



Exploring Enlightenment And Progress: A Critical Study Of Robert Frost's Poem

The Road Not Taken

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Abstract: This article examines Robert Frost's timeless poem *The Road Not Taken* as a metaphorical framework for getting into the themes of enlightenment and progress. Through a comprehensive analysis of the poem's nuances, it explores the complex interplay between choice, individuality, and the pursuit of progress. Drawing parallels between the diverging paths in Frost's verses and the multi-layered facets of personal and societal advancement, the article investigates the inherent complexities and transformative potential encapsulated within decision-making. It illuminates the profound relevance of Frost's work in navigating the pathways to enlightenment, urging readers to contemplate the significance of choices and their impact on the journey towards personal growth and societal evolution.

Keywords: Enlightenment; Progress; Agency; Self-Discovery

1. Introduction

In the realm of literature, Robert Frost's iconic poem *The Road Not Taken* serves as a poignant allegory, delving into the complexities of choice, individuality, and the pursuit of enlightenment. This introspective work transcends its verses to mirror the human quest for progress, inviting reflection on the paths we choose in the pursuit of personal and societal advancement. Within the poem's exploration lies a profound connection to the ideals of enlightenment, beckoning us to navigate the diverging paths of life in search of growth, wisdom, and self-discovery. The quest for enlightenment is reflected in the traveler's contemplation of the paths, each representing a different direction in life. The pursuit of enlightenment often involves introspection, self-discovery, and the willingness to explore uncharted territories. Similarly, the poem underscores the significance of self-reflection and the courage to embark on less conventional paths, fostering personal growth and understanding. Furthermore, the concept of progress emerges through the poem's exploration of the consequences of choices. The speaker

acknowledges that their decision will influence their future, recognizing the transformative power of the chosen path. This mirrors the essence of progress, as individual choices propel us forward on our life journey, shaping our experiences and contributing to personal development. Finally, *The Road Not Taken* encapsulates the quest for enlightenment and progress by highlighting the significance of individual agency, the impact of decisions on one's life pathway, and the continuous pursuit of personal growth and understanding.

1.2 Research Questions

This research study addresses the following research questions:

1. How Robert Frost's poem, "the road not taken" resonates with the spirit of enlightenment?
2. How is Robert Frost's poem, "the road not taken" a quest for progress?

1.3 Research Objectives

Research objectives of this study are mentioned below:

1. To know the resonating spirit of Robert Frost's poem, "the road not taken" with the spirit of modernity.
2. To explore Robert Frost's poem, "the road not taken" a quest for progress.

2. Review of Literature

Etymologically, the word 'progress' is derived from the Latin word *prograde* which means 'to walk forth, to advance'. Trohler (2017) says in this regard that the idea of advancements or walking forth can be linked to the advancement of knowledge, perfection of souls, or social order. He connects the idea of progress to the development or perfection of the future as a whole. As a rule, the act of moving forward or the idea of progress did not include future chaos but was taken as an order proceeding to the future. Human progress is a dynamic process and intends to be good and improved from earlier stages. Therefore, the term also has some connection with evolution but it is not quite similar. Human progress is run by scientific advancements and technological changes which act as a revolution in the life of human beings. According to Walker et al. (2016), technological advancements bear huge impacts on our existence. Technology camouflage (the act of hiding or disguising one's self), makes us adjust to the time, and place as lizards camouflage themselves as sands or rocks or camel that crosses the desert without being affected by thirst. The point is that human progress is made possible through scientific and technological advancements and brought about a relevant revolution in the existence of human beings. The socio-economic structure is reshaped by scientific achievements and subsequent technological developments.

Bellitto & Coccia (2018) describe, human progress as an entity that upgraded basic human interests of people like health, wealth, expansion of knowledge, and technology. It is a process to achieve maximum results improving society. These efforts are carried out to enhance well-being throughout the world. Basella (1988) argues that to achieve maximum results of human progress and uplift the society we cultivate technology for meeting the needs of the day. Therefore, humans have technological means to satisfy their basic needs like health and wealth, etc. The forgoing elements shape a more complex form of life in which we live. There is no denying that human progress has made the life easy, but there comes murkier facet of human progress and disturbs the equation of economics, growth progress because it has negative impacts on society

Sarivastava (2017) says in his other article that since earlier times Man and Nature are compatriots, but Man startlingly treated Nature and thought of it as a source of development as a result we succumb to natural disasters as

the time passes. Indeed human development is the main cause of this unfair treatment of nature. As humans advance, Man gets in conflict with the environment and reflects negative impacts upon us. For their progress, humans adopted deforestation and installment of various kinds of industries. To make life luxurious and comfortable, people still cut down trees because they will affect our existence. Human comfort is made possible through the crushing of natural resources and the process is going on and on. Robert Frost is an ambassador for human problems. In his poetry, he takes social problems and tries to divert the attention of the masses towards them. According to Mishra (1992), Frost's poetry describes modern man's predicaments and takes them as a subject matter in his poetry, and offers a constructive attitude towards life. He was well aware of the problems like death, decay, alienation, disintegration, and devaluation which have been the dominant wing of his poetry.

3. Discussion and Analysis

3.1 Robert Frost as an Ambassador for the Contemporary World

The poetry of Robert Frost is universal and highly symbolic in nature, his symbols and metaphorical interpretation of the world realistically display contemporary problems. This section occupies an important position that will highlight the problems that the researcher looks at in the content of his poetry. The world we live in is driven by innovation and discoveries of materials that formulate human development. The desire of prosperity and ambitions for enhancement of living standards are represented in terms of metaphors in his poem "the road not taken".

3.2 Critical Views Over the Poem

Two roads diverge in a yellow woods but the traveler is indecisive in taking the road. Being one traveler he cannot go on both. So, chooses the less traveled because it was giving a hint of a better claim. The traveler also tries to find how the taken path leads to another to keep it as an alternative for another day.

In his poem "the road not taken" two roads are used as metaphors that strengthen the argument that human beings desire to progress and opt new ways to move on. So, they welcome fresh and new ideas to deal with modern challenges. As a consequence, groundbreaking technological changes are resulted. Taking the other path by the traveler symbolizes an ardent seeker of knowledge. (Jeselink, 2019).

3.3 The Road Taken is a Way to Enlightenment

"And both that morning equally lay

In leaves, no step had trodden black"..... (Winston et al, 1964, P. 131.11-12)

Here the word "morning" metaphorically reflects the period of enlightenment. Morning is usually used in the literal sense for an earlier time of the day but here it shows the start of human progress, before the Renaissance man found two ways the traditional and modern way. The word "Both" is used for the two roads: one is traditional and the other is modern. The traditional way was much traveled by the people. Here it connotatively says that before enlightenment the pathway taken by mankind was worn and the other which was grassy and less worn represents

the spirit of renaissance and enlightenment. Robert Frost, juxtaposes modern and traditional approaches in his poem that the future is the development of the past. As new seedling comes out of the crust of the soil same is the case with human progress comes out of the waste of the past. The modern era is driven by the traditional era. The road taken is also an emblem of embracing the challenges of modern man. It is also the start of infinity and gaining courage. Taking the less traveled is an optimistic attempt, it is a theory that all failures and shortcomings are coming because of insufficient knowledge (Pinker, 2004). The road taken makes the foundation of an optimistic civilization that brave people do not afraid of taking challenges but embrace and go for innovation. The traveler and his bold decision in the poem of Robert Frost lay the basis for innovation and encourages human beings.

3.4 The Road Taken Leads to Modernity

Then took the other as just as fair

And having the better claim..... (Winston et al, 1964, P .131 6-7)

The very title of the poem is symbolic that gets contrasts with the ending lines of the poem and represents how a modern man becomes anti of his decision with time. The two roads show two paths that symbolize the traditional and the modern way of living. Here in the poem, two roads diverged in a yellow wood, but the person chooses the less traveled one by the people and signifies the modern lifestyle and embracing new challenges. The title is given “The road not taken” which refers back to the path nostalgically. Robert Frost looking back at tradition. He was a traditionalist and criticized American leaders who betrayed tradition and established materialistic and science-oriented lifestyles. He does not tell about the road which had a better claim for him but about that which had left. The road which had taken metaphorically represents the human instinct to search for newness and ambition to discover a new nova. Frost, here represents humans generally as a discoverer that since the earlier time man keeps an earnest ambition for seeking new things. Morning symbolizes the start of human development. His poetry is pregnant with meanings and provides multiple layers of meaning to the readers.

Since the road had taken made all difference in the world. Getting into the text of the poem we get the idea that the poet is nostalgic he doesn't talk about the road which is taken but talks about what is not taken. The taken road is continuous and unending which symbolically represents infinity, the pathway taken by humans for worldly progress is unceasing and the poet makes aware the masses of challenges he is prophesizing in the last lines. To quote the lines ...

I shall be telling with a sigh

Somewhere ages and ages hence

Two roads diverged in a wood, and I

I took the less traveled by,

And that has made all the difference. (Winston et al, 1964, P.131)

The poet uses the first-person pronoun “I” but he is an archetype of the entire humanity. As the preceding interpretation was about the choice either to take the traditional way or the modern way and the title itself reflects the idea that the person is nostalgic talking about the road which is not taken. Here in the last stanza, it makes us enlightened that the choice you made for upgrading your living standards somewhere ages and ages you will tell with a sigh that I took the less travel path which was less fruitful to me as well to the humanity. The poet is making us aware through the abstract imagery “somewhere ages and ages” that the choice we made taking the modern way of living will have some unpleasant results for us. The last line is conveying the theme and repercussion of the way which is taken. It is the passion for materialistic growth that human beings have enchained themselves. (Sarivastava, 2017) The word “difference in the last line gives us layers of meaning that the path has catered the difference in terms of the upper and lower class, developed and developing countries, black and white, material growth, etc. the most robust idea comes from the concept of difference during and post-enlightenment that is the difference of ideologies. Conquests, expansionist ideas, and nationalism

4. Conclusion

Robert Frost's *The Road Not Taken* stands as an evergreen testament to the human experience, inviting thinking faculty on the pursuit of enlightenment and progress. Through its vivid imagery and profound reflections on choice, individuality, and the unknown, the poem attune to the complexities inherent in navigating life's divergent paths. As readers traverse the metaphorical woods alongside the speaker, they encounter a profound truth: that the roads we choose shape our journey towards enlightenment and progress. Frost's masterpiece serves as a poignant reminder of the transformative power of decisions, urging us to embrace uncertainty, exercise agency, and embark on the less trodden path—ultimately fostering personal growth and contributing to the collective evolution of society.

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