**Application of Deconstruction to the Analysis of Literary Texts**

**1. Deconstructing Robert Frost’s “The Road Not Taken”: Choosing Between Two Roads**

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|  |  **The Road Not Taken** |  |  |
| **01****02****03****04****05****06****07****08****09****10** | Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,And sorry I could not travel bothAnd be one traveler, long I stoodAnd looked down one as far as I couldTo where it bent in the undergrowth;Then took the other, as just as fair,And having perhaps the better claimBecause it was grassy and wanted wear,Though as for that the passing thereHad worn them really about the same, | **11****12****13****14****15****16****17****18****19****20** | And both that morning equally layIn leaves no step had trodden black.Oh, I marked the first for another day!Yet knowing how way leads on to wayI doubted if I should ever come back.I shall be telling this with a sighSomewhere 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. **Robert Frost** |

Robert Frost’s *The Road Not Taken* deals with the confrontation of two choices in the symbolic form of roads. The speaker’s decision to take the road “less traveled by” makes “all the difference” in his future. One common interpretation of this poem describes its theme as dealing with the issue of nonconformity, or taking the road less travelled, as opposed to following the crowd and taking a beaten path. It frames the speaker’s choice to not conform in a positive light and interprets the poem as delivering a positive message about nonconformity. However, by deconstructing this poem’s binaries and examining its ambiguous language, *The Road Not Taken* may be understood as a cluster of contradiction and uncertainty mirrored by the speaker’s predicament.

The poem deals with the binaries of conformity versus nonconformity and the beaten path versus the road less taken. The privileged binaries are nonconformity and the road less taken. Traditionally, nonconformity leads one down a more difficult path in life – the road less taken. It indicates immediate hardship and separation, and implies future reward and success; the ideological glory is found in purposefully making a choice that one knows will be difficult to maintain his or her morals and values. The speaker of *The Road Less Taken* is typically interpreted to have chosen this kind of road over the first, easier road in the poem. However, rather than making an immediate choice between two obviously dissimilar roads, the speaker takes ample time (“long I stood”) weighing his options. He determines that the second path is “just as fair” as the first; he then deems the second path, which he chooses, as having a “better claim/because it was grassy and wanted wear.” Given these considerations, who is to say that the speaker knew the road he chose was the road less traveled or the more difficult path, or that he chose it because of any steadfast value? Perhaps it’s just a difficult choice between two possibilities, one no worse than the other, and the speaker is simply sorry that he cannot experience both; perhaps he chooses the second road because it is “grassy,” and knowing it would be difficult would have changed his decision. Furthermore, the speaker clearly says that he “kept the first for another day!” showing he is not unwilling to take the first path. The speaker may have a plethora of intentions, leaving a limitless number of possibilities as to the theme of the piece.

The textual ambiguities of *The Road Not Taken* further contradict the accepted theme of the text and broaden the spectrum of possible meanings. The last stanza of the poem deals with the effects of the speaker’s choice. He declares that he will someday be telling his story “with a sigh,” and that taking the road “less traveled by” has “made all the difference.” “Sigh” and “difference” are ambiguous words which may have positive or negative connotations; thus, one cannot be sure whether the choice had significantly good or bad consequences. This poem may serve as a regretful reflection of taking the second road, in which case the piece may be interpreted as a message *against* taking the road less traveled. This theory is supported by the title of the poem, which focuses on the road *not* taken. The speaker will never know what could have happened if he had chosen the first path; as concepts are often understood in terms of and defined by what they are not, how can one define the road taken as resulting in a positive or negative experience if he will never know what choosing the other path would have led to? Finally, simply because a road is “less taken” does not mean that it is better than another road. For example, the number of individuals who have committed murder is far less than the number of individuals who have, making murder a road less taken. The text may point in any of these directions.

The undecidability of the text and the limits of its ideologies show the slipperiness of language and that there can never be one definite meaning or truth. Perhaps the meaning of the poem may, ironically, be found in its deconstruction: life, like language, is a series of uncertain roads that may lead one anywhere.

**2. A Deconstructive Reading of Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein***

The focus of this analysis is on the binary pair ***creation*** and ***destruction***. It seems safe to assume that when faced with the binary pair, creation and destruction, creation (seen as "presence") would be placed above the concept of destruction (seen as "absence") in a hierarchy of the two binaries. Deconstructionists assign a hierarchy to these binary oppositional pairs. One of the two binaries is given a position of higher value than the other, as they believe human nature instinctively separates things into a hierarchical system. This study attempts to shed light on the blurred lines of opposition in the binary pair *creation* and *destruction* in Mary Shelly’s *Frankenstein*.

In the beginning of Mary Shelley's Frankenstein, the concept of creation is glorified. Victor’s creation will be the means to answer some of largest questions of the universe. His particular creation of a living human being composed of deceased bodies using electric currents is exalted as a wondrous and advanced scientific undertaking. The result of his creation though is disastrous. Creation is meant to be a happy and beautiful thing, but the creature says to Victor, “my form is a filthy type of yours.” Victor’s creation is not “a perfect creature, happy and prosperous” such as God’s creation, Adam, in Paradise Lost, but a hideous monstrosity made from the flawed vision of Victor, “wretched, helpless, and alone.” As creation becomes a monstrous concept, it is no longer situated in the higher tier of the binary opposition; or rather it is no longer viewed with the absolute certainty of meaning and value as it would traditionally be viewed. As Victor’s creature learns to communicate and observe society, he begins to realize his utter isolation, not only from society but also from his own creator. He learns that no other has been created like him, and when Victor will not create another like him, he becomes violent and destructive, killing Victor’s family and in doing so, he destroys Victor. Victor’s creation becomes his destruction, and the clear distinctive line between creation and destruction is blurred.

The blurred line between creation and destruction can be seen not only directly from the story of Victor and his monstrous creation but in the second title of the work as well, which is The Modern Prometheus. The story of Prometheus is one that calls into question the assumed value of the concept of creation and makes vague the distinction between creation and destruction. Prometheus was given the honorable task by Zeus to create man. Though there are cultural variations in the myth of Prometheus, the general story tells of mankind being made of clay by the hands of Prometheus. After creating mankind, Prometheus gives them fire stolen from the gods, promoting human progress beyond what the gods had allowed and intended. In western thought, Prometheus’ tale represents the striving of mankind to acquire power that is beyond them, which tends to lead to disaster. Prometheus is given an esteemed and honorable task to create human life, but he takes his authority for granted, assuming more power than he is granted. When Prometheus gives fire to mankind, which he created, his creation then becomes his damnation, his destruction, as he is eternally damned by Zeus to have his liver eaten daily by vultures. The distinctive lines of opposition are again blurred by the pen of Mary Shelley.

In Shelley's novel, the meaning of creation is unclear. The traditional line that separates creation and destruction is made less clear, less distinctive. Deconstructive theory, then, adequately explains Frankenstein, in that absolute meaning is indeterminable, but it also fails in that the binary oppositions that deconstructive thinkers would apply to the novel are broken down and reversed. Shelley's novel contradicts traditional thinking, which seems appropriate considering the grotesque, monstrous nature and subject of the novel.