

APPENDIX I

Robert Frost at Highlight



Robert Lee Frost (March 26, 1874 - January 29, 1963) was an American poet. His work was initially published in England before it was published in America. He is highly regarded for his realistic depictions of rural life and his command of American colloquial speech. His work frequently employed settings from rural life in New England in the early twentieth century, using them to examine complex social and philosophical themes. One of the most popular and critically respected American poets of the twentieth century, Frost was honored frequently during his lifetime, receiving four Pulitzer Prizes for Poetry. He became one of America's rare "public literary figures, almost an artistic institution". He was awarded the Congressional Gold Medal in 1960 for his poetical works.

Early Years of Robert Frost

Robert Frost was born in San Francisco, California, to journalist William Prescott Frost, Jr. and Isabelle Moodie. His mother was of Scottish descent, and his father descended from Nicholas Frost of Tiverton, Devon, England, who had sailed to New Hampshire in 1634 on the *Wolfrana*.

Frost's father was a teacher and an editor of the *San Francisco Evening Bulletin* (which later merged with the *San Francisco Examiner*), and an unsuccessful candidate for city tax collector. After his death on May 5, 1885, the family moved across the country to Lawrence, Massachusetts, under the patronage of (Robert's grandfather) William Frost, Sr., who was an overseer at a New England mill. Frost graduated from Lawrence High School in 1892. Frost's mother joined the Swedenborgian church and had baptized him in it, but he left it as an adult.

Although known for his later association with rural life, Frost grew up in the city, and he published his first poem in his high school's magazine. He attended Dartmouth College for two months, long enough to be accepted into the Theta Delta Chi fraternity. Frost returned home to teach and to work at various jobs including helping his mother teach her class of unruly boys, delivering newspapers, and working in a factory maintaining carbon arc lights. He did not enjoy these jobs, feeling his true calling was poetry.

Adult Years of Robert Frost

In 1894 he sold his first poem, "My Butterfly. An Elegy" (published in the November 8, 1894, edition of the *New York Independent*) for \$15 (\$409 today). Proud of his accomplishment, he proposed marriage to Elinor Miriam White, but she demurred, wanting to finish college (at St. Lawrence University) before they married. Frost then went on an excursion to the Great Dismal Swamp in Virginia and asked Elinor again upon his return. Having graduated, she agreed, and they were married at Lawrence, Massachusetts on December 19, 1895.

Frost attended Harvard University from 1897 to 1899, but he left voluntarily due to illness. Shortly before his death, Frost's grandfather purchased a farm for Robert and Elinor in Derry, New Hampshire. Frost worked the farm for nine years while writing early in the mornings and producing many of the poems that would later become famous. Ultimately his farming proved unsuccessful and he returned to the field of education as an English teacher at New Hampshire's Pinkerton Academy from 1906 to 1911, then at the New Hampshire Normal School (now Plymouth State University) in Plymouth, New Hampshire.

In 1912 Frost sailed with his family to Great Britain, settling first in Beaconsfield, a small town outside London. His first book of poetry, *A Boy's Will*, was published the next year. In England he made some important acquaintances, including Edward Thomas (a member of the group known as the Dymock Poets), T.E. Hulme, and Ezra Pound. Although Pound would become the first American to write a favorable review of Frost's work, Frost later resented Pound's attempts to manipulate his American prosody. Frost met or befriended many contemporary poets in England, especially after his first two poetry volumes were published in London in 1913 (*A Boy's Will*) and 1914 (*North of Boston*).

The Robert Frost Farm in Derry, New Hampshire, where he wrote many of his poems, including "Tree at My Window" and "Mending Wall." As World War I began, Frost returned to America in 1915 and bought a farm in Franconia, New Hampshire, where he launched a career of writing, teaching and lecturing. This family homestead served as the Frosts' summer home until 1938. It is maintained today as The Frost Place, a museum and poetry conference site.

During the years 1916-1920, 1923-1924, and 1927–1938, Frost taught English at Amherst College in Massachusetts, notably encouraging his students to account for the myriad sounds and intonations of the spoken English language in their writing. He called his colloquial approach to language “the sound of sense.”

In 1924, he won the first of four Pulitzer Prizes for the book *New Hampshire. A Poem with Notes and Grace Notes*. He would win additional Pulitzers for *Collected Poems* in 1931, *A Further Range* in 1937, and *A Witness Tree* in 1943. For forty-two years from 1921 to 1963, Frost spent almost every summer and fall teaching at the Bread Loaf School of English of Middlebury College, at its mountain campus at Ripton, Vermont. He is credited as a major influence upon the development of the school and its writing programs. The college now owns and maintains his former Ripton farmstead as a national historic site near the Bread Loaf campus. In 1921 Frost accepted a fellowship teaching post at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, where he resided until 1927 when he returned to teach at Amherst. While teaching at the University of Michigan, he was awarded a lifetime appointment at the University as a Fellow in Letters. The Robert Frost Ann Arbor home was purchased by The Henry Ford Museum in Dearborn, Michigan and relocated to the museum’s Greenfield Village site for public tours.

In 1940 he bought a 5-acre (2.0 ha) plot in South Miami, Florida, naming it *Pencil Pines*. He spent his winters there for the rest of his life. His properties also included a house on Brewster Street in Cambridge, Massachusetts, that today belongs to the National Historic Register. Harvard's 1965 alumni

directory indicates Frost received an honorary degree there. Although he never graduated from college, Frost received over 40 honorary degrees, including ones from Princeton, Oxford and Cambridge universities, and was the only person to receive two honorary degrees from Dartmouth College. During his lifetime, the Robert Frost Middle School in Fairfax, Virginia, the Robert L. Frost School in Lawrence, Massachusetts, and the main library of Amherst College were named after him. "I had a lover's quarrel with the world." The epitaph engraved on his tomb is an excerpt from his poem "The Lesson for Today." In 1960, he received the United States Congressional Gold Medal for "*In recognition of his poetry which enabled the culture of the United States and the philosophy of the world.*" Frost was 86 when he read his well-known poem "The Gift Outright" at the inauguration of President John F. Kennedy on January 20, 1961. He died in Boston two years later, on January 29, 1963, of complications from prostate surgery. He was buried at the Old Bennington Cemetery in Bennington, Vermont. His epitaph quotes the last line from his poem, "The Lesson for Today (1942). "I had a lover's quarrel with the world."

One of the original collections of Frost materials, to which he himself contributed, is found in the Special Collections department of the Jones Library in Amherst, Massachusetts. The collection consists of approximately twelve thousand items, including original manuscript poems and letters, correspondence and photographs, as well as audio and visual recordings. The Archives and Special Collections at Amherst College hold a small collection of his papers. The most significant collection of Frost's working manuscripts is held by Dartmouth.

Personal life

Robert Frost's personal life was plagued with grief and loss. In 1885 when Frost was 11, his father died of tuberculosis, leaving the family with just eight dollars. Frost's mother died of cancer in 1900. In 1920, Frost had to commit his younger sister Jeanie to a mental hospital, where she died nine years later. Mental illness apparently ran in Frost's family, as both he and his mother suffered from depression, and his daughter Irma was committed to a mental hospital in 1947. Frost's wife, Elinor also experienced bouts of depression.

Elinor and Robert Frost had six children: son Elliot (1896–1904, died of cholera), daughter Lesley Frost Ballantine (1899–1983), son Carol (1902–1940, committed suicide), daughter Irma (1903–1967), daughter Marjorie (1905–1934, died as a result of puerperal fever after childbirth), and daughter Elinor Bettina (died just three days after her birth in 1907). Only Lesley and Irma outlived their father. Frost's wife, who had heart problems throughout her life, developed breast cancer in 1937 and died of heart failure in 1938.

Work

The poet or critic Randall Jarrell often praised Frost's poetry and wrote, "Robert Frost, along with Stevens and Eliot, seems to me the greatest of the American poets of this century. Frost's virtues are extraordinary. No other living poet has written so well about the actions of ordinary men. His wonderful dramatic monologues or dramatic scenes come out of knowledge of people that few poets have had, and they are written in a verse that uses, sometimes with absolute mastery, the rhythms of actual speech." He also praised "Frost's

seriousness and honesty,” stating that Frost was particularly skilled at representing a wide range of human experience in his poems.

Jarrell’s notable and influential essays on Frost include the essays “Robert Frost’s ‘Home Burial’” (1962), which consisted of an extended close reading of that particular poem, and “To The Laodiceans” (1952) in which Jarrell defended Frost against critics who had accused Frost of being too “traditional” and out of touch with Modern or Modernist poetry.

In Frost’s defense, Jarrell wrote “the regular ways of looking at Frost’s poetry are grotesque simplifications, distortions, falsifications-coming to know his poetry well ought to be enough, in itself, to dispel any of them, and to make plain the necessity of finding some other way of talking about his work.” And Jarrell’s close readings of poems like “Neither Out Too Far Nor In Too Deep” led readers and critics to perceive more of the complexities in Frost’s poetry.

In an introduction to Jarrell’s book of essays, Brad Leithauser notes that, “the ‘other’ Frost that Jarrell discerned behind the genial, homespun New England rustic the “dark” Frost who was desperate, frightened, and brave has become the Frost we’ve all learned to recognize, and the little-known poems Jarrell singled out as central to the Frost cannon are now to be found in most anthologies.”

Jarrell lists a selection of the Frost poems he considers the most masterful, including “The Witch of Coos,” “Home Burial,” “A Servant to Servants,” “Directive,” “Neither Out Too Far Nor In Too Deep,” “Provide, Provide,” “Acquainted with the Night,” “After Apple Picking,” “Mending Wall,”

“The Most of It,” “An Old Man’s Winter Night,” “To Earthward,” “Stopping by the Woods on a Snowy Evening,” “Spring Pools,” “The Lovely Shall Be Choosers,” “Design,” and “Desert Places.”

Themes

In *Contemporary Literary Criticism*, the editors state that “Frost’s best work explores fundamental questions of existence, depicting with chilling starkness the loneliness of the individual in an indifferent universe.” The critic T. K. Whipple focused in on this bleakness in Frost's work, stating that “in much of his work, particularly in *North of Boston*, his harshest book, he emphasizes the dark background of life in rural New England, with its degeneration often sinking into total madness.”

In sharp contrast, the founding publisher and editor of *Poetry*, Harriet Monroe, emphasized the folksy New England persona and characters in Frost’s work, writing that “perhaps no other poet in our history has put the best of the Yankee spirit into a book so completely.” She notes his frequent use of rural settings and farm life, and she likes that in these poems, Frost is most interested in “showing the human reaction to nature’s processes.” She also notes that while Frost’s narrative, character-based poems are often satirical, Frost always has a “sympathetic humor” towards his subjects.

Pulitzer Prizes

- 1924 for *New Hampshire: A Poem With Notes and Grace Notes*
- 1931 for *Collected Poems*

- 1937 for *A Further Range*
- 1943 for *A Witness Tree*

Poetry collections

- *A Boy's Will* (David Nutt 1913; Holt, 1915)
- *North of Boston* (David Nutt, 1914; Holt, 1914)
 - "Birches"
 - "Mending Wall"
- *Mountain Interval* (Holt, 1916)
 - "The Road Not Taken"
- *Selected Poems* (Holt, 1923)

Plays

- *A Way Out: A One Act Play* (Harbor Press, 1929).
- *The Cow's in the Corn: A One Act Irish Play in Rhyme* (Slide Mountain Press, 1929).
- *A Masque of Reason* (Holt, 1945).
- *A Masque of Mercy* (Holt, 1947).

Prose books

- *The Letters of Robert Frost to Louis Untermeyer* (Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1963; Cape, 1964).
- *Robert Frost and John Bartlett: The Record of a Friendship*, by Margaret Bartlett Anderson (Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1963).

- *Selected Letters of Robert Frost* (Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1964).
- *Interviews with Robert Frost* (Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1966; Cape, 1967).
- *Family Letters of Robert and Elinor Frost* (State University of New York Press, 1972).
- *Robert Frost and Sidney Cox: Forty Years of Friendship* (University Press of New England, 1981).
- *The Notebooks of Robert Frost*, edited by Robert Faggen (Harvard University Press, January 2007).

Letters

- *The Letters of Robert Frost, Volume 1, 1886–1921*, edited by Donald Sheehy, Mark Richardson, and Robert Faggen (Harvard University Press; 2014); 811 pages; first volume of the scholarly edition of the poet’s correspondence, including many previously unpublished letters.

APPENDIX II

“Fire and Ice” Poem

Some say the world will end in fire,
Some say in ice.
From what I've tasted of desire
I hold with those who favor fire.
But if it had to perish twice,
I think I know enough of hate
To say that for destruction ice
Is also great
And would suffice

“Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening” Poem

Whose woods these are I think I know.
His house is in the village though
He will not see me stopping here
To watch his woods fill up with snow.

My little horse must think it queer
To stop without a farmhouse near
Between the woods and frozen lake
The darkest evening of the year.

He gives his harness bells a shake

To ask if there is some mistake.
The only other sound's the sweep
Of easy wind and downy

The woods are lovely, dark and deep,
But I have promises to keep,
And miles to go before I sleep,
And miles to go before I sleep.

“The Road Not Taken” Poem

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, as just as fair,
And having perhaps the better claim,
Because it was grassy and wanted wear
Though as for that the passing there
Had worn them really about the same,

And both that morning equally lay

In leaves no step had trodden black.

Oh, I kept the first for another day!

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 travelled by,

And that has made all the difference