

ABSTRACT

The aim of this thesis is to analyse three major aspects of Robert Frost's poetry: first his relationship with Emersonianism, second with American nationalism, and third with the natural world. Besides the use of form and the focus on rhythm and meter, these three aspects are to a great extent characteristic of Frost's poetry, recurring in many of his poems. Analysing them provides a comprehensive view of the poet's work and illuminates his unique style distinguishable by its play of imagination, the often unnoticed ambiguity and even obscurity.

The analysis will be based on close readings of Frost's poems, available critical material, and comparisons with other authors who deal with the same aspects and have influenced Frost's work. With Emersonianism this will include, besides Emerson's essays, the works of Thoreau and Whitman. The three authors had indubitably a great influence on Frost. Particularly their concepts of individualism, self-reliance and life in society can be traced in some of Frost's best known poems such as 'The Road Not Taken' or the 'Mending Wall'. Frost's take on them however, is much more complex than is generally believed. His development of these themes brings mainly indefinite results.

Given that in the U.S. nationalism is a concept that often overlaps with individualism, it is something with which the Emersonians also deal in great detail. Thus the works of Emerson, Whitman, and Thoreau are again important influences on the theme of nationalism in Frost's poetry, together with influences that can be traced to the very beginnings of American history and to the Jeffersonian tradition. However, Frost's nationalism must be assessed within the context of the events that took place during his lifetime. Specifically, the implementation of the New Deal, the Cold War, and, last but not least, Kennedy's inauguration – at which Frost read his poem 'The Gift Outright'. In this context, nationalism in America – as the opposition to socialism – becomes even more important for Frost's poetry. What is also essential to consider in the second chapter, is the poet's role in forming national conciseness.

In the last chapter I will analyse perhaps the most dominant theme of Frost's poetry, which is nature. The poet spent a great part of his life in New England. For years he lived on his farms first in New Haven and later in Vermont. The nature in his poetry thus mirrors the nature of rural New England with its long hard winters, life-bringing springs, and deep forests. Still, Frost cannot be considered a nature poet. Nature in Frost's poetry is a force with which the humans are in constant battle. This fight brings both joy and despair. As opposed to the Romantics and the Transcendentalist (Thoreau and Emerson) Frost does not find the divine, or the always present goodness in nature. Rather through its imagery he explores human psychology.