



E-ISSN 3032-601X & P-ISSN 3032-7105

Vol. 3, No. 1, 2026

MISTER

**Journal of Multidisciplinary Inquiry in Science,
Technology and Educational Research**

**Jurnal Penelitian Multidisiplin dalam Ilmu
Pengetahuan, Teknologi dan Pendidikan**

**UNIVERSITAS SERAMBI MEKKAH
KOTA BANDA ACEH**

mister@serambimekkah.ac.id

Journal of Multidisciplinary Inquiry in Science Technology
and Educational Research

Journal of MISTER

Vol. 3, No. 1, 2026

Pages: 1138–1148

Translating Emotion Through Imagery A Qualitative Analysis of Robert Frost' s The Road Not Taken

Fiona Djunita Natalia Luhulima, Andhyka Bhayangkara Asmara,
Charista Syarani Bell, Naysilla Blessing Kolamban

Universitas Papua

Article in Journal of MISTER

Available at : <https://jurnal.serambimekkah.ac.id/index.php/mister>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.32672/mister.v3i1.4039>

How to Cite this Article

APA : Fiona Djunita Natalia Luhulima, Andhyka Bhayangkara Asmara, Charista Syarani Bell, & Naysilla Blessing Kolamban. (2025). Translating Emotion Through Imagery A Qualitative Analysis of Robert Frost' s The Road Not Taken. Journal of Multidisciplinary Inquiry in Science, Technology and Educational Research, 3(1), 1138 - 1148. <https://doi.org/10.32672/mister.v3i1.4039>

Others Visit : <https://jurnal.serambimekkah.ac.id/index.php/mister/index>

MISTER: *Journal of Multidisciplinary Inquiry in Science, Technology and Educational Research* is a scholarly journal dedicated to the exploration and dissemination of innovative ideas, trends and research on the various topics include, but not limited to functional areas of Science, Technology, Education, Humanities, Economy, Art, Health and Medicine, Environment and Sustainability or Law and Ethics.

MISTER: *Journal of Multidisciplinary Inquiry in Science, Technology and Educational Research* is an open-access journal, and users are permitted to read, download, copy, search, or link to the full text of articles or use them for other lawful purposes. Articles on Journal of MISTER have been previewed and authenticated by the Authors before sending for publication. The Journal, Chief Editor, and the editorial board are not entitled or liable to either justify or responsible for inaccurate and misleading data if any. It is the sole responsibility of the Author concerned.



Translating Emotion Through Imagery A Qualitative Analysis of Robert Frost's The Road Not Taken

Fiona Djunita Natalia Luhulima^{1*}, Andhyka Bhayangkara Asmara²,
Charista Syarani Bell³, Naysilla Blessing Kolamban⁴
Universitas Papua, Indonesia^{1,2,3,4}

Corresponding Author's Email: f.luhulima@unipa.ac.id

Received: 12 14, 2025

Accepted: 12 24, 2025

Published: 12 26, 2025

ABSTRACT

Robert Frost's The Road Not Taken (1916) is one of the most frequently cited yet persistently misinterpreted poems in American literature. Popular readings often frame the poem as a celebration of individualism, overlooking its deeper engagement with ambiguity, memory, and emotional self-fashioning. This research paper examines how Frost employs imagery as a primary mechanism for translating complex emotional states into poetic experience. Using a qualitative interpretive methodology grounded in New Criticism and Affect Theory, the study conducts a close reading of key visual, auditory, and temporal images, such as the "two roads," the "yellow wood," the "undergrowth," and the final "sigh." The findings reveal that these images do not merely support the poem's narrative but actively construct its emotional architecture, mediating ambivalence, nostalgia, regret, and retrospective rationalization. The study argues that Frost's imagery exposes the tension between lived experience and remembered narrative, inviting readers to confront the human tendency to mythologize past choices. The paper contributes to literary studies by demonstrating how imagery functions as an affective translator rather than a decorative element, with implications for poetic interpretation, memory studies, and literature pedagogy.

Keywords: *imagery, affect theory, ambiguity, memory, Robert Frost*

INTRODUCTION

Robert Frost's *The Road Not Taken* (1916) occupies a paradoxical position in modern literary culture. It is simultaneously one of the most widely quoted poems in American literature and one of the most persistently misinterpreted. Frequently cited in graduation speeches, motivational discourse, and popular media, the poem is often read as a celebration of individualism, courage, and nonconformity. However, such readings tend to oversimplify the poem by isolating its concluding lines from the imagistic and emotional tensions developed throughout the text. As Frost himself once remarked, the poem is "very tricky," a statement that has continued to resonate within scholarly debates about its ambiguity and irony.

Critical scholarship has long challenged celebratory interpretations of the poem. Early critics such as Bloom (1994) and Sacks (1996) argue that *The Road Not Taken* dramatizes self-deception and retrospective rationalization rather than decisive agency. Formalist readings further emphasize the poem's internal contradictions, particularly the repeated visual insistence that the two roads are "just as fair" and "really about the same," which undermines any clear moral distinction (Brooks, 1947; Newlin, 2001). From this perspective, meaning emerges not from the act of choosing but from the tension between description and conclusion.

More recent studies (post-2015) reaffirm and expand these critical insights. Febriyantasari and Yulistiyanti (2024), using a New Critical approach, demonstrate that Frost's figurative language and imagery construct ambiguity rather than resolution, revealing how the poem resists a single authoritative meaning. Similarly, Irawan and Afriana's (2025) semiotic analysis shows that central images such as the diverging roads, the yellow wood, and the final sigh function as psychological markers that encode uncertainty, hesitation, and emotional self-negotiation. These studies confirm that imagery plays a central role in shaping the poem's meaning, yet they tend to treat imagery primarily as symbolic rather than affective.

Other contemporary scholars continue to interpret the poem through themes of individualism and identity, though often with greater nuance. Yustisiana and Sari (2023), for example, examine metaphors of choice and nonconformity, acknowledging that the poem's imagery complicates simplistic notions of personal freedom. Likewise, Ahmadzadeh (2007) employs Lacanian theory to explore how the poem constructs subjectivity through desire and lack, suggesting that the speaker's identity is shaped more by narrative reconstruction than by the original choice itself. While these approaches deepen thematic analysis, they often prioritize ideological or psychological interpretation over the experiential role of imagery.

This study argues that a fuller understanding of *The Road Not Taken* requires closer attention to imagery as an affective mechanism rather than merely a symbolic code. Drawing on Affect Theory, which emphasizes how emotions circulate through texts prior to conscious interpretation (Massumi, 2002; Ngai, 2005), this paper examines how Frost's visual, auditory, and temporal images translate complex emotional states into poetic experience. Recent humanities research supports this direction. Carte (2024) studies in *Humanities* applies the psychology of regret to Frost's poem, demonstrating that emotional meaning arises through retrospective narration rather than objective difference between choices. This aligns closely with the poem's imagistic structure, which consistently foregrounds sameness, obstruction, and delayed emotional framing.

Affect Theory is particularly useful in reading Frost's poem because it allows emotional ambiguity to remain productive rather than problematic. As Ngai (2005) notes, literary texts often generate low-

intensity or indeterminate feelings - such as hesitation, mild anxiety, or nostalgia - that resist moral clarity. In *The Road Not Taken*, such effects emerge through imagery: the obstructed vision of the “undergrowth,” the autumnal tone of the “yellow wood,” and the emotionally ambiguous “sigh.” These images do not tell readers what to feel; instead, they create conditions under which feeling is experienced.

Accordingly, this paper is guided by the following research question: How does imagery in Robert Frost’s *The Road Not Taken* function to translate complex emotional states and shape the reader’s affective engagement with the poem? It argues that the poem’s emotional depth lies not in the moment of choice but in the retrospective emotional reconstruction of that choice through imagery. By foregrounding imagery as an affective translator rather than a decorative or symbolic element, this study reframes the poem as a meditation on memory, narrative identity, and emotional meaning-making .

By integrating formalist criticism, recent journal scholarship, and affect theory, this study contributes to contemporary Frost criticism and offers pedagogical value. It provides a framework for teaching *The Road Not Taken* that moves beyond motivational simplification and instead highlights how poetic imagery enables readers to confront uncertainty as a shared human experience. Ultimately, the poem endures not because it resolves the anxiety of choice, but because its imagery renders that anxiety emotionally intelligible while leaving meaning deliberately unresolved.

METHODS OF RESEARCH

This study adopts a qualitative interpretive methodology grounded in close textual analysis. The poem is approached as an autonomous literary text whose meaning emerges from the interaction of its internal elements rather than from biographical or historical context alone. Two complementary theoretical frameworks guide the analysis. First, New Criticism provides the methodological foundation for close reading, emphasizing imagery, tone, ambiguity, and internal coherence as sources of meaning. Second, Affect Theory informs the examination of how emotions circulate through the poem and how readers experience these emotions through imagistic cues rather than explicit statements. Following New Critical principles, this study treats the poem as an autonomous text, avoiding biographical intention in line with Wimsatt and Beardsley’s (1946) concept of the intentional fallacy.

The primary data for this research is the complete text of Robert Frost’s *The Road Not Taken* (1916). Particular attention is given to recurring and climactic images, including visual imagery such as the “two roads,” the “yellow wood,” and the “undergrowth,” auditory imagery represented by the final “sigh,” and temporal imagery encapsulated in the phrase “ages and ages hence.” These images are treated as affective nodes through which emotional meaning is produced and negotiated.

The analytical process proceeds through an integrated sequence of close reading and interpretation. First, the poem’s imagery is traced across stanzas to identify patterns, repetitions, and contradictions. Second, the emotional connotations of each image are examined to determine how they translate ambivalence, nostalgia, regret, and rationalization. Finally, these findings are synthesized to demonstrate how imagery contributes to broader themes of memory construction, narrative identity, and retrospective meaning-making (Bruner, 1991). This integrated methodological approach allows for a holistic analysis in which form, emotion, and theme are inseparable.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study demonstrate that imagery in *The Road Not Taken* functions as the poem's primary emotional engine. Rather than serving a merely illustrative or symbolic role, Frost's images actively construct the speaker's emotional landscape and guide the reader's affective response. Through a network of visual, auditory, and temporal images, the poem translates complex psychological states that remain largely unstated on the surface.

The Diverging Roads: Ambivalence and the Illusion of Meaningful Choice

The image of two diverging roads is among the most iconic in American poetry, yet its emotional significance is frequently misunderstood. While the image initially suggests a decisive moment of choice, Frost systematically undermines this interpretation by emphasizing the similarity of the roads. The speaker notes that both paths are "just as fair," "equally worn," and "really about the same." This insistence on sameness generates emotional ambivalence rather than confidence.

At an affective level, the image reveals a psychological tension between the human desire for meaningful differentiation and the reality of arbitrary decision-making. The speaker's careful scrutiny of the roads suggests an attempt to locate justification for the choice, yet the imagery refuses to provide it. As a result, the reader experiences a subtle discomfort that mirrors the speaker's uncertainty. The roads thus function not as symbols of heroic individualism but as representations of emotional hesitation and the anxiety of choice.

Bellow, Frost's diction repeatedly emphasizes similarity rather than difference, which undermines the idea of a clearly meaningful decision.

"Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,
And sorry I could not travel both"
(Frost, 1916, stanza 1, lines 1–2)

At first glance, divergence suggests opposition and exclusivity. Yet this implication is immediately destabilized by the speaker's regret at not being able to experience both options, indicating hesitation rather than conviction.

This ambivalence is reinforced later in the same stanza:

"Though as for that the passing there
Had worn them really about the same"
(stanza 1, lines 9–10)

Here, imagery explicitly denies qualitative distinction between the roads. The emotional effect is subtle anxiety: the speaker wants the choice to matter, but the visual evidence refuses to confirm that desire. Thus, the roads function affectively as symbols of uncertainty and rationalization, not confident agency.

The Yellow Wood: Nostalgia, Aging, and Retrospective Distance

The setting of the poem in a "yellow wood" contributes significantly to its emotional atmosphere.

"Two roads diverged in a yellow wood"
(stanza 1, line 1)

The poem does not take place in spring (growth and possibility) but in autumn, suggesting that the speaker's emotional stance is already shaped by hindsight. This imagery translates nostalgia into a visual landscape, inviting readers to experience the moment as a memory reconstructed, not an event lived in immediacy. Yellow, associated with autumn, maturity, and decline, situates the poem within a reflective temporal frame. This imagery signals that the speaker is not simply recounting an event but revisiting it from a later stage in life.

Emotionally, the yellow wood translates nostalgia and longing. The scene feels distant, softened by time, and imbued with reflective melancholy. The image encourages readers to interpret the poem not as a record of immediate experience but as a memory shaped by subsequent reflection. In this way, imagery establishes temporal distance as an emotional condition, reinforcing the idea that meaning emerges retrospectively rather than at the moment of action.

The Undergrowth: Uncertainty and the Limits of Human Knowledge

The image of the road bending into the "undergrowth" symbolizes the limits of human foresight. The speaker's attempt to see "as far as I could" reflects a desire for certainty and control, yet the natural obstruction of the undergrowth makes such knowledge impossible. This image translates a complex emotional mixture of hope, frustration, and resignation.

"And looked down one as far as I could
To where it bent in the undergrowth"

(stanza 1, lines 4-5)

The speaker's effort to look ahead suggests a desire for certainty and rational justification. However, the undergrowth blocks vision, symbolizing the inherent opacity of the future. Emotionally, this image translates a universal experience: choices must be made without complete knowledge.

From an affective perspective, the undergrowth embodies the universal condition of making choices without full information. The emotional weight of this image lies in its quiet acknowledgment of helplessness. Regret, as the poem suggests, arises not because a wrong choice was made but because no choice can ever be made with complete understanding. The imagery thus reframes regret as an emotional response to uncertainty rather than failure.

The Sigh: Performative Emotion and Self-Mythologizing

The final "sigh" is one of the poem's most ambiguous and emotionally charged images.

"I shall be telling this with a sigh"

(stanza 4, line 16)

A sigh is emotionally indeterminate: it may signal regret, satisfaction, irony, or theatrical exaggeration. Frost deliberately leaves this unresolved. From an affect-theoretical perspective, the sigh functions as a performative emotion, shaped for an imagined audience rather than a transparent expression of inner truth. This reinforces the idea that emotional meaning is constructed through narrative performance rather than direct experience.

By introducing the sigh in a future retelling, Frost emphasizes that the speaker is consciously shaping the emotional tone of the narrative. The sigh becomes part of the story the speaker tells about himself, signalling an awareness of audience and the desire to impose significance on an otherwise ordinary

choice. This image exposes the human tendency to mythologize personal history, transforming ambiguity into destiny through emotional performance.

Temporal Imagery and the Construction of Narrative Identity

“I shall be telling this with a sigh, Somewhere ages and ages hence”

(*stanza 4, lines 16–17*)

The phrase “*ages and ages hence*” shifts the poem’s emotional center away from the immediate moment of choice and toward the future act of remembrance. This temporal imagery foregrounds the process of narrative construction rather than decision-making itself. The speaker anticipates a future self who will recount the experience, already aware that the story will be shaped, simplified, and emotionally framed for coherence and significance.

From an affective standpoint, this temporal projection reveals how emotions are not static but reconstructed over time. The anticipated retelling implies that meaning is not inherent in the original choice but produced retrospectively through narrative. The speaker’s awareness of this future narration introduces a layer of self-consciousness that complicates any straightforward emotional reading. The choice becomes emotionally charged not because of its immediate consequences but because of the story that will later be told about it.

This temporal imagery thus plays a crucial role in the construction of narrative identity. The speaker imagines himself as a character in his own story, one whose life trajectory can be explained through a single symbolic decision. In doing so, Frost exposes a fundamental human impulse: the desire to impose narrative order on the randomness of lived experience. The emotional resonance of the poem emerges from this impulse, as readers recognize their own tendencies to reinterpret past choices in ways that confer meaning, purpose, or distinction.

Imagery as an Affective Translator Rather Than a Symbolic Code

Taken together, the poem’s images function less as fixed symbols with stable meanings and more as affective translators that mediate emotional experience. Unlike allegorical imagery, which typically points to a clear moral or lesson, Frost’s imagery resists closure. The roads do not represent good versus evil, success versus failure, or conformity versus independence. Instead, they translate emotional uncertainty, hesitation, and self-justification into concrete visual terms.

This distinction is significant for literary interpretation. By treating imagery as an affective mechanism rather than a symbolic code, the poem invites readers to experience emotion before interpretation. The reader feels the weight of ambivalence, nostalgia, and quiet irony even when unable to articulate a definitive meaning. This aligns with Affect Theory’s emphasis on pre-cognitive emotional response, suggesting that Frost’s imagery operates at the level of feeling rather than doctrine.

Moreover, the emotional ambiguity of the imagery mirrors the instability of memory itself. Just as memories are reshaped over time, the poem’s images remain open to reinterpretation. The emotional power of *The Road Not Taken* lies precisely in this openness, which allows readers to project their own experiences of choice, regret, and rationalization onto the text.

Reconsidering Popular Interpretations Through Imagistic Analysis

The findings of this study challenge the dominant popular interpretation of *The Road Not Taken* as a poem celebrating decisive individualism. Such readings often isolate the final line, “*And that has made all the difference*” (stanza 4, lines 18–19), from the poem’s broader imagistic and emotional context. However, when examined through the lens of imagery, this line appears less as a triumphant declaration and more as an ironic or self-aware conclusion to a carefully constructed narrative.

The cumulative effect of the poem’s imagery suggests that the “difference” is not an objective outcome but a subjective emotional framing. The roads were initially indistinguishable; the significance attributed to the choice emerges only through retrospective storytelling. The imagery thus destabilizes the notion of clear-cut agency and instead foregrounds emotional interpretation as the source of meaning.

By emphasizing imagery as an emotional structure, this analysis repositions Frost’s poem as a meditation on how humans live with uncertainty. The poem does not instruct readers to choose boldly but invites them to reflect on how they explain their choices to themselves and others. In this sense, imagery becomes a site of ethical and emotional inquiry rather than moral affirmation.

Pedagogical and Theoretical Implications

The implications of this imagistic reading extend beyond Frost scholarship. Pedagogically, it suggests that teaching *The Road Not Taken* through imagery and affect can help students move beyond reductive interpretations. By focusing on how images generate emotional tension and ambiguity, educators can encourage more nuanced readings that acknowledge uncertainty as a central human experience.

Theoretically, this study contributes to ongoing conversations about the relationship between emotion and form in poetry. It demonstrates that imagery can function as an active emotional agent, shaping readers’ responses without relying on explicit emotional language. This supports broader claims within Affect Theory regarding literature’s capacity to transmit feeling through formal elements rather than thematic exposition.

Imagistic Repetition and Emotional Reinforcement Across Stanzas or Repetition

Beyond individual images, Frost’s strategic repetition of imagistic motifs across stanzas reinforces the poem’s emotional continuity and intensifies its affective ambiguity. The recurring emphasis on similarity, “just as fair,” “equally lay,” “about the same”, operates not merely as semantic repetition but as emotional insistence. Each recurrence subtly increases the reader’s awareness that the speaker’s eventual claim of difference lacks empirical grounding.

From a New Critical perspective, this repetition creates internal tension between description and conclusion. The poem’s emotional force emerges precisely from this disjunction: the speaker insists on significance while the imagery consistently undermines it. Affectively, this produces a quiet unease rather than resolution. The reader is invited to sense the gap between lived uncertainty and narrated certainty, a gap that remains unresolved even at the poem’s conclusion.

Frost reinforces ambivalence through repeated imagery emphasizing equality between the roads. This repetition deepens emotional tension by contradicting the speaker’s later claim of difference.

“Then took the other, as just as fair”

(stanza 2, line 6)

“And both that morning equally lay
In leaves no step had trodden black”
(*stanza 2, lines 11–12*)

Each repetition intensifies the emotional contradiction: the speaker insists on significance while the imagery insists on sameness. Affectively, this produces discomfort rather than resolution, inviting readers to sense the instability of the speaker’s self-justification.

This imagistic reinforcement also mirrors cognitive processes involved in memory formation. Psychological research on memory suggests that repetition does not guarantee accuracy but often enhances emotional conviction. In this sense, Frost’s repeated imagery dramatizes how emotional certainty can grow independently of factual distinction, further reinforcing the poem’s meditation on self-deception and retrospective meaning-making.

Irony as an Emergent Property of Imagery

Importantly, irony in *The Road Not Taken* is not overtly stated but emerges organically through imagistic contradiction. The speaker’s future claim that one road was “less traveled by” directly conflicts with earlier visual evidence. This irony is not sarcastic or mocking; instead, it is quietly embedded within the poem’s imagery.

This form of irony aligns with what Cleanth Brooks describes as “the language of paradox,” where meaning arises from internal tension rather than explicit statement. The emotional effect of this imagistic irony is subtle and delayed. Readers may initially accept the speaker’s conclusion, only to experience a retrospective emotional recalibration upon closer reading. Thus, imagery functions as a mechanism that produces irony experientially rather than declaratively.

From an affect-theoretical standpoint, this delayed irony enhances the poem’s emotional realism. Human self-narratives often feel sincere even when they are logically inconsistent. Frost captures this phenomenon not by condemning the speaker but by allowing imagery to expose contradiction gently. The emotional effect is recognition rather than judgment, inviting readers to reflect on their own narrative constructions.

Emotional Ambiguity and Reader Identification

One of the most significant findings of this study is that Frost’s imagery facilitates strong reader identification precisely because it avoids emotional specificity. The poem never names emotions such as regret, pride, or satisfaction. Instead, these feelings are implied through images that remain emotionally open-ended.

The “sigh,” for instance, does not resolve emotional ambiguity but sustains it. A sigh can signal relief, exhaustion, longing, or theatrical exaggeration. By refusing to anchor this image to a single emotional register, Frost allows readers to project their own affective experiences onto the text. This projection is central to the poem’s enduring popularity and pedagogical relevance.

Affect Theory helps explain this phenomenon by emphasizing that emotional engagement often precedes interpretation. Readers feel the emotional weight of the poem before they articulate its meaning. Imagery thus becomes a shared affective space where personal memory and literary text intersect. The poem’s emotional universality arises not from moral clarity but from imagistic openness.

The Ethics of Choice and Emotional Responsibility

While *The Road Not Taken* is rarely discussed in explicitly ethical terms, its imagery implicitly raises questions about emotional responsibility. The speaker's awareness that he will later recount the story differently suggests an ethical tension between truth and coherence. The act of mythologizing one's past may offer comfort and identity, but it also involves selective memory and emotional simplification.

The imagery surrounding future narration, particularly "ages and ages hence", implies an ethical choice not about which road to take, but about how to remember it. Frost does not condemn this impulse; instead, he presents it as a deeply human response to uncertainty. The emotional ethics of the poem, therefore, lie in its recognition of narrative construction as both necessary and inherently distorting.

This finding complicates interpretations that frame the poem as either celebratory or cynical. Imagery reveals that Frost's position is neither prescriptive nor dismissive. Instead, the poem occupies an ethical middle ground, acknowledging the emotional need for meaning while exposing its fragile foundations.

Synthesis: Imagery as Emotional Infrastructure

Synthesizing these findings, it becomes evident that imagery in *The Road Not Taken* functions as the poem's emotional infrastructure. Each image contributes not to a linear message but to an affective network that sustains ambiguity across time, memory, and interpretation. The roads, the wood, the undergrowth, the sigh, and the temporal projection collectively construct a psychological environment rather than a moral lesson.

This infrastructural role of imagery explains why the poem remains emotionally persuasive despite critical arguments against its popular interpretation. Readers do not merely misunderstand the poem; they respond to its affective cues. Frost's imagery allows readers to feel that a choice "made all the difference" even as the text subtly questions that belief. Thus, imagery operates simultaneously as emotional catalyst and critical corrective. It invites belief while undermining certainty, creating a dynamic tension that sustains the poem's interpretive richness.

CONCLUSION

This study has examined how imagery in Robert Frost's *The Road Not Taken* functions as an affective and structural mechanism through which complex emotional states are translated into poetic experience. Drawing on a qualitative close reading informed by New Criticism and Affect Theory, the analysis demonstrates that imagery in the poem does not merely embellish meaning or symbolize abstract ideas, but operates as an emotional infrastructure that shapes uncertainty, memory, irony, and narrative identity.

The findings reveal that Frost's most prominent images, particularly the diverging roads, systematically resist differentiation. Through repeated visual emphasis on sameness, the poem constructs emotional ambivalence rather than decisiveness, thereby challenging popular interpretations that frame the poem as a celebration of individualism or bold choice. This imagistic repetition reinforces the psychological

tension between the desire for meaningful distinction and the reality of arbitrary decision-making, positioning uncertainty as a central emotional condition of human experience.

Moreover, the analysis shows that irony in the poem emerges organically from imagistic contradiction rather than explicit authorial commentary. The discrepancy between the speaker's initial descriptions and his anticipated future narration produces a quiet, experiential irony that mirrors real-life processes of memory and self-interpretation. Rather than exposing the speaker as deceptive in a moral sense, the imagery reveals how emotional conviction can develop independently of factual difference, highlighting the human tendency to retrospectively impose coherence on past events.

The study also demonstrates that Frost's imagery enables strong reader identification by maintaining emotional openness. Images such as the "yellow wood" and the final "sigh" resist fixed emotional categorization, allowing readers to project their own experiences of choice, nostalgia, and regret onto the text. In this way, imagery operates at the level of affect before cognition, aligning with Affect Theory's claim that literature transmits feeling through form rather than explicit emotional declaration.

Importantly, the poem's temporal imagery foregrounds the ethics of remembering rather than the ethics of choosing. The speaker's awareness of future retelling suggests that emotional responsibility lies not in making the "right" decision, but in how one narrates and emotionally frames that decision over time. Frost's imagery neither endorses nor condemns this impulse; instead, it presents narrative self-fashioning as an unavoidable and deeply human response to uncertainty.

Taken together, these findings reposition *The Road Not Taken* as a meditation on emotional meaning-making rather than a moral lesson about choice. The poem's enduring power lies in its ability to render ambiguity emotionally intelligible through imagery that invites belief while simultaneously destabilizing certainty. By functioning as affective translators rather than fixed symbols, Frost's images sustain interpretive openness and encourage readers to reflect on their own practices of memory, storytelling, and self-understanding.

This study contributes to literary scholarship by demonstrating that imagery can serve as an organizing emotional force rather than a supplementary poetic device. It also offers pedagogical value by providing a framework for teaching poetic ambiguity without reducing complexity to motivational simplification. Ultimately, *The Road Not Taken* endures not because it resolves the anxiety of choice, but because its imagery articulates the emotional labor involved in living with uncertainty and transforming it into narrative meaning.

REFERENCE

- Ahmadzadeh, S. (2007). The Study of Desire: A Lacanian Perspective. *Teaching English Language*, 1(2), 139-153. <https://doi.org/10.3390/h13050130>
- Bloom, H. (1994). *Robert Frost*. Chelsea House Publishers.
- Brooks, C. (1947). *The well wrought urn: Studies in the structure of poetry*. Harcourt, Brace & World.
- Bruner, J. (1991). The narrative construction of reality. *Critical Inquiry*, 18(1), 1-21. <https://doi.org/10.1086/448619>

- Carte. (2024). *Deconstructing two roads: Applying the psychology of regret to resolve the mystery surrounding Robert Frost's most beloved poem*. *Humanities*, 13(5), 130.
<https://doi.org/10.3390/h13050130>
- Febriyantasari, D. A., & Yulistiyanti, Y. (2024). Exploring Robert Frost's *The Road Not Taken* using New Criticism. *Interference: Journal of Language, Literature, and Linguistics*, 5(2), 100-110.
<https://doi.org/10.26858/interference.v5i2.63779>
- Frost, R. (1916). *The road not taken*. In *Mountain interval*. Henry Holt and Company.
- Irawan, N., & Afriana, A. (2025). Symbolism and theme as intrinsic elements in Robert Frost's *The Road Not Taken*: A semiotic analysis. *eScience Humanity Journal*, 5(2), 521–530.
- Massumi, B. (2002). *Parables for the virtual: Movement, affect, sensation*. Duke University Press.
- Newlin, K. (2001). *Robert Frost and a war of the mind*. Princeton University Press.
- Ngai, S. (2005). *Ugly feelings*. Harvard University Press.
- Sacks, P. (1996). *The English elegy: Studies in the genre from Spenser to Yeats*. Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Wimsatt, W. K., Jr., & Beardsley, M. C. (1946). The intentional fallacy. *The Sewanee Review*, 54(3), 468–488.
- Yustisiana, A., & Sari, C. M. I. (2023). Individualism and nonconformity in Robert Frost's *The Road Not Taken*. *Anaphora: Journal of Language, Literary, and Cultural Studies*, 6(2), 175–181.