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5.0 OBJECTIVES

In this unit, we will talk about
Work and life of Robert Frost and
His poem *The Road not Taken*

5.1 INTRODUCTION

The Road Not Taken is a narrative poem written by Robert Frost. It is first published in the August 1915 issue of *The Atlantic Monthly*, and later published as the first poem in the collection *Mountain Interval* (1916). The central theme of the poem is the divergence of paths, both literally and symbolically, though its interpretation is noted for being complex and potentially different.

5.2 ROBERT FROST

Robert Lee Frost (March 26, 1874 – January 29, 1963) was an American poet. His work first published in England before it was published in the United States. He was known for his rational depictions of rural life.

He often wrote about settings from rural life in New England in the early 20th century, using them to examine complex social and philosophical themes. He was born in San Francisco, California, to journalist William Prescott Frost, Jr. and Isabelle Moodie. His father descended from Nicholas Frost of Tiverton, Devon, England, who had sailed to New Hampshire in 1634 on the *Wolfrana*, and his mother was a Scottish immigrant. His father was a teacher and later an editor of the *San Francisco Evening Bulletin*. After his death on May 5, 1885, his family moved across the country to Lawrence, Massachusetts, under the patronage of Robert's grandfather William Frost, Sr., who was an overseer at a New England mill. William Frost graduated from Lawrence High School in 1892.

He grew up in the city, and he published his first poem in his high school's magazine. He attended Dartmouth College for two months at early span of academic life. He returned home to teach and to work at various jobs, including helping his mother to teach in her class, delivering newspapers, and working in a factory. He did not enjoy these jobs, feeling his true calling was poetry. The poems in Frost's early books, especially *North of Boston*, differ drastically from late 19th-century Romantic verse with its view of nature. Lowell called *North of Boston* a "sad" book, referring to its portraits of inbred, isolated, and psychologically troubled rural New Englanders.

Later, in other poems such as "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening" and "The Hill Wife," "The Road not Taken" the benign surface of nature and death itself lurks behind dark and strange trees. Nature's others feature predominates in his poems such as "Birches," where a critical ice storm is recalled as a thing of memorable beauty. Frost is known to many as essentially a "happy" poet. Frost established desirable adaptability of theme, but he usually investigated human contacts with the natural world in small encounters that serve as metaphors for larger aspects of the human condition. He often portrayed the human ability to turn even the slightest incident or natural detail to emotional profit, seen at its most economical form in "Dust of Snow"

Legacy

Frost was the most admired and highly honoured American poet of the 20th century. His name ceased to be linked with New England, and he gained wide acceptance as a national poet. He was often able to give his rural imagery with a larger symbolic or metaphysical significance, and his best poems exceed the instant realities of their subject matter

to illuminate the unique combine of tragic survival, stoicism, and stubborn affirmation that marked his outlook on life.

Awards and recognition

He was nominated for the Nobel Prize in Literature 31 times.

In June 1922, the Vermont State League of Women's Clubs elected Frost as Poet Laureate of Vermont. When a *New York Times* editorial strongly criticised the decision of the Women's Clubs, Sarah Cleghorn and other women wrote to the newspaper defending Frost. On July 22, 1961, Frost was named Poet Laureate of Vermont by the state legislature through Joint Resolution R-59 of the Acts of 1961, which also created the position.

Robert Frost won the 1963 Bollingen Prize.

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.

5.3 POETRY ANALYSIS

Structure

When we talk about structure of the poem, it consists of four stanzas of five lines each. The rhyme scheme is 'ABAAB', the first line rhymes with the third and fourth, and the second line rhymes with the fifth. The meter is basically iambic tetrameter, with each line having four two-syllable

feet, though in almost every line, in different positions, an iamb is replaced with an anapest.

Rhythm

The variation in the rhythm of poem gives naturalness, a feeling of thought taking place spontaneously, affecting the reader's sense of expectation. In the only line that contains strictly iambs, the more regular rhythm supports the idea of a turning towards an acceptance of a kind of reality: "Though as for that the passing there ... " In the final line, the way the rhyme and rhythm work together is significantly different.

Summary

The narrator/poet was walking down the road, when he found a diversion where two roads diverged in different directions. The narrator felt sorry that he could not travel on both the roads. He had to make one choice. He stood at the junction for the longer period of time and tried to look at the road, but unable to see beyond diversion as roads were curved and covered with tress.

In the stanza, the yellow wood refers to the forest with leaves, and indicates autumn season. Through the first stanza, the narrator wants to convey that in everyone's life there comes a time when we have to make choices. There are always options for things but we can only chose one at a time.

At that time, we see the pros and cons of the situation and take the time to decide which path to take. Similarly, the poet is also taking time before making any decision. After thinking on it for a long time, the narrator decided to take the other road which was grassy and wanted wear. He chose the road which was used very less.

Through this the poet conveys that, in our life whatever decision we take or choices we make, each choice has some pros and cons. So we have to be ready to face them. However, he knows that one way leads to another way and he could not go back and take the other path once he moved ahead with one. Similarly, in our life, when we make one decision, we can't go back. We have to move ahead with the same choice and face the consequences which come our way.

The narrator says that in the future, he will tell his grandchildren that he chose different road which made all the differences in his life. He chose the road which was less travelled by many, and that decision has changed his entire life. Through the poem, the poet sends a powerful message that people should decide wisely in their life because the decision they take will have an impact on the rest of their life.

5.4 LET US SUM UP

In this unit, you have learnt about Works and life of Robert Frost and his poem “The Road not Taken”.

5.5 KEY WORDS

Divergence	the process or state of diverging
Depictions	the action of depicting something, especially in a work of art.
Spontaneously	performed or occurring as a result of a sudden impulse or inclination and without premeditation or external stimulus.

5.6 CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Choose the correct options from given below.

1. The poem is written by.
a) Robert Frost b) Shakespeare c) Milton
2. What does the poem speak about?
a) about the plight of roads
b) about the people
c) about the choices made by people
3. Diverge mean.
a) to be separated and taking a different turn
b) to be torn
c) above all
4. What does the choice of road signify?
a) too many things
b) two paths
c) toughness of a choice and decision in life
5. What is the dilemma of the poet?
a) whether he will be able to come back to the second road or not
b) whether he will get time for himself
c) whether he will be able to walk

Answer the following questions.

1. Describe the theme of the poem in your own words.

2. Explain rhyming technique of the poem.

5.7 BOOKS SUGGESTED

- English Literature: Its History and Its Significance For the Life of the English-speaking World by William J. Long
- History of English literature by Edwards Albert

Answers: 1-a, 2-c, 3-a, 4-c, 5-c