



Analysing Robert Frost's Poetry To Examine The American Dream: Ambition, Individualism, And Disillusionment

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Abstract:

This paper looks at how Robert Frost's poetry addresses the idea of the American Dream, especially as it relates to the conventional ideas of upward mobility, self-reliance, and personal accomplishment. Although Frost's writing frequently honours independence and country living, it also criticizes the demands and aspirations of the American Dream. This paper examines how Frost captures the nuances of the American Dream, presenting both its bright prospects and the harsh realities that occasionally undercut it through close readings of significant poems.

Keywords: Robert Frost, American Dream, individualism, self-reliance, disillusionment, nature, rural life, modernism

Introduction

The American Dream is a cultural construct that has developed over many centuries and is ingrained in the country's original principles. Its fundamental message is that everyone can succeed and move up the social ladder with effort, willpower, and initiative—regardless of background. The concept is linked to the ideas of democracy, the pursuit of happiness, and individual freedom.

American businessman and historian James Truslow Adams first used the term "American Dream" in the 1930s. He described it as "that dream of a land in which life should be better and richer and fuller for everyone, with opportunity for each according to ability or achievement." Though the idea of trying to live a better life exists before this expression, Adams is credited with formalizing it.

Important Facets of the American Dream:

Economic Opportunity: Historically, the prospect of upward economic mobility has been linked to the American Dream. Humans want to own homes, amass riches, and raise their level of living; these goals are frequently represented by a family, a steady job, and a home surrounded by white picket fencing.

Freedom and Democracy: The American Dream is frequently associated with the liberties guaranteed by the U.S. Constitution, including the freedom of speech, of religion, and the ability to follow one's own course free from repressive state intervention. One of the fundamental tenets of meritocracy is that achievement is determined by ability rather than by privilege or social status. It's the conviction that success can be attained via skill and hard work.

Immigration and Hope: The American Dream has come to represent hope for many people, particularly immigrants, who want to leave their home nations of poverty or persecution behind and live prosperous lives in the United States.

Contemporary Reactions and Modifications

Economic Inequality: Proponents of the American Dream contend that in the present era, widening income disparities, mounting student loan debt, and unstable employment have made achieving it more challenging.

Race and Gender Disparities: Talks regarding the extent to which all Americans can genuinely achieve the American Dream have been sparked by social issues including racial and gender inequity.

Ideals Shift: In reaction to evolving ideals, the definition of the American Dream has likewise changed. For some, the priorities have shifted from economic success or homeownership to sustainability, creativity, or personal fulfillment.

An Introduction to Robert Frost

One of the most well-known poets in America, Robert Frost (1874–1963) was renowned for his profound philosophical understanding of human existence as well as his vivid portrayals of New England country life. After his father passed away, Frost, who was born in San Francisco, relocated to Massachusetts at the age of 11, establishing him in the New England area that would greatly impact his poetry.

Life and Education.

Frost did not complete his studies at Harvard or Dartmouth College, where he briefly attended both. Before committing himself entirely to poetry, he worked at a number of jobs, including farming and teaching. After relocating to England with his family in 1912, Frost experienced success following the release of his debut book, *A Boy's Will* (1913). This was a crucial step since it put him in contact with writers such as Ezra Pound, who helped to publicize his writing. After his return to the United States in 1915, Frost was now acknowledged as a budding writer.

Literary Profession

Frost's poetry is renowned for its apparent simplicity; it frequently depicts commonplace country sights and uses informal language. Beneath this seeming simplicity, however, his poems delve into difficult subjects like human weakness, nature, choice, and loneliness. *The Road Not Taken*, *Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening*, and *Mending Wall* are among of his most well-known poems. Though his investigation of ambiguity and the darker sides of human experience is similarly modern, his use of conventional forms and meter sets him apart from the modernist movement of his day. Four Pulitzer Prizes later, Frost rose to prominence in American letters and was frequently regarded as the voice of rural America. The recitation of his poem "The Gift Outright" during John F. Kennedy's 1961 inauguration solidified his legacy in American culture.

Unique Presence in American Writing

Due to his ability to unite romanticism from the 19th century with modernism from the 20th, Frost has a special place in American literature. While many modernists dabbled in free poetry and abstraction, Frost preserved conventional forms and meters while imbuing them with profound philosophical overtones and contemporary sensibility. He was a uniquely American poet who was able to convey the difficult beauty and complicated complexity of rural life. He was able to establish a connection with both literary experts and general readers. Frost's reputation as a poet of technical verse mastery and profundity ensures his enduring influence on American poetry.

Through his thematic focus and stylistic decisions, Robert Frost blends rural life with greater philosophical problems about existence, individualism, and change in his poetry, reflecting both traditional and current American concerns.

Ordinary American Issues:

Link to Nature: Frost's poetry frequently references the rural New England scenery, which reflects the country's long-standing agrarian heritage. Poems such as "The Road Not Taken" and "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening" encapsulate the pastoral ideal that was essential to the formation of early American identity by portraying nature as a central, almost supernatural force.

Individualism and Self-Reliance: Frost often addresses the themes of personal autonomy and self-determination in his writings, evoking the Transcendentalist and Puritan ideals that shaped early American philosophy. This is best summed up in "The Road Not Taken," where picking one's own route represents the distinctively American ideal of independence.

Rural Life and Community: The ties between neighbours and the lines that separate and unite them are the subject of several of his poems, including "Mending Wall." This reflects long-standing worries about the cohesiveness of tiny, rural communities and their requirement to maintain both real and abstract boundaries.

Contemporary American Issues:

Psychological Depth and solitude: Although the majority of Frost's poems are set in rural areas, they frequently touch on the more contemporary subject of personal solitude and existential doubt. Frost explores loneliness and hopelessness in "Acquainted with the Night," which reflects the modernist concern with inner unrest and isolation.

Ambiguity and Complexity of Choices: A recurring theme in Frost's poetry is the ambiguity of human choices, which speaks to contemporary issues. In "The Road Not Taken," the speaker considers the results of decisions, emphasizing the ambiguity and difficulty of making decisions in contemporary life.

Scepticism toward Progress: Despite his traditional upbringing, Frost was wary of modern concerns such as unrestrained technical advancement and modernization. Poems such as "Out, Out—" illustrate how urbanization and mechanization encroach on the country lifestyle's simplicity, frequently with disastrous consequences.

Fusion of Styles:

Form & Meter: Frost adheres to previous poetry traditions through the employment of conventional forms like iambic pentameter and blank verse, but he also expresses a modern sensibility through the use of conversational tone and informal speech. His poetry can be read widely while delving into more complex, contemporary subjects thanks to this blending.

Frost is a key character in American literature because of his ability to bridge the gap between conventional and modern topics, as well as between the rural and the existential. This allows him to create connections between the intricacies of modern life and past American ideals.

Conclusion

Robert Frost's poetry frequently captures the American Dream's dual essence, expressing both its innate limitations and its hopeful prospects. Frost discusses the attraction of opportunity, individualism, and independence on the one hand—essential components of the American Dream. Poetry such as "The Road Not Taken" highlight the value of free will and the notion that paving one's own route to happiness is possible. The optimistic, aspirational aspect of the dream, in which people are free to choose their own paths, is conveyed by this.

Frost is cognizant of this ideal's limitations as well as its darker aspects, though. Themes of loneliness, adversity, and life's unpredictable nature are frequently explored in his poetry. Frost emphasizes the existential and physical limitations that impede human aspiration in pieces like "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening" and "Mending Wall." In his poetry, the natural environment may be both lovely and uncaring, signifying the difficulties and surefire setbacks that might accompany the quest for fulfillment and prosperity.

Therefore, Frost's writings might be understood as a meditation on the complexities of the American Dream, providing a sobering perspective on its limitations as well as a sense of hope in its possibilities.

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- Yale College Lecture on Robert Frost – audio, video and full transcripts of Open Yale Courses
- Robert Frost Declares Himself a "Balfour Israelite" and Discusses His Trip to the Western Wall
- Drawing of Robert Frost by Wilfred Byron Shaw^[permanent dead link] at University of Michigan Museum of Art

Libraries

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- Robert Frost book collection and Robert Frost papers at the University of Maryland Libraries
- The Victor E. Reichert Robert Frost Collection from the University at Buffalo Libraries Poetry Collection

