

A Multi-Critique on Robert Frost's "The Road Not Taken"

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Publication history:

Received: August 9, 2026

Revised: August 21, 2026

Accepted: August 25, 2026

Published: August 26, 2026

International Journal of Sustainable and Integrated Studies, Vol. 1, No. 1, pp. 434–442, August 2026.

Abstract

This study examined Robert Frost's "The Road Not Taken" through a multi-critical literary framework anchored in Mimesis, Expressivism, Objectivism, and Affectivism. It aimed to analyze the poem's imaginary transaction, versification, possible poet's presence, and reader response through a poetic write-back. The study employed a qualitative-descriptive research design using interpretive textual analysis. No human respondents were involved, as the poem served as the primary unit of analysis, supported by literary, theoretical, and biographical sources. The findings revealed that the poem presents life as a journey characterized by uncertainty, limitation, and consequential decision-making. Its road imagery represents possible life directions, while the speaker's retrospective account demonstrates how individuals construct meaning from choices whose outcomes could not initially be known. Formally, the poem consists of four five-line stanzas, follows an ABAAB rhyme scheme, and generally employs iambic tetrameter with rhythmic variations that reinforce hesitation and reflection. The expressive analysis identified possible parallels between Frost's life and the poem's concerns, although the poem could not be treated as direct autobiography. The poetic write-back, "Light," demonstrated how a reader may transform textual interpretation into a personal creative response. The study concluded that meaning emerges through the interaction of represented human experience, poetic structure, authorial context, and reader interpretation. Future studies may conduct comparative multi-critical analyses of Frost's other poems and selected works by other poets. The study supports SDG 4—Quality Education by promoting critical reading, literary interpretation, cultural appreciation, and creative expression. Its sustainability impact lies primarily in strengthening educational, cultural, and institutional practices through a reusable framework for literature teaching and research.

Keywords: Affectivism; Expressivism; Imaginary Transaction; Literary Criticism; Mimesis; Objectivism; Poetic Write-Back; Reader Response; Versification

1. Introduction

Robert Frost's "The Road Not Taken" remains one of the most recognizable poems in American literature because of its accessible language, memorable road metaphor, and apparent reflection on human choice. Beneath its simplicity, however, is a complex poetic construction that raises questions about decision-making, uncertainty, regret, memory, identity, and the stories individuals create to explain their past choices. The poem does not merely describe a traveler selecting between two roads. It also dramatizes the difficulty of knowing whether one choice is truly different from another and whether the meaning of a decision exists at the moment it is made or is constructed retrospectively. The poem's ambiguity makes it appropriate for a multi-critical analysis. A purely moralistic reading may interpret it as an encouragement to pursue an unconventional path, while a closer examination reveals that the roads were described as having been worn "really about the same." This tension complicates the familiar belief that the speaker intentionally chose a distinctly less-traveled road. Moosavinia and Shahrakzadeh (2018) explain that the poem's ambiguity opens questions concerning free will, determinism, and

fate rather than offering a single, uncomplicated celebration of individualism. Its meaning therefore emerges from the interaction of its symbolic world, formal structure, possible authorial context, and effect on readers. This study employs the literary orientations of Mimesis, Expressivism, Objectivism, and Affectivism to examine four interconnected dimensions of the poem: imaginary transaction, versification, poet's presence, and poetic write-back. Instead of treating these dimensions as isolated objects of analysis, the study considers how they work together. The road and the journey establish the represented world; the stanzaic and rhythmic organization regulates the speaker's hesitation; the authorial context offers a possible but not definitive interpretive background; and the reader transforms the poem's meanings through reflection and creative response. Through this integrated approach, the study argues that "The Road Not Taken" is not simply a poem about choosing an uncommon path. It is a poem about the uncertainty surrounding choice, the impossibility of experiencing every available possibility, and the human tendency to give decisions meaning after their consequences have unfolded. Its continued relevance lies in its ability to support multiple interpretations while maintaining formal and thematic unity.

Literature is an artistic and intellectual record of human thought, emotion, experience, and imagination. It does not reproduce life mechanically but recreates human realities through language, symbolism, characterization, imagery, and form. Poetry is especially capable of compressing complex experiences into carefully arranged words, sounds, rhythms, images, and silences. Because poetic language frequently communicates indirectly, the meaning of a poem cannot always be reduced to a paraphrased moral lesson. "The Road Not Taken" illustrates this complexity. The poem presents a traveler who encounters two diverging roads and must choose one without possessing complete knowledge of their destinations. The physical landscape consequently becomes a symbolic representation of decision-making. The roads may represent life possibilities, professional directions, personal commitments, beliefs, relationships, or other choices whose consequences cannot be fully predicted. The "yellow wood" may further suggest transition, maturity, or a stage in life when existing conditions require a decision. The poem's accessibility may also contribute to its frequent oversimplification. Its concluding declaration is often separated from the earlier description that the roads were approximately equal. When the conclusion is read together with the preceding stanzas, the poem appears less like a direct celebration of nonconformity and more like an examination of how individuals remember, justify, and narrate their decisions. The "difference" mentioned by the speaker is not explicitly identified as positive or negative. Likewise, the anticipated "sigh" may communicate satisfaction, regret, nostalgia, resignation, or a combination of these emotions. Recent scholarship supports the need to examine this ambiguity rather than impose a fixed interpretation. Moosavinia and Shahrakzadeh (2018) connect the poem's uncertainty with free will, determinism, and fate. Pradhan and Chakraborty (2021), meanwhile, demonstrate that the poem's linguistic and rhythmic construction can be examined systematically, showing that formal patterns are not merely decorative but are part of the production of poetic meaning. These studies indicate that a responsible interpretation must consider both thematic uncertainty and textual form.

The poem centers on the necessity of choosing despite incomplete knowledge. The speaker can examine the available roads but cannot see where either path will lead, symbolizing the uncertainty surrounding life decisions. Choice therefore represents both freedom and limitation: selecting one direction creates possibility while leaving another unrealized. Moosavinia and Shahrakzadeh (2018) relate this tension to freedom, fate, and determinism, emphasizing that although the speaker is free to choose, the consequences and meaning of the decision remain uncertain. This uncertainty is reinforced by the contrast between the speaker's initial observation that the roads were nearly equal and his imagined future claim that one was less traveled. The difference suggests that the speaker may later reconstruct the meaning of his decision through memory and self-narration. Rather than presenting a single moral lesson, the poem invites readers to examine contradictions and consider multiple interpretations. Its road, forest, bend, and undergrowth imagery transforms an ordinary journey into a representation of human decision-making. From a mimetic perspective, these elements reflect recognizable life experiences, while a formalist reading shows that repetition, contrast, imagery, syntax, and shifts in time deepen the poem's themes of uncertainty, choice, and retrospective meaning.

The poem consists of four five-line stanzas whose recurring rhyme pattern provides formal stability, while pauses, qualifications, syntactic extensions, and rhythmic variations reflect the speaker's hesitation. His observations continually shift, as shown when one road appears to have a "better claim" but is later described as nearly equal to the other. Pradhan and Chakraborty (2021) demonstrate that the poem's rhythm, rhyme, word distribution, and linguistic patterns contribute to its meaning, supporting the Objectivist view that form dramatizes comparison, choice, and retrospective interpretation. Meaning also develops through the reader's engagement with the text. Readers may connect the roads with career, education, migration, relationships, identity, or moral choices, but these interpretations must remain grounded in the poem's language, imagery, structure, and tensions. Whiteley and Canning (2017) emphasize evidence-based reader response, while Jusslin and Höglund (2021) show that arts-based responses can deepen understanding and reflection. Thus, the poetic write-back functions as both a creative interpretation and a pedagogical response that enters into dialogue with Frost's poem.

At the local level, this study was developed within a Philippine graduate literature context. It responds to the need for students and teachers to move beyond plot summary, impressionistic appreciation, and predetermined moral interpretation. By demonstrating how different critical orientations may be applied to a single poem, the study provides a model that can be adapted in literature courses, literary criticism classes, language education, and creative writing activities. Within the broader Philippine educational context, the study is particularly relevant to learners who encounter English poetry in multilingual environments. Such readers may need to negotiate unfamiliar vocabulary, figurative language, cultural references, poetic conventions, and competing interpretations. A multi-critical approach can assist them by providing several points of entry: the represented human experience, the internal structure of the poem, the historical or biographical context, and the reader's own informed response. Research in comparable EFL settings supports this relevance. Febriani et al. (2020) examined how EFL readers interpreted "The Road Not Taken" through reader-response and stylistic approaches. Their findings indicate that students can develop an understanding of literal, symbolic, and metaphorical meanings when they are guided to engage with both the text and their own responses. This suggests that literary theory becomes more educationally valuable when it is transformed into an active process of evidence-based interpretation. Sigvardsson (2020) similarly found that effective poetry instruction encourages learners to explore both their emotional reactions and the formal characteristics of poems. Personal response and formal analysis should not be treated as competing approaches. Emotional engagement may motivate reading, while attention to language and structure makes interpretation more disciplined. At the global level, "The Road Not Taken" continues to generate formalist, psychoanalytic, reader-oriented, philosophical, linguistic, and cultural interpretations. Its sustained scholarly relevance demonstrates that canonical poems can remain productive when readers question conventional interpretations and apply updated theoretical approaches. The poem's themes of uncertainty, agency, consequence, and retrospective identity are not confined to a single historical period or cultural setting. Nevertheless, interpretations may vary according to readers' linguistic proficiency, literary experience, cultural background, and familiarity with poetic conventions. Fokin et al. (2022) found that expertise affects how readers process poetry, reinforcing the importance of teaching the reading strategies required for attentive poetic interpretation.

This study is anchored in Mimesis, Expressivism, Objectivism, and Affectivism, which respectively examine the represented world, the author, the text, and the reader. Mimesis views literature as a representation of reality. According to Plato, poetry functions as a mirror of the world (Abrams 8), while writers transform perceived realities into imaginative verbal constructions (Adams 3 in Pesirla 2). In "The Road Not Taken," the roads, forest, leaves, and journey symbolize recognizable human experiences, particularly making choices without complete knowledge of their outcomes (Pesirla 2). Expressivism examines how the author's imagination, experiences, and historical circumstances may illuminate a literary work (Pesirla 4). In this study, it supports the analysis of Frost's possible presence in the poem, although the speaker is not automatically equated with the poet. Objectivism treats the poem as an organized verbal structure whose form contributes to meaning (Pesirla 6). It guides the examination of stanza form, rhyme, rhythm, imagery, syntax, pauses, and contrasts as devices that reflect the speaker's hesitation and reflection (Pesirla 6). Affectivism focuses on how readers interpret and respond to a literary text through reflection, learning, emotion, and aesthetic experience (Rozakis 180, Stanford 92, Lee 128 in Pesirla 9). Whiteley and Canning (2017) emphasize that reader responses should remain grounded in textual evidence. Accordingly, Affectivism supports the poetic write-back as a creative response to the poem. Together, the four orientations explain how meaning emerges from the interaction of represented reality, poetic form, authorial context, and reader interpretation.

The existing version of the study identifies the poem's life message, versification, authorial presence, and reader response. However, several conceptual and analytical gaps require further development. First, the interpretation of the poem as a straightforward lesson that one must choose a road and live with the decision does not fully address its ambiguity. The roads are initially described as approximately equal, yet the speaker imagines later calling one of them less traveled. The discrepancy between observation and future narration requires closer attention. Recent criticism indicates that the poem involves tensions among free will, determinism, uncertainty, and retrospective interpretation rather than communicating only a motivational message (Moosavinia & Shahrakzadeh, 2018). Second, the original discussion of versification contains inconsistent descriptions of stanza form and meter. A research-worthy formal analysis must distinguish among stanza type, line count, rhyme pattern, meter, metrical substitution, sound pattern, and syntax. These features should then be connected to the poem's themes rather than simply identified. Third, the claim that Frost's life is directly mirrored in the poem requires qualification. Biographical information may establish interpretive possibilities, but it cannot independently prove that the speaker is Frost or that every image represents an event in his life. The revised study therefore treats poet's presence as a contextual and interpretive question instead of an established autobiographical fact. Fourth, the poetic write-back requires a clearer theoretical justification. It should be analyzed as an informed reader response that emerges from engagement with specific textual elements. Jusslin and Höglund (2021) demonstrate that creative and arts-based responses can expand understanding and personal reflection, but the interpretive relationship between the source poem and the new creative work must be explained. Finally, limited attention has been given within the study's immediate context to integrating traditional literary orientations with recent reader-

response and poetry-pedagogy scholarship. The present research addresses this need by combining close reading, formal analysis, contextual interpretation, and creative response in a framework that may be applied in Philippine literature and EFL classrooms.

The study is most directly aligned with Sustainable Development Goal 4: Quality Education, particularly the promotion of literacy, effective learning, critical inquiry, cultural appreciation, and lifelong learning. The analysis of poetry contributes to quality education by strengthening learners' ability to interpret figurative language, assess competing meanings, identify relationships between form and content, and support conclusions with textual evidence. These abilities extend beyond literature because they involve critical reading, reasoned judgment, communication, and reflective thinking. The study is particularly relevant to Target 4.7, which calls for learners to acquire knowledge and skills related to sustainable development, global citizenship, appreciation of cultural diversity, and recognition of culture's contribution to sustainable development. By engaging students with a literary work from a different historical and cultural setting, the study encourages cross-cultural literary understanding while allowing readers to relate its themes to their own experiences. The alignment is educational rather than directly environmental or economic. The study does not claim to produce measurable progress toward SDG 4 by itself. Its contribution lies in providing a replicable literary-learning framework that can support advanced literacy, aesthetic education, interpretive independence, and appreciation of cultural expression. The United Nations identifies literacy, effective learning outcomes, cultural appreciation, and education for sustainable development as central components of SDG 4.

The study contributes primarily to educational, cultural, and institutional sustainability. In terms of educational sustainability, the multi-critical framework can be reused across different poems, literary genres, and classroom settings. It assists learners in moving from personal reaction to text-based interpretation and from the identification of literary devices to an explanation of how those devices produce meaning. This makes the study relevant to literary criticism, language education, curriculum development, and teacher preparation. In terms of cultural sustainability, the research supports the continued interpretation and transmission of literary works across generations and cultural settings. A canonical poem remains meaningful not because readers repeat one established interpretation, but because they test inherited readings, recognize ambiguity, and relate the work to changing human concerns. The study therefore treats literary preservation as an active process of critical engagement rather than passive admiration. In terms of institutional sustainability, the study offers an analytical model that literature teachers and researchers may adapt without requiring highly specialized equipment. The framework can be implemented through close reading, guided discussion, reflective writing, textual analysis, and creative response. It can also support course modules, assessment activities, research projects, and interdisciplinary collaborations among literature, linguistics, education, psychology, and creative writing. The study is multidisciplinary because it connects textual criticism with questions of decision-making, identity formation, memory, language learning, emotional response, and artistic production. It does not convert the poem into a psychological or decision-science instrument. Rather, it demonstrates how literary analysis can contribute a humanities-based understanding of how individuals confront uncertainty and create meaning from their choices. Reader-response and arts-based scholarship supports this integrated value. Evidence-based reader-response research connects stylistics with the empirical study of reading, while creative responses can deepen interpretation, personal reflection, motivation, and confidence (Whiteley & Canning, 2017; Jusslin & Höglund, 2021).

The study is limited to Robert Frost's "The Road Not Taken." It analyzes the poem through four dimensions: imaginary transaction, versification, poet's presence, and poetic write-back. The principal analytical orientations are Mimesis, Expressivism, Objectivism, and Affectivism. The imaginary transaction focuses on the poem's vision, persona, addressee, and symbolic representation of choice. The versification analysis examines the poem's internal structure and sound organization. The poet's presence considers relevant biographical context while recognizing that the speaker and the historical author are not necessarily identical. The write-back examines one reader's creative response to the poem. Because the study focuses on one poem and one creative response, its findings are interpretive rather than statistically generalizable. It does not measure the responses of a defined participant group. Claims about readers in general must therefore be avoided unless future research gathers and analyzes empirical reader-response data. The poetic write-back should be presented as an illustrative interpretation rather than as evidence of how all readers respond to the poem.

The study may benefit literary academics by demonstrating how several critical orientations can be integrated without forcing the poem into a single theoretical explanation. It may assist literature students in developing close-reading, interpretive, formal-analysis, and creative-response skills. It may also provide literary researchers with a framework for comparative studies of Frost's other poems or works by poets from different cultural traditions. More importantly, the study encourages readers to reconsider familiar interpretations. Its contribution lies not in discovering one final meaning of "The Road Not Taken," but in demonstrating how poetic meaning develops through the interaction of representation, structure, context, and reception. The poem becomes impactful because it invites readers to examine not only which roads they take, but also how they understand and narrate the choices that have shaped their lives.

2. Material and methods

2.1 Research Design

The study used a qualitative-descriptive research design. Qualitative-descriptive research involves the systematic collection, organization, and interpretation of textual information (Young Hren 2 in Cadillas 37). Textual analysis was employed to interpret the poem's life message, poetic structure, authorial presence, and effect on the reader. The analysis was guided by Abram's Literary Critical Theories of Mimesis, Expressivism, Objectivism, and Affectivism.

2.2 Locale of the Study

As a literary and text-based investigation, the study was situated within the textual and scholarly context of Robert Frost's "The Road Not Taken." The analysis focused on the poem's literary world and was enriched by relevant theoretical, critical, and biographical sources that supported its interpretation and contextual understanding.

2.3 Respondents of the Study

The study employed Robert Frost's "The Road Not Taken" as its principal unit of analysis. Consistent with its literary and text-based design, the researcher served as the interpretive reader and expressed her engagement with the poem through a poetic write-back developed from close reading, personal reflection, and emotional response to the text.

2.4 Sample and Sampling Procedure

The study focused exclusively on "The Road Not Taken," which was obtained from *Fiction and Drama Towards Skills and Development* by Dr. Charlie A. Dayon. The poem was selected because its language, imagery, structure, and themes allowed analysis through multiple literary-critical approaches. Supporting information about Robert Frost's life was drawn from *The Famous People*, Stanley Burnshaw's discussion of Frost's life and career in *Modern American Poetry*, and RobertFrost.org. The theoretical foundations were obtained from *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and Critical Tradition* by M.H Abrams and the argument paper *Literary Critical Theories* by A.O Pesirla.

2.5 Research Instrument

Textual analysis served as the principal research instrument. The analytical framework consisted of four literary-critical theories that guided the interpretation of the poem. Mimesis was used to examine the realities and life meanings represented by the poem's figurative language and themes. Objectivism supported the analysis of the poem's internal form and structure. Expressivism was applied to explore the possible reflection of the poet's life and experiences in the text. Affectivism was used to examine the reader's emotional and creative response. The analysis also employed the concepts of imaginary transaction and versification. Imaginary Transaction involves a two-way exchange of ideas between the speaker and the reader and consists of the vision, persona, and addressee. The vision refers to the implied principle, philosophy, or comment about life; the persona is the imaginary speaker created by the poet; and the addressee is the imagined recipient of the message. Persirla (1). Versification refers to the organization of poetic language according to syllables, stresses, rhythm, pitch, stanza, meter, line, and rhyme. It may be accentual or syllabic depending on the phonetic patterns used in the poem. Pesirla(1).

2.6 Data Gathering Procedure

The verbal data were generated from a close reading of "The Road Not Taken." The analysis proceeded through four interconnected stages. First, the poem was examined to identify its vision, persona, and addressee. Its figurative language, symbols, and themes were interpreted through Mimesis and Objectivism to determine the human experience and life message represented in the text. Second, the poem's versification was analyzed through its stanzaic organization, lines, meter, poetic feet, rhyme, and tonal patterns. Formalistic analysis was used to determine how these structural and sound elements contributed to the poem's meaning. Third, biographical information about Robert Frost was examined through Expressivism to determine how aspects of the poet's life and historical circumstances might be reflected in the poem. Expressivism sees a literary text as a reflection of the writer's life and times on the character's life and times in the work Pesirla(1-10). Finally, the researcher produced a poetic write-back as a reader response to the poem. The response was developed from the emotions, memories, and reflections evoked by the poem's message regarding decision-making and the consequences of personal choices.

2.7 Data Analysis Techniques

The study used interpretive textual analysis. The poem's words, images, symbols, themes, sound patterns, and structural features were examined qualitatively rather than statistically. Mimetic analysis was used to interpret the realities and life conditions represented in the poem. Formalistic or Objective analysis was applied to its versification and textual unity. Expressive analysis connected relevant biographical information with the possible presence of the poet in the work. Affective analysis examined the reader's response and its transformation into a creative poetic write-back. The findings from the four analytical dimensions were subsequently synthesized to

explain how the poem communicates its life message through the interaction of represented experience, poetic form, possible authorial context, and reader interpretation.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Multi-Critical Findings

3.1.1 Imaginary Transaction and Life Message

The analysis revealed that the poem presents a persona confronted with two possible paths but compelled to choose only one. Its central vision portrays life as a journey characterized by opportunity, uncertainty, limitation, and difficult decision-making. The persona represents an individual experiencing hesitation at a decisive moment, while the addressee may be understood as a reader who must likewise confront choices and accept their consequences. The roads, yellow wood, leaves, bend, and undergrowth function as representations of possible directions, transitional experiences, incomplete knowledge, and the challenges encountered throughout life. Pesirla, 2019 presented that vision refers to an implied message, principle, philosophy, or comment about the human condition. In the poem, the speaker's hesitation reflects the difficulty of deciding when the consequences of the available options cannot be fully known. Girsang et al. (2023) similarly explained that the roads and other natural images function symbolically, allowing the physical journey to represent the larger human experience of choosing a life direction. Febriyantasari and Yulistiyaniti (2024) further found that the poem's imagery, symbolism, and ambiguity contribute to its thematic complexity and support multiple interpretations. The speaker's later assertion that his choice "made all the difference" emphasizes the significance he retrospectively assigns to the selected path. However, this statement should not be interpreted as unequivocal proof that one road was objectively more unconventional or advantageous than the other. Earlier in the poem, the speaker acknowledges that the roads had been worn almost equally. Moosavinia and Shahrakzadeh (2018) therefore interpret the poem's ambiguity in relation to free will, determinism, and fate. Robinson (2016) likewise explains that the poem's meaning becomes clearer in hindsight and that its apparent celebration of individual choice contains an ironic dimension. Thus, the poem suggests not only that individual must make decisions despite uncertainty but also that they later construct narratives to explain the meaning and consequences of those decisions.

3.1.2 Versification and Poetic Form

The poem contains four stanzas, each consisting of five lines or cinquains. It follows an ABAAB rhyme scheme throughout and primarily employs end rhyme. Its lines generally contain four metrical beats and follow a predominantly iambic tetrameter pattern, although variations in stress, including initial inversions and other substitutions, prevent the rhythm from becoming completely mechanical. These variations create a measured yet conversational movement that corresponds with the persona's hesitation and reflection. A stanza is a poetic form composed of a fixed grouping of verse lines, Abrams (161-162) in Persirla (1-4). The five-line organization is consistent with the cinquain or quintet form discussed in the poetry anthology of Gwynn (1-452), Pesirla (1-4). Meter is determined through the arrangement of stressed and unstressed syllables, while poetic feet establish the rhythmic movement of each line, Pesirla (1-4). Mulyati (2021) similarly identifies the poem as consisting of four five-line stanzas organized through the recurring ABAAB rhyme pattern. The regular return of this pattern provides structural coherence even as the speaker expresses uncertainty concerning the available roads. Pradhan and Chakraborty (2021) demonstrate that the poem's organization may also be examined systematically through its linguistic, rhythmic, and structural patterns. Such an approach reinforces the importance of treating form as an essential component of meaning rather than as a decorative feature. From an Objectivist or formalist perspective, the recurring rhyme, stanzaic balance, enjambment, pauses, qualifications, and metrical variations reproduce the movement of thought itself. The regular structure suggests control, while the rhythmic deviations and extended sentences reflect hesitation, comparison, and reconsideration. Febriyantasari and Yulistiyaniti (2024) similarly argue that close reading of the poem's internal elements reveals how its formal construction develops its themes of choice, uncertainty, and reflection.

3.1.3 Poet's Presence in the Poem

The expressive analysis identified possible parallels between the poem and Robert Frost's life. Frost experienced different occupations, financial instability, unsuccessful farming, teaching, relocation, family difficulties, personal loss, and gradual recognition as a poet. His life involved repeated changes, struggles, and consequential decisions, including his continued commitment to poetry despite uncertainty. Within an expressive interpretation, these experiences resemble the poem's presentation of diverging roads, limited foresight, and choices that acquire meaning over time. Hart (2017) presents Frost's life as complex and often precarious, showing how his personal struggles, family experiences, ambitions, and literary development influenced his work. These biographical conditions provide a meaningful context for interpreting the poem's concern with uncertainty and life direction. Nevertheless, biographical parallels do not establish that "The Road Not Taken" is a direct account of Frost's personal decision to become a poet. The speaker remains a constructed poetic persona rather than an unquestionable representation of the historical author. The poem's more immediate context also suggests that the poet's presence operates through observation, humor, and irony rather than straightforward autobiography.

Robinson (2016) explains that Frost wrote the poem partly in response to his friend Edward Thomas, who frequently regretted the paths they had not selected during their walks. This context strengthens the interpretation of the poem as a reflection on indecision and retrospective storytelling. Consequently, Frost's presence may be recognized in the poem's intellectual perspective, ironic treatment of choice, and transformation of an observed experience into a broader meditation on human decision-making. The roads may be associated with Frost's own challenges and opportunities, but the poem should not be reduced to a literal account of his life.

3.1.4 Reader Response Through a Poetic Write-Back

The researcher expressed her response to Robert Frost's "The Road Not Taken" through the following four-line poetic write-back:

Light
by Glenda B. Orozco-Abdul
A light of a thousand colours
Getting into the old shadows
Setting back the lunacy of meadows
Flaring the beauty of horizon

The poem "Light" emerged from the researcher's emotional and reflective engagement with the perceived message of "The Road Not Taken." Its imagery of light, colors, shadows, meadows, and the horizon communicates movement from darkness and uncertainty toward hope, beauty, and renewed possibility. While Frost uses diverging roads to represent choice and its uncertain consequences, the write-back uses the contrast between shadow and light to express the personal growth that may arise after a decision has been made. The "old shadows" may represent past difficulties or confusion, while the "beauty of horizon" suggests hope and continued movement toward the future. Taken together, the movement from the "old shadows" toward the "beauty of horizon" parallels the movement from uncertainty toward retrospective meaning in Frost's poem, showing how the researcher reinterprets the experience of choice as a process of hope, acceptance, and personal growth. Through the production of this new poetic text, the researcher transformed literary interpretation into creative expression. Whiteley and Canning (2017) explain that reader-response research recognizes readers' interpretations and evaluations as significant dimensions of literary study, particularly when they remain connected to identifiable textual features. The write-back therefore represents more than an unrestricted personal reaction; it is an interpretive response grounded in Frost's imagery, themes, and emotional tensions. Febriani et al. (2020) found that readers of "The Road Not Taken" construct meaning by combining textual details with personal experiences. Similarly, Jusslin and Höglund (2021) found that arts-based responses can deepen learners' understanding of poetry by allowing them to recreate aspects of a poem through another expressive form. "Light" may therefore be understood as an arts-based reader response that extends the reading experience and communicates an individual yet textually connected interpretation of choice, uncertainty, consequence, and personal development. The write-back should nevertheless be regarded as the researcher's particular transaction with the text rather than a universal interpretation of Frost's poem. Its emphasis on hope, perseverance, and growth reflects one possible response, while other readers may emphasize regret, irony, uncertainty, individualism, self-justification, or the impossibility of knowing the consequences of the unchosen path. This interpretive openness demonstrates the relevance of Affectivism in explaining how readers participate in constructing literary meaning.

3.2 Integrated Relationship Among the Critical Dimensions

The combined findings showed that the imaginary transaction, versification, poet's presence, and reader response contribute distinct but interrelated perspectives on the poem. The imaginary transaction revealed a vision of life as a journey requiring choice under conditions of uncertainty. The versification demonstrated how stanzaic form, rhyme, meter, syntax, and rhythmic variation organize and intensify the poetic message. The expressive analysis connected the poem with relevant experiences and relationships from Frost's life without treating it as direct autobiography. The poetic write-back demonstrated how a reader can transform textual interpretation into a new creative work. These dimensions show that the meaning of "The Road Not Taken" is produced through the relationship among represented human experience, formal construction, authorial context, and reader interpretation. Febriyantasari and Yulistiyantri (2024) demonstrate that close reading of the poem's imagery, symbolism, ambiguity, and internal structure reveals meanings that cannot be obtained from its concluding lines alone. Moosavinia and Shahrakzadeh (2018) likewise establish that the poem's ambiguity complicates a purely motivational interpretation. The speaker does not clearly know whether the selected road is objectively better, more difficult, or less traveled; instead, he anticipates giving the choice a particular meaning in the future. The poem therefore presents decision-making as a complex human reality in which individuals cannot experience every possible path. They must select one direction without complete knowledge of its outcome, leave other possibilities unrealized, and subsequently interpret the life created by that decision. The multi-critical framework makes this complexity visible: Mimesis connects the roads with human experience; Objectivism explains how formal features construct the poem's tensions; Expressivism considers the authorial circumstances that may illuminate the work; and Affectivism accounts for the reader's role in producing personal and creative meaning.

Whiteley and Canning (2017) support this integrated perspective by recognizing the productive relationship between textual analysis and the systematic examination of reader responses.

4. Conclusion & Recommendations

The study concludes that Robert Frost's "The Road Not Taken" communicates meaning through the interaction of its life message, poetic form, possible authorial presence, and reader response. The imaginary transaction presents life as a journey in which individuals must make decisions and accept the consequences of their chosen paths. The poem's four five-line stanzas, ABAAB rhyme scheme, rhythmic organization, and structural unity reinforce its reflection on hesitation and choice. An expressive reading identifies possible parallels between Frost's experiences and the poem's themes, while the poetic write-back demonstrates how the text can evoke personal reflection and creative interpretation.

Future literary research may undertake a comparative analysis of Robert Frost's "The Road Not Taken" and "Trial by Existence," particularly in relation to imaginary transaction and the poet's presence. Researchers may also conduct a multi-critical analysis of "Trial by Existence" by Robert Frost and "On the Mountain: Question and Answer" by Li Po to determine how different critical approaches reveal their themes, poetic structures, authorial expressions, and effects on readers.

The study was limited to Robert Frost's "The Road Not Taken" and to four analytical dimensions: imaginary transaction, versification, poet's presence, and poetic write-back. Its conclusions are interpretive and confined to the selected text and the researcher's creative response; therefore, they should not be generalized to all of Frost's works or to the responses of all readers.

5. Compliance with ethical standards

This text-based literary study adhered to institutional standards on academic integrity, responsible authorship, and proper citation. As it involved no human participants, voluntary participation, informed consent, confidentiality measures, and formal ethical approval were not applicable. All literary and scholarly sources were appropriately acknowledged, copyright ownership remained with the respective authors and rights holders, and the researcher assumed full responsibility for the analysis and interpretation. No conflict of interest was declared.

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