where it bent in the undergrowth;

The proverbial fork in the road: which path should he take? Well, he'd like to take both, but obviously he can't.

10 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,

Both paths are essentially the same – equal. He takes the one that at first seems less taken, as it is “grassy,” but on closer inspection, he realizes that they are both “really about the same,” as in lines 13-14, they “equally lay/In leaves no step had trodden black.”

15 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.

He tells himself that he'll come back and take the other path some day, but he knows “how way leads on to way,” meaning that it's unlikely he really will ever come back to this path, because he'll end up doing something else.

20 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 travelled by,
And that has made all the difference.

Sighs can either be good or bad – wistful, or reminiscent. He knows someday in the future (“ages and ages hence”) he will look back on the choice he made and wonder what it would have been like had he made the other choice. Note: he is NOT celebrating or degrading the choice he made; he's just considering “the road not taken”(significance of title) and thinking about the consequences of his choice. Strangely, he now claims he took the “one less travelled by,” but in the first three stanzas, he claims they are virtually the same. Is this because our memories shift as we grow older? We remember things differently? Is our speaker an unreliable narrator? It's up for interpretation.

Difference in what? We don't know. There is no value judgment here. It cannot be assumed that he was either a success or a failure based on this. It's ambiguous.

Speaker: someone looking at his choices in life

Subject: the choices we make

Theme: No matter what choices we make in life, we always look back on them and wonder what if we had made different ones; there are consequences to our choices in life.

Elements: extended metaphor of the road, symbolism of fork in road, imagery of grass and leaves, characterization of speaker

Sonnet XVIII
by William Shakespeare

5 Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?
Thou art more lovely and more temperate:
Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May,
And summer's lease hath all too short a date:
Sometime too hot the eye of heaven shines,
And often is his gold complexion dimm'd;
And every fair from fair sometime declines,
By chance or nature's changing course untrimm'd;
But thy eternal summer shall not fade
10 Nor lose possession of that fair thou owest;
Nor shall Death brag thou wander'st in his shade,
When in eternal lines to time thou growest:
So long as men can breathe or eyes can see,
So long lives this and this gives life to thee.

- rhetorical question, should I compare you to the beauty of a summer's day?

Summer's lease = the amount of time summer lasts

Your beauty will outlast summer; you will never lose your beauty

Personification of Death – to wander in "his shade" = to get old

This is true forever, and will make you live forever (metaphorically speaking)

Speaker: someone to his lover

Subject: eternal love

Theme: True love lasts forever, beyond the natural seasons.

Elements: rhetorical question, imagery, personification, symbolism, metaphor

She Walks In Beauty

by Lord Byron

The host of Mary and Percy Shelley;
who sponsored the ghost story contest

- 5 She walks in beauty, like the night
Of cloudless climes and starry skies;
And all that's best of dark and bright
Meet in her aspect and her eyes:
Thus mellow'd to that tender light
Which heaven to gaudy day denies.
- 10 One shade the more, one ray the less,
Had half impair'd the nameless grace
Which waves in every raven tress,
Or softly lightens o'er her face;
Where thoughts serenely sweet express
How pure, how dear, their dwelling-place.
- 15 And on that cheek, and o'er that brow,
So soft, so calm, yet eloquent,
The smiles that win, the tints that glow,
But tell of days in goodness spent,
A mind at peace with all below,
20 A heart whose love is innocent!
- She is dark and beautiful (not fair skinned and blonde like the stereotypical ideal); celebrates the beauty and mystery of darkness and suggests lightness/fairness can be "gaudy" or showy
- She's perfect the way she is – doesn't need to change
- Raven = dark, black tress = hair
- Beautiful on the inside as well as outside

Speaker: someone talking about a woman he loves

Subject: beauty

Theme: True beauty is seen internally as well as externally; sometimes beauty is not direct and showy.

Elements: simile ("like the night"), symbolism of night, diction ("serenely sweet," "eloquent," "innocent" paint a picture of a demure and angelic persona with an ethereal calmness)

