

Robert Frost

Poet Description:

Frost was born and spent his first eleven years in San Francisco. At that point, his father, a journalist, died and the family moved to New England. Frost was educated at Dartmouth and Harvard and for a time made an effort to run a poultry farm in New Hampshire. But in 1912 he went to England, where he published his first book, *A Boy's Will*, the following year. With Ezra Pound's help, he was able to publish his next volume in the United States, after which he returned and made another New Hampshire farm his home, supporting himself by regular college teaching. Increasingly successful as a poet, his family life was nonetheless often bitter. His son Carol took his own life in 1940, and a daughter, Irma, suffered a severe mental breakdown and was institutionalized. These disasters followed upon the death of his daughter Marjorie in 1934; she contracted a fever after giving birth and died slowly.

Frost cultivated the public image of a New England sage, and the poems, read carelessly in search of platitudes, often seem to support that view. In American high schools, Frost's poems continue to be misread to teach little moral lessons that the poems themselves actually decisively undercut. "Take the road less traveled by," students are urged, in a sentimentalized promotion of individual initiative; or, even more crudely, "don't turn like most toward sin or self-gratification; take the road less traveled by." About the only certainty "The Road Not Taken" may be said to offer is that of self-deception. In fact the poems can be corrosively sardonic, offering a menacing nature or human cruelty as the only alternatives to emptiness. That the voice is so crisp, folksy, and pithy only adds to the underlying sense of terror. Over and over again, the poems drain human choices of any meaning, yet they do so in straightforward images, colloquial diction, and rhythms that mimic natural speech.

Race/Ethnicity:

Western European ^[1]

Picture:

