

Robert frost: poet, icon, legend essay

[Profession](#), [Poet](#)



Robert Frost: Poet, Icon, Legend It is really no surprise that Robert Frost possessed such an intense love of literature. Both of his parents, Isabelle Moody and William Prescott Frost, Jr. were teachers who exposed him to the likes of Shakespeare, Wordsworth and Burns at a very early age. Born on March 26, 1874, Frost almost immediately developed a love of nature and the countryside. Although his life was filled with unthinkable tragedy, he managed to overcome the obstacles and become one of the most beloved American poets of all time (Parini 14-20).

Frost's most valuable contribution to American Literature was his ability to relate to the common man through his writing; this was accomplished through his masterful blending of traditional iambic pentameter with common speaking rhythms to create free verse. Robert Lee Frost was named after the confederate general, Robert E. Lee, in San Francisco, California. At the age of five, Frost entered kindergarten but due to nervous stomach pains he stayed only one day. Through the years he made several attempts to return, only to experience the same result. Because of this, his mother homeschooled Frost until he was ten years old.

At that time, his father died and because it was his desire to be buried in New Hampshire, the family moved. It was there that Isabelle returned to teaching to support her children and for the first time, Frost was successful in school. He continued on to Lawrence High School where he graduated as the valedictorian in 1892. It was there that he met Elinor White who would later become his wife and was first published in the Lawrence HS Bulletin (Robert Frost Biography 1). Frost then attended Dartmouth College but only

stayed for one semester. Upon returning home he began teaching and writing as a sideline.

After several of his poems were published, he began reporting for the Lawrence Daily American and the Sentinel. In 1895, Elinor finally agreed to marry Frost and shortly thereafter their first child, Elliott, was born in 1896. Frost was awarded the Sewall Scholarship and decided to return college, this time at Harvard. This attempt also failed and he left in 1899 (Robert Frost Biography 1). This time period marks the beginning of a series of life-changing events for Frost. In 1899, Frost's health was failing and he was advised by his doctor to abandon his sedentary lifestyle.

He moved his family to his grandfather's poultry farm and became a farmer. Tragedy struck in 1900 when Elliott died of cholera. The death of their son put a great strain on Robert and Elinor's marriage and they began to drift apart. During this time period known as "The Derry Years" Frost continued writing and his experiences on the farm influenced him to write two of his most famous poems, "Home Burial" and "The Mending Wall". In "Home Burial" we can see great examples of Frost's common language and ability to capture the readers' attention with his variance from strict iambic pentameter.

In lines 18 and 19 we see his creative genius: ' You don't know how to ask it. ' ' Help me, then. ' The visual presentation of these lines and the break in pattern from the other verses clearly represent the distance between the husband and wife. Toward the end of the poem, the wife repeats the words her husband said upon returning from burying their son: " Three foggy

mornings and one rainy day Will rot the best birch fence a man can build. ”

The wife is angry at her husband’s lack of grief after such a horrible task; she fails to realize the symbolism of nature taking their son as it takes the fence.

This further indicates the lack of communication and understanding between them. The title, “ Home Burial” seems to refer to several deaths-the death of the child, the death of the husband’s control over the wife and the death of their emotional relationship (Merriman 1). Because the poem is written in basic speaking language and deals with the brutal reality of the loss of a child, the poem is very relatable. During “ The Derry Years” Frost also lost his grandfather, mother and youngest daughter, Elinor Bettina. She was only three days old.

After these horrible losses and less than flattering reviews of his writing, Frost decided to sell the farm and move to England in 1912 which allowed him to concentrate on writing full time. Incredibly, within six months his first book, “ A Boy’s Will” was published. He learned in 1914 that his books were to be published in the United States and were receiving excellent reviews. He was quite surprised as his writing had been met with poor reviews in the past. Frost decided to move back to the United States in 1915 due to his success (Robert Frost Biography 1). Shortly after returning to America, Frost published “ The Road Not Taken”.

This poem became one of his most famous and most analyzed works. A man is walking in the woods and reaches a fork in the road where he contemplates the options before him and how each may affect his life. There are two basic analyses on this piece. One interprets the poem very literally,

assuming that the poem is inspirational and represents the joy of self-reliance. “ But a close reading of the poem proves otherwise. It does not moralize about choice, it simply says that choice is inevitable but you never know what your choice will mean until you have lived it” (Grimes 1).

Robert Frost himself cautioned readers about this poem by saying, “ You have to be careful of that one; it’s a tricky poem – very tricky. ” This poem is an excellent example of Frost’s ability to write in free verse, drawing readers into its simplicity. Publishing poetry that engaged the common man, Frost rapidly gained popularity and began speaking at colleges. He was asked to teach at Amherst College where he remained until 1920 at which time he took one of only two breaks in his career. Another wave of tragedy was about to befall Frost. In 1920 he committed his daughter, Jeanie, to a mental hospital.

He then bought “ Stone House” in South Shaftsbury, Vermont where he wrote most of the poems in the collection “ New Hampshire” (1923) for which he won a Pulitzer Prize. Eventually, his son Carol married and started his own family and Frost gave him “ Stone House”. Frost then bought “ The Gully” where he wrote many of his works including “ A Witness Tree”. He enjoyed spending time with his children and grandchildren there. His second break in teaching and speaking came in 1934 when his daughter, Marjorie, was stricken with puerperal fever and died after the birth of her first child.

His relationship with Elinor continued to suffer until her death in 1938. Elinor would not allow Frost to visit her on her deathbed and in turn he did not attend her funeral. Soon after, Frost became quite attached to Kay Morrison

whom he hired to be his secretary and advisor (Faggen 35). Although Frost was not known for writing poems for people, "The Witness Tree" was actually a love poem for Kay. After Elinor's death, Frost left "The Gulley" and moved to Ripton, Vermont. Again, tragedy struck in 1940 when his son Carol committed suicide.

It was there that he was inspired to write "A Cabin in the Clearing." He also wrote two plays, "A Masque of Reason" and "A Masque of Mercy." His last book, "In the Clearing" was published in 1962 and in December of the same year he became ill and was admitted to the hospital. Robert Frost died shortly thereafter on January 29, 1963. Although his writing was not autobiographical, Frost was heavily influenced by nature and the tragedy in his life. This caused his writing style to be dark and meditative while portraying universal themes.

Frost is considered to be a modern poet as he adheres to language as it is spoken. It is because of his blending of style, his constant self-promotion through speaking engagements and his vast body of work that he won four Pulitzer Prizes in his lifetime and countless other literary awards. In 1958, President Eisenhower appointed Frost as Poetry Consultant for the Library of Congress. Then, in 1961, President Kennedy invited him to speak at his inauguration. Although he had written a special poem for the occasion, his eyesight was failing and he could not read it so he recited, "The Gift Outright." That moment is one of the most famous in literary history (Cummings 115). Although Frost was celebrated among readers of his poetry, he was never appreciated by literary critics. The blending of

traditional forms with American speech patterns was considered a direct conflict with the “ elitist credo of Modernism” (Gioia 1). Robert Frost took risks with his writing and in the process brought a new class of people, the average people, into the circle of literature. His free verse which was so artfully applied to his experiences and tragedies gave birth to a new wave of modern poets.