



The Poetry of Robert Frost

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The Work

Robert Frost wrote his poems before scholars and readers became widely interested in tracing themes of personal and cultural identity through an author's work. Nevertheless, these themes can be found in *The Poetry of Robert Frost*. Examples of the theme of the struggle to find and maintain a personal identity can be found in such early dramatic poems as "The Fear" and "A Servant to Servants," in which women cope with mental illness fostered by the highly solitary lives the culture then imposed upon them; in "The Housekeeper," in which society's narrowly defined expectations for women in marriage are confronted; and in "The Self-Seeker," in which a man disabled in an industrial accident struggles to retain his identity as an amateur botanist.

Other poems examining choices people make in the struggle to find a personal identity include those in "The Hill Wife," a group of five short poems about a married and childless woman who simply disappears rather than continue a grimly lonely life with her husband, and "The Road Not Taken," though this famous poem was originally written as a gentle satire of an indecisive friend, the English poet Edward Thomas. As the latter example suggests, not all of Frost's poems about personal identity are grim. Frost, in a talk he gave at the University of California, Berkeley in 1953, for example, said that "The Silken Tent," which describes a woman's mind and beauty, is about "the free spirit." Many other poems are about forming a personal identity that is resilient enough to allow clear thinking, as, for example, the later poems "One Step Backward Taken," "Take Something Like a Star," and "Directive."

While the best known of Frost's poems focus on the lives and thoughts of rural characters on New England farms, it would be a mistake to assume that the poet was uninterested in other cultural groups. He writes with contempt for and insight into a murderer of a Native American in "The Vanishing Red," which was titled before the publication in the 1960's of Native American writers who would offer better ways to refer to Native Americans. In "A Cliff Dwelling," Frost writes of an ancient occupant of a Pueblo Indian settlement. And in "The Ax-Helve," he writes of a French Canadian interested in the nature of education.

Suggested Readings

Frost, Robert. *Robert Frost Reads His Poetry*. Recorded December 9, 1953. University of California, Berkeley. Audio Forum sound cassette 23066.

Marcus, Mordecai. *The Poems of Robert Frost: An Explication*. Boston: G. K. Hall, 1991.

Pritchard, William H. *Frost: A Literary Life Reconsidered*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1984.

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