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CERTAIN AMERICAN CHARACTERISTICS REFLECTED  
IN THE POETRY OF ROBERT FROST

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บทคัดย่อ



วิทยานิพนธ์ฉบับนี้ เป็นผลของการศึกษามุคตีกลักษณะบางประการของชาวอเมริกัน  
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วิทยานิพนธ์ฉบับนี้แบ่งออกเป็น ๒ ตอน ตอนแรกกล่าวถึงบุคลิกลักษณะที่สำคัญของ  
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 ว่า อุตทานิยม ส่วนที่สองพูดถึงผลในทางปฏิบัติ บทที่ ๒ แบ่งออกเป็น ๒ ส่วน เช่นกัน ส่วนแรก  
 เป็นเรื่องเกี่ยวกับความศรัทธาในการทำงานหนัก และส่วนที่สองกล่าวถึงผลในทางปฏิบัติ ใน  
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 ทั้งนี้เพราะชาวอเมริกันเชื่อมั่นในอิตตานิยม และศรัทธาในการทำงานหนักตั้งแต่เริ่มเข้ามาอยู่  
 ในอเมริกา พื้นฐานทางประวัติศาสตร์และสภาพภูมิศาสตร์ ยังคงมีอิทธิพลต่อชาวอเมริกันพอ  
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ตอน ๒ ของวิทยานิพนธ์ฉบับนี้ ก็ประกอบด้วย ๒ บท แต่ละบทเป็นการตีความ  
 บุคลิกลักษณะของชาวอเมริกันทั้ง ๒ ประการ ที่ปรากฏอยู่ในบทกวีนิพนธ์ของโรเบิร์ต ฟรอสต์  
 ซึ่งผู้ประพันธ์ได้แสดงภาพของชาวอเมริกันไว้ทั้งในลักษณะและเสีย ส่วนแรกของบทที่ ๓ แสดง  
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## ABSTRACT



This thesis is an attempt to identify certain American characteristics and to show how they are reflected in the poetry of Robert Frost.

The thesis is divided into two main parts, the first of which deals with two major American characteristics. The first part of chapter I is concerned with a major American characteristic, individualism, and the second with its practical effects. In chapter II, the first part deals with another American characteristic, faith in hard work, and similarly, the second part deals with its practical effects. In part I, the part played by American history in the development of these characteristics is also discussed, since the Americans have been individualists and hard workers since they first went to their new land. They are still being influenced by their historical and geographical background, as well as by their individual beliefs.

Part II is also divided into two chapters, each of which is concerned with the interpretation of these two American characteristics in the poetry of Robert Frost. As a moderate poet, Frost presents both positive and negative pictures of Americans. Consequently, the first part of chapter III deals with Frost's vision of the virtues of "rugged individualism," and the second with its weaknesses. The beginning of chapter IV shows the hard work of Frost's characters leading to achievement and progress. The end of this chapter reveals the negative side of the American "work ethic," again as illustrated by Frost's characters in his poems.

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## INTRODUCTION



A first reading of Robert Frost's poetry suggests that his settings as well as his characters belong to a special community. Frost is recognized as "The Voice of New England," or even "The Voice of America"; once he said:

People do me the honor to say that I am truly a poet of America. They point to my New England background, to the fact that my paternal ancestors came here some time in the sixteen hundreds. So much is true, but what they either do not know or do not say is that my mother was an immigrant. She came to these shores from Edinburgh in an old vessel that docked at Philadelphia. But she felt the spirit of America and became part of it before she even set her foot off the boat.<sup>1</sup>

Frost is a great American poet of the first half of the twentieth century whose personality and poetry are typically American. Born in San Francisco in 1874, he was taken back after the death of his father in 1885 to New England where his paternal ancestors had been living for years. There the fatherless boy grew into an independent young man. He attended school but never completely finished it. After his marriage in 1895, Frost tried to settle into the routine of schoolteaching. He helped his mother manage

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<sup>1</sup>Edward Connery Lathem (ed.), Interviews with Robert Frost (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1966), p.50.

a private school in Lawrence and spent two years at Harvard College, preparing himself for college teaching. He tried to become involved in the academic atmosphere but felt it was not congenial to him. In 1900, he moved his family to Derry, New Hampshire where his grandfather had given him a farm. He worked hard to master the soil, struggling against hardships, but he failed. Meanwhile he started writing poetry, but with little success. He said:

None of my relatives wanted me to write.  
Grandfather wanted me to be a lawyer.  
My mother was very fond of poetry, and,  
while she never said so, I always felt  
that underneath she wanted me to write.  
So I entered college. While my marks  
were always good, I somehow felt that  
I was wasting time, and so I left college.  
Later I tried it again, but eventually had  
the same feeling, and I left again. My  
grandfather was disgusted.<sup>2</sup>

Most of the time, he was caught up with financial problems, but to him defeat was an experience to learn from and it encouraged him to go on. In 1912, he moved to England with his family so that he could concentrate on his writing. With his first collection of lyrics, A Boy's Will, published in London in 1913, Frost was welcomed. In the following year, North of Boston attracted so much attention that he became recognized as the interpreter of his country, which he discovered with surprise and delight when he returned to

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<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 36.

the United States of America in 1915. As one observer remarked: "He is a Puritan who has fought the soil for sustenance and has fought the world for recognition as a poet."<sup>3</sup>

Frost was independent, self-confident and experienced. He knew what he wanted and worked hard to get it. Louis Untermeyer writes about him in his introduction "Robert Frost: The man and the poet":

Long before he became known as the greatest American poet of his time, Robert Frost worked as a farmer, a bobbin boy in a Massachusetts mill, a shoemaker, and a teacher in country.... Although his father's father was willing to help him, Robert Frost was not willing to take the advice that went with the help. He might be told what to do, but never how to do it.<sup>4</sup>

It is no mistake to say that most of his poems are studies of character, particularly the collection entitled North of Boston, which Frost himself called "a book of people." In his poetry, Frost expresses what he has experienced, sometimes speaking for himself and sometimes through his characters. His characters are distinct individuals who often ask questions about their surroundings, which they only accept with good reasons. Most of his

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<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 21.

<sup>4</sup>Louis Untermeyer, The Pocket Book of Robert Frost's Poems (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1936), pp. 3-6.

characters explicitly believe in hard work, like their creator, who had gone through hardships and struggle during his early years. There is also a theme of anti-intellectualism in Frost's work which in fact derives from his personal attitude towards life. So through his characterization and his images drawn from homely materials, Frost calls the readers' attention to a certain nation and a certain people - America and the Americans: "... this poet expressed the heart of America in his poetry...."<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>Ricardo Demetillo, The Authentic Voice of Poetry (Quezon City: University of the Philippines, 1962), p.214.