Robert Frost's Gift

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ROBERT FROST'S GIFT

by

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A thesis submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of the University of Colorado in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts

Department of English

1967
This Thesis for the Master of Arts degree by

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Date: June 15, 1966

Robert Frost's life was dominated by two strong beliefs: first, that he had been granted the gift of "intuitive wisdom," which he recognized in "flashes" on several occasions during his life; second, that this gift imposed on him the duty of making his "gift outright" to his nation and the world.

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This study, conducted through hearing Frost speak, reading his poetry, and analyzing what others--life-time friends, world-wide scholars, and critics have written--to discover what Frost could accept as truth.

He was interested primarily in people as individuals rather than in social movements or in groups. He believed there were fundamental underlying motives that controlled men regardless of their historical time.

Frost's last message, spoken at President Kennedy's inauguration, was a challenge to every man to give himself
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He dedicated his life to the search for truth through his personal experiences and the expression of what he believed to be truth in the form of poetry.

He distinguished clearly between what could be known in the human world and man's speculations concerning a superhuman world.

This study attempts, through hearing Frost speak, through reading his poetry, and from analyzing what others--life-time friends, world-wide political acquaintances and critics have written--to discover what Frost could accept as Truth.

He was interested primarily in people as individuals rather than in social movements or in groups. He believed there were fundamental underlying motives that controlled men regardless of their historical time.

Frost's last message, spoken at President Kennedy's inauguration, was a challenge to every man to give himself
"outright" that we might possess the land in which we have already lived for centuries: "The land was ours before we were the land's."

This abstract is approved as to form and content.

Signed William Drak
Faculty member in charge of thesis
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PREFACE

Some individuals are notable because of their desire to learn by thinking for themselves rather than by allowing their beliefs and actions to be controlled by tradition. They are willing to search for "Truth," seeking to discover all they can about themselves, and frequently offending others because they will not conform to the accepted pattern of the environmental culture in which they are striving to live.

Robert Frost was such an individual and his search within himself led him to believe he had been given a gift of "intuited" wisdom and a trust in instinctive knowledge of a right decision at times. The "well-adjusted" men with whom he came in contact called him a drifter and a failure. If one becomes acquainted with him through his talks, writings, and life as the "ordinary" man, he may draw his own conclusions in relation to the gift Frost gave to his country and to the entire world.

Although Frost often talked about his "theory of poetry," he is actually an unsystematic theorist. He refused to clarify his own poetry with prose comments and sometimes added to misunderstandings of it by paradoxical and metaphorical remarks. He scorned to set forth
definite explanations of the meaning of individual poems; let his life and writings be understood by those who had eyes which observe and ears which heard "the sound of sense." His duty, as he saw it, was seeking "Truth"—the whole truth as far as man could know it, and urging others to join the search with his invitation, "You, come too."

The purpose of this thesis is to indicate how Robert Frost gave his country and the world a great gift because he believed he had been given a gift of "intuited wisdom." He felt that this gift imposed on him the duty of using all his potential talent to help others in a search for "Truth." This thesis is an attempt, then, to consider his basic beliefs and the fundamental decisions he made which were determined by these beliefs.

Discovering Frost's beliefs will require a careful examination of his complete poetic writings, of his speech readings of individual poems, his prefaces to collections of poetry, of fragments of so-called lectures (talks while on tours and while poet-in-residence in many universities), and of course, conversations and interviews with friends and other poets.

The question posed is: Did Frost deal with modern problems in a modern world or did he refuse to admit that essential problems vary with changes of time? Were his essential problems actually essential or chosen merely to enable him to escape considering the real ones?
My conclusion is that Frost's viewpoint that man can face his conflicts within himself and with the world only when he recognizes that what science considers the "real" world is not reality, since it ignores the feelings, purposes, and values of the individual man himself. This recognition provides the courage to meet his problems and make decisions.

Frost's decision to make the struggle of the individual "ordinary" man the vital center of his poetry enabled him to urge other men to give of their best to the land in the human world and not to spend too much energy speculating as to whether there is a future life.

His continual use of a variety of dramatic forms was based on the belief that poetry must be "people" whose deeds, not their words, reveal what they are. He also believed that men in all ages have the same essential conflicts within themselves in the human world and that there is a limit to the knowledge man can get in relation to the supernatural world while he is still on earth.
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Robert Frost's poetry spans a period of some seventy years, his first poem "La Noche Triste" having been published in the Lawrence, Massachusetts, Bulletin in 1890, while perhaps the last one may have been one written in 1960 for use at John F. Kennedy's inaugural ceremonies on January 20, 1961. Although the weather prevented his reading it on that occasion, it is included in In the Clearing,¹ pages 28-30, just preceding "The Gift Outright" which he did speak during the ceremonies.

These years had been troubled ones for Frost in his personal life as well as for the world, overwhelmed by wars and depressions. He had felt himself a failure at age forty; when he received the telegram inviting him, a man of eighty-seven years, to read from his own poetry during the inaugural ceremonies, he may have felt at last the contrasting thrill of success.

Any man whose activities during his lifetime deviate noticeably from those of other men who are active in

similar areas, will have his contribution—good or bad—examined and re-appraised many times by both popular approval and critics. Men involved in the fields of the humanities are usually violently criticized during their lifetimes; greatly praised, but also sharply disapproved. The standard for measurement during this period is most often the literary philosophy accepted by the individual critic at the time of his writing.

The achievements of men involved in scientific and technological fields are usually highly praised and considered very valuable to progress during and shortly after the lifetimes of the men who "produce the scientific breakthrough" which speed up our lives. The proof of benefit or harm to society (the real evaluation of the contributions) frequently is made years afterward when an actual testing of effects has occurred.

Literary criticism has tended to reappraise the work of dramatists, essayists, novelists, and poets periodically as the critics restate their philosophies. The "test of time" is no longer considered the most vital and only real measure of any artistic achievement.

Seldom has history recorded the names of men who have lived to experience a reappraisal upward of their achievement while they were still alive. The almost superhuman ability to decide and announce one's goal early in life, to make the correct selection of the means to prepare for attaining it, and to have the will power to hold firmly
to that plan regardless of opposition and effort demanded, has been God's gift to few individuals. Such persons have attained recognition in varied areas: the artist Michelangelo, the scientist Marie Curie, the statesman Winston Churchill, and the poet Robert Frost.

Only an individual who has dedicated his life to a purpose he conceives of as a life of supreme sacrifice: a stubborn life-long "lover's quarrel with the world" or the risk of losing his life by defiance of the Pope in order to depict his ideas of God's relation to man on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel—is ever granted a "gift" such as those that Robert Frost and Michelangelo felt had been given them. Their gift to the world required the use of all the talents their Master had entrusted to them.

Michelangelo's realization of his great contribution came when he was able to restore self-control to his Pope, who had in a period of dejection abandoned his duties; the Pope had forced the painter to return to his task. He had done so and stamped his name on it so that all generations since might acknowledge his contribution; his duty demanded that he go farther and recall the Pope to his duties as well. Frost's realization of the acceptance of his gift came with the invitation to participate in the inaugural.

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Stewart Udall had suggested to Kennedy that he persuade Robert Frost to read some of his poetry "as Frost was a poet of the people, the honor would pay tribute to all American literary artists."

He was the first inaugural poet. It had taken nearly ten generations for the nation born out of revolt to realize that poetry was as valuable to the "general welfare" of its people as the wheels of industry.3

During the ceremonies Frost was introduced as "Robert Frost, our national poet." When he had accepted Kennedy's invitation, it had been suggested that he write a poem for the occasion. Frost replied that occasional poetry was not his style. Then President-elect John F. Kennedy asked him to read his "The Gift Outright," a poem which he had written in the thirties when the Depression had aroused a new consciousness of America's history and its great worth in contrast to Hitler's dictatorship. It was first read publicly two days before Pearl Harbor, on December 5, 1941. The critic Randall Jarrell at that time proclaimed it "one of the best patriotic poems ever written in this country." Kennedy admired it greatly, but asked Frost to change the form of the verb in the last line.

The poem first appeared in a volume called A Witness Tree, published in 1942.

The land was ours before we were the land's. She was our land more than a hundred years before we were her people. She was ours in Massachusetts, in Virginia, but we were England's, still colonials, possessing what we still were unpossessed by, possessed by what we now no more possessed. Something we were withholding made us weak until we found out that it was ourselves. We were withholding from our land of living, and forthwith found salvation in surrender. Such as we were we gave ourselves outright (The deed of gift was many deeds of war) to the land vaguely realizing westward, but still unstoried, artless, unenhanced, such as she was, such as she would become.4

Frost had never been sure it expressed all he wished to imply. Receiving the request for change, he repeated the words, testing it aloud:

"Such as she was, such as she would . . . such as she will . . . become . . . ." I have played with that since I wrote it. Kennedy must have sensed the duo-possibilities. But it is interesting that he wants me to say "will," because it is four years ahead that he is going to do something there.5


5Jean Gould, p. 4.
CHAPTER II

EARLY FORMATIVE INFLUENCES

The guiding principles of Robert Frost's philosophy were firmly established in his personality before he was twenty years old: a strong urge for independence, a clear distinction between thought and knowledge, and a refusal to be overcome by the challenges and barriers an individual meets in his earthly existence. His ideas may be illustrated by some stanzas from "Trial by Existence" which was published in the *Independent* (a New York paper), October 11, 1906.

Even the bravest that are slain
    Shall not dissemble their surprise
On waking to find valor reign,
    Even as on earth, in paradise;
And where they sought without the sword
    Wide fields of asphodel fore'er,
To find that the utmost reward
    Of daring should be still to dare.

And from a cliff-top is proclaimed
    The gathering of the souls for birth,
The trial by existence named,
    The obscuration upon earth.
And the slant spirits trooping by
    In streams and cross-and counter streams
Can but give ear to that sweet cry
    For its suggestion of what dreams!
And none are taken but who will,
Having first heard the life read out
That opens earthward, good and ill,
Beyond the shadow of a doubt;
And very beautifully God limns,
And tenderly, life's little dream,
But naught extenuates or dims,
Setting the thing that is supreme.

'Tis of the essence of life here,
Though we choose greatly, still to lack
The lasting memory at all clear,
That life has for us on the wrack
Nothing but what we somehow chose;
Thus are we wholly stripped of pride
In the pain that has but one close,
Bearing it crushed and mystified.¹

In an age when large numbers of Americans shrugged off any suggestion that they largely produce their own lives by their own decisions as changing situations must be faced, Robert Frost decided that he would listen to what relatives and friends urged him to do, but that he would demand the privilege of examining his problems through his own observations and thinking; then make his own decisions. He would seek for what seemed the best for him under the existing situation and conditions.

His friendships, many of which were long-standing and closely woven into the events which provided both the sorrows and joys of his life, reveal the outer and inner influences which determined the "road" he chose to take.

His father's influence seems to have been limited for a considerable period of time. In San Francisco he greatly admired his father, but the shock of learning after his father's death how thoughtless he had been in his conduct relating to his own health and his failure to provide for the future of his family, affected Frost profoundly. Years later he suddenly came to believe that he had the same ability to write that his father had acquired, and which had led to defying family tradition and removal of William Prescott Frost, Jr. to California before Frost's birth. He had been graduated from Harvard College with honors, Phi Beta Kappa, in 1872. After his marriage he decided that journalism in San Francisco would offer greater opportunity than did teaching in Pennsylvania. He was a self-confident man and far too willing to take unusual risks for the sake of showmanship. He died of tuberculosis in San Francisco when Frost was eleven years old, leaving his family with funds barely sufficient to return his body to Massachusetts, as he had requested. Grandfather William Prescott Frost lived in Lawrence, Massachusetts. After his son's funeral he harshly upbraided Robert's mother, Isabelle, for neglecting his son, saying that she should have prevented him from wasting their equity in insurance.

Robert's mother had much to do with the forming of her son's inner life. She was deeply religious, a strong believer in guiding her children's development, but also
in allowing them broad self-determination. From her actions and attitudes Robert certainly learned that since "the Lord helps those who help themselves," the social welfare plans were not the wisest way to help others. She herself was very sensitive and, therefore, understood the boy's problem when the move from California to New Hampshire revealed that he had read little for himself; he would have been frustrated had he been placed in regular school. When Isabelle began teaching in Salem, Massachusetts, she set her son tasks which enabled him to begin to enjoy reading for himself so that he made rapid strides in broadening his knowledge of the outside world. She also arranged a summer job for him that increased his physical strength and gave him opportunity to become acquainted with other children, enabling him to learn to play rather than be treated as an adult as his father's conduct had inevitably led to. Isabelle's teaching methods probably set the pattern for the methods he used later in his own teaching.

Grandfather Frost tried mightily to help his grandson, but he was more interested in his following the tradition of his own family: get a job to assist Isabelle's effort to support herself and children, but also to enable him to learn how to work in the industry of the community; next, get a formal education--high school and college, since his father had graduated from college (although he had been "the black sheep of the family" in leaving the East). Grandfather never was able to adjust himself to
Frost's way of thinking because the boy was determined to choose for himself what "road" he would take. When years later he took a backward look in "The Road Not Taken," he expressed no regrets, merely a philosophical review of the decision. He chose to place this poem first in his Mountain Interval, which was published in 1916.

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood
And sorry I could not travel both
And be one traveler, long I stood
And looked down one as far as I could
To where it bent in the undergrowth

Then took the other . . . .

And both that morning equally lay
In leaves no step had trodden black.
Yet knowing how way leads on to way,
I doubted if I should ever come back.

I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence:
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I--
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.  

Frost did achieve some approval from Grandfather Frost when he graduated from the Lawrence high school as valedictorian of his class and delivered a speech which was highly praised.

Another member of this same graduating class was co-valedictorian--Elinor White, who later became his wife. Unquestionably Elinor's influence on Frost's "way of life is poetry" was greater than that of any other person.

When she insisted on completing her college courses before marrying him, our young man tried to run away from himself, but finally came back to demand "his girl." She became engaged to him, but did finish her education. Robert's mother established a private school in which Elinor, Jeanie (Frost's sister), and Frost himself taught. But Frost's great love was in writing. Half a dozen poems, one of which was "Trial by Existence," were written during these schoolroom days. He was not yet certain how his creative efforts would work out, but above everything else he enjoyed writing. In periods of discouragement, he doubted himself and wrote a Miss Ward, who had once paid him fifteen dollars for a poem, "I fear I am not a poet, or but a very incomprehensible one."

Elinor and Robert were married in 1895, and by this time Elinor knew that Robert had chosen to dedicate his life to poetry. His mother had died of cancer; he had rejected formal college education at Dartmouth and soon they were settled on a farm which in the will of his grandfather had been left to Frost. Grandfather had purchased it earlier, explaining he would give Frost a year to prove he could provide a living by his writings. Frost demanded twenty years instead of one. When the farm became his, he sold it to provide the opportunity in 1912 to broaden

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his creative efforts by coming under the influence of poets in England, a venture which led to publication of *A Boy's Will*. 
CHAPTER III

THE SELF-EDUCATION OF ROBERT FROST

Gorham Munson stated that Frost told him that he was shaped by the unorthodoxies of his parental background, retaining his mother's poetic mysticism and his father's independent spirit. Frost saw himself as a political, moral, and social thinker. In each of these areas, he constantly points to the wisdom of a "Center" position and emphasizes the folly of all extremists. His basic principles determining his decisions were based on convictions arising out of beliefs which grew within his own inner consciousness. Since he has consciously avoided formal statements of his attitudes and preferred to mask himself as an "ordinary man," a seeking man who is only an "amateur philosopher," it is very difficult to organize any statement that could be considered his beliefs. One facet of his thought which all his biographers seem to agree upon is a fear that some "outward" pressure would too deeply color his freedom to think for himself. This fear is reflected in his determination to choose his own curriculum.

rather than to acquire a formal academic education. A second time, at the urging of his grandfather and his wife, he tried to comply with family tradition for college education, hoping to prepare for college teaching. But it was impossible for him to restrict his freedom of thought for the sake of acquiring a diploma by forcing his efforts into a formal plan.

The nearest approach to a plan that I can discover in any book is an outline of his beliefs in *An Introduction to Robert Frost* by Elizabeth Isaacs.²

At fifteen years of age Frost had practically selected his life-goal; by the time he was twenty he had mapped out the path he would attempt to travel to prepare himself for what he considered his duty in life; and before he was forty he had tested his poetic theories by writing more than enough poems to form his first published book of poetry, *A Boy's Will*. He had also had the courage to announce his belief in himself through the poem entitled "Into My Own":³

One of my wishes is that those dark trees . . . .

. . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .

Stretched away unto the edge of doom

. . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .

I should not be withheld but that some day


Into their vastness I should steal away,

I do not see why I should e'er turn back,
Or those should not set forth upon my track
To overtake me . . .

They would not find me changed from him they knew--
Only more sure of all I thought was true.

His preparation for his poetic "way of life" was very unusual. His educational "pattern" during his first eleven years was a divisive one: an errand boy for a selfish, thoughtless father and at the same time the outlet for a romantically inclined mother's love for her family. Isabelle's husband considered it unnecessary for him to spend time at home; he was a busy journalist and his wife should be very happy to stay at home and take care of her children and not expect much attention from him.

Robert admired his venturesome father and did not realize the home situation until Grandfather Frost, immediately after the father's funeral, accused Isabelle of having neglected his son by not preventing his wasteful habits. Probably Isabelle, concerned with keeping her son ignorant of his father's conduct, was shocked as she realized the handicap she had brought upon both herself and her son. She had not sent him to school to get the standard elementary education, but had aroused his poetic imagination, largely by reading romantic poetry to him and his sister, Jeanie. This type of training may have built up in Robert his wavering approach to solutions of his
problems that arose in later life. Although we may say he had developed a somewhat divided personality, we must admit that it helped to form his habit of attempting to examine all facets of any situation before making a decision.

Grandfather's attitude forced Isabelle to realize she must not only provide the livelihood for her family, but also she must find a way to enable her highly intelligent son to close the gap between his schooling and that of the children he must associate with in Lawrence, Massachusetts. He must be taken to some place where his "superior" relatives could not make him feel frustrated and add to his handicap.

Wisely, Robert's mother obtained a teaching position where she could help him make speedy progress in his own way and be motivated to read for himself. He completed elementary grade work in two years and was ready to enter high school in Lawrence. Grandfather was pleased enough that he was willing to help his grandson earn enough money to pay for his transportation as he commuted daily. The contact with the classwork of other children acted like magic, but Robert still had enough opportunity to broaden his mind by choosing most of his own reading. His sense of responsibility for choosing his out-of-school reading allowed him to get some adventure into his life even when he was studying hard for high school courses and also working to get all the money he could earn to help his
mother meet family expenses.

It was not long until he had the added pleasure of finding some one in his classes who could listen to him and understand his enthusiasms. This produced a break in his self-isolation and led to a desire to do his work, including writing poetry. Soon he had fallen in love with Elinor, and when she decided to go to college, he agreed to try Dartmouth.

But he found the academic atmosphere too restrictive; the horse-play of the fraternity he joined bored him, and he decided he could do a better job preparing himself by associating with the sturdy, independent Yankees of his mother's community. She helped him by explaining that she really needed his help at the school to discipline the big, unruly boys. He left college before the end of the first term and actually began his training to become a teacher. He developed methods and attitudes he was later to advocate by observing his mother's methods, especially those that were based on the idea of the individual approach to each child's personal conflicts rather than the traditional method of seeing that every child acquired a stipulated amount of knowledge before he could be tested and moved on to the next higher level.

He decided he did not need to join a group, read philosophy, or talk with others about poetry. He would develop his own philosophy. He had a remarkable memory for what he read and the ability to see the interrelationship
that he felt made up man's experience on earth. He would seek "Truth" and encourage others to do the same.

As early as July, 1915, in a letter to Louis Untermeyer, Frost stated clearly his interpretation of the meaning of the word true: "Nothing is true except as a man or men adhere to it—to live for it, and to spend themselves on it, to die for it." Then he began asking himself, "What does it mean to live as a poet?"

Elizabeth Isaacs implies that Frost answered his own question by identifying three "beliefs" which were basic to "poetry as a way of life." They were "self-belief, love-belief, and art-belief." He felt that

The person who gets close enough to poetry is going to know more than anybody else about the word belief. ... I happen to think that those three beliefs are all closely related to the God-belief, and the belief in God is a relationship you enter into with Him to bring about a future.4

Frost never stated any systematic theory for poetry or for life, but he did state these beliefs. His urge for independence and his feeling of the importance of individualism are at the core of his "self-belief." He never considered it as making him free to tell the world what it should be. He was more interested in seeking his own road. The freedom he sought was the right to decide not what he would do to others, but rather what he would permit others

4Lawrence Thompson, "A Native to the Grain of the American Idiom," Saturday Review, XLII (March 21, 1959), 53.
to do to him. In "Directive" he bids us back out of this modern time which is too much for us and find our way to the mountain and stream, to discover our destination and destiny in the brook whose source is high on the mountain. His symbolism in using the hidden cup as the Grail and suggesting that we drink of the lost cultures of the past, points to a way to find our own lost selves and become whole again beyond the confusions of the troubled times.

"Back out of all this now too much for us, / Back in a time made simple by the loss / Of detail . . . . Drink and be whole again beyond confusion."

Robert P. T. Coffin comments that the myth of "self-belief" may be the very young man's assumption that he is something very important and new in the world, but that the myth turns into the gospel truth if he believes in himself hard enough and long enough. Frost apparently felt a duty to indicate he recognized his high calling and was aware of his own special gift. Jean Gould seems to lend emphasis to this viewpoint in her study based on personal interviews with Frost himself.

5Complete Poems of Robert Frost, 1949, p. 520.


Miss Gould tells us Frost's version of how he was inspired to write his first poem. He had been walking Elinor White home from high school. He had been reading Prescott's *The Conquest of Mexico* and was visualizing the sad fate of the Montezumas for Elinor as they walked. Just after he left her, "he was suddenly aware of a strange whirling in his brain. He hardly knew where he was going. 'There was a wind and a darkness,' Frost said afterwards." He had never written a poem before, and as he continued walking homeward it appeared to him as a revelation. Luckily his grandmother was not in the kitchen. Seated alone at her kitchen table, he began to write as the words flowed. The result was a long, heroic ballad, straight off, making no changes in the stanzas as he had heard them along the way—"like a voice from some unseen Power."

Frost had difficulty trying to explain to others his theory as to the source of the poetic impulse. In a "talk" before students at Princeton University on October 26, 1937, he tried to make them understand. He gave this talk the title "The Poet's Next of Kin in a College."^8

The growth of a poet is through flashes. Sight and insight make poetry, and that belongs to the beginning poet—the poet coming out. I suppose that poets die into philosophy—if they don't die the other way. They die into wisdom . . . . Sight and insight. You must have form—performance. The thing itself is indescribable but it is felt like athletic form.

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When one looks back over his own poetry, his only criticism is whether he had form or not. Did he worry it out or pour it out? You can't go back to a tennis game and play it over--except with alibis. You can go back over a poem, but only if you are in the same mood.

Frost believed in his "gift" that brought the "flashes" that produced the surprise of remembering something he did not realize he knew. However, he did not believe that a good poem is an accident. He was convinced that it is the product of a human mind having knowledge enough and skill enough to impose form, pattern, and organization upon the "raw materials" of experience. He read widely the Latin and Greek poetry with which he had become acquainted in the traditional high school of Lawrence. He also read many poems of the earlier American and British poets: Emerson, Thoreau, Wordsworth, Keats, and Shakespeare. He studied Latin grammar and the classical metrical forms. He acquired his most helpful education through the stern discipline of hard and tedious work on a hilly New Hampshire farm, after the other members of his family had retired for the night.

William Mulder in an article in the South Atlantic Quarterly for July 1955, page 386, explains the disciplines which Frost imposed on himself during his earlier years of experimental writing. Mulder entitled his article "Freedom and Form: Robert Frost's Double Discipline."

Poetry is experience shaped by pressure from within and pressure from without; from within
by the subject that should be fulfilled, like
the lines of a good axe helve, native to the
grain before the knife expresses them from
without by a regular meter, the curve to be no
false curves. From this double discipline the
reader derives a double pleasure: from his
recognition of the subject and from his lis­
tening to the music of the word and metrical
pattern in close interplay.

Reading this passage makes one wonder if William
Mulder was trying to include as many of Frost's own ex­
pressions as possible into one explanation and to make the
reader at the same time feel the intense pressure under
which Frost lived before he had proved himself.

But Frost was also aware that he must live in the
world with other human beings. He was dependent on others.
He must live in a world conditioned by conflict, tension,
and balance; he must find his place. This led to his
second belief--his "Love-belief." This seems to be an
even more remarkable thing for it concerns two separate
universes. His self-belief required that he

must first know and trust himself and recognize
his own loneliness and isolation in the midst
of life. Second, he must know himself as a
social being: as lover, friend, teacher, bard.
He must be willing to share what he knows with
his fellow-man.\textsuperscript{9}

It is this belief that made him feel the compulsion
to communicate with society. In the "Introduction" to \textit{A
Way Out}, page i, Frost wrote, "Everything that is written
is as good as it is dramatic: it is drama or nothing. . . .

\textsuperscript{9}Isaacs, p. 41.
It goes deep. And I have always come as near to it as I could." He did not want to talk and write about poetry; he felt he must create and live poetry. He sought to create a form through which he could share his philosophy of beauty and truth in the world, a union of "Self-belief" and "Love-belief." This he called "Art-belief." Reginald Cook quotes Frost as saying, "Art serves life by clarifying reality; every form that fulfills its commitment is to the particular degree of its fulfillment an example of prowess in performance." So this third belief arises out of his belief that he has a responsibility to do his best to communicate the "truth" he can discover in this world. As Frost seems to feel whenever he creates a good poem, he has made an investment in the infinite—somewhat of a partnership with God. This Elizabeth Isaacs entitled his "God-belief." These four beliefs seem to cover all the human conditions of life in this world; Frost's answer to "What does it mean to live as a poet?"

Robert Frost became a farmer to make sure he could provide the necessities for his family and because his doctor feared he might contract tuberculosis. He became a teacher to enable him to assist others who might also be led to see for the actual realities of the world—not the "real" as scientists asserted and on which society based

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its attitudes, but rather the inner life of the individual man as seen through his feelings, actions, and purposes. To provide for himself the needed release from tensions within himself and to gain freedom to express his emotions, he lived the life of a poet.
CHAPTER IV

THE UNKNOWN POET

In October, 1906, Robert Frost published a poem entitled "Trial by Existence." A parable, suggesting what might be the purpose of man's life on earth, it directs attention to the central thought: "the utmost reward / Of daring should be still to dare." In addition Frost wrote "'Tis of the essence of life here, / Though we choose greatly, still to lack / The lasting memory at all clear."

Robert Frost's trial, his own life on this earth, was extremely difficult. Lawrance Thompson says in his Fire and Ice that Frost lived in a world where the odds are stacked high against the individual,¹ where forces press so hard against the individual as to make him seem destined to defeat from the start. No wonder that non-conformists such as Michelangelo and Frost needed an intense belief in a God-given vision, or special call, to give them power to stay loyal to their inner beliefs in the face of apparently over-powering handicaps of poverty, sickness, and cries of "no-good-failure."

Frost's divisive early training and the extremely restraining environment in which he attended school in New England led to his habit of seeking answers to the important questions he asked himself only after he had examined conditions as fully as possible in relation to what possible answers others might have given. Probably this developed within him a willingness to start with nothing except courage. Acquire as much knowledge as possible, and, while seeking more, use what you have: resourcefulness in using what you have, rather than refusing to act because you do not have what you think you need—became for him a guiding philosophy.

The application of this philosophy, no doubt, led to Frost's feeling that he did not need new ways to write modern poetry. Neither did he need to discuss what he was striving to do with other poets. There was ample opportunity for him to adapt to his needs the means that earlier poets had used; therefore, many critics call his poetry really classic.

The sing-song monotony and romantic approach in the late nineteenth-century poetry led to a rash of attempts on the part of twentieth-century poets to alter poetry. Most of the experimentalists tried to formulate new theories based on those of the French Symbolists, who had been strongly influenced by Edgar Allan Poe's tenet of "Art for pleasure's sake." They considered that "Art for wisdom's sake" was outmoded. Also, they accepted the idea
that science had proved that the restraints of religion were based on myths. They made a fetish of vers libre since this would permit each poet to make up his own rules. Another part of their creed was that a work of art is something "constructed" to produce a certain definite effect.

Frost had been more deeply influenced by Emerson whose view was that poetry should have the purpose of searching for "truth" as far as it could be found. Moreover, Frost accepted for himself "intuitive wisdom" as his gift which would provide the impulse to start a poem. His poetry would spring out of his own experience— that of the ordinary man— rather than from philosophy and the writings of other poets. He disliked lush decorations and "poetic" words. He did not like extremes. He did not accept the idea that men were merely animals and that the universe could have been accidentally produced.

While Ezra Pound and T. S. Eliot became expatriates to gain closer contacts with European philosophies, Frost was reading widely and deeply from Chaucer, Shakespeare, Virgil, Lucretius, Emerson, Thoreau, and studying classic meters and the sounds of the English language.

Because of his isolation and the refusal of the editors of American magazines to publish anything which did not conform to the then popular verse patterns, Frost was an unknown poet. But he continued writing poems when inner pressure forced him to break his tension by self-expression. By 1912 he had produced more than enough

He was proud of his English heritage and felt the urge to see the places he had learned to love by reading English poetry and plays. Elinor suggested that they go to England where costs would be less and where they could live "under thatch." Money from the sale of the farm would enable the family to make the move, and the Frosts believed that there was a greater interest in poetic writing across the Atlantic.

Not long after their settling in the countryside not far from London, Frost attended a dinner where a group of poets were present. One man asked him if he had come over to get inspiration. Frost replied, "No, I came as an importer, not as an exporter." He could answer in that manner because he had already made enough friends that he had been able to arrange for the publication of his first book. The poems that made up *A Boy's Will* had all been written in New England and brought over in his trunk when the family moved to London.

He had received a card from Ezra Pound indicating that he was sometimes "at home," but had not taken the trouble to call. When Pound discovered that a first copy of a Frost book was at the David Nutt press, Pound decided they must rush over and get a copy. Arriving there, Pound took possession of the first copy and returning to his home, began reading it. A few minutes later, he
informed Frost, "I guess you'd better run along home. I'm going to review your book."^2

Frost believed that poetry at its best deals with spiritual values where there is no room for argument, merely the revelation of sorrow, aspiration, loneliness, and love. He felt that poetry should deal with meaning and "truth" which may clarify the mingled goodness and badness of life without being too optimistic over the existence of the one or too pessimistic over the existence of the other.3

It is hardly fair to say that Frost was "influenced" by contemporary poets or critics. However, his break-away from isolation was very valuable for him. Perhaps the strongest immediate effect was a renewal of his belief that poetry as a way-of-life was a necessity for him. His own evaluation of the contribution of this period in England and Scotland might be summarized in these words: he had no such chance at home to meet people who were as convinced as he that poetry was man's work and worthy the dedication of a life.4 Association with the poet-laureate, Robert Bridges, definitely helped to crystallize Frost's own theory relating to speech rhythms and intonation of poetry.

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3Thompson, Fire and Ice, p. 38; this is Thompson's explanation, but not his wording.

He felt the greatest affinity with a group of English poets known as the "Georgian" poets: Wilfrid Gibson, Lascelles Abercrombie, Rupert Brooke, and Edward Thomas. Gibson said they welcomed him as a rich, ripe philosopher whose talk was like good draught cider. Frost was so unknown in the United States at this time that when Louis Untermeyer read two poems published in Poetry and Drama, a magazine edited by Harold Monro and issued at his Poetry Bookshop in London, he wrote to Abercrombie to inquire who Robert Frost was and was surprised to learn that he was an American poet. He had known nothing of Frost's twenty-year efforts to be a poet while serving as farmer and teacher to earn a living. Frost had known of Untermeyer's poetical contributions, but Untermeyer had known nothing of Frost's.  

Frost's contacts with Ezra Pound did not prove very satisfying to him. As soon as Pound learned that Mrs. Nutt was interested in Frost, he decided to take the attitude that he had discovered an American poet who might be useful to him. He felt so sure of his position as major critic and poet (and also the link between poetry magazines in the United States and Britain) that he attempted to "shorten" one of Frost's poems. One drawback, as Frost saw it, of discussions by poets of each others' poetry was

this tampering with the structure after the poem had been written. He believed that a poem set its own form as soon as its first line had been settled; any tampering must be done only if the same mood came to the poet a second time—in other words, a poem was not something constructed, as Poe had believed. Therefore, he objected to Pound's suggestion to him that he make a change in his poem and calmly replied that the change would spoil his meter, his idiom, and his idea. Pound had grasped the value in the poem, but his arrogance and strong-willed conviction that he could claim Frost as his discovery led him to send a review, including the poem in the changed form he had suggested, for the May, 1915, issue of Harriett Monroe's magazine Poetry, in Chicago, without telling Frost he was doing so. He also tried to persuade Frost to join his group of Imagists.

After North of Boston appeared, Amy Lowell sent a review to New Republic in America. It appeared in the February 20, 1915 issue. In her review Miss Lowell wrote:

Mr. Frost is only expatriated in a physical sense. Living in England he is, nevertheless, saturated with New England. For not only is his work New England in subject, it is so in technique. No hint of European forms has crept into it. . . . The pictures, the characters, the feelings are reproduced directly from life; they are burnt into his mind as though it were a sensitive plate. . . . One of the great interests of the book is the uncompromising New Englander it reveals. . . . He writes in classic metres in a way to set the teeth of all the poets of the older schools on edge. He goes his own way, regardless of any one
else's rules, and the result is a book of unusual power and sincerity.  

When Louis Untermeyer read Miss Lowell's critique, he began to publicize Frost's work.

North of Boston was published in England in 1914.

One of the friends Frost had become very attached to in England, Edward Thomas, wrote for the Daily News:

These poems are revolutionary because they lack the exaggeration of rhetoric, and even, at first sight, appear to lack the poetic intensity of which rhetoric is an imitation.

These were the reviews which greeted Frost when he landed back in New York on February 22, 1915. Frost said he considered Miss Lowell's the first American review of his work; he refused to consider what Pound had sent to Poetry as a review of his poem.

Why were the men and women in this book so distinctly New Hampshire individuals? Apparently Frost has been so shocked to discover that the British laborer lived a life of deprivation and want that no Yankee farmer, or even his hired hand, had ever known that his thoughts dwelt constantly on his New Hampshire friends. The legal restrictions that governed the British worker on the land kept him so tightly bound that he was hardly considered a citizen. Even with all his lack of material things, the New Englander could solve his own problems without the

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dictation of a land owner or attempt to better himself in some other place. Frost felt an increasing pride in the independence and resourcefulness of the sturdy, strong-willed Yankee neighbors he had lived among; he realized their courage even more than when he was in closer contact with them. Hence, he called North of Boston a book of people. Frost liked the Robinson Crusoe attitude. When the New England farmer was confronted by situations which seemed impossible to avoid, he used whatever he had at hand rather than assuming the attitude that he could do nothing.

Frost's stay in England marks the crucial point in his development as a poet. It represents the step from the doubt of his ability to earn a living by the use of his "gift"; it indicated his decision as to what would be the primary purpose in his "Trial by Existence." He had been acknowledged as a poet in the lands from which his ancestors had come. But he still felt he must be publicly accepted by those in America who had done all in their power to deny him the right to decide as an individual what should be his life's work. They had tried to discourage him in his belief that writing poetry could be a man's work.

He felt that the American standard for judging success was conformity and monetary proof of acceptability of his poetry. "Progress" meant that material things were more important than the feelings, beliefs, and inner achievement of a man. No wonder that he felt resentment toward those who had forced upon him greatly increased
burdens. Frost could see no reason why the poet who forged a poem out of allusions based on multiple quotations from other writings which the "ordinary man" had to have explicated for him, should be considered a better poet than one who drew on life experiences for his inspiration. Why should one who catered to a limited "educated" audience be considered a greater contributor to the literary world than he, who sought to discover what is "true" and help others to do the same? His poetry had been refused because he used the language of the sturdy, self-reliant American worker rather than "poetic words and phrases" traditionally considered proper for poetry.

In 1914, when war in Europe seemed inevitable, Frost was stung by what he felt was improper criticism of America's desire to avoid involvement in it as an ally. He felt that our nation had the same privilege that he asked for himself—to decide what he would let others do to him. Therefore, the Frost family chose to return to the United States, knowing that arrangements had been made for publication of his books there, but fearing his possible neglect by American reviewers.

By the time he returned, Frost was no longer "unknown"; his North of Boston was becoming a best seller. Success embarrassed him. To allow time to adjust himself to his new status, he bought a small farm in New Hampshire, but for "reasons of economics and pride,"7 he could not

7Lawrance Thompson, Robert Frost, University of Minnesota Pamphlets on American Writers, No. 2 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1959), p. 6.
long refuse invitations to give public lectures and readings. Within one year following his return he had journeyed widely in the States. In 1921 he moved with his family to Ann Arbor, Michigan, to become one of the first American poets to live on a university campus as Poet-in-Residence.

The man who had sailed to England feeling himself a complete failure: a feeble provider for his family, a "queer" teacher, and a dreamer whose poetry was unacceptable to American publishers, returned to work for fifty more years in his chosen field and to contribute to his country a growing feeling that poetry may be as valuable to "the general welfare" of the nation as the material things we so proudly boast about. This was acknowledged when he spoke his message at the inaugural ceremonies for John F. Kennedy.

How had this become possible? I think Frost would have answered this question by saying by being himself, by seeking to find out what manner of man he himself was. He developed a trust in his ability to discover what he really wanted to be and to do. This he called his "Self-belief." Then later he sought to discover what were the "real" problems of "man," the individual in the world of the twentieth century; he was not interested in trying to find ways to overcome all the difficulties of the mass of mankind. These searchings for "truth" led to the development of theories concerning the function of poetry in the
lives of all individuals—his "Love-belief." As he sought ways to enable every man to find some reason for living, some meaning in life on this earth, he came to his "Art-belief."

For Frost art was the product of any man who did the best job he could perform within his own potential. The French-Canadian Baptiste was an Artist in that he knew how to choose the wood "Native to the Grain" that could be made into an axe-helve that would last a man's lifetime.

But Frost decided there were limitations to what man can learn during his life on this earth in relation to man with God. "Something must be left to God. If there were no God— but there is a God!"8

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8Letters of Robert Frost to Louis Untermeyer, p. 23.
CHAPTER V

ROBERT FROST'S POETIC THEORIES

Having decided that his life was to be dedicated to poetry, Frost set for himself the limitations which were to govern his work. There was a God who granted him a "gift." He would strive to discover not only the purpose of his trial by existence, but also to use his observations as the background against which to seek for meanings in the life of mankind—as individuals surrounded by the process or nature of this world.

In Chapter IV, "The Unknown Poet," I have tried to indicate his efforts to become the Poet he felt he should and could become. His religious training, his close contacts with growing things, and his physical handicaps had provided practical testing of many of his beliefs. He had proved to his colleagues, to a number of other poets, and to some publishers that he could produce good poetry which was apparently "understandable" to the common man, if not to the critics.

On this basis we need as far as possible to read his later poems in the light of his statements of intention. Since Frost had a strong sense of reticence—probably from
having been told he would never be able to do what he said he expected to do, we must very largely discover his theories as he discusses them with friends and leads others to state them in answering their own questions in his classrooms. In this study of his theories, I am using as a definition of theory a wording from Webster's New World Dictionary, College Edition, 1958. Theory: "a mental plan of a way to do something"; or, in a somewhat broadened form, "a formulation of apparent relationships or underlying principles of certain observed phenomena which have been verified to some degree."

What was it that Robert Frost wanted to do? What was his mental plan for doing it? It has already been stated that he would depend on his own personal observations rather than follow poetic traditions. He would use his own skill as a reader to select from history and literature the writings of others that aroused his own significant emotions and thoughts. He would examine these closely to see how the effects he had felt in himself had been produced by a particular author.\(^1\) He would never write a poem just for a specific book. He would wait until a poetic impulse aroused him to "make words become deeds."

We need to remember that Frost began his writing at the time when there was still going on in the United States

the readjustment that follows a civil war. The transition from an agricultural era to an industrial one and from a feeling of great dependence on Europe to one that was growing strong through Westward expansion. This brought about reassessment of aims for the nation. Interest in religion and philosophy had reached a new low. Poetry was considered somewhat unnecessary. Progress meant that a man was increasing his wealth. Society felt that a man must be about the business of helping rebuild the financial status of himself and his nation rather than be concerned with what he might personally desire to be and do. The successful man was the one who acquired wealth even if he obtained it through injustice and by starving his fellowmen. The Calvinistic predestination theory was being replaced by naturalistic determination. Therefore, Frost was battling against the stream. He seemed to be like the West-Running Brook, standing still and waving as it met the rock.

Frost himself stated he had a "setness" which made life hard for his wife and children, but Elinor's faith in him and her very strong love for him, was what made it possible for him to "live his own life" and prove the effectiveness of most of his theories.

He could wait patiently for the poetic impulse of experience to bring a poem into his consciousness. He has described the necessary feeling in his explanation of how a poem originates in his statement which was printed on the dust jacket of his West-Running Brook.
A poem begins with a lump in the throat; a home-sickness or a love-sickness. It is a reaching out toward expression; an effort to find fulfilment. A complete poem is one where an emotion has found its thought and the thought has found the words. . . . My definition of poetry (if I were forced to give one) would be this: words that have become deeds.²

Frost's "setness" was counter-balanced by his habit of doubt. This in reality was the outgrowth of his own self-discipline which compelled him to hold his ideas in relation to life in this world as a continuing process of discovery. It mattered little to him whether a poetic device was new or old. His use of classic forms he justified on the basis of the structure of our language. If a meter provided the best means for stimulating the appropriate emotion in his reader, he believed in using it.

He directed teasing comments to several "modern" poets who insisted on attempts to "free" poetry from traditional rules, especially in relation to its purpose and its form. He was opposed to both pure art and pure preaching, but in an address at Amherst in 1931, he concluded his lecture by saying:

We must be very tender to our dreamers. They may seem like pickets or members of the committee on rules for the moment. We shan't mind what they seem, if only they produce real poems.³


Many of the contemporary poets felt they must search for the materials for their poems in emotions traditionally classified as poetic or they must find their inspiration in something that would shock their readers into attention. Having chosen their subject matter, they would then construct it into verse form. Frost desired the surprise of the unexpected impulse—intense enough to compel self-expression.

But he had also experienced the poetic impulse from a sudden mental perception of a thought which arises from an analogy or metaphor. Lawrance Thompson suggests that "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening" is an illustration of a poem beginning with a "love-sickness," and "For Once, Then, Something" is an example of an impulse which was a "happy analogy which states the paradox between his own watchfulness and his own skepticism."^4

When a poet considers his purpose in producing a poem, he may be influenced by what he has been taught he should be emphasizing. If he is interested primarily in form, he may follow such writers as Aristotle, believing the aesthetic should ignore moral standards; that poetry's first purpose is refined pleasure. Poe was vitally concerned with pleasure, not truth. Plato considered the chief purpose of a poem should be moral. Early American poets

were greatly interested in teaching religious ideals by means of poetry. Earlier British poets, Sidney and Dryden, in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, considered that teaching could best be done by delight. Frost apparently felt that the ideal beauty is truth and goodness—in other words, "Art for Wisdom's sake" will produce the best poetry. He leaned toward Emerson's idea that intuition should determine the appropriate form to stimulate the reader to feel the emotion that the poet experienced and desired to communicate to the reader.

Frost expressed strong dislike for poetry which had been "constructed." He apparently felt that he was merely the vehicle by means of which, by reason of his "gift," he could hope to inspire other men to search for truth (which he was very careful never to "define" even for himself). He did not consider truth to be a willow-of-the-wisp, but rather the ultimate—which man could not completely know in this world. He refused to yield to any desire for expression if the result would be formless: "huge gobs of raw insincerity bellowing with pain." One of the best sources for saucy quips which reveal Frost's deep reactions to the work of other poets, is the recording of "asides" from conversations and lecture-talks which Reginold Cook enjoyed over a period of some thirty years.\(^5\) He was closely

associated with Frost at Middlebury College and at Bread Loaf Summer Sessions. They have been selected from Frost's conversations with Cook (and with others at times when Cook was also present). He quotes Frost in one item as saying:

For the manner of poets, like T. S. Eliot in The Wasteland, who scatter through their poems, multiple quotations from other poets' works, I have nothing but scorn. I call this tendency "scatteration." . . . In Ezra Pound's translations you find the poet working not directly from originals but from the originals plus a lot of other translators' versions.

This method of construction leads to many allusions which the ordinary reader can comprehend only after "explication."

Frost disliked pretense in any form.

Robert Frost has never been popular as a poet; many people say they like his poetry, but they have read or heard discussed only a very few of his poems, and usually misinterpret them by using a line or two as "slogans" to illustrate what they believe Frost meant. The danger is that they have never read Frost's own "definitions" of the common word he uses. He sought to write about common things, thoughts, and feelings in uncommon ways. He was very specific when talking or writing about poetic and critical terms. He would even correct critics and other poets when their usage of a word did not fit his meaning in a given poem. When Wallace Stevens told him, "You don't face life; you write from subject matter," Frost replied: "You write bric-a-brac." Another contemporary poet referred to Frost's wisdom as "introspection"; Frost corrected him: "No, it's
insight." He did not ask that others use the same meanings as he had, but he did feel that his meaning would not be clear unless the reader understood how he had used it. He consciously and frequently went back to original, or at least traditional, usages of words in his vocabulary.

The fact that he came to know Lascelles Abercrombie well during his three-year stay in Britain may have assisted in fixing this habit more firmly for Frost. The group that he admired most at this formative period in his poetic development were not fadists; they differed in their choice of content for their poems, but felt that writing poetry was a worthwhile vocation and were willing to put effort into work. An example of their approach is given by Abercrombie in his Poetic Personality, when he interprets the meaning of such an expression as "His characters are true to life." All that we mean is that they are intelligible. They continually reveal the innermost secrets of their deep reaction to events and persons around them.6 Frost said that he had written only two poems which were not about people. Of course, one must remember that he counts among "the people" and any poem in which he weighs the conflicts within himself or any other individual is included in Frost's statement. Poets are interested in the result of a mind's working: the vital revelations of people.

He sought to analyze his own impulses, his thoughts, his doubts. He did not seek subject matter. He shows wide variation in his moods of belief. As an illustration of this we may consider his attitude toward Nature (that is Process which includes a broader meaning than that word as used by "Nature Poets"). At times he found nature could be benevolent, but just as certainly at other times, malevolent. One of his most persistent questionings is who steers "what, where, and how?" The inter-relations of things and the surprise exceptions to what we usually see in our natural environment serves as the focus for such a discussion in the poem "Design."

I found a dimpled spider, fat and white,  
On a white heal-all, holding up a moth  
Like a white piece of rigid satin cloth—  
Assorted characters of death and blight  
Mixed ready to begin the morning right,  
Like the ingredients of a witches' broth—  
A snow-drop spider, a flower like a froth,  
And dead wings carried like a paper kite.

What had that flower to do with being white,  
The wayside blue and innocent heal-all?  
What brought the kindred spider to that height,  
Then steered the white moth thither in the night?  
What but design of darkness to appall?—  
If design govern in a thing so small.  

Many questions; no definite answers, but a wink at a possible answer.

Frost believed that a poem is a connection of two things in the universe. The poet has the imagination to

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see the latent connection. The metaphor becomes the poem. Much discussion as to the function of metaphor in poetry has left Frost unconcerned. He defined metaphor as the use of a word or phrase (literally denoting one kind of object or idea) in such a way that it suggests an analogy or comparison. These analogies were very numerous in Frost's thoughts because of his widely varied experiences. Four lives: farmer, teacher, traveler, and friend, with many contacts with individuals who represent the extremes of social levels from the lowest levels among the workers of "dying New England" to the highly educated youngest President of the United States, provided uncounted metaphorical comparisons.

Frost's ever-expanding educational interests presented materials in a continuous flow to whet his curiosity. His memory was loaded with legends of twelfth-century witchcraft, but also had included such contemporary achievements as T. S. Eliot's "Four Quartets." After the death of his wife, Elinor, and the suicide of his son, Carol, there was a period of many months during which he was unable to recover his equilibrium. The withdrawal from writing brought greater interest in metaphysical questions. These he called "speculations." His greater interests before had been in the human world; now the questionings were more personal and less ultimates--dealing with what he had done and been during the years when he was winning the approval of the literary world. A backward view brought to mind his
"Putting in the Seed." He had enjoyed his work on the farm. It could have been called a labor of love, a dialogue (perhaps it would be better to call it a three-way love match: the family, Robert, and the seed).

Putting in the Seed

You come to fetch me from my work tonight
When supper's on the table, and we'll see
If I can leave off burying the white
Soft petals fallen from the apple tree
(Soft petals, yes, but not so barren quite,
Mingled with these, smooth bean and wrinkled pea;)
And go along with you ere you lose sight
Of what you came for and become like me,
Slave to a springtime passion for the earth.
How love burns through the Putting in the Seed
On through the watching for that early birth
When, just as the soil tarnishes with weed,
The sturdy seedling with arched body comes
Shouldering its way and shedding the earth crumbs.8

Nature's design of winter and springtime and the storage of power within the seed which enables it to push its own way out to a renewal of life visible to the man who loves the soil.

The same backward look enforced upon Frost the realization that the family life had changed when his devotion to poetry had vitally affected his family: the swing from concern for a seed to the attempts to acquire knowledge of outer space. Awareness of the increasing influence of scientific thought, the older he had grown the more he had talked and written about science—a very broad swing from

love for a seed to a concern about the nation-wide efforts to learn about outer space. His chief fear seemed to be that men might let themselves be led away from thinking through easy acceptance of metaphors as absolute dogma or creed.

In his "Education by Poetry: A Meditative Monologue," Frost said:

Another metaphor that has interested us in our time and has done all our thinking for us, is the metaphor of evolution. Never mind going into the Latin word. The metaphor is simply the metaphor of the growing plant or of the growing thing. And somebody very brilliantly quite a while ago, said that the whole universe was like a growing thing. That is all. I know the metaphor will break down at some point, but it has not failed everywhere. 9

This statement seems to illustrate very well Frost's attitude toward man's ability to get definite answers to our greatest, oldest questionings as to the relationships between land and sea, the human knowable and the unknowable super-human to man in this world. John Ciardi quotes Frost as saying:

My theme is that the only event in all history, is science plumbing deeper into matter; we have plumbed into the smallness of matter, and are plumbing into the hugeness of space--but not without fear that the spirit may be lost. . . . Someone asked me if I thought God could take a chance. I said it looked to me as if he had--right from the start. 10


Ciardi said that Frost called this talk "The Great Mis-giving."

A Boy's Will and North of Boston came out of Frost's rural environment—the first emphasized the love of sensuous beauty and the second, the tragic facts of poverty, loneliness, suffering, disaster, and mental illness. The scientific poems grew out of the outside pressures of city life on his life and thought, when it was almost impossible to isolate himself from mass media and political criticism.

The basis of science is observation, experiment, and recording of data. It is "disinterested curiosity." Its aim is to find natural laws or uniformities underlying the whole. Poetry is a matter of feeling and thought, and arouses our imagination; hence, by making us feel and think, influences our attitude toward life. It is the purpose of poetry to build up our sensibilities and make us conscious of aesthetic values. Frost felt there is really no antagonism between science and poetry; that they are complementary. Cook said in Robert Frost's Asides on His Poetry that there are interesting examples of poems illustrating this idea in his latest book, In the Clearing.11 "The Mixture Mechanic" on page fifty-seven, I think, does so. Another one, entitled "A Reflex," appears on page ninety-three. One of the most noticeable differences in

the two poems is their lengths, the first one having thirty-five lines, broken into three stanzas of differing numbers of lines, while "A Reflex" consists of only eleven lines.

Both poems seem to indicate that Frost has decided that he will enjoy laughing at the so-called "facts" of science.

A Reflex

Hear my rigmarole.
Science stuck a pole
Down a likely hole
And he got it bit.
Science gave a stab
And he got a grab.
That was what he got.
"Ah," he said, "Qui vive,
Who goes there, and what
ARE we to believe?
That there is an IT?"

"The Mixture Mechanic" is too long to quote in its entirety, but a few of the lines indicate its tone:

This wide flight we wave
At the stars or moon
Means that we approve
Of them on the move.

. . . . . . . . .
Matter mustn't curd,
Separate and settle.
Action is the word.

Nature's never quite
Sure she hasn't erred
In her vague design
Till . . . We come

. . . . . . . . .
Undertake to tell her
What in being stellar
She's supposed to mean.
God of the machine,  
Peregrine machine,  
Some still think is Satan,  
Unto you the thanks  
For this token flight,  

. . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .  
To the brothers Wright  
Once considered cranks.

Frost had welcomed barriers in the life of man and  
felt that conflicts in man or nature proved that life  
existed in the object. But during his period of extreme  
condemnation of himself withdrew from poetry and people as  
much as he could. He accused himself of needlessly sacrific­  
ing Elinor to his selfish devotion to poetry. He sought  
release in spending money on real estate and developing  
gardens. Friends tried to drive out his "wildness" by  
arranging tours and seeking honors for him which might re­  
call to him that the people claimed him as the poet they  
could understand. As his health gradually returned, he  
began to wonder if the Bible narratives might help to il­  
luminate his personal problem. He asked himself why did  
God test Job so cruelly; had Job sinned by believing that  
he could live a life on this earth that would be acceptable  
to God? Had God acted justly toward Job? Had God pun­  
ished Robert Frost for his unconscious sin of letting  
poetry become his God? He reread the story of Jonah, who  
had tried to defy God's orders because he could not believe  
God would really punish the wrong-doers whom he was being  
sent to warn. Many people felt that Frost was committing  
a wrong in an irreverent manner of writing his Masques.
The Masques were not very successful, probably because Frost had developed them in an abstract way and the characters did not seem real. Frost had not presented them as people but merely as devices for discussing a problem for which no answer could be given by a human being, but he closed the Masque of Mercy with the line "Nothing can make injustice just but mercy."

The poetic work of a major poet who wrote for over sixty years, cannot be comprehended in so brief a period as has elapsed since Frost's death. New studies are continuing to be published in magazines and as books at the present time. A very interesting experiment occurred during the closing weeks of the 1965 theatre season in New York. Frost had consistently regarded the dramatic as the most essential quality in artistic literary production. Drama is the capstone of poetry, he had said. The dramatic need not declare itself in form, but people and their thoughts and actions make up life. Wilfred Sheed reports in Commonweal, LXXXIII (November 5, 1965), on page 147 that the high point of the theatre season was "An Evening's Frost," which was a program developed by Donald Hall out of writings by or about the life of Robert Frost. This could have been a real testing of Frost's belief that writings must be dramatic or nothing.

Mr. Sheed's review states,

It was a modest compliment, but a heartfelt one; real stuff, coarse, personal, sly; shaped and hardened like an old man's face by geologic
layers of experience and cunning. Hall turned Frost's narrow, incantory power onto Frost himself. The result is not only intriguing, but in a way a genuine dramatic creation.

Act I dealt with Frost's long apprenticeship in the self-imposed exile on his Vermont farm. Hall brings out the shadowy quality that Lionel Trilling noted in Frost and that Frost so characteristically denied. This is the period in Frost's life which he declared was one of hating the human race. The end of Act I coincides with his risk of breaking his isolation. Frost said he had to take the risk because "he had been kept in exile by real fears."

Sheed continues:

he had an ego like a rock, an evernormal reserve of smug wisdom to fall back on, a personal language already fully developed, and a sense of his own limits almost unique in modern American writing.

Act II reveals his "Self-Education." His literary taste was exquisite, but his public style was outrageous—a crazy quilt of early American, middle-high Harvard, and all-round Huck Finnery, stitched together in solitude, one supposes for purposes of disguise. . . . But his tricks did protect him and enable him to write the poems.

This seems to be Mr. Sheed's reaction as a drama critic in relation to the performance.

I would expect that for the next decade, while many still want to read Frost, the "people" will resent any hint that Frost's life was largely kept hidden by Frost himself, and the play will not be popular. I think Frost himself would not have liked it, since he never so far as I can
discover, liked any performance of poetry that he had written in drama form--the actors were never able to create the characters as he had meant them to be interpreted. But, at least, such an experiment reveals a continuing interest in his poetry. His long-time friends, Lawrance Thompson and Louis Untermeyer, now seem to hint that within the next few years we may know more about the poet himself, both his weaknesses and his strong qualities.
CHAPTER VI

RECOGNITION: HONORS AND AWARDS

The word "recognition" can be used to mean either a recognizing of a fact by one's self or the approval and acknowledgment of such a fact by others. Robert Frost felt that he knew the exact moment when he recognized himself as a poet. From that experience until the end of sixty years' practice of his poetic theories, he believed in his powers to communicate with others through his poetry.

However, his willingness to develop the skills needed for the effective stimulation in the reader of the emotions he had experienced was sorely taxed. Twenty years' patient effort without acceptance by those whose help was necessary before he could even acquire an audience to judge his efforts would have turned an ordinary man from his goal.
Publication was denied him because he would not and could not conform to what the poetry editors of the nation's magazines considered the correct approach to poetry.

There seems to be a general agreement among critics that his early efforts came during the very lowest ebb in appreciation of poetry in American literary history. This I think is quite clearly made evident in Chapter V, "Robert
Frost's Poetic Theories."

As occurs in almost all such periods, whether in literary, industrial, medical, or space-exploratory fields, Americans cannot accept new ideas gradually. Once an "authority" in any area speaks out in favor of the work of an experimenter who defies tradition, it becomes the fashion to consider it essential to turn the spotlight on the life and work of this "daring" man.

After Frost's second attempt to conform to the traditional method of attaining the proper education for the would-be writer, he left Harvard and settled down to farming near Derry, New Hampshire. His farming was an unsystematic as his schedule for writing. He would read and try out various experiments in meter and use of words after the other members of his family and his neighbors were in their beds. Occasionally he would test his own wordings to see if the rhythm was right, but he did not like to reveal, even to Elinor, the bits and pieces of syllable and sound that went to build the structure of a poem. As soon as the poem was complete, he was more than ready to put it to the test of speech.

if the struggle between train of thought and mechanics of meter became unsolvable, unendurable, he could always get a perspective on it by stepping out to gaze at the stars.1

When a delinquent grocery bill became a threat that they

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would lose their only horse, Robert and Elinor talked about the possibility of his going back to teaching.

There was the old Pinkerton Academy near them. Frost's personal friendships always seemed to be his chief help in adjusting to his numerous crises. A good illustration of this was the chance that gave him his job as a part-time teacher at Pinkerton. Frost asked the minister, Charles Merriam, if he could arrange some way to introduce him to the faculty. Soon after the Derry Village Men's Club was having a program meeting, and Merriam arranged to have Frost read his poem, "A Tuft of Flowers." Frost was too timid to read it himself, so the minister did the reading. Its reception was so hearty that the following fall Frost was invited to become a part-time teacher at the Academy.

Near the end of his life this same friendly attitude of those he met led to friendships with politically powerful senators and foreign guests in the United States, which became the source of his appointments as Goodwill Ambassador to other nations. His contacts with Stuart Udall led to a more personal friendship between Frost and John F. Kennedy and helped to obtain numerous honors during the last few years of his life.

In 1912 Frost decided that the time had come for a desperate move--his abandonment of isolation and contacts with British poets in England, since there seemed to be more interest in poetry over there at that time. The stay in England with its hoped-for but unexpected results--a
sudden change in his status as a poet—practically determined the course of his life for the fifty-eight years that followed.

By the time of his death, millions of persons had read one or more of Frost's poems and were using as slogans what they considered his lines to mean to prove that their own ideas were "right." Frost did not approve of such use of poetry.

Robert Frost is sure that poetry should, like teaching, be a matter of touch and go—of lodging something way beneath the skin and vanishing. He has himself always known that, the more stuff and stamina a person has, the less he will be told.  

And I am sure Frost would also have said, "And the more he will be able to think for himself."

In 1948 he remarked to girls at Bryn Mawr that poetry offers

- tentatives but not tenets. Tenets you hold with rigor. Tentatives you try; when new knowledge demands, you change them. Poetry offers tentatives and declines to supply safeguards.

By 1915, when Frost returned to New York from London, he was given a hearty welcome. Now the other meaning of "recognition" could be applied to his work. For forty years he had recognized, inside himself, that he was a poet. Now others—poets, editors of poetry sections of magazines, and

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3Ibid., p. 97.
schools were acknowledging his ability as a poet and a lecturer.

Soon after Frost became a celebrity he was engaged to read—the first poet who had ever been hired to do so—at a dinner of the Poetry Society in New York. Sidney Cox tells us that a lady who sat near him conscientiously explained that she was not a regular attendant.

"Staying away won't hurt you," Frost said.

"That sounds cynical," she said.

"No, spiritual," he said. "The spiritual life is lived when we are by ourselves."

"I had thought of it as doing good," she said.

"The spiritual is different from the social though close to it."4

Frost felt that realities must be determined from within—whether we are talking about an individual or a nation.

It was pleasant, and distinctly financially helpful, to be recognized as a Poet by others, but the self-confidence he had felt during the slow climb to this acceptance was the strength that enabled him to continue toward his self-chosen goal during the next forty years.

Lawrance Thompson in his Selected Letters of Robert Frost, lists a total of forty-four honorary degrees that were received by Frost between the years of 1918 and 1962. It is interesting to note that more than one university presented him with two degrees on separate occasions.

4Cox, p. 136.
Amherst, for instance, presented an M.A. in 1918 and the Litt.D. in 1948. Cynically, one wonders how many of the degrees given during his last few years were presented more to indicate his having honored the university rather than the university's having honored the poet himself. He received his second M.A. in 1922 from Michigan University and an honorary Doctor of Laws degree from the same university in 1962. Vermont University awarded a Doctor of Humanities degree to Frost in 1923. His first Doctor of Literature degree came from Middlebury College in 1924.

As early as 1915 Frost had become interested in trying to discover some method of improving the teaching of literature in schools of higher education. This interest grew continuously stronger even to the last few weeks of his life. As an outgrowth of this interest in college teaching, he suggested that Bread Loaf School establish summer conferences. He became co-founder of the School in 1921. He felt that such a set-up could bring together individuals who were seeking to think their problems through, recognizing that others had similar problems, but not willing merely to accept the solutions of these others. In other words, Frost's greatest desire was to help find ways to educate students to think so that decisions at any time in their lives would be based on patiently collected knowledge. He deplored what he said was the method being used by the schools, which developed men with collections of facts, but very few thoughts or original ideas. He believed that
such writers' conferences could help those individuals who desired to become writers to acquire the necessary skills with less lonely strivings.

Tufts College gave him his first invitation to read a Phi Beta Kappa poem, in 1915. He received a similar invitation from this college again in 1940. But he had to wait until 1959 for Tuft's presentation of the Litt. D. to him. He read the Phi Beta Kappa poem at Harvard in 1916 and again in 1941. Harvard honored him as Doctor of Humanities in 1930 and as Doctor of Literature in 1931. Its highest honor to him was receiving the Signet Society, Harvard, Medal for Achievements in the Arts, presented in 1958. Some persons would consider his election to the Alumni Board of Directors as an even higher honor.

The years between 1920 and 1926 were primarily devoted to the vocation of teaching, but both Amherst and Michigan University arranged his duties in such a manner that he was able to produce some of his finest poems during these years. Frost's fourth volume of poems, New Hampshire, was finished while he was trying to solve the problem of being loyal to Amherst, which had given him his first appointment, and a desire to accept a tempting offer from Michigan. It contained a greater variety in types of poems than his other volumes. Fourteen of the poems, which Frost called "talk" poems were full of the tones of speech. Several of them are among those now being discussed critically during reassessment of his works: "A Star in a

President Burton of Michigan had in the spring of 1924 offered Frost a permanent appointment at Michigan, but Frost had given him no definite answer. Dr. Burton's sudden death in October of that year imposed a new decision by Frost. Amherst did not want Frost to leave the East. His New York friends and publishers began planning a "Recognition Dinner" to celebrate his fiftieth birthday in March, 1925, with such well-known writers as Sara Teasdale, Dorothy Canfield Fisher, Willa Cather, and the Van Doren brothers as speakers. His publishers, the Holts and the Harcourt's, were also to be present. This pleased Frost, but he indicated that he wanted the affair to be a joyous, family-like occasion. His own contribution to the "after-dinner" speech-making proved to be a one-act Irish verse play. Amy Lowell was invited to attend, but told Frost she was planning a "cut-glass" dinner in Boston on April 4 to celebrate her own birthday and she would expect both Robert Frost and Louis Untermeyer to be present and to deliver such speech as she desired. Neither of them accepted her invitation. She had hoped for praise for her Imagist movement. On May 12, Miss Lowell suffered a fatal stroke. Frost was so moved by this sudden tragedy that
two days after her funeral he delivered a talk to his students based on an image—a concept that a good poem strikes a reader, producing an "immortal wound"—and he will never get over it. The wording of this speech, as reported in the May 16 issue of the Christian Science Monitor, has been considered as the possible basis of the new measuring device for testing a poem for permanence. He used it to judge Miss Lowell's poetry.

It is absurd to think that the only way to tell if a poem is lasting is to wait and see if it lasts. The right reader of a good poem can tell the moment it strikes him that he has taken an immortal wound—that he will never get over it. That is to say, permanence in poetry as in love is perceived instantly. It hasn't to await the test of time. The proof of a poem is not that we have never forgotten it, but that we knew at sight that we could never forget it. There was a barb to it and a toxin that we owned at once.

The most exciting movement in nature is not progress, advance, but expansion and contraction, the opening and shutting of the eye, the hand, the heart, the mind.5

Frost said that Amy Lowell's work had "lodged poetry" with her generation that would stay. Her Imagism lay chiefly in images to the eye. Her poetry was forever a clear resonant calling off of things seen.

The following week, Frost accepted the position in Ann Arbor, but did not stay permanently since his family began to scatter through marriages and serious illnesses.

But the honors and awards flowed quite continuously.

In 1930 the University of New Hampshire awarded its Litt.D. to him. This same year Collected Poems was published. It took the Pulitzer Prize in 1931. That year members of the Writers' Conference at the University of Colorado, in Boulder, heard his lectures. Denver heard him read his favorite poems during his stay in Boulder. He returned to the area again in 1939, making a tour that included Utah, Kansas, and Wyoming. At that time the Collection of Frost items was established in the English Department of Wyoming University at Laramie. In response to my letter asking what was available there, I received a nice letter from the Chairman of the English Department. During Frost's tour at this time, he was given the degree Doctor of Humanities by the University of Colorado.

The year 1932 brought two honorary degrees: the Litt.D. from Columbia University and Doctor of Humanities from Williams College. The year 1933 brought honor that meant much to Frost. The college from which he had fled when he distressed his family by his decision to design his own educational plan—Dartmouth—awarded him the Litt.D.

The year 1934 became a tragic one for the Frosts. Marjorie, the brilliant daughter who was closest to them in their emotional lives, died. This was probably the event that began the failure of Elinor's health. On doctor's orders Robert and Elinor spent their first winter in Florida for health reasons. This led to the several series
of lectures at the Miami Winter Institute. Two more volumes won Pulitzer Prizes: *A Further Range* in 1936, and *A Witness Tree* in 1943.

These prizes and degrees meant little to Frost now. Elinor underwent an operation for cancer and died in 1938, but friends continued to see that he received them, hoping to restore his desire to live. Between 1938 and 1963, Frost was awarded nine more honorary degrees, of which three were European: Durham, in 1951; Cambridge and Oxford in 1957. The year 1960 brought another Doctor of Humanities, this one from the Hebrew Union. The interesting trip to Israel was sketched in *Scopus*, XVII, No. 2 (June, 1963), which Charles E. Feinberg so kindly sent me from Detroit. He had presented Frost with a copy of *North of Boston* to place in the special Robert Frost Collection presented to the Jewish National and University Library. Frost inscribed the rare first edition with the words "in friendship forever" at a ceremony during his visit in Jerusalem in March, 1961.

Frost's attitude toward all these showerings of honors on him has been well summarized by Sidney Cox:

Robert Frost has carefully embarrassed all attempts to treat him as an authority. He doesn't, he says, feel very confident of himself. He isn't, as he once angrily affirmed, "any Jesus Christ." He doesn't have the answers -- though that has never kept him from making his response. . . . He has always been "after ultimates."  

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6Cox, p. 170.
The problems that distressed him most date back to the beginnings of recorded history:

Why must educators emphasize knowledge of facts rather than ability to have thoughts? Why do men accept the ideas of others because they are too lazy to reach their own conclusions? But more important than all other questions, why do civilized men still insist that struggles between nations can only be settled through wars?
CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION

People in many areas of the world have honored Robert Frost. His poems have been translated into several foreign languages. Chairs in American Literature honoring him have been established in foreign universities, and he has talked his way into the hearts of students in universities in America, Brazil, Russia, and Israel.

What was the gift that brought this world-wide interest in a man who seemed destined to be just a representative uneducated New Englander? Frost thought it was "intuitive wisdom" which by flashes stimulated his cultivated sensibilities until he felt compelled to seek release from tension in the pleasure of finding thoughts and words for a poem to ease "the lump in the throat"—the "love-sickness."

Perhaps it was really his trait of patience, his willingness to withhold stabilizing the thrilling idea on paper (as he himself has stated) for months or even years. Could this have been a gift as great as his intuition? Great cathedrals, stories of the Creation painted on a ceiling, and ageless messages concerning universal feelings and motives of men are not produced by the impatient
artist. Frost's poetry is largely concerned with the
griefs of his world, but he did not point up the problems
in a pessimistic fashion. He brought them out into his
consciousness and thereby attracted the attention of others
toward them. Frequently he gave the reader the shock of
realizing how ridiculous the extreme, hasty solutions
which the impatient psychologist or politician suggested
really were.

Granville Hicks, in his column of the July 9, 1966
issue of Saturday Review, has an article he entitled "Robert
Frost Revisited." He quotes Frost as saying, "Grievances
are a form of impatience. Griefs are a form of patience."

Robert Frost was a conscientious and brilliant student of
both the practice and the theory of poetry. He resented
having some interviewer refer to the contrast between his
"intelligibility" and the "obscurity" of most of the poets
who were influential during the Twenties. He was frankly
impatient with what seemed to him a faked obscurity, but
he would not classify a poem as bad only because it was
difficult to read. In his own writing he was patient
enough to let a "flash" idea mature before fixing it in
words. He preferred to meditate over it in memory, but
since he believed he should not tamper with a poem after
it was given form, unless he was in the same "mood" again,
he took time to choose the exact word and the precise order
of words and sentences, before recording it on paper. A
few weeks before his death, one interviewer asked Frost if
his long life had been worthwhile. The answer he received was:

I guess I didn't take life very seriously. It's hard to get into this world and hard to get out of it. And what's in between doesn't make much sense. If that sounds pessimistic, let it stand. There's been too much vaporous optimism voiced about life and age. Maybe this will provide a little balance.1

The question posed in this thesis is: Did Frost deal with modern problems in our modern world or did he merely want to escape dealing with the essential problems.

The title is "Robert Frost's Gift." There can be more than one interpretation of the word "gift." Was the gift "intuitive wisdom"? If we consider it to be this, we need to ask how Frost had come to believe that he had received it. It seems to me that the answer to this question has been given in Chapter II, "Early Formative Influences." If by "gift" we mean, What gift did Frost offer to our nation, we would be discussing a different facet of the issue. The subsidiary question here would be, Did he really hope to persuade this restless, impatient, unskilled generation of Americans to even see any connection between what they considered "modern" problems and what he was talking to them about?

Frost felt he had a "mission" to carry out during his life on earth. The individual who believes that his

1Granville Hicks, "Robert Frost Revisited," Saturday Review, XLIX (July 9, 1966), 24.
"age" is totally unlike that of his parents and grandparents, will object to this idea. Their slow pace cannot be used today; he will want to go to work so he can earn money while he is young instead of acquiring an education (even under our "speeded-up" systems). His goal is to get a million before he is forty. Frost's patient "plodding" toward his goal of becoming a Poet was only a waste of time, and in addition, a selfish choice of vocation. The conflicts and barriers which Frost accepted as improving him as an individual are "out-dated." No longer does the farmer need to "build soil" or a man to work as long as he is able-bodied. Some selected lines from the poem "Build Soil" reveal Frost's attitude toward Franklin D. Roosevelt's welfare plans:

I say take life easy,
I should myself, only I don't know how.
But have some pity on us who have to work.
Why don't you use your talents as a writer
To advertise our farms to city buyers,
Or else write something to improve food prices.
Get in a poem toward the next election.

Let those possess the land and only those
Who love it with a love so strong and stupid
That they may be abused and taken advantage of
And made fun of by business, law, and art;
They still hang on.2

What did many people consider the modern problems of the nation in the Thirties, and hence accuse Frost of being unpatriotic? Certainly converting the entire earth to

believe that "democracy" is the only proper form of government (by force if it cannot be accomplished by the example of our nation). Moreover, it is essential to keep increasing our gross national income so that we may satisfy all the desires of every human being alive, but also provide recreation and leisure to all men during their entire lifetime. They questioned Frost: "Is socialism needed, do you think?" His reply is continued in additional lines from "Build Soil":

I don't know what it would be. No one knows.
I have no doubt like all the loves when
Philosophized together into one—
One sickness of the body and the soul,
Thank God our practice holds the loves apart
Beyond embarrassing self-consciousness.
Where natural friends are met, where dogs are kept,
Where women pray with priests. There is no love.
There's only love of men and women, love
Of children, love of friends, of men, of God,
Divine love, human love, parental love.
Roughly discriminated for the rough.

Poetry itself once more, is back to love.

Thought product and food product are to me
Nothing compared to the producing of them.
I sent you once a song with the refrain:
Let me be the one
To do what is done—
My share at least lest I be empty—idle.
Keep off each other and keep each other off.
You see, the beauty of my proposal is
It needn't wait on a general revolution—
I bid you to a one-man revolution—
The only revolution that is coming.

The poem is very long, perhaps it had to be to summarize Frost's most troublesome problem: separation of human from super-human issues and attempts to find distinctive methods to analyze each. It is evident that Frost
recognized that life on this earth could never be utopian. Men do work separately; a one-man revolution is only a dream which men have held throughout all recorded time and is in the realm of the super-human—or, as Frost remarks, heaven would already be on earth.

Frost's concern with politics and international affairs grew stronger as his physical body grew weaker with age. His recognition as a middle-of-the-road advisor (although he never compromised to gain favor), brought him in close contact with senators, cabinet members, and presidents. He was invited to White House dinners as a guest, joked with those who had political power, and attracted the admiration of President Kennedy. The old man with the instinctive wisdom of a bard and the young man with desires and hopes for increasing interest in the struggles of the individual in world society (but especially in our own nation), complemented each other. Frost became the representative sent by our State Department on goodwill tours abroad. Free rein was given him to speak openly to and about leaders in other nations. He could accuse us as a people who had withheld ourselves from our land. "The deed of gift was many deeds of war," but at the same time he felt that he was speaking for the incoming President as promising that we would become the strong nation we should be.

In his last book, In the Clearing, he makes us laugh at ourselves by pointing out how silly is our approach to war. In the humorous poem about the cow that jumped over
the moon and its "Postscript," he again challenged the idea that war is a solution for problems of international relations. Having bit the cow that put her foot in the pail of milk, causing her to "let out a howl of rage / that was heard as far away as New York / And made the papers' front page . . . ." He answered her back, "Well who begun it? / That's what at the end of a war / We always say--not who won it / Or what it was foughten for." 3

If we as a people have not fully possessed the gift of our land, can we expect us as individuals to accept Frost's gift--his suggestion that more patience and less demand for immediate possession of all that we desire in our earthly life--will be accepted? We are more likely to reject it. We apparently are less interested now than ever before in the effect that our present actions will have on our future as a nation. We no longer accept the idea that life here may be a trial by existence to test our courage to dare in a possible life in a supernatural world. Frost's willingness to wait and work patiently is unpopular, and force is still considered the necessary means of solving international problems.

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