Robert Frost is best known to the public as the poet of New England. Like Faulkner, he stands forth as both the interpreter and the representative of a particular regional culture. It is therefore quite natural that his poetry has been most valued for the precision with which it portrays the rural world 'north of Boston'. There have been many fine studies of the poet's relation of his Yankee environment, and these have done a lot in helping readers to a more sensitive appreciation of his verse. Yet while this approach has its value, there is in it a dangerous tendency to overemphasize pure subject matter to the neglect of form. One can become so interested in the 'reality' of Frost's New England or so concerned to see the local landscape as a reflection of the poet's own experience that one forgets to notice the art through which the regional world is presented. Of course, the reader will want to know something about the locality Frost describes, just as he will want to know something about the poet's life. But if he is interested in Frost's poetry rather than the region, he will need to go beyond a consideration of whether or not; Frost's New England is an accurate picture of the real place. He will want to discover how the poet has recreated this region within the medium of language. More important, he will be interested to see how he uses New England as a means of revealing what is universal rather than merely local. In the end, Frost's rural world is interesting because it symbolizes the world
known to all. One's main concern must be to discover how he has shaped his world as an image of every man's experience.

Biographically, Robert Frost was a New Engander not by birth but by adoption—or rather readoption: the first canonical writer to return from the New England diaspora to his parental region and claim it as his literary home. By the same token, artistically Frost’s tastes were cosmopolitan, not strictly regional. His first favorite poet was Poe; he was an able and zealous student of the classics, especially Virgil’s Eclogues; he once described himself as caring most for Shakespearean and Wordsworthian Sonnets; the one significant fellow poet to whom he dedicated a poem was the English Georgian, Edward Thomas; and in the formation of his mature poetic style none of the writers of the New England Renaissance era were more important to him than Matthew Arnold and Robert Browning. Yet Frost was also acutely conscious of his relation to his New England precursors. Some times he showed it in explicit claim or allusion, more often obliquely, by imitation, repossession, echo, or parody—and not just by means of the written word.

The particular region which he has selected for his purpose is New England and he has represented and interpreted this region, accurately and precisely, in one poem after another. Its physical features, its people, its ways and manner, its habits, traditions, custom beliefs, and codes of conduct, appear and reappear in one poem after another. But he does not render and interpret the whole of New England. He deals only with that part of it which lies to the north of Boston. The other parts of New England such as Massachusetts, Connecticut, and Maine appear only rarely in his poems.
Further, the industrial sites and fishing villages are ignored by him. There is no mention of railway trains and automobiles and factories giving out smoke and gas, or of radios, or of large scale migration to the cities. He is not a poet of skyscrapers, factories, machines, mechanics and truck-drivers, but of field and brooks, and of farmers at their humble tasks. His subject is the region north of Boston and from that region also, only the rural areas and farms and villages. He takes one particular kind of locality to stand for the New England people. In New England, there are also Poles and French, Canadians but they are ignored by the poet. As J.F. Lynen points out “he chooses, not simply what is real in the region, what is there, but what is to his mind the most essential, what is representative. The delimiting of rural New England is only the first step. Even within the area we still find the great mass of detail suppressed in favour of a few significant local traits. Now it should be clear that this process of representing the locality as a whole through a limited set of visual images and portraying the culture and mentality of the region through a particular kind of character is really a mode of symbolism. What emerges from Frost’s scrupulous selection is not reality itself, but a symbolic picture expressing the essence of that reality. Frost’s regionalism is both symbolism and creative.”

It is the region which lies north of Boston which forms the background to the poems of Frost, “It is a landscape, pearly in tone, and lonely to those who do not recognise its friendliness. It is a landscape broken in outline, with views but not giant views, mountains but not too high

ones, pastures, swamps, farms deserted and farms occupied.”

According to Malcolm Cowley, Frost is the poet ‘neither of the mountains nor or the woods, although he lives among both, but rather of the hill pastures, the intervals, the dooryard in autumn with the leaves swirling, the closed house shaking in the winter storms.’ In the same way, he is not the poet of New England in its great days, or in its late nineteenth-century decline; he is rather a poet who celebrates the diminished but prosperous and self-respecting New England of the tourist home and the antique shop. It is a region where people have lived long enough to build granite defences for themselves. Nowhere else in America can the people have as a saying. ‘Good fences make good neighbours.’ Everything that he describes is true. The broken walls, the wood pile that, ‘warmed the frozen swamp as best as it could’, the white tailed bird whose suspicion was that of, ‘one who takes everything said as personal to himself’ all these, and many others, can easily be recognised by anyone who travels through that part of the country. The scenery he describes, the people and their occupations which he presents and the language which he uses, are all peculiar to this select region. The massive birches swinging in fierce winter storms is a common sight in New England and Frost has immortalised it in his famous poem, ‘The Birches’. Blueberries brings out he skill and vividity of New England berry pickers. Similarly true, is Frost’s picture in ‘After Apple-Picking’ of the tired farmer going home for rest after the day’s labour of picking apples:

My Long two-pointed ladders sticking through a tree
Towards heaven still,

And there’s a barrel that I didn’t fill
Besides it, and there may be two or three
Apples I didn’t pick upon some bough.
But I am done with apple-picking now.
Essence of winter sleep is on the night.
The scent of apples; I am drowsing off.

Thrift is the recognized trait of the inhabitants of New England.
“Perhaps the rugged land fostered in the settlers of New England an attitude of making the most of what was available of them. Whatever the causes, the Yankees early developed the fine art of making the best of things. Thrifty and hard-working, they had little time for idle talk.”

The farmer in Blueberries, who fed his entire family on blueberries, is thrifty, one who has put to use Shakespeare’s adage, ‘Sweet are the use of adversity’.

He seems to be thrifty; and hasn’t he need.
With the mouths of all those young Larens to feed?
He has brought them all up on wild berries, they
Say like birds........................
They eat them the year round, and those they don’t eat
They sell in the store and buy shoes for their feet.

In a similar way, the farmer, in Mending Wall, who would say no more than, ‘Good fences make good neighbours’, is not being silly or adamant, but is merely trying to make secure for himself the land he has acquired, the

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garden he has reared, through hard work and dedication. The swinger of birches too has the New England spirit of adjustment in him. He lives far away from the city where alone he could learn to play baseball. So he makes do with what was at hand—playing on the birches:

Somebody too far from town to learn baseball
Whose only play was what he found himself.
Summer or winter, and could play alone.
One by one he subdued his father's trees
By riding them down over and over again.

The idea of adjustment to situations and determination in the face of adversities is again the key-note of Mowing. Two Tramps in Mud Time illustrates the resourcefulness—the Yankee ingenuity of the tramps in making theirs what others have a right to. In ‘The Code’, the hired man will not be taught how best he should work and drives a severe lesson into his master for having attempted to teach him. The Vanishing Red studies a situation where the farm—hand is a Red Indian. It is Yankee speech that we constantly hear in Frost's poetry. He has succeeded in capturing the very tone, accent, and rhythm, idiom and phraseology, of the conversation of New Englanders. The very spirit of the place is enshrined in his pages.

Frost suggests much more than he actually describes, with the result that the impression created is that a whole region has been completely described in all its facts. There is much sifting and selecting of material, yet the impression of wholeness is created, and this impression is an important aspect of Frost's regional art. 'The region, as he depicts it, is not just a place;
it is a world, coherent and complete within itself. This wholeness illustrates the difference between his art and that of lesser regional poets. At best, they portray a series of independent scenes, observed from varying angles. Frost is able to describe some particular place, a sugar orchard, a brook in the woods, or a pasture, and, at the same time, makes us aware of the region as a whole stretching away on every side toward the horizon and beyond. We see only the maples, the brook, or the pasture, but we sense the presence of an entire locality inhabited by a particular breed of men who live in a certain way by certain lights. Very little in the way of factual statement is needed to accomplish this. Such short poems as Hyla Books and Desert Places show that even within the space of a dozen lines or so he can create an image of the entire locality. Furthermore, the regional world seems exactly the same in poem after poem. The New England of Mending Wall is the same New England of Stopping by Woods, Home Burial, The Star-Splitter, An Old Man’s Winter Night, The Cow in Apple Time, all exist within a single world.

Another important aspect of Frost’s regionalism is the fact that he shows the environment, the region, acting on the mind of his people, and determining their natures and attitudes. Thus a strong link is established between the individual mind and the land itself. He constantly associates aspects of landscape and psychological traits. The clear, frank gaze of the Yankee persona is related to the chill air of New England and his strength of mind to its rugged terrain, in the same subtle way that Michael’s courage and dignity are related to the grandeur of the Lake County mountains. Since the Yankee mind reflects the landscape, the whole sense of values which forms the centre of this mentality seems to have an organic relation to the land. In
other words, Frost's regionalism is thoroughly social. It is concerned more with the rural way of life than with its scenery, more with the sense of values shared by the local society than with the intuitions of a single mind. Not that the community and the individual are opposed: the speaking voice of Frost's lyrics is certainly that of a particular person, but this person is also the spokesman for a community.

**ROBERT FROST—HIS LIFE AND WORK**

Robert Frost, one of the distinguished poets of America, was born on 26th March, 1874 in San Francisco. His father, a new Englander, was an editor of a newspaper whereas his mother, a Scot, was a school teacher. His full name was Robert Lee Frost. He was a sickly and neurotic child. When he was just eleven, his father died. So he and his mother had to settle with their relatives in Massachusetts. His mother remained busy in teaching in the Grammar school of the village of Salem. The boy Robert showed no particular interest in studies except during a brief period of four years at the Lawrence High School. He was just sixteen when his first poem on the subject of Cortez in Mexico appeared in the high school newspaper. During the next few years, he engaged himself in earning a living. He shifted from one profession to another, from working in mills to newspaper reporting; and then to teaching in school. In 1895 he married his school-fellow Elinor White. After having failed to lead a settled life as a school teacher, he spent two years at Harvard College to prepare himself for college teaching. But as usual, he opted out, feeling that the academic atmosphere did not suit him.
Frost was twenty-five but he had made no headway in life. Disappointed with his progress, his grandfather gave him a farm in Derry, New Hampshire, on the condition that he would keep it for ten years. For some time he did farming and took to poultry business. He was warned against tuberculosis because of his recurrent illness. As farming did not prove to be lucrative, he supplemented his income by teaching in a school at Plymouth. During his farming period, he continued writing poetry. At the end of ten years, he sold his property, and migrated with his family to England in September 1912. In England he came into contact with Ezra Pound and many other distinguished expatriate American poets. But he was attracted most by the British poets, Edward Thomas, Lascelles Abercrombie, Wilfred Gibson, who often treated rural subjects in their poetry. It was in England that his first volume of books *A Boy’s Will* (1913) was published. Just a year later his second volume *North of Boston* appeared.

Frost returned to America in 1915. The American edition of North of Boston had already appeared and got a favourable response. *A Boy’s Will* appeared in an American edition. Frost was now accepted as a major poet. Though he settled on his farm in New Hampshire and then more permanently in Vermont, he remained on the move, giving lectures and public readings from his own poetry. Eight more volumes of his poetry were brought out in America. Honours and awards poured in. He was poet-in-residence at many colleges and universities like Amherst, Harvard, Michigan and Dartmouth. He won four Pulitzer Prizes for poetry, countless honorary degrees, membership in the National Institute of Arts and Letters and in the American Academy, and many other honours, medals and awards. He got formal felicitations from
the United States Senate on his seventy fifth birthday. In 1961, he was invited to recite his poem at the inauguration ceremony of the new President, John F. Kennedy. On January 29, 1963, he died of complications following a heart attack. Radio and television spoke of his death in the manner and tone reserved for figures of state. All over the world, people noted his demise, and in the States, his death was felt as a public and personal loss. He was, in every sense, a poet of the people. He got every honour, big or small, except the Nobel Prize which eluded him more than once.

As a boy in San Francisco, Robert Frost needed all the protection he could find, inside or outside his imagination. From the time of his birth he showed excruciating sensitivities, and many of his infant ailments seemed directly traceable to nerves. Compounding these troubles, unavoidably, were the frequent estrangements between his parents, who lived a part for several months when the child was in his third year. The warmth and assurance he needed while he was growing up were not adequately provided in the charged atmosphere of his home. His New England-born father, holding to the puritanical slogan, ‘Spare the rod and spoil the child’, punished the boy with any weapon handy—and these recurrent whippings were usually administered in moments of rage. Robbie’s mother, trying to make amends for such brutality, almost smothered the child with her love and overindulgence. The results were predictable. In later life Frost was never quite able to understand or fully resolve some of his inner conflicts, which seemed to mirror the opposed attitudes of his parents. There were times when his own self-inflicted punishments were mixed with self-gratification.
Closely related was his later inability to overcome some habitual responses which he began to make in boyhood, at least as soon as he was forced to share his mother’s attentions with a sister; responses of jealousy, sulking, temper tantrums, and vindictive retaliations. Also lasting were his first attempts to protect himself by running away or by hiding. Like so many children in similar circumstances, he comforted himself with the motion that those who had hurt him would feel sorry, and blame themselves as they would find him dead. His early and purely imaginative play with thoughts of suicide became another lifelong game of indulgent self-pity.

As Frost’s poetry originates in the experiences of an ‘original, ordinary man’ it clings to the raft of existence and is not an account of the glorious possibilities of life. Hence it is essential to throw a backward glance over the long span of his life to know what made Frost, Frost. It is all the more indispensable because like many celebrated American writers, Frost made himself the centre of his poetic world. When he acknowledged to one of the correspondents—‘I’m a mere selfish artist most of the time’, he indirectly hinted at his essential presence in his work. It is, obviously, not an easy task to gather the biographical details from the poems of such a volatile and complex man, but one could roughly estimate that these poems were written by the same person, out of the same region, that is, New England, and convey the same spirit in the face of trials by existence. His poems on the surface seem deceptively simple but astute critics have managed to reach the bottom of the well as Quentin Anderson did when he remarked that it was, “his whole usable past was his own poems, which meant that it
was also his present.” Thus, what he lived through—enjoyed or suffered—what he was, is what he created. Frost could not only disregard the basic factor of life in his poetry, but also firmly believed that in the flux of life every moment is a revelation of something new.

However, Frost’s poetry speaks of his life experiences only in parables, which are presented through a variety of persona with recognizable attitude and characteristics. They actually stand for a many-sided personality and the mercurial moods of the poet who is known to be a man with meaningful inconsistencies and self-contradictions as if to prove what Emerson said “With consistency a great soul has simply nothing to do.” In spite of the great popularity which he enjoyed in a society that was basically hostile to poetry, Frost as a man of irresponsible, irritating moods has enjoyed encouraging many critics to neglect the best in him. It seems as if he played a trick only to ‘keep off’ the undeserving ones to estimate his real worth.

A record of the major events of his life would hardly serve any purpose if one does not remember that Frost, from the beginning to the end, remained a man with his imperfections and irregularities. His personality was the result of self-cultivation as he had otherwise a precarious, tragic and anti-climatic family background with mismatched parents, who were drawn together by momentary attraction and loneliness soon to drift apart because of differences and death. Any study of Frost’s biographies, letters and poetry

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with a view to understand him and not to create a myth of Robert Frost by taking extreme views, reveals three important phases of his character. Frost as a kindly platform personality, a simple person whom one meets in public performances, personal meetings and feels sure of knowing him closely even after a brief acquaintance. It is the Frost of Donald Adams, full of affirmation, encouragement, tenderness, humour and wit, playfulness joviality: Frost whom Jean Gould calls ‘master of the bon mot, bordering, on a wise-crack but never descending to it.’\(^6\) Frost as a fine specimen of irritable genius, promoter of self, full of jealousies, obsessive resentments, nervous and vindictive relations, who has an unquenchable thirst for honour and glory. This aspect of his personality is fully reflected in his private correspondence; Frost as a secretly magnanimous man, who understand the diminishing tendencies of the matter and with his remarkable gifts and strength makes the ‘terrible’ thing bearable. All three phases merge to create the personality of Robert Frost, the genius.

When he died in 1963, Robert Frost had received more official and academic honors than any other poet who had lived and written in the United States. He had won four Pulitzer Prizes, received forty-four honorary degrees, been invited to read his poetry at a Presidential Inaugural, and been sent to Russia as a cultural ambassador. But despite these triumphs in the academic and literary world, Frost owed much of his poetic reputation to his identification with farming. His mannerisms and the years he had spent farming in New Hampshire seemed to guarantee that his poems were a uniquely authentic vision of a pastoral existence in which man is ‘closer to

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reality’ and “independent of the complicated social structure” because he “earns his living from the soil.” As Professor George Whicher, who saw him give his first reading in Amherst in 1916, later recalled, “Frost was dead set not to appear either academic or literary. He was all farmer, when it came my turn to speak with him, we spent an animated ten minutes discussing the healthful properties of horse-manure.”

Actually, as Frost was sometimes quick to admit, he was never a very successful farmer. He was a part-or full-time teacher for five of the ten years he lived in Derry, and after he established himself as a poet in 1915 he held a great many appointments as an English professor or poet-in-residence. However, he was often unhappy with academic life, and when his difficulties became critical on several occasions he resigned and retreated back to his farm in Vermont (or New Hampshire).

When he first began to try to earn his living as a poet in 1913, his dream was to start his literary career in London and then retire to a New England farm where he could write and live cheap. By November of the next year, his desire for recognition and financial security led him to amend this dream significantly. He would like a quiet job in a small college, he decided, where he could receive some honor for what he had achieved as a reporter. He was a good teacher and a poor farmer, but he disliked teaching because it did not allow him time to write and because he hated, academic ways. A decade later—after he had taught at Amherst and Michigan—he complained

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half jokingly that college kept intruding on his pastoral serenity by offering him teaching jobs. "I want to farm", he said, "...............Amherst, Dartmouth, Bowdoin and Connecticut Wesleyan are going to give me a living next year for a couple of weeks in each of them. The rest of the time I shall be clear away from the academic, feeding pigeons, hens, dogs, or anything............for the pleasure or profit of it."9 However, in 1930 when he was worried that his collected poems would not be well received and that his poetic career had been eclipsed by Robinson’s, he complained to Louis Untermeyer: ‘I don’t want to raise sheep; I don’t want to keep cows; I don’t want to be called a farmer.................What am I then? Not a farmer-never was-never said I was.10 These letters as well as many incidents in Frost’s life suggest that he needed both the simple, ‘pastoral serenity’ of farming and the more complex milieux which he inhabited as a professor or poet-in-residence. He needed both the relative isolation and the simplicity of rural life and the honors and financial security which academic appointments gave him. However, it was not easy for him to reconcile the very different values represented by these two ways of life.

The tensions which were created by Frost’s efforts to live in both of these worlds are expressed obliquely but forcefully in his one-act play, A Way Out. This work was first published in the February, 1917 issue of The Seven Arts. This was only a month after he started his first major academic appointment as a professor of English at Amherst. Frost was offered this

position during the summer of 1916. He was still not certain whether he would accept the Amherst appointment as late as December, 1916, and so he must have written the play when he was still struggling to decide whether or not to become a professor. Also, during the summer and fall of 1916, Frost was preparing the manuscript for *Mountain Interval*, which was published in December of that year. At least eleven of the thirty-two poems in that book were written or begun between 1900 and 1911 during the lonely years at Derry when Frost was an unrecognized and virtually unpublished farmer and teacher. Thus, as he was writing *A Way Out* and making up his mind about Amherst, he was re-reading and finishing poems like ‘An Old Man’s Winter Night’ and ‘The Hill Wife’, which must have reminded him of how hard and lonely his years as a New England farmer had been.

Frost’s best poems demonstrate his certainty that he is one kind of man moving down one kind of road. The most telling of the poems are the monologues and dialogues which begin in North of Boston, early in his career. Again and again the subject is the failure of communication, a failure which shows just how small and delimited the effective community can be. As often as not it comes to be a community of one—a community which can be called such only because its existence is, as it were, authorized by the fact that they can not communicate, that they can but find the rather limited terms in which they can communicate this fact. The terms deriving from Frost’s abiding sense of farm, mountain and village life-are sharp enough to cut him off cleanly from his fellows him who live by them.
Always in Frost there is the desire to 'go behind' something. Almost always, there is the failure to do so, and then the triumph in living with the failure and discovering oneself as a person, limited by the conditions which can be made clearly to define oneself as a person. This is the subject which 'shall be fulfilled'. In the dramatic poems it is difficult to find precise points where this is fully realized, because the realization is not the protagonist's, but rather the poet's—as a result of the total effect of the poems. For Frost the failure infuses what he makes out to be a whole experience. Here, one might say, Frost is almost a novelist, because the meaning of his poems depends so much upon a minute attendance to the conditions in which particular failures must be portrayed. There are moments of pure, unmediated realization. Such moments are by definition private and are accordingly rendered in first-person lyrics—'Tree at My Window', ‘Desert Places', ‘The Tuft of Flowers', ‘The Road Not Taken', ‘Bereft’, ‘Once by the Pacific', ‘Stopping by Woods........’ and so many more. To name them is to recall a series of instants of awareness whose abounding clarity is gained at the expense of a certain willed irrelevance to many of the conditions in modern life. This is, one is forced to conclude, a failure which Frost wills so that he can understand it and proceed to build positively out from it.

Frost would have us feel that the failure is inevitable and therefore it means making some sort of decision about the nature of his world, its people, and their meaning for us. He is realistic enough, and delights in his
realism, to recognize that many of his readers will be unable to follow him closely.

What finally gives the best poems their tremendous effectiveness is a sense of local detail so sharp, so fully controlled, so wholly the poet's own, as to make us know once and forever the gulf between his world and all others. Above all, Frost can call up a sense of place and of the working of an individual sensibility when limited by and therefore complementary to it.
ASPECTS OF HIS POETRY

During his fairly long poetic career Robert Frost composed poems abundantly, and published them in the form of several volumes. These volumes are ‘A Boy’s Will (1913), North of Boston (1914), Mountain Interval (1916), New Hampshire (1923), West-Running Brook (1928), A Further Range (1937), A Witness Tree (1942), A Masque of Reason (1945), Steepie Bush (1947), A Masque of Mercy (1947), and In the Clearing (1962). These volumes reveal a gradual and steady growth of Frost’s poetic talent, and an increasing command over poetic skill and technique. Right from the beginning Frost wanted to establish himself as a poet and therefore had started composing poems steadily. During his years at the Derry Farm, side by side to farming, he was also writing poems that would be collected later on. When he felt that he could not carry one, he decided to leave New England and go to ‘Old England’.

Frost sold the Derry Farm to raise money to maintain himself and his family in England where he planned to go to find a proper climate and market for his poetry. On arriving in England he made a collection of his poems, and offered it for publication to the publishing concern, David Nutt and company, of London. The collection was, contrary to his hopes, accepted for publication, and was brought out in the year 1913. The poems in it are chiefly lyrical, and express a variety of subjective moods, doubts, questionings, etc. They are set against the background of New England, and depict the scenes and moods of various seasons and the poet’s emotional responses to various aspects of rural natural phenomena. The consciously arranged pattern of lyrics in A Boy’s Will was designed to represent the poet’s
youthful growth, in a wavering progression of subjective moods. The sequence begins with the poet's acknowledged need for separateness and isolation ‘Into My Own’, progresses through a group of subtly intense love-and-courtship lyrics like ‘A Late Walk’, Flower Gathering, ‘A Dream Pang’. Frost’s poetry turns to a newly perceived sense of the brotherhood of men ‘whether they work together or apart’ in ‘Tuft of Flowers’, and finally circles back to a mood of isolation in the wistful ‘Reluctance’.

A Boy’s Will does not have the element of echoes from other poets, that are usually found in the early poems of a new poet. Frost deals with various themes in his own manner. He depicts the mood of autumn in poems like ‘Reluctance’ and ‘A Prayer in Spring’. The theme of the dignity and importance of labour is dealt with in ‘Mowing’. Different poems are marked by various poetic qualities. For example the power of imagination is found in ‘Trial By Existence’, a clean finish in ‘Pan with Us’, the expressive quality of words in ‘Storm Fear’, simplicity and lucidity in ‘The Procession of Muses’. Thus, both from the view points of thematic concerns and technical skill, A Boy’s Will is a remarkable first volume. It received a lukewarm critical response, although some discerning people like Ezra Pound, expressed their admiration for it. Most of the poems in the volume give voice to the melancholy moods and musings of a lonely narrator who may not always be identified with the poet. The volume may be regarded as a work marking a gradual maturing of Frost’s poetic technique which, as it is at present, leaves much to be desired.

A Boy’s Will established Frost as a ‘Yankee Poet’ whose worth was recognized by eminent literary figures of London. However, it was with his
second volume, *North of Boston* that he came to be acknowledged as a
great poet. With its greater poetic quality and thematic richness this volume
received a more favourable and enthusiastic critical response than the
volume that preceded it. Published by David Nutt & Co. in London and by
Henry Holt & Co. in America, it was praised by eminent literary figures. The
poems of this volume were mostly in the form of dramatic dialogues and
narratives set against the rural background of New England. They often bear
resemblance with the idylls of Theocritus. The rural ways and manners the
rural scenery comprising hills, pastures, autumn orchards, farming activities
like reaping, mending walls and others, are faithfully presented in various
poems like ‘*Mending Wall*’ and ‘*After Apple-Picking*’.

*North of Boston*, hailed as ‘a book of people’, was quite popular, and
proved to be Frost's major achievement marked by a maturer technique and
richer thematic concerns. He has presented the most bleak and depressing
view of life, especially in poems such as ‘*Home Burial*’, ‘*The Fear*’, ‘*The
Housekeeper*’, and ‘*An Old Man’s Winter Night*’ wherein he presents the
disintegration of rural culture under the impact of growing industrialism. In the
poems of this volume, Frost appears as a terrifying poet of human isolation,
helplessness and despair. The dramatic quality of the poems in *North of
Boston* is remarkable; and so is Frost's realistic portrayal of rural life and
manners, and its joys and sorrows.

Having won recognition and fame in England as a poet, with his first
two volumes, Frost returned to America and settled at a farm near Franconia
in New Hampshire, and became a popular figure all over New England. The
farm where he lived was called ‘*interval*’ or ‘*intervale*’, a name which has
adopted by Frost for his next volume of poems, *Mountain Interval*. This volume contains poems presenting pictures of rural life those presented in *North of Boston*; but the mode of these poems is not dramatic, as was the case with poems in that volume. The mode now is meditative and reflective. Some of them, like ‘*Hyla Brook*’, ‘*Snow*’ and ‘*Christmas Tree*’ present beautiful pictures of nature; and ‘*The Sound of Trees*’, ‘*The Oven Bird*’, ‘*Birches*’ and ‘*The Cow in Apple-Time*’ give a graphic description of various objects of nature, like trees, birds, fruits, and so on. The volume contains dramatic dialogues like ‘*Snow*’ and ‘*In the Home Stretch*’, and narrative monologues like ‘*The Bonfire*’. Other notable poems in the volume are ‘*Hill Wife*’, ‘*The Road Not Taken*’, ‘*The Gum Gatherer*’ and ‘*A Patch of Old Snow*’.

*New Hampshire* marks an advance in Frost’s poetic quality and a turn in his mode of writing. Discarding the reflective and meditative mode of *Mountain Interval*, he now adopts the mode of humorous, witty and gentle social satire chiefly directed at the American glorification of commercialism and materialism coming in the wake of big-business. Consisting chiefly of dramatic narratives and dialogues, such as ‘*The Witch of Coos*’ and ‘*A Star in a Stone-Boat*’, and lyrics like ‘*Stopping by Woods On a Snowy Evening*’, ‘*Dust of Snow*’, ‘*A Fountain*’ and ‘*A Donkey's Ears*’, *New Hampshire* reveals some new qualities of Frost as a poet. *New Hampshire* shows Frost to be in full command of his poetic powers and with a complete hold on his poetic powers he displays his poetic vision of the American countryside. The recognition of the poetic worth of *New Hampshire* came in the form of the award of Pulitzer Prize to it in 1924.
After an interval of five years, in 1928, Frost came out with his fifth volume of verses, *West Running Brook*, containing some of the most significant verses of the poet. The major theme of this book is resistance and self-realisation. The tension between man and nature hitherto always exciting and often harmoniously resolved, has loosened. Nature has grown more hostile, man more heroic. The increasing undertone of humanism is beautifully eloquent in the sonnet *A Soldier*, one of Frost's greatest poem:

But this we know the obstacle that checked
And tripped the body shot the spirit on
Further than target ever showed or shone.

Some poems of this book show Frost's interest in astronomy while in others we find religious or philosophical reflection. Some of Frost's best lyrics are also contained in this volume, as for example, *Spring Pools, A Peck of Gold, Once by the Pacific, Tree at My Window, Acquainted with the Night*, etc.

*A Further Range* is Frost's sixth volume of verses, published after a long silence in 1936. The habit of moralising had grown on the poet, and he was constantly sermonising. *At Woodwards Garden*, for example, showed him in his most didactic, school-masterish, and unattractive mood. However, even in this volume there are lyrics which are pure gems. In the same tradition are many of the longer, more dramatic pieces: *The Gold Hesperides*, for instance, and *The Old Barn at the Bottom of the Fogs*. If these poems are generally less distinguished than his lyrics, it is because they are discursive, and because they more easily admit two elements which
have marred much of Frost's works for at least some of his readers, an obvious didacticism, and a ponderous kind of playfulness.

'A Witness Tree (1942) and Steeple Bush (1947) are two volumes of poems which are heavily padded with relatively unimpressive and inartistic matter and add little to Frost's stature as a poet. However, even these two volumes contain some lyrics of great merit, lyrics which have achieved wide recognition and popularity. In the former volume we have The Gift Outright in which Frost's patriotism finds its most emphatic expression. It was this poem which Frost was invited to recite in 1961, when the late President Kennedy took up office at the White House as the President of the U.S.A. In the later volume, those poems are remarkable in which the poet satirises the complacent attitude of the modern scientist.

A Masque of Reason (1945) and Masque of Mercy (1947) are two short verse plays which Frost significantly placed at the end of his Complete Poems, published in 1949. The former is a modern philosophical drama based on the Biblical story of Job, the purpose being to justify the ways of God to men. The setting is Heaven, and the entire play is in the form of a dialogue between God, Job, and his wife, concerning the strength and weakness of human reason to understand the divine plan, and the place of evil and suffering, in it. There is very little action. Besides this, the tone throughout is humorous, jocular, and flippant, and Frost's mockery of conventional religious attitudes is often offensive.

A Masque of Mercy is also based on the Biblical story of Johan, the prophet, and Frost's viewpoint is more conventional and so more
acceptable. The setting is a small book store in New York, and the play opens at about the closing time. It is in the form of a dialogue between Keeper, the owner of the store, his wife, named Jesse Bel, a friend, named Paul and a fearful, fugitive, who enters the shop running away from the law, and who is afraid of divine punishment. Thus its central theme is the wisdom or un-wisdom of man’s fearing God. By the end, the primacy of God’s mercy as against His justice is established. It is only the limitation of human knowledge which prevents man from realising this truth, his fears arise from his ignorance.

The two masques taken together provide an epitome, or a gathering metaphor, of many major themes developed by Frost in the poems which precede and succeed them. Relationships to self, to society, to nature to the universe, to God. Or, to say it in an other way, the two masques further extend themes involving man’s perennial sense of isolation and communion, of fear and courage, of ignorance and knowledge, of discontinuity and continuity.

The New England setting is visible is most of Frost’s poems, ‘Birches’ portrays the peculiar experience of swinging of birches by the local young boys. ‘After Apple-picking’ offers a picture of a rich harvest of apples, and the feeling of contentment as experienced by the tired Yankee farmers. In ‘Two Tramps in Mud Time’, Frost describes the peculiarity of weather in New England in the month of April which is sometimes hot and sometimes cold. The phenomenon of contentment as experienced by the tired Yankee farmers snowfall has been minutely observed in ‘The Onset’. 
At last the gathered snow lets down as white
As may be in dark woods, and with a song
It shall not make again all winter long
Of hissing on the ye! uncovered ground.

The most striking quality of Frost’s setting is that though it relates to an actual locale, it is never without its symbolic importance. Snowy woods are woods, but are also suggestive of wayside attraction in ‘Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening’. The snow in ‘The Onset’, similarly, forms a part of the observed scene, but at the same time, it emerges to be a sinister and evil force.

But more than the setting, it is the Yankee character that is important in any study of regionalism in Frost’s poetry. ‘Mending Wall’ is one of the few poems on which Frost’s reputation as a great New England poet rests. The speaker in this poem projects the viewpoint of an outsider, while the neighbour, that of a conventional Yankee. The speaker does not like ‘Walls’ to be made between neighbours. He is disdainful of the attitude of his neighbour who, with characteristic reticence of the New Englanders, only repeats his father’s belief: ‘Good walls make good neighbours’. The poet, thus, sets up a conflict between the approaches of the two speakers, and does not make any statement as to who is right and who is wrong. And yet the speaker’s, the outsider’s, viewpoints finds favour with the modern reader. John C. Kemp rightly observes ‘We find a brilliantly realized New England scene and an indelibly etched Yankee farmer’ in this poem, but ‘the regional provides only the world the poem, not the point of view.”

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‘Christmas Trees’, on the other hand, projects the Yankiness of the persona in an unqualified manner. The opposite viewpoint is simply missing. It is intended to underline the peculiar Yankee virtues: Shrewdness, honesty, noble, simplicity and rustic independence. The common assumption of many New England writers—that the country is better off for its separation from the city—is implicit in the very opening lines of the poem:

The city and withdrawn into itself.
And left at last the country to the country.

If ‘Christmas Trees’ fares poorly in comparison with ‘Mending Wall’, it is because of the treatment of the regional in a different manner. ‘The Code’ is another significant poem in which Frost has projected two different attitudes—one is that of the outsider, and the other is that of a Yankee farmhand. The outsider, who is a farmer, is confused when a farm labourer all of a sudden stops his works and quits. The other Yankee workers tells him that the farm-hand has quit because his casual remark about ‘their taking pains’ has offended him. He himself narrates how once he nearly killed his master when he showed over-enthusiasm about doing work. He says the Yankees do their work honestly and feel offended if they are asked to do work ‘better or faster’. The poet leaves the matter as it is. The Yankee’s stubbornness or arrogance or honesty is posited against the outsider’s humility. The strength of the poem lies in this conflict, as it is in ‘Mending Wall’.

In many poems, Frost has used the peculiar Yankee character. In ‘The Mountain’, the Yankee farmer reveals his rugged practical sense of wisdom and realism when he tells the speaker, an outsider, that he has
never thought of climbing the mountain to see the magnificent brook. He considers the mountain as an obstruction to the growth of the village. In ‘Home Burial’, the Yankee reveals a calm acceptance of death, in spite of his wife’s protestation that he is cruelly indifferent and shows no grief over the death of his own child. In ‘Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening’, the traveller, though momentarily goes into speculative and expansive mood, prefers fulfilling his promises to watching the bewitching snowy woodscape. Like all New Englanders, he gives precedence to duty over rest and pleasure.

In his poetry, Frost has also tried to use the Yankee speech. He modulates his language in such a way as to capture the tone, accent, rhythm and idiom of the speech of New Englanders. In ‘Home Burial’, for instance we see how Frost uses breaks, dashes and turns of speech to convey the feel of the actual Yankee speech:

‘Not you! Oh, where’s my hat? Oh, I don’t need it!
I must get out of here. I must get air.
I don’t know rightly whether any man can.’

Then Frost has used peculiar Yankee phrases such as ‘To get it any where that I can see’ and ‘Has nothing any more to do with me’. His image is also closely related to the rustic life of New England. For instance, in describing the brook, the Yankee farmer employs a familiar, homely image from the common rustic life in the ‘The Mountain’—‘It steam in winter, like an ox’s breath’, the image of the ice on birches as the ice reflects the
sunlight, cracks and falls on the earth like the broken pieces of glass in ‘Birches’ is not an uncommon sight in the New England country side.

It is the symbolic treatment of New England which makes Frost's poetry universal, in spite of its surface regionalism. The local is raised to the level of the universal and the timeless symbolically; New England becomes the whole human world. The tensions and the conflicts, sorrow and suffering of New Englanders are those of everyman. The conflict between duty and pleasure in the mind of the Yankee person in ‘Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening’, the reasonableness of foolishness of creating walls in ‘Mending Wall’, the contentment felt by the Yankee farmer in ‘After Apple-Picking’, the anguish of the mother in ‘Home Burial’ the euphoria of swinging birches in ‘Birches’ are some of the universal issues, longing and feelings, not solely related to the rustic Yankees.

Frost's poetry has the spirit of the pastoral if we take into consideration the fact that it deals primarily with rural life. The countryside to the north of Boston, a part of New England, provides its proper setting. In most of Frost's poetry, the rural setting is obvious. But nature, as in all pastorals, remains in the background. As John F. Lynen says, “The pastoralist does not write about nature; he uses nature as his scene, and it is important only in that it defines the swain's point of view.”

In ‘Stopping by Woods on a Snow Evening’, there is an obvious spirit of the pastoral. The scene is beautiful depicted: the woods are lovely dark and deep; the tufts of snow are gently falling; a light breeze is blowing:

and there is an almost total calm and quiet. But this scene helps project the point of view of the Yankee traveller. Like all rural people, he can not stay for long in idle contemplation. As a practical man, he wants to do his assigned work before taking rest. In poems like this, the setting and the point of view are both important. In ‘Birches’, nature is mainly used as a scene. There is a beautiful description of birches ‘loaded with ice’ that cracks in the warmth of the sun and falls on the ground like heaps of broken glass. But the swinging of birches is used to portray the Yankee farmer’s wish to go ‘upward’ in search of noble ideals and then again to come back, as ‘Earth’s the right place for love’.

Frost is chiefly concerned with the rural people and their world. His poetry, directly, deals with the beliefs, ideals, traditions, customs and habits of the rural folk. The Yankee people believe in such virtues as honesty, simplicity, reticence, realism, optimism, and the capacity to work hard. In ‘Mowing’, we find that the typical Yankee farmer advocates the idea of sweet labour—‘the fact is the sweetest dream that a labourer finds the greatest pleasure in doing work. In ‘Mending Wall’, the reticent farmer who believes—‘Good walls make good neighbours’—projects the Yankee’s belief in privacy, the sense of possession and individualism. The farmer in ‘Blueberries’ is thrifty as he feeds his entire family on blueberries. ‘The Death of the Hired Man’ records the fact that the rural folk give much importance to self respect. It is the pride and self-respect of Silas, the old farm-hand that alienates him from his rich brother, and finally costs him his life. In ‘Home Burial’, we find a Yankee farmer who is extremely realistic and practical. He takes the death of his son as another inevitable fact of nature,
unlike his wife who hates him for his indifference. In ‘The Code’, we learn that the rural workers do not like to be taught how to work as they know their work and do it with complete dedication and honesty.

In one of his television interviews, Frost said, ‘I am not a nature poet.’ It is difficult to agree with him, though man is at the centre in his nature poetry. He has written so much about the rural landscape and the wild life that one can hardly call him anything else but a nature poet. He began his poetic career as a nature poet with poems like; ‘To a Moth Seen in Winter’, ‘Rose Pogonias’ and ‘Going for Water’ which are representative of his work before 1913. His interest in nature grew with age. His nature poetry, as John F. Lynen says, ‘is so excellent and so characteristic that it must be given a prominent place in any account of his art.’

Frost’s view of nature is unique. Though he has some affinity with the great Romantics like Wordsworth, Keats and Shelley, his attitude towards and treatment of nature is different from theirs. It is interesting to compare Frost’s nature poetry to that of Wordsworth, the acknowledged high-priest of nature. Wordsworth considers nature as a living entity, and asserts the close affinity between man and nature. He looks upon nature as a benevolent force, a great educator, as he shows it to be in his Lucy poems, and as a guide, friend and philosopher, as he calls her in his famous poem ‘Tintern Abbey’. On the other hand, Frost’s attitude towards nature is marked by a rugged realism and a sense of practical utility. He finds no harmony between man and nature. What he sees are essential barriers between the two which

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must be recognized and respected. In ‘Two Look and Two’, there is a man-made fence that separates the lovers from the world of nature represented by a doe and a buck. This barrier between man and nature is not merely physical; it is mental as well, because there is an absence of any communion between the two. In ‘The Mountain’, nature represented by the mountain is just an obstacle in the growth of the human colony.

In the poetic world of Frost, nature is often looked upon as an impersonal, insensitive and even hostile and sinister force. In ‘The Most of It’, the buck that comes out of the lake represents the remoteness of nature. In ‘The Onset’, nature represented by snow is an evil and sinister force, and is likened to death. Man is exhorted not to lose hope, as in due course, this snow-death is likely to disappear:

And I shall see the snow all go down hill
In winter of a slender April rill
That flashes tail through last year’s withered brake
And dead weeds......................

The snow here is imagined as a crawling serpent, the symbol of evil and death, that reinforces the idea of nature as a destructive force. In ‘Design’, too, Frost, through the perceived view of a white heal-all where a white spider has killed a white moth, projects the idea that there is a malevolent dark force that weaves such a terrible pattern. He seems to challenge the Romantic notion that Nature or God who governs this world is benevolent and kind. Similarly in ‘The Bereft’ the poet finds something sinister in the ‘hissing’ of leaves.
Frost has also warned us against the design of nature which often seems to be hostile even to those who love it:

**There is much in nature against us.**

But we are at a vantage point also. In order to sustain such injuries as nature inflicts on us, ‘It’s well to have all kinds of feeling............’. So at times, Frost writes of the natural world, as Montgomery says, ‘in a cavalier fashion which Wordsworth would consider heretical.’\(^\text{14}\) He seems to make fun of the seasons in ‘Two Tramps in Mud Time’. In ‘The Star-Splitter’, he says in a light vein: ‘You know Orion always comes up side ways.’ Of course, these are poems in which Frost reveals his sensuous love for nature. In ‘A Boundless Moment’, for example, he portrays a glimpse of beauty in cheerful mood:

**Oh, that is the Paradise-in-bloom, I said,**

**And truly it was fair enough for flowers.**

Some of his passages depicting nature reveals his, keen observation and love for the landscape. In ‘Two Tramps in Mud Time’, the image of the bluebird is sensuous and concrete:

**A bluebird comes tenderly up to a light**

**And fronts the wind to unruffle a plume**

**His song so pitched as not to excite**

**A single flower as yet to bloom.**

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In ‘Birches’, there are lines depicting natural phenomenon which are a sheer delight. We are told how the birches bend down with the load of ‘ice’, and keep bending for long. When the ice starts melting in the warmth of the Sun, it cracks and falls:

_Soon the sun’s warmth makes them shed crystal shells_
_Shattering and avalanching on the snow-crust_
_Such heaps of broken glass to sweep away_
_You’d think the inner dome of heaven had fallen._

A striking feature of Frost’s nature poetry is the use of personification. The device is quite common in the Romantics. The modern reader may take an unfavourable view of it as it suggests sentimental pantheism of over simple allegorization. But while personification remains a brief metaphor in the Romantics, it is a sustained comparison in Frost. This sustained comparison is possible only because of Frost’s view of nature and man as distinct entities operating on different planes.

It is through humour and irony that Frost tries to counter this effect of absurdity. In ‘Waspish’, for example, his humour seems to save the personification from going out of hand:

_On glossy wires artistically bent,_
_He draws himself upto his full extent._
_His natty wings with self-assurance perk._

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_Poor egotist, he has no way of knowing_
_But he’s as good as anybody going._
In ‘Tree at My Window’, too, Frost uses humour as a safeguard against absurdity arising out of the use of personification, and perhaps also as a counterpoise for any sense of high seriousness. ‘Not all your light tongues talking aloud / could be performed; he says in a humorous and satirical tone, as he goes on to elaborate the analogy between the tree and the persona. Montgomery rightly observes that what, ‘is high serious in Wordsworth is fancy or humor in Frost’.

Frost’s nature poetry is akin to the pastoral. In the manner of the pastoralist, he uses nature to illustrate and define a particular viewpoint, mostly of the Yankee rustic. In ‘The Onset’, the unharvested and ‘Evening in Sugar Orchard’ we have beautiful pictures of landscape, but the Yankee point of view projected through the scene is as much important, if not more than the scene itself.

Thus, in Frost we have a nature poet who is at once unique and striking. In one type of poems, though the number of such poems is not large. In the other, nature acts as a backdrop to project a viewpoint, a moral or a philosophy. In contrast to the Romantics, he is a different kind of nature poet. His view of nature is unique, complete and realistic. Man is at the centre of Frost’s poetry. Man and human concerns which we call humanity are his important subject. In most of his poems nature is used as a scene to enact a human drama. And there is hardly any poem in which he does not have something to say or ask about human nature and human concerns. He is a poet who, in the words of Radcliff James Squires, ‘speaks to men about men’.

Montgomery, Marion: Robert Frost and His Use of Barriers (Summer 1958), pp. 353.
No doubt, Frost's poetic world is inhabited mainly by the rural folk belonging to the countryside to the north of Boston in New England. One hardly finds the city people going in and out of it. But the rural people depicted by Frost reveal a wide range of feeling and thoughts, moods and whims, likes and dislikes. Either they are healthy normal and well-adjusted people, or they are neurotic, abnormal and frustrated. The picture is complete. Together these neurotic, abnormal, and frustrated people portray various facets of humanity. In 'Apple-picking', 'Mowing', and 'The Pasture', we have normal and well-adjusted human beings. The persona in each of these poems is hard working, normal and contented. He has no grudge against the world, and derives pleasure from whatever he does, and in whatever position he is.

Of course, there are other human beings who are abnormal, lonely, frustrated and even neurotic. Such people terrify us and Lionel Trilling seems to be right in conceiving Frost's world as terrifying. In 'Home Burial', the wife, possessed by the death of her child, is on the verge of a mental-breakdown. In 'A Servant to Servant', the ghastly lunatic makes life unbearable and a mockery for himself and others. In such poems, Frost brings out the helplessness of man in an indifferent and hostile universe.

In some poems, Frost reveals that there are barriers among men. Though the common assumption is that these barriers or walls are unnecessary and even harmful, yet, in a certain sense, these are essential. As Montgomery points out: "To Frost these barriers serve as framework for mutual understanding and respect'. If we break all walls and barriers, as the speaker in 'Mending Wall' desires, then we are in
danger of losing our individuality and privacy. Only the walls provided a guarantee against regimentation.\textsuperscript{16} As a humanitarian, Frost wants us to recognize and respect them, as does the reticent farmer in ‘Mending Wall’ with his received wisdom—‘Good walls make good neighbours’. In ‘Trespass’, the poet shows how a person came poking about his property without permission, but then

Came his little acknowledgement:

\begin{quote}
He asked for a drink at kitchen door,
An errand he may have had to invent,
But it made my property mine once more.
\end{quote}

But what is of prime concern to Frost is that modern man is totally alienated and lost. In ‘Neither Out for nor In Deep’, some people who represent the condition of modern man keep standing on the shore with their backs to the land. They want to escape from reality, suggested by the land, into the unknown and the mysterious, represented by the sea. But the irony is that

\begin{quote}
They cannot look out far,
The cannot look in deep,
But when was that ever a bar
To any watch they keep
\end{quote}

Two things about Frost’s humanity become clear from these lines: first that he is conscious that modern men have myopic vision, are incapable of

\textsuperscript{16} Marion Montgomery : Robert Frost and His Use of Barriers (Summer 1958), p. 340.
facing the reality, and hence are alienated and cannot cope up with the flux, the finite and secondly that as an optimist, he believes that what they do is important, as attending and not successful completion is important. In another poem ‘Acquainted with the Night’, Frost reveals modern man’s total isolation. The deserted road at night is an apt symbol of the hollowness and the dread of modern life. In fact, Frost clearly perceives barriers not only between man and man, but also between man and nature, and man and his creator. The man-made world is little consoling.

And yet, Frost shows his essential humility, honesty, the sense of duty and rugged realism in the lives of the people he portrays in his poetry. In ‘Birches’, his persona finds heaven on earth:

Earth’s the right place for love!
I don’t know where it’s likely to go better.

‘The Death of the Hired Man’ upholds the pride of self-respect of a farm-hand. ‘After Apple-picking’ reveals the sweet rewards of labour, that is, contentment. ‘The Code’ exposes the exaggerated sense of self-respect in the Yankee mind.

As a well-wisher of humanity, Frost allows man the right to rebel against social and economic injustice. ‘West-Running Brook’ reveals the rebellious spirit of Frost:

And life is too like a pathless wood
Where your face burns and tickles with the cob webs
Broken across it, and one eye is weeping.

From a twig’s having lashed across it open.

It is in Frost's accepting man and his world, good or bad, that we see his essential humanity. He is aware that the human world in which man tries to live is impersonal, senseless and hostile. There is much evil in it. The forces of darkness are real and strong. Man is not sure if the mysterious power that governs the human and natural world is benevolent or malevolent. But he has to accept everything as it is. He cannot do without recognizing and overcoming the forces of evil that obstruct his path. He can do so only through love, understanding and hope. He must love the skies, friendly or hostile, and sings with the poet:

   Lord, I have lovely your sky,
     Be it said against or for me.
   Have loved it clear and high
     Or low and stormy.

It was only through his deep understanding of man and nature that Frost was able to create a rapport with his readers. It was his ability to connect with his readers that made him so beloved of all that in turn made him into a national legend, the bard of New England.

THE NATIONAL LEGEND

The 1930’s were troubled times for America. The aftermath of the stock market crash altered national ways and ideals, and the arts no less
than economics were affected. Changing times dictated changing fashions. Among writers, many popular in the 1920’s found themselves on the scrap heap in the 1930’s. F. Scott Fitzgerald was one of these unfortunates. He died with his own tales of the Jazz Age, to be resuscitated much later as a nostalgic legend of an era whose glitter, seen form a distance, once again seemed golden.

Other writers particularly the ‘proletarians’, found themselves the rage. Especially popular were the socially conscious playwrights and the novelists who Frost remarked were producing ‘huge shapeless novels, huge gobs of raw sincerity.’ Art for art’s sake was in for bad days. Propaganda for socio-politico-economic reform carried the new times.

For Frost himself, the 1930’s were times of both triumph and tragedy. He was fifty-five years of age when the decade began old enough perhaps to be closing out his career, older, in fact, than many American writers were when they laid down their pens. Yet 1930 itself appeared to augur well for the future. Frost published his most comprehensive book, Collected Poems. In one sense, he thereby delivered himself over to the critics by presenting them with a sizeable body of works to be appraised. It was a fate he protested as being similar to handing over a corpse to a scientist for autopsy. He most emphatically did not want to be ‘analyzed’. While there is every indication that Frost was highly flattered by all the talk his work engendered, his protest against the critics and explicators was in character. The myth he had encouraged from the start, that of Frost as the good, gray poet, ‘country

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boy’ from New Hampshire, had flourished. This myth presupposed simple verses that need not be pulled apart to satisfy the curious.

Also in 1930 Frost was elected to the American Academy of Arts and letters, an honor surely, but one from a group whose own arrogance and cliquishness had let them to snub many writers of top rank. Frost’s election is an example of the good taste this group, at times, demonstrated. Moreover, two serious studies of the poet and his work had appeared. Gorham Munson in 1927 published Robert Frost: A Study in Sensibility and Common Sense; and in 1929 appeared Sidney Cox’s Robert Frost: Original ‘Ordinary Man’. The titles of both studies were indicative of the popular appraisal of Frost. They also helped define the gulf which lay between him and the poets then emerging into prominence: T.S. Eliot and his followers.

Frost’s personal life had been comparatively harmonious and without tremendous disruption, but he suffered hugely during the 1930’s when three of his closest and dearest were lost. The first, in 1934, was his daughter Marjorie. For some time she had been a source of concern to her parents, having contracted tuberculosis and been sent for treatment in the mountain air of Boulder, Colorado, where the Frosts had visited her in 1932. She recovered her health and married. Only to die of an infection following childbirth. The elder Frosts had done everything possible to save Marjorie, including flying her to the Mayo clinic in Rochester, Minnesota, for treatment. They took this blow hard, but after a normal period of recuperation they seemed to be reconciled.
Each winter the Frosts traveled South or Southwest to escape the hard snowbound winter of the northeast. Apparently Frost preferred writing about snow to tramping through it. In 1938 they were settled in Gainesville, Florida, accompanied by Coral Frost and his family. There, on March 20, Elinor Frost suffered a sudden heart attack. Without warning, the poet’s greatest and most dependable bulwark was gone.

Less than two years later, Elinor’s death was followed by that of her son. Carol Frost had always been a bit unstable. He had not adapted well to any formal education and as a result had no profession. He fancied himself a poet, but his verses were rejected by the Journals to which he submitted them. Probably the most devastating fact of Carol’s life was his own father, by whose shadow he was dwarfed continually. The steady growth of the elder Frost’s fame made Carol’s own feeble efforts appear more and more hopeless. Although his father thought he had dissuaded him from suicide, Carol ended his life with a gun.

Through all this disruption, Frost’s own career as a poet proceeded as if unmarked by personal difficulty. Honorary degrees became a regular feature of his way of life, almost a bore: Harvard’s was awarded in 1937. A new book of verse, issued by Henry Holt, was called A Further Range; it was Frost’s sixth volume. It contained some of his best-known poems, including ‘Two Tramps in Mud Time’ and the delightful satire ‘Departmental’. As a result of Holt’s furnishing him with a regular monthly stipend, Frost had remained comparatively unaffected by the national financial plunge; but any incipient money problems were taken care of when A Further Range was given the Book-of-the-Month Award in the summer of
1936. The next spring this collection of poems brought him his third Pulitzer Prize.

In 1938, criticism of Frost began to lose its air of mere appreciation and to take a more serious tone, one first evidenced in the collection of diverse material gathered by Richard Thornton under the title: Recognition of Robert Frost. By the end of the decade, Frost had published an updated edition of collected poems, and the National Institute of Arts and Letters had awarded him its Gold Medal for poetry.

When a person reaches the age of sixty-five established almost by fiat as the national retirement year, he may look backward over his career and accomplishments, with a view to respite and perhaps to a rocking chair. But Frost's career had a quarter of a century to run; the poet had many miles to go before he slept. Even so, one would not be mistaken to surmise that the solid establishment of Robert Frost as a national legend dates from this period.

Already solidly anchored in the modern mythology of the United States was the mental portrait of Frost which would remain secure. A sampling of descriptions supplied impromptu by a college poetry class some time after the poet's death is representative of these young people, Robert Frost was variously 'a kindly old Rural Farmer'; 'a sensitive person who sees what other's don't notice, but when he puts it down, then they see'; and 'a New Englander who shows what that part of the country is like, the quality of the people.' In short, to his great 'Public' Frost was the epitome of the
benevolent farmer-sage, a type of ideal regional seer, whose total humility rendered him approachable to all.

He represented in many important respects the ideal American leader, combining sharpness of mind with the indispensable common touch, regional identity with national appeal. Contributory to this image of rural genius was the fortuitous Frost face and figure, now jelled into outlines that would not change much except to become broader, more clearly defined as the man aged. Reginald Cook, who knew him well, has depicted Frost with rare precision as he appeared in these years:

“Physically, Frost has the solidity of close-sodded native soil. He stands about five feet nine, and you are aware at once of his strong-armed, full-chested, rugged build. In his old clothes he looks bigger than he actually is. When approached in the garden, he appears to loom; but when dressed up, he shrinks to medium height. Close up you notice the full, thick, muscular, workman like hands, the backs of them rough, the thumb large, the finger long, the tips blunt, the nails wide and thick-firm fingers to grasp an ax, strong shoulders to start the swing, muscular forearms to follow through. His practical truths are the tougher, you think, recalling Thoreau, for the calluses on the broad, well lined palms. His blue eyes, which are rarely measuring, nevertheless take you in. He looks, listens, appraises. And he sizes up memorably, saying, ‘I see what I see.’ His nose is strong and aggressive. His lips are full but not sensual the chin is firm.\(^\text{18}\)

So far there was nothing to clash with the prevailing image; and one could ask any American who knows Frost at all for his picture of the poet. Invariably, Cook's is the portrait he will put out of his wallet, so to speak, and show; for it is the only snapshot of Frost that most Americans posses: the wise old farmer with workman's hands. If one opens an illustrated anthology of American literature, one sees the frank, open face with just the right amount of smile playing at the edge of the lips.

Yet Cook's description continues, including traits not commonly a part of the image: the manner 'not unurban', the carriage which is that of a city dweller, the speech 'not identifiable with rustic voice'. This is another Frost, clearly, unpublicized and therefore unknown to most; but he is the only Frost who could claim authorship of Complete Poems.

Frost began the 1940's already burdened by the most dire tragedies possible for the need of a family. Looked at another way, his troubles were a release: for the various family deaths at least assured him that these particular blows could not fall again. Once past and survived, they were over. He was beginning now to emerge again from the darkness. He began teaching at Harvard—quite a vindication for the man who had tried Harvard: so many years earlier and withdrawn. Now he became the Ralph Waldo Emerson Fellow in poetry at the university, a role he would continue for three years. In 1941 the Harvard Phi Beta Kappa Chapter invited Frost to read a new poem. He selected 'The Lesson for Today'. The occasion marked the twenty fifth anniversary of his first public reading.

In Ripton, Vermont, Frost at this time acquired the Homer Noble Farm, which was to become his 'homestead'. Until his death he would find peace there. He was visited at Ripton in 1962 by an old friend. Daniel Smythe, who
recalls that Frost, living his farmer’s part to the end, interrupted the conversation to scratch in his garden for potatoes with the same hands that had just autographed a thousand copies of his books.19

The fresh surge of activity and optimism which seemed to characterize Frost’s activities was reinforced by publication in 1942 of A Witness Tree. The next year this volume made its author America’s only four time winner of the Pulitzer Prize for Poetry. A Witness Tree while not studded as heavily as some previous collections with sure-fire anthology pieces, did confirm Frost’s ability to continue his lyrical output. In all justice, no volume containing the beautifully conceived and wrought. ‘A considerable Speck’ could be termed undistinguished, particularly when that book offered also ‘Come In’ and ‘The Quest of the Purple-Fringed’. It was to A Witness Tree that Frost returned in 1961 for ‘The Gift Outright’, used at the inauguration of President John F. Kennedy.

As his three-year stint at Harvard drew to a close; Frost lacked the enthusiasm to continue in Cambridge. He loved to teach; he had felt drawn magnetically to the classroom for decades, ever since his youthful days when he had aided his mother in her small school. Writing can be a most lonely vocation, and poets probably need more reflective solitude than other authors. It is easy to imagine Frost’s need of the classroom as a balance-wheel against the loneliness. Another reason had kept him there as well. He possessed, as Emerson put it, the ‘fury to impart’ his knowledge to receptive ears. He was a born communicator, burning to tell the new facts. When others burned to hear it, he was content.

Frost felt with considerable justification that Harvard did not appreciate either his stature in the world of letters or the prestige his presence lent to the campus. Incredible as it may seem, he was, by and large, taken for granted—an attitude he keenly resented. In part, this apparent nonchalance seems to have resulted from the general turmoil into which World War II had thrown the nation’s entire educational system. Emphasis was all upon the practical, the scientific, the immediately useful. In sad contrast, the arts and humanities generally were either ignored or tolerated for the peripheral service they might render to war time concerns. Despite Frost’s awareness of military exigencies, he could not bring himself to accept wholly the ignominious position to which the situation relegated him.

Dartmouth College, becoming aware of Frost’s restiveness, bid for him. In the summer of 1943 he accepted Dartmouth’s offer of the George Ticknor fellowship in the Humanities. He remained in Hanover until the end of the 1940’s, when he resigned to return—this time finally and permanently to his favourite campus. Amherst, Meanwhile, for the remaining war years, he dealt primarily with young soldiers attending Dartmouth on the Army specialized Training Program assignment. He took particular delight in leading these sharp young minds to his own awareness of the ultimate limitations of science.

Frost used a special technique for leading his soldier-students to a face-to-face confrontation with the larger question. For example, he might quote from Shakespeare’s Sonnet, “Let, Me Not to the Marriage of True Minds’. When he reached the description of the star ‘whose worth’s unknown, although his height be taken; he would pause knowingly.
‘Science measures height, but can’t measure worth; he would tell his boys. Science will never know.”20

It was in Frost’s nature to be cynical of science and particularly of the material progress which far too many felt was synonymous with improvements of the race. There was enough of the Transcendentalist in Frost to bring out real fire on this issue. Science, he argued, was earthbound. It could never discern value. It could measure weight, height, speed and mass, yes. But how could it ever expect to provide a satisfactory approach to the measurement of friendship? Or of love?

As if the pump were never going to run dry, Frost’s books continued dramatically to tumble forth. In 1945 and 1947 Frost’s two volume-length dramatic dialogues, A Masque of Reason and A Masque of Mercy, appeared. With their sophisticated air, the masques seemed typical of what people expected from Frost. Perhaps the old man had a few surprises in him yet. A group of new poems, Steeple Bush, came out also in 1947. Immediately recognized in this book was the impact of the war, and particularly its aftermath, on Frost’s. ‘Sarcastic Science’ was portrayed as reaching its nadir in the nuclear explosions which ended the war. The Frankenstein overtones of man’s overreaching were not lost on the poet, who in verses likes ‘The Planners’, ‘Bursting Rapture’ and ‘U.S. 1946 King’s X’ drew upon the nightmare of nuclear holocaust and The Bomb.

Upon the occasion of his seventy-fifth birthday, Frost was honored by a Resolution of the United States Senate. The resolution called attention to

the poet’s significant achievement in writing poems ‘which are enjoyed, repeated and thought about by people of all ages and calling’, and which ‘have helped to guide American thought with humor and wisdom.’ Affirming that Frost’s position in American literature was secure, the resolution closed with ‘felicitation of the Nation which he has served so well.’

Robert Frost is typically an American poet in that he presents in his poems the American life, scene, customs, traditions, beliefs, people and activities. Often he may say something having a universal appeal and application; but mostly he expresses his views that have a tinge of the American standpoint. He deals with American life—especially as found in rural and pastoral areas and sings of the glory of American cultural tradition.

Frost achieved great popularity as a poet both in his own country America and in other countries, especially England which was the first country to recognise his poet merit. The initial neglect of his worth shown by critics and publishers in America was more than compensated for by the numerous awards and honours bestowed on him by way of the recognition of his greatness as a poet. Frost has earned international recognition for his poetry. All lovers of poetry fell under the spell of his poems. The first prime-minister of India, Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru was so influenced by him that the day he died the last lines from ‘Stopping by Woods’ were found written in his own hand on his table. Prime Minister Khrushchev of Russia was one of his keenest admirers and had welcomed him heartily when he visited Moscow in 1962.

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Frost has been an immensely popular poet right from the publication of his second volume *North of Boston* in 1914. The common people have read his poetry with interest and admiration and learned critics have recognized his merit as a poet. The numerous awards, honors and degrees bestowed on him are marks of this recognition. About 44 institutions of higher learning have conferred honorary degrees on him. He was honoured by being elected a fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Letters, and was twice felicitated by the American Senate for his exceptional contribution to poetry. He was invited to recite a poem on the occasion of the inauguration of President Kennedy in 1962. He had the unique distinction of winning the coveted Pulitzer Prize four times. Few poets have won so much recognition and honour in their life. It seems highly astonishing that an ordinary man like him, working on farms with his own hands, should make such a distinct mark in the field of poetry. He must have known by this time that he was the best poet produced in the twentieth century by either America or England, for this is what critics of both countries were saying in loud, clear voices.

Sometimes poets suffer a decline after their death but Robert Frost is one poet whose reputation, even in the 21st Century remains intact, rather the number of his admirers, keeps on growing from day to day. The young teens of America, still find a lot to think, admire and follow in the writings of this colossal figure of the 20th Century. The name of Robert Frost is such that will never be diminished even in the coming years as he was one poet who appealed its all and sundry. Presidents, Prime Minister Senators, actors,
singers, scientists, industrialists, farmers, soldiers and commoner—all fell under the spell of the magic of his poetry. No others words could describe this great legendary figure than the one used by President Kennedy at the time of his demise—"His death impoverishes us all; but he has bequeathed his nation a body of imperishable verse from which American will forever gain joy and understanding. ‘He had promises to keep and miles to go, and now he sleeps.’"22

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