

## *The Road Not Taken* under Deconstructive View

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### Abstract

As a method of textual analysis, deconstruction involves close reading of works of different types to reveal incompatibilities between the explicit and implicit planes of discourse and limitless interpretation of meaning in a text. Because of the hierarchy that Frost sets up, *The Road Not Taken* is an ideal piece for deconstructive analysis. This paper is an analysis and a breaking down of this poem into its various elements and a close examination of those elements, especially the elements that most need examination because of the difficulties, ambiguities, or problems that they pose. It is revealed through this analysis how the poem can be approached from a deconstructive point of view that requires moving beyond individual phrases. The poem's overt ideological project rests on some binary oppositions that can be deconstructed by contradictory textual evidence, that conflict with or undermine these hierarchies. It is hoped that the results of the current analysis may offer some fresh insight into the poem and shed some light on the appreciation of it from a different perspective, which is based on deconstructing the poem.

**Keywords:** Deconstruction, Robert Frost, *The Road Not Taken*

### Introduction

Deconstruction as a critical outlook concerned with the relationship between text and meaning was inaugurated by Jacques Derrida's 1967 work *Of Grammatology*. It is being put to use in humanities and social sciences such as literary criticism. Deconstruction generally tries to demonstrate contradictions and oppositions and to show that any text contains severe contradictory meanings and therefore has more than one interpretation. As a method of textual analysis, deconstruction involves close reading of works of different types to reveal incompatibilities between the explicit and implicit planes of discourse and limitless interpretation of meaning in a text.

Deconstructive readers look at the ways a text says something different from what it intends to mean or the ways texts don't always mean what they say. In fact, deconstructive readers like to read against the grain. One way to achieve this aim is to discover conventions and prejudices prescribing meaning to words. After recognizing existence of binary oppositions that restrict meaning, assuming a fixed interpretation, one can explore the text outside assumptions. In a binary opposition one element is superior and privileged while another element is inferior or unprivileged and their effects govern interpretation of a text. By reversing the

hierarchy and creating new binary inversions we can analyze various levels of meaning that evolve when binaries are reversed.

Because of the hierarchy that Frost sets up, *The Road Not Taken* is an ideal piece for deconstructive analysis. This paper is an analysis and a breaking down of this poem into its various elements and a close examination of those elements, especially the elements that most need examination because of the difficulties, ambiguities, or problems that they pose because this poem may be as the critic Frank Lentricchia put it, "the best example in all of American poetry of a wolf in sheep's clothing." [1] and deconstruction may be a way to unravel this clothing.

In light of the fact that there have been considerable analyses of this poem yet little attention to a deconstructive criticism of it, the importance of further research is evident. It is hoped that the results of the current analysis may offer some fresh insight into the poem and shed some light on the appreciation of it from a different perspective, which is based on deconstructing the poem. This paper proceeds to examine how deconstruction can illuminate the above-mentioned poem. This deconstructive reading of the text will allow the reader to gain a better understanding of the poem.

### Discussion

Robert Frost's *The Road Not Taken* "has become an American icon of the value of nonconformity" [2]. The aim of this paper is to show how the poem forwards its theme of rebellion against conformity which seems to be the poem's overt ideological project and then to deconstruct this assumed ideological project by finding all the evidence in the poem that seems to undermine the value of nonconformity since there is not as much support in the poem as one expects for the ideology of nonconformity. So the text deconstructs its own project by inadvertently reasserting some of the same stereotypes it has worked to undermine.

One source refers to "the efforts of ordinary men to develop individual identities in a hostile world" as one of Frost's most persistent themes [3] a theme developed in *The Road Not Taken*, published in 1916 as the first poem in the collection *Mountain Interval*. Although among the best known poems, *The Road Not Taken* is one of the most misunderstood; perhaps by reason of Frost's "aiming at unforeseen, paradoxical and uncanny aspects of life" by "finding those elements in very simple and ordinary aspects of life" [4]. According to Frost's biographer Lawrence Thompson Frost would say that the speaker of the poem was based on his friend Edward Thomas who in Frost's words was "a person who, whichever road he went, would be sorry he didn't go the other [5].

The speaker must choose between two diverging paths heading in different directions in the woods i.e. different directions in life. He has difficulty