New England is the name given to the region in the United States of America, which is constituted of six states of the country Maine, New Hampshire Vermont, Massachusetts, Connecticut and the Rhode Island. This name was given to the region in 1616 by one Captain John Smith. The region was inhabited by the early Puritan immigrants to America, and had distinctive geographical features, and people possessing distinct cultural and religious traits. The philosophical movement of transcendentalism originated here. Eminent figures in different spheres belonged to this region. Some of them are John Adams, George Santayana, Robert Lowell and Eugene O'Neill. Later, Robert Frost joined this distinguished company. New England was the homeland of Robert Frost's forefathers. But they had migrated to San Francisco (California), and settled there. Frost's father died there, and before his death, he expressed, despite his dislike for New England, his desire to be buried there. Accordingly his wife and two children including Robert Frost came back to New England, and set up a home at Lawrence in Massachusetts, where the boy passed the formative years of his life and received his early education up to the High School level. After attending college for some time, he spent much of his time in various places of this region, like Derry, Franconia. He did much farming work here with his own hands. He must have become thoroughly familiar with the natural scenes, life, manners, customs and speech of the New England region. His poetry
bears a distinct stamp of the characteristic features of this region. He became a poet of New England because of his long and close association with it.

Frost frequently depicts the natural scenes and the landscape of the New England region, with its hills, brooks, trees, birds, flowers, swamps, pastures, and farms. He is not a poet of the big cities with their skyscrapers, vehicular traffic, factories, and machines; he is chiefly a poet of the countryside, of the rural areas of New England with their characteristic geographical features. Moreover, he also describes the activities of people living in these areas such as mowing, apple-picking, berry picking, gum gathering, birch swinging etc. in poems like ‘Mowing’, ‘After Apple-picking’, ‘Birches’, and ‘Blueberries’. The hard life of the New Englanders finds a reflection in his poems like ‘The Hill Wife’, ‘An Old Man’s Winter Night’, and others. Frost describes New England as a region isolated from other places or regions, and having a separate identity of its own. Frost's New England, like Arcadia, is a distinct plane of existence portrayed in such a way that a comparison with the outer world is always strongly implied. It is isolated from ordinary experience, a society with its own folkways, customs, and ideals, a locality with its own distinctive landscape...... It is an agrarian society isolated within an urbanized world, and its country-folk are separated from the modern reading public by a gulf of social, cultural and economic differences nearly, as broad as, that dividing the swain of the old pastoral from the courtly reader.

Frost presents an image of New England in his poetry by portraying in it a rugged region and its people, the panorama of nature and man in nature.
His portrayal is consistent; it is basically the same New England which we discover in his different poems. It must be noted that Frost’s regionalism is part of his creative art. He does not give us a photographic illustration of the region, but presents it realistically and imaginatively. He demonstrates the uniqueness of the region, but in his poems the regional effects expands to cover the universal. Frost’s titles, *North of Boston* and *New Hampshire*, in themselves refer to New England. He presents and interprets the essence of the life of New England in his poetry by portraying the very spirit of the region. The region, as he depicts it, is not just a place; it is a world, coherent and complete within itself.

In 1912, when Frost went to live in England, he was still a failure, so far as recognition goes, in what he considered his one true calling, that of a poet. Yet the early years in rural New England, especially those on the Derry farm, were crucial in Frost’s intellectual, spiritual, and artistic development. During this period he formulated his personal philosophy, wrote some of the most notable of the poems later to be published in *A Boy’s Will*, *North of Boston*, and subsequent volumes, and accumulated material and memories that found expression in poems to be written decades afterward. In 1952, at the age of seventy-eight, Frost wrote: “I might say the core of all my writing was probably the five free years I had there on the farm down the road a mile or two from Derry Village toward Lawrence. The only thing we had plenty of was time and seclusion,”23 then added, ‘it turned out as right as a doctor’s prescription’. Those years, indeed he frequently

referred to as “the most sacred in his entire life.” The fact is that at the Derry farm, Frost had come into his own, as he expressed it in a poem in *A Boy’s Will*, but the spiritual and artistic maturation begun there continued in his years of teaching at Derry and Plymouth and later in Franconia, New Hampshire, where he lived for a time after his return from England.

Frost’s treatment of regional features of New England is not a matter of mere description. Very often he endows his description with a symbolic quality. He has not described the whole of the New England; he has chiefly focused his attention on the part lying to the North of Boston, as is signified by the title of his volume *North of Boston*. He picks up the significant and representative features of this part, and presents them in a symbolical manner. He chooses not simply what is real in this region, what is there, but what is to his mind is 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. This process of representing the locality as a whole through a limited set of visual images and of portraying the culture and mentality of the region through a kind of character is really a mode of symbolism. What emerges from Frost’s scrupulous selection is not reality itself, but a symbolic and creative presentation of his surroundings. And this symbolical nature lends a peculiar charm and appeal to Frost’s regionalism. There is, for example, a charming symbolic regionalism in the description of the ‘woods’ and ‘promises to keep’ in ‘Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening’. The flavours of New England life, an insight into New England character, and a

surprising penetration into life's complexities are found in his poems. He uses
the ‘facts’ of life, but it becomes apparent that the fact becomes metaphor
and symbol through which Frost is penetrating into life and experience.

In Birches Frost gives a living description of a New England
birchwood: birches bent to left and right as a result of swinging or the force
of the ice storms and birches loaded with ice. In Two Tramps in Mud Time
he refers to the vagaries of seasonal climate in New England. Frost explains
‘mud time’ in the countryside very effectively in this poem:

‘In every wheelrut’s is now a brook,
In every print of a hoof a pond.’

He presents rural errands and objects of New England in such poems
as The Pasture, Mowing, After Apple-Picking, Mending Wall, and ‘Out, Out’.
In the Pasture the persona is going out to clean the pasture spring, to
rake the leaves, and to fetch the calf. In Mowing the persona works the
scythe and leaves the hay for some time. In After Apple Picking the
persona’s ladder is sticking through a tree and he is ‘over tired, of the great
harvest’ he himself desired. Mending Wall refers to two farmers and their
farms, and the problem of securing farms by raising and maintaining fences.
‘Out-Out’ refers to the working of the buzz saw:

‘The buzz saw snarled and rattled in the yard
And made dust and dropped stove-length sticks of woods
Sweet-scented stuff when the breeze drew across it
In *After Apple-Picking* the persona has been busy apple picking and is tired. In *Mending Wall* there is a reference to the maintenance of the wall to segregate farms and to keep away hunters and animals. The rural traveler in *Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening* thinks of the farmhouse—even when he is viewing the charming vista of nature.

Frost’s poems consist of three types of New England people, the abnormal people, the sound people, and characters whom Frost allows us to see through the eyes of a humorist. In *Home Burial* the lady is over-wrought because of the ‘mother-loss of first child.’ Her unbalanced condition is known from what she speaks.

‘….Oh, where’s my hat? Oh, I don’t need it!

I must get out of here. I must get air.’

Such abnormal people reflect the morbid disorder in the life of the people of the region. There are sound people, like the traveller in *Stopping by Woods On a Snowy Evening* and *The Road Not Taken*, who ‘tip the scales back in favour of normality.’ In the farmer poem the persona is aware of the charm, profundity, and incomprehensibility of the woods of life and the world but he is also conscious of the necessity of human performance and therefore determines to go the miles and keep the promises before death overtakes him. The third category of characters are discovered in the ‘hulking fellow continually moving into a size-larger shirt’ of *A Hundred Collars* and the *Lorens of Blueberries*.

Frost does not display any nostalgic or utopian wish while presenting his New England in his poetry, although he shows his humane concern for
the people of the region. He makes no attempt to idealize New England. He
knows that rural New England is no longer a region of ‘vital accomplishment’
and shows his realistic concern about the socio-economic conditions
prevailing in the region.

The bleak pictures of life in his poetry refer to the background of the
socio-economic disturbances in the region. *Mending Wall* refers to the
maintenance of farms. *Two Tramps in Mud Time* refers to the economic
need of the rural tramps and this is conceded by the persona in the poems
as ‘the better right’. In *‘Out, Out’* Frost presents the tragedy of the boy
whose hand is snapped off by the buzz saw. In *Home Burial* he presents the
tragedy of parents over the loss of their child and the extra ordinary effects of
the loss on the mother.

Frost indicates New England attitudes and Yankee temper in his
poetry. The wood-Chopper in *Two Tramps in Mud Time* is a thoughtful and
good citizen of New England in conceding the economic need of the two
tramps and social claims on the individual. In *Mending Wall* the attempts of
one farmer to secure his land refers to the Yankee spirit of making the best of
things. *Mowing* indicates adjustment to situations. *Two Tramps in Mud
Time* brings out the significance of inner equilibrium in the individual- the
wood-chopper debates the issue of love and need, avocation and vocation,
individual freedom and social regimentation within his mind and ultimately
achieves inner equilibrium. *Birches* and *Stopping by Woods on a Snowy
Evening* refer to mature adjustment in life. *Stopping by woods on a Snowy
Evening* is an exhortation to man to perform his human duties in the face of
the fact of incomprehensibility of life and the world. The New England Spirit of determination in the face of adversity is discovered in Frost’s poetry.

Frost’s regionalism indicates the uniqueness of New England and yet has universal implications. He sifts his material and presents the essence of things in a realistic and imaginative manner.

In *Mending Wall* there are two farmers and their farms and a wall between the two farms. The poem refers to a New England farmer trying to secure his land and thus to make the best of things; but symbolically it contemplates the propriety or impropriety of barriers between man and man. Frost is a symbolist and synecdochist. The selected experience in a Frost poem, as in *Mending Wall*, represents other levels of experience and values also. An episode in a Frost poem expands and touches the universal. Life in New England has its meaning for the world. Frost uses his New England setting as a dramatic and poetic medium of expression.

The suggestiveness which makes Frost’s poems of New England universal is marked in poems like *Birches* and *Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening*. Frost presents essential human predicament in these poems. In *Birches* is revealed the charm of illusion and man’s ultimate return to reality and his determination to face the world as it is:

‘One could do worse than be a swinger of birches.’

In *Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening* is revealed man’s wise decision to perform his duties in spite of the incomprehensibility of life and the world.
In so far as Frost is a voice of New England, he is a minor figure in contemporary literature, to the extent that he makes his New England universal in meaning and implication.

Frost presents the very spirit of New England in his poetry. Apparently his characters are New Englanders, particularly the rural people of New England. It is the rural New Englanders whom we meet in *The Pasture*, ‘After Apple-Picking’, ‘Out-Out’, and ‘Mowing’. Frost brings out the very temper of the New England in his poems—their spirit of adjustment to situation and life in *Mowing*, *Birches* and *Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening*; the propriety of inner equilibrium in *Two Tramps in Mud Time*; determination and stoic resistance in the face of adversity in *West Running Brook*; and the apparently calvinistic streak of moralism in poems like *Two Tramps in Mud Time* and *Birches*. Nonetheless this presentation of New England life has its human relevance. Frost’s presentation of humanity in New England is a microcosm study of humanity at large that develops into the macrocosm of the whole world.

Thus his study of humanity is not limited in range and his humanism cannot be called regional humanism. His use of synecdoche and symbolism makes this study universal. The thought of the rural traveler in *Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening* suggests same human adjustment in an incomprehensible world. New England plays such a pivotal role in Frost’s poetry that no study of the poet could be complete without discussing the presence of New England. When a writer makes a particular area particularly his own, it becomes a part of his personality. It was the Lake District for Wordsworth, Wessex for Hardy or Malgudi for R.K. Narayan. In the same
way New England has become a part and parcel of the poetic genius of Robert Frost as the Scenery and the people crop up continuously in his poems.

**SITUATION OF NEW ENGLAND**

Rural New England in 1900 was culturally and economically in a state of ruin. Many farms, sometimes whole villages, had been abandoned during the past fifty years as the inhabitants emigrated to the west or to factory towns where regular wages would provide a surer and better living than would the stony soil. The plight of the New England countryside had become a cause for national concern. Articles describing it were appearing in such periodicals as The Atlantic Monthly, the New England Magazine, and The Century, and it is most probable that Frost had read some of these dismal accounts of large scale desertion of the land and of poverty and outright degeneracy among those who remained. Conditions were at their worst back in the hills and mountains, but no region was unaffected. Derry, with its proximity to the large mill towns of the Merrimack Valley, would be in a somewhat favoured locality but would be no means exempt from the general blight. In Plymouth, New Hampshire, where Frost taught in 1911-1912, and in the White and Green Mountains, where he vacationed during the summers before his trip to England and where he lived the year around after his return, he would have observed decadence in its most advanced stages. During these years there were many who could not or would not leave New England, some of course did not succumb to hopeless or degeneracy,
but continued to live by the Puritan principles that had been their fore-fathers' support in setting in these sterile regions. One need not rehearse the Calvinist conviction that underlay the New England way of life for three hundred or so years after the landing of the first Puritans. For them one of the points of faith was that God would not desert. His elect, though He might test them by the sternest of trials, which the true Christian must accept as part of a divinely pre-arranged program culminating in salvation and eternal life. The problem was to know whether one was elect; but there were evidences, so called, and among the most important was submission to God’s will, no matter what afflictions He might send. God’s plan for the world and its inhabitants was held to be an orderly one, and the true believer must persevere in assurance of this. In later years, even among persons who were not theologically strict Calvinists, the old belief and values would survive and would prove supportive even in an environment where failure and decay were everywhere evident.

‘I have all the dead New England things…….'25 Frost once said, but those things were not really dead. They survived not only in him but also in many New Englanders and Americans all across the land. Indeed Frost did not entirely deplore his heritage of residual Calvinism. He found that to a certain degree it answered his spiritual needs; and as an admirer of William James, he found in this heritage a sufficient justification for his beliefs. Furthermore, he was frequently a champion of New England, especially of its past, and by no means denigrated its contribution to the national culture.

In his poems about backcountry people, in *North of Boston* and later volumes, Frost, deliberately or not, presents a gallery of portraits from a place and time that one writer has described as ‘the terminal moraine of New England Puritanism.’ On these pages we find records of the cultural rubble, the glacial erratics, and the residue of an era that is past—that has melted away, but not without adding its currents to the streams of the future. One should not mistake Frost’s realistic portrayal of the land he so loved. Frost in his travels about New England, in his rambles along backroads, and among the hills, had seen the cellar holes of abandoned farmhouses, the miles of stone walls surrounding whole townships long since reverted to forest, and the tottering and fallen stones of family graveyards. Some of his most poignant lyrics ‘The Census-Taker’, ‘Ghost House’, ‘The Black Cottage’, ‘Directive’ attest to his acute awareness of the desolation and decay that had over spread the New England countryside. But he was even more keenly aware of the close lipped, rather aloof people who still remained in the region, and he became deeply concerned about their successes and failures in coping with a harsh and deteriorating physical and social environment. He was not the first to experience this concern. Both sociologists and journalists shared in his concern and earlier writers had also depicted the area and its residents as dark and somber.

Their’s, in the main, was a region of contented and harmonious communities and households where the old virtues, the harmless, happy folkways, the quaint speech the pursuit of wholesome livelihoods, the observance of the old religion, and the democracy of town-meeting

---

government still remained. But in the last two decades of the century, when
dissolution was becoming catastrophic, two other writers—Rose Terry Cooke
of Connecticut and Mary E. Wilkins Freeman of Massachusetts and Vermont-
had a very different report to make. In the villages and on the farms that were
left over both—they found meanness, vindictiveness, narrowness, psychosis,
and grinding poverty. Of the two, Mary Wilkins Freeman was the better artist
and the one more conscious of the significance of her subject matter. A New
England villager herself, descended on both sides from seventeenth century
Puritans, she was fully as discerning as Frost in her efforts to analyze and
understand what was happening to the people of rural New England. More
assiduous than Frost in her probing of hereditary traits, she said of her tales
in Humble Romance and Other Stories, her first volume of fiction: “They are
studies of the descendants of the Massachusetts Bay colonists, in
whom can still be seen traces of those features of will and conscience,
so strong as to be almost exaggerations and deformities, which
characterized their ancestors.”27 In many of her tales, indeed, she depicts
the New England will and conscience as warped to the point of disease— for
example in ‘Conflict Ended’ ‘An Honest Soul’, or the novel Pembroke, which
is perhaps the most profound study of New England village life ever to be
written.

But even the gloomiest writers of fiction or non-fiction took into
account those rural New Englanders who had not sunk into some form of
degeneracy. Thus is certain stories by Mary Wilkins Freeman, the will,
though likely to be hypertrophied, finds constructive outlets and becomes a

27. Perry D. Westbrook, Mary Wilkins Freeman (New York : Twayne Publishers,
1967), 34.
positive force in meeting adversity, as in her ‘Louisa’ and ‘A Taste of Honey’. Sarah Orne Jewett, Mrs. Freeman’s contemporary, wrote more frequently but by no means exclusively, in this optimistic vein, repeatedly giving emphasis to those elements in the post-Puritan character that make for survival and perhaps growth. The Country of the Pointed Firs amply exhibits her faith in the perennial health of New England village life. Yet even this volume contains some pathologically eccentric characters, like the recluse Joanna Todd and the hallucinating Captain Littlepage. The robust spiritual strengths of Elmiry Todd or Esther Hight are by no means universal in the New England of Sarah Orne Jewett’s fiction.

One could list other authors, more are less contemporaries of Frost, who wrote primarily about New England country and village people. Among them was Alice Brown (1857-1948), a native of Hampton Falls, New Hampshire, only a few miles from Frost’s Derry; and Dorothy Canfield Fisher, who for years was Frost’s neighbour in Vermont. It is impossible to determine how much of the work of any of these New England authors Frost read. There is a good evidence that he knew and admired E.A. Robinson’s work at least by 1913. One cannot be so sure about the fiction writers; but since they published prolifically in periodicals and in book form, it is hardly likely that he did not have an acquaintance with the work of at least some of them. Indeed only a determined non-reader, which Frost was not, could be entirely ignorant of their work. But even if he had read nothing by any of them, he is of their company though admittedly his work as a whole transcends their ‘local-colourist’ limitations.
As in the writings of these fellow New Englanders, some of Frost's country people are defeated by their environment and by hereditary traits. Among such victims is the housewife in ‘A Servant to Servants’, a character modeled on a farm woman, with a history of mental illness, whom Frost had met at Willoughby Lake in Vermont in 1909. The situation is totally plausible and realistic. The incidence of insanity, especially among woman, in the rural areas of Northern New England, was the highest in the nation. The woman in Frost's poem has spent time in a state hospital and expects soon to return there. Mental illness runs in her family, and she tells of her demented uncle who had been kept in a cage in the attic of his house. In addition to her inheritance of unfavorable genes, she has been affected by a rigid Calvinistic conscience, a legacy from her Puritan forefathers—which manifests itself as a grim sense of duty toward her husband and in a conviction that she was predestined to an existence of grinding toil, alternating with periods of collapse. Except for the view of the lake from her kitchen window—and the view has ceased to delight her—her life is as devoid of beauty as of hope. Nor is her husband, whom she serves in accord with the most rigid Biblical injunctions, a source of comfort. His communication with her is limited to platitudes. The women tells her story in a monotone which intensifies in dreariness as she progresses. Her words are restrained, as the culture which she represents demands, but for the reader for restraint serves only to dramatize her plight.

Similarly bleak depictions of sick or desperate woman, presented in equally subdued tones of voice and color, are common in the fiction of Mary Wilkins Freeman—for example, in ‘A New England Nun’ or ‘Sister Liddy’,
and their male counterparts may be found in the early poems of E.A. Robinson. ‘A Servant to Servants’ takes its place alongside the more memorable character studies of these and other New England writers. In subject matter and mood it is far from unique; even its form, that of the dramatic monologue, is paralleled in certain tales by Mary Wilkins Freeman, such as ‘On the Walpole Road.’

Two other poems by Frost deal as poignantly with the lot of women on New England farms. ‘Home Burial’ records the emotional collapse of a wife whose inarticulate husband—he too communicates mainly in platitudes—has just buried their child in the family graveyard. ‘The Hill Wife’, a series of short lyrics, traces the psychological deterioration and eventual flight of a childless woman isolated on a remote farm.

These women have succumbed to neurosis or worse under environmental and inner stresses. Three other women in Frost’s early poetry suffer the collapse of morality so frequently commented on by the journalists and sociologists writing about rural New England. The narrative poem, ‘The Witch of Coos’, tells a story of adultery and murder; and though presented as folk superstition, is not out of place in a primitive New England setting. The same is true of the dramatic monologue, ‘The Pauper Witch of Grafton, which depicts a woman utterly without morals and glorying in her own vindictiveness. Finally in ‘The Fear’ Frost dramatizes the guilt of a woman who has left her husband and is living with another man.

It is the presence of some poems like these in North of Boston that induced Amy Lowell to designate that volume as “a very sad book”\(^\text{28}\),

remark that infuriated Frost. But Amy Lowell was at least partly right. Decay and collapse of character, not to mention of a whole culture, are sad. As a summer resident of Dublin, New Hampshire, Amy Lowell knew rural New England and in one poem at least, ‘The Day that Was That Day’ portrayed a woman as desperate as the wife in ‘A Servant to Servants’. Moreover, the fact that in the ‘sad’ poems, Frost focused on woman provides an even closer association with the “recorders of the New England decline” as Fred Patte has called writers like Mary Wilkins Freeman, Rose Terry Cooke, and Sarah Orne Jewett. Social and cultural disintegration was particularly hard on women—at least according to writers—for it was more difficult for women to escape their immediate circumstances by moving west or to a factory town.

But many—perhaps the majority—of Frost’s poems depicting rural characters record less depressing lives and situations and celebrate qualities that make for survival and perhaps fulfillment and which have their origin in the Puritan heritage quite as clearly as do the sick consciences and the sense of doom that destroy the wife in ‘A Servant to Servants’. In direct contrast to her, indeed, is the widow described in ‘The Black Cottage’, a poem that Frost wrote during the Derry years and which was inspired by an actual woman inhabiting such a cottage near the Frost farm. As the minister in the poem tells it, the widow, living alone for many years, is bulwark of the old beliefs, not only religious but political, and her presence in the community is a restraint on the minister and prevents him from altering the traditional

29. The phrase is the heading of the very interesting chapter XI in Fred Lewis Pattee, A History of Literature since 1870 (New York: The Century Company, 1915)
creed in order to conform to theological liberalism. The cottage, like so many New England buildings of the time, was black because it had never been painted. Like its occupant it stood for the unvarnished truths by which the early settlers lived and from which the widow and, through her, the contemporary community still drew spiritual strength. She resembles certain strong and secure characters in Sarah Orne Jewet’s work for example, Mrs. Blackett in The Country of the Pointed Firs, who is spiritually rooted deep in the New England past.

Akin to the widow’s traditionalism is a New England capacity as the regional authors see it-to endure and surmount whatever obstacles God, nature, or chance may raise. Among Frost’s characters so endowed, the most obvious is the farmer in the punning, half-humorous ‘Brown’s Descent’, who faces undaunted the three mile walk back to his barn after his icy descent. It may be symbolic of rural New Englanders who falls into decadence-an opinion from which both Brown and Frost dissent.30

Another character who belies the theory of theory of New England decadence is the preacher, Meserve in ‘Snow’, a poem suggested to Frost by an anecdote he heard in Franconia, New Hampshire. Meserve triumphs in an ordeal he need not have encountered. He deliberately chooses to battle his way home along a country road in a blizzard in the middle of the night-party, it seems, to gauge the extent to which God will help one of His own. Frost, who was a prey to fears of the night and storms, would have admired

30. Another pun occurs in the subtitle to the poem in which Frost describes Brown’s descent as the Willy-Nilly slide. The allusion is the famous Willey Landslide that occurred in Crawford Match in the White Mountains of New Hampshire in 1826 and destroyed the entire Willey family.
Meserve's determination and confidence. Characters endowed with similar self-reliance abound in the New England fiction of the period, though most do not fling themselves so nonchalantly into dangerous situations.

In Puritan and post-Puritan New England the pursuit of the work for which one is best suited was a means of achieving self respect and the approval of God and society. In Frost's 'The Death of the Hired Man', written in Derry, a farm laborer draws his sense of self-worth from his humble but useful skills, especially his knack of loading a hay wagon. By this ability also, he wins the respect and affection of the farmer and his wife for whom he has worked in the past. Thus they take him in at the end of his life, recognizing that he has a sort of claim on them. The college boy who has worked with him in the fields studied Latin for the fun of it. Such absence of serious purpose offended the hired man, whose mastery of the art of hayloading was the justification of his life.

The semi-humorous 'The Code' extends Frost's commentary on the New England country man's feeling about his work. If one has attained excellence in some useful and honorable calling, he has earned immunity from the merest suggestion, even by his employer, as to how he should do his job. An accomplished farmhand deserves and demands not only total confidence in his abilities but also the deference due to any kind of excellence. For this reason the hired men on New England farms have always eaten at their employers' tables and have otherwise been treated as equals.
It mattered little where the ‘aberrant’ poet went. When his soul needed to ‘go apart by itself, he was not partial, certainly not attached, to any special ‘location’. From Frost’s point of view in 1912. New England had only been a setting for his sentimental education. Consequently, the product of this period, A Boy’s Will, lacks the regional concern that characterizes the work of leading New England authors like Jewett, Robinson, Stowe and Whittier. Even Long fellow’s nostalgic poem, ‘My Lost Youth’-Frost’s source for the title of A Boy’s Will-gives much more attention to an identifiably regional setting than does Frost’s book.

During the year after his arrival in England, Frost evolved from the promising, yet inconsistent and immature, poet of A Boy’s Will to the much more forceful and controlled artist of North of Boston. In the earlier collection, disguising himself here, parading himself there, he exhibited the familiar weaknesses of late Romanticism. A year later, however, no longer victimized by his Romantic background, he began to build on it, creating new and distinctive poetry. This advance involved an unprecedented synthesis of his lengthy apprenticeship to the tradition of nineteenth-century British poetry and his suddenly found appreciation for the literary potential of rural New England.

The subservience about being ‘allowed’ to rub elbows with the cosmopolitan British and the disparagement of New England villages are sufficient proof that the Yankee farmer poet had not yet come into his own. This is not the perspective of one who had learned to speak or see ‘New Englandly’. In fact, the specific place hardly deserved mention; it might as well have been California or Virginia’s Dismal Swamp. Frost would refer to it
only as a vague ‘wilderness’. He attempted to find an answer to it for himself by going literally into the wilderness. So cut away from friends and other people that during his five year sojourn, not more than five people crossed his threshold. Yet he was none the wiser for this experience. Despite Frost’s image as a farmer poet, the Derry sojourn was the only time in his life when he relied solely on farming far his income.

This was a development on the basis of a letter Frost had sent to Miss Ward a few months before, professing an ‘aberrant’ mood and a soul inclined ‘to go apart by itself.’ But despite his claim to have returned ‘none the wiser’ from the ‘wilderness’, and despite his rejection (to Miss Ward) of the ‘virtue in location’, he had begun—even before writing the letter to Flint—to miss New England. In a letter written on Christmas day 1912 he admitted, ‘I am homesick at times’. Although he was apparently surprised by it, his nostalgia increased during the winter.

While developing a new sense of his relationship to the New England countryside, Frost also became aware of his affinities with the Georgian poets, a loosely connected group, rural in sympathy, who sought to write, as Edward Thomas noted in 1913, “in a natural voice and in the language of today.”31 But Frost’s closest association with this movement did not begin until the fall of 1913, by which time he had completed North of Boston. During the spring of that year, however, as he became familiar with the movement and as he first met Lascelles Abercrombie and Wilfred Gibson, he must have sensed that for these poets the contrived Romantic posture he

---

had often assumed since the 1890s, the posture exhibited in A Boy’s Will-
would have little appeal.

In a profoundly serious way, each of Frost’s great poems explores the human conditions, the universal experience of an individual located in New England, who struggles to find meaning in his or her life and in the surrounding natural and social worlds. There is no lack of commitment here, and at bottom no evasiveness or irony. Frost’s speaker may doubt his ability to find meaning in the situation; he may express an ironic awareness that the meaning he finds, or thinks he may find, is unreliable or inappropriate. But the very existence of the poetic utterance, and of the care it implies, establishes commitment to the persona and provokes strong sympathy with his search for meaning.

It was New England that first provided him with a way of approaching and gaining artistic control of the confusing emotional and imaginative forces that nearly overwhelmed him during the early years. Yet his tendency toward Romantic postures remained a hindrance to his development throughout his Derry period, until, having moved to England, he began to see himself and his special characteristics more clearly. There he discovered that his experience in New England provided imagery, dramatic conflict, lyric stimulation, and a variety of vocal tones that he could combine with his own personal visions and emotions to create highly effective poetry. Thus he became capable of the extraordinary achievement embodied in some fifty regional master-pieces - a poetic equivalent of Faulkner’s Yoknapatawpha fiction or Hardy’s Wessex novels.
The rural New England from which Frost emerged when he sold his farm in New Hampshire was not the region of vital accomplishment that had once predominated the American scene. In the opinion of Henry Adams the influence of New England was sharply curtailed after 1815, when the South and West began adding an aggressive, expansive tone to American society. Perhaps Adams was too pessimistic about his Yankees; but the New England that literary historians were commemorating with nostalgic solicitude was in the grave with Emerson and his contemporaries long before Robert Frost began to write. North of Boston reflects a hinterland in a time of declining prosperity. The people in Frost’s book have never known the culture of a mid nineteenth-century concord. They are caught up in a struggle with the elementary problems of existence—holding a farm together, paying off mortgage, dragging through the routine of the daily chores, and at the same time not breaking under the strain of anxiety, isolation and over-work.

The term 'Indian summer' has been used to designate certain phases of a latter nineteenth-century New England, but that image is hardly an accurate evocation of life as it actually was in the hill towns and on the isolated farms. After reaching a climax in 1860, their development began to decline within a decade. Marginal land and farms were abandoned almost immediately, bridges went unrepai red, and old roads disappeared vaguely in the middle of a wood. Within twenty years, maple trees and birches were back again in fields that had once been plowed every spring. When the Civil War commenced 12,000,000 acres were under cultivation in New England; fifty years later there were only 7,000,000 acres. During that half century of shrinking agriculture the population of the region doubled. In short, New
England became largely urban and industrialized. As the strength of the village culture diminished year by year, the cities were expanding with a steady influx of immigrants who spoke no word of English and knew nothing of native customs.

Robert Frost recognized the failure and defeats that Henry James noted on his leisurely tour through New England in 1904, but he was one of those who decided to come back and resist the supposed verdict of history. Frost described the record of failure with uncompromising realism because he knew from first-hand experience the conditions that Henry James could only observe at a distance. Many of his best lyrics grow out of this knowledge of the facts and express a sense of transience of realization of the rush of everything to nothingness the end of a season, the end of a farm or a family or a village culture. But the fact of the decline in New England led Frost to a conclusion diametrically opposed to the one reached by Eliot and James. What impressed Frost most of all was not that much of the older New England had been lost but that something had survived, that a vitality remained which was strong enough to meet the challenge of new and potentially disastrous conditions. If this perception of survival is not true, then America has been in a bad way indeed for many decades.

**REFLECTION OF COUNTRY LIFE IN HIS POEMS**

Frost passed a large portion of his life in rural New England, especially New Hampshire and Vermont, and got acquainted with life in this rural region, including farming activities, and vicissitudes that a farmer or poor villager has to undergo. He did much of the farming work with his own hands,
and was familiar with the hardships of a farmer’s life. When he came to write his poems, his experience as a farmer stood him in good stead, and he could present a realistic picture of rural life. According to Egbert S. Oliver, ‘His experience in husbandry and craftsmanship made an impact upon his poetry, both in subject matter and in style: for he demanded of his poems the honesty and simplicity of the scythe or the plough, and he learned to recognize fact.’ By 1920, Frost had become thoroughly at ease in the role of spokesman for rural New England, getting ‘Yankier and Yankier’ as he aged. He had begun to understand the range of subjects and tonalities possible within his tiny territory, seeing there were few limits to where he could go in this persona, or how deeply he could inhabit it.

Frost wrote about country life in a natural, simple and plain manner. He did not like to adopt an artificial or sophisticated manner of writing or to pass to be a poet. He was a Countryman, with the countryman’s apparent preference for rural life, with its heavy seasonal rhythm of growth and decay that imposes its own continuity on those who live amongst it. He struck no attitudes; he made it clear that he was determined not to be poetical. Frost was a farmer: the poetry was, so to speak, a dividend. The farmer was a large part of himself, his author to reality, not local colour or a week-end gesture. His poetry cropped out of his farmer’s world, every part of which how to render in words with a brilliant, off hand ease. In a large number of Frost’s poem like ‘Birches’, ‘The Pasture’, ‘After Apple Picking’, ‘The Death of Hired Man’, ‘Snow’ and others, we find a faithful depiction of rural life, scenes and activities.
Frost is a country poet. The very title of his poems, *Mowing*, *After Apple Picking* and *The Pasture* are characteristically rural. He presents rural objects, like the buzz saw in ‘Out, Out’. He draws a realistic picture of the sound and working of the buzz saw:

‘And the saw snarled and rattled, snarled and rattled,
    As it ran light, or had to bear a load.’

Frost keeps to the rural setting in his pastoral poems. In *Two Tramps in Mud Time* he explains mud time in a rural setting.

‘In every wheelrut’s now a brook,
    In every print of a hoof a pond’.

Frost presents rural characters and errands in his pastoral poems. His rural characters are New Englanders— the woodchopper and the tramps in *Two Tramps in Mud Time*, the boy swinger in *Birches*, the rural traveller in *Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening*, and farmers in *Mending Wall*. The rural events mentioned by Frost involve the elementary problems of existence. *Mowing* and *After Apple-Picking* refer to the work-a-day life of the rural folk. The physical activity of mowing is mentioned at the beginning of the poem of the same name:

‘There was never a sound beside the wood but one,
    And that was my long scythe whispering to the ground

The poem ends with the results of the mowing:

‘My long scythe whispered and left he hay to make.’
Mending Wall apparently refers to repairing the wall between two farms. Gaps may be created in the wall by the frozen-ground-swell spilling the boulders or by the hunters in chase of their prey. In Birches there is the reference to swinging as a pastoral pastime. The persona in Two Tramps in Mud Time refers distinctly to the pastoral hobby of cutting wood.

‘Good blocks of oak it was I split,
As large around as the chopping block’.

This is the rural context within which Frost's most characteristic poems are presented. Frost's ruralism has been recognized from the beginning, but commentators have tended to view it primarily as a source of subject matter. The rural world, however, is not only the area in which Frost finds his most congenial subjects; it provides the framework in terms of which he can most effectively picture reality. In other words, the rural world supplies not only the objects the events, the characters he writes about, but also the point of view from which they are seen. In ‘Stopping by Woods’, for example, the poet casts himself in the role of a rural character—a man riding home, across the countryside in a horse-drawn sleigh—and we are made to see the incident, the poem describes, through his eyes. So natural does this perspective seem and so thoroughly appropriate to the subject that one may well be unaware of it; yet it is the rural point of view, which offers the key to the poet's technique.

The idealizing of country life, however, is only one aspect of his pastoral art. The contrast between country and town involves a recognition of two sets of values, and pastoral does not simply eulogize the rural world at the expense of the great world beyond. To make the picture of rural life all
good is to deprive it of its relevance to ordinary experience, with the result it
will be shallow and merely pretty—as indeed it becomes in the decadent
pastoralism of the eighteenth century. The pastoral poet’s real power springs
from his ability to keep the two worlds in equilibrium. While he gives us an
idealized picture of the country, he must at the same time cultivate our
awareness of the real values of the more sophisticated point of view. Thus
pastoral is to be distinguished from primitive art. It is not the spontaneous
overflow of peasant song, but quite the opposite. It is always the product of a
very highly developed society and arises from the impulse to look back with
yearning and a degree of nostalgia towards the simpler, purer life which such
a society has left behind.

Morrison starts from Frost’s own observation on that he had never
written a ‘nature poem’ and argues that ‘Frost was not so much a nature
poet, if there is such a thing, as a country poet.’ The difference, he says, is
‘considerable’, but he never fully explains it, though he goes on to say: “A
poet can dredge landscape and seascape for images, can offer a
philosophy of nature and man’s relation to it, without in any profound
sense being a countryman. Frost, on one side, was profoundly a
countryman. He was deeply and truly penetrated by the mores, the
institutions, the economy, the people, the mental horizon of the rural
New England he memorialized in his work.”32

As Morrison soundly argues, Lionel Trilling’s notorious efforts to
categorize Frost as a ‘terrifying’ poet ignores another aspect of his work,

32. Theodore Morrison, ‘Frost: Country Poet and Cosmopolitan Poet’ Yale Review,
because ‘some of the poems that would most justify Trilling’s words are country poems and in sense much profounder than mere scene and setting.’ ‘Terror aside’, Morrison continues, “to attempt to subtract from Frost’s work’ his country idylls would be to rob him of far more than trappings and locale. It would be to deprive him of the defining, tangible, physical conditions that give body and being and distinctiveness to a large share of his work.”

But even to make such an explanation, we cannot put ‘terror aside’. To an extent, Trilling is right that Frost is a terrifying poet, and what must be done is to flesh out Morrison’s definition of the ‘country poet’ must be a terrifying poet, as he because life in the country is terrifying, as life anywhere is terrifying. Even the local colorists like Rose Terry Cooke and Alice Brown have grasped elements of this terror at times, but to be a true ‘country poet’ one must be able to face both the heartwarming and the blood chilling aspects of rural life with equal equanimity. One may prefer one to the other, but must not limit his poetry to his preference. He must offer us scenes not just for the sensations they afford, but so that we can begin to fathom through them what it means to live in that country.

In this sense of the term, there have been remarkably few ‘country poets’. There are very few that come to mind besides Frost and Whittier. Robinson Jeffers is too one-sided and apocalyptic, too exclusively ‘terrifying’. If the Point Sur Country is as he pictures it, who would choose to live there?

The work of a ‘country poet’ must mix some measure of invitation with warning, must say to us like Frost in his most mellow mood, ‘You come too.’

There have been country fictionists aplenty—Willa Cather, Faulkner, the early John Steinbeck, Elizabeth Madox Roberts, even filmmaker D.W. Griffith—who have been called ‘poets’ at times; but only Whitier and Frost have sought from their New England prospects to capture the bright and dark lyricism of the county in disciplined lines that intensify the preciseness of the perception.

Morrison’s essay does not fully explain the nature of the ‘country poet’ because he shares the tendency of others to attribute any current interest in ‘country poetry’ to nostalgia. ‘From time to time I have found myself wondering’, he observes, “whether the rural strain in Frost’s poems will prove a help or an obstacle to his reception in the future. A realm of experience once common to the majority is directly and intimately known only to a shrinking minority.” He resolves his doubts, however, by universalizing Frost’s works—moving from the earthly to what John Steinbeck in Cannery Row calls ‘the cosmic Monterey’: “I am far from convinced that country element in Frost will prove a fatal detriment to his continued reception. Frost’s country poems may be trusted to create their own world for readers many years hence, perhaps the more so as the world of these poems grows even more remote than it has become already, and as temptations to view it with nostalgia are removed once and for all by the time and change.”

It was during this fifty-year period that the myth of rural virtue, culminating in the ‘Great Experiment’ of Prohibition, flourished in the very face of the decay of the rural areas. This was the period during which distrust of city corruption allowed rural voters to win such disproportionate influence in American state and national legislatures that it took another fifty years to restore a balance. Frost may be seen as the Irving or the Whitman of the 20th Century, bringing to perfection his myth, just about the time that it was about to lose its hold; but it is arguable that Frost gives us no image of unmixed rural virtue and that the true mythmaker of the period arose in a newly risen art just as Irving had in the short story and Whitman had in free verse. This was the age of the silent film, and David Work Griffith, who began to champion the country over the city in his still unequally spectacle Intolerance (1916) and stepped up his mythmaking for the millions in True Heart Susie (1919) and Way Dawn East (1920), was its Homer. Frost and Griffith have not been compared; but they were born only a year apart, and there are many similarities between their careers that would provide a fruitful basis for a comparison of the roles of the traditional poet and the new movie-maker in the early twentieth century that cannot be digressed into here, except to suggest that their creative paths crossed most conspicuously when Frost’ key poem, ‘The Need of Being Versed in Country Thing’, was published a few months after the release of Griffith’s fabulously successful melodrama Way Down East. These two works highlight the differences between their creators: Frost’s tough vision of the decline of the country and the indifferences of nature to man’s concerns as compared to Griffith’s sentimental defence of rustic virtues against the debaucheries of the city.
Frost's poetry is entirely free from such convention and artificial elements. He has succeeded in capturing the simplicity and naturalness of the earliest Greek masters of this form. The greatness of Frost, as a country poet has been universally recognized. The bulk of his poetry deals with rural life, and his rustic poetry provides the centre, the basis, from which to study even that part of his poetry which is not strictly pastoral. New England, or more strictly speaking that part of it which lies north of Boston provides the rural context, within which Frost's most characteristic poems are presented. It is this rural world which provides him not only with the setting but also with the objects, the incidents, the events, and the characters he writes about. His personages are all New Englanders and his poetry is a record of their characters and habits, as well as of the various aspects of their life and activity, their beliefs, ideals traditions, and codes of conduct. In After Apple-picking, we get a true and interesting picture of the tired farmer going home for rest after the day's labour of picking apples:

My long two-pointed ladder's sticking through a tree
Towards heaven still
And there's barrel that I didn't fill
Beside 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 a recognized trait of the inhabitants as New England. ‘Perhaps the rugged land fostered in the settlers of New England an attitude of making the most of what was available to 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—

He seems to be thrifty; and hasn’t he need,
With the mouths of those young Lorens to feed?
He has brought them all up 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 garden he has planted, through such hard work.

Frost’s swinger of birches, too, has the New England spirit of adjustment in him. He lives for away from the city where alone he could have learnt to pay baseball. So he manages with what is at hand. He plays on the birches.

Some boy too far from town to learn baseball
whose see 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 poem thus brings out the Yankee pride and sense of self-respect.

Frost’s analogy between the ideal development of poetry, the individual, and race based on agrarian beginnings has strong grounding in the development of ancient Greek democracy. In his landmark study the other Greek: The Family Farm and the Agrarian Roots of Western Civilization, Victor Hanson has shown that ‘we owe our cultural legacy to Greeks outside the walls of the polis, forgotten men and women of the countryside, the ‘other Greeks’. But neither the agrarian world of ancient Greece nor of Frost’s New England is a democratic utopia; it is a place of labor struggle, and warfare. Its emphasis on the urgencies and uncertainties of the moment militate against too much contemplation or theorizing. Frost’s agrarians appear at a time of great threat of extinction from highly developed technology and industry as well as social upheaval from immigration. But these threats yield in Frost neither nostalgia nor messianic longing. Rather, Frost’s rural world becomes a metaphor for the kind of forces and challenges that continually test the limits and balance of human freedom and equality.
BEAUTY FOUND IN RURAL NEW ENGLAND

John F. Lynen aptly remarks, “Frost is the interpreter and representative of his regional culture. His poetry portrays the rural world as interesting because it symbolizes the world we ourselves know. The reader will object that Frost does not claim to describe the whole of New England. His subject is the region North to Boston and within that region he describes only the rural areas and farm villages. But to admit this is to recognize that his selection by Nature is creative. He has taken one particular kind of locality to stand for New England as a whole, one particular kind of Yankee to stand for the essential character of the New England mind.”

While he seems more of a realist, his regional picture is actually far more stylized. He seems to discriminate by a stricter standard. 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 the portraying of 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 discovered a new myth of rural life. As a poet, Frost did not mature early. His early lyrics show that he had been in constant search for an idiom and a subject. From the very beginning he was inclined towards rural subjects but in the long run when he started experimenting he wrote of these subjects in an elegant manner which reminds one of Victorian nature poetry. Later on he started writing from the point of view of a New England farmer. This change was brought about when he could guess the poetic possibilities of a region he knew so well. When he left his home and went to stay in New England after a brief stay in old England, he had the opportunity to see the rural life in New England and in this world he found an ideal world which for him could have served the same purpose as Arcadia.

In actual fact, basic changes had been taking place in Frost all along, but from the beginning the clarity of his verse had obscured the complexities of his development. His lucidity is such that he who runs may read; there is always an easily grasped meaning or image for the reader-some perception of nature, some comment about bent birches, blueberry patches, or deep woods filling up with snow. Were there nothing in Frost below this superficial level, he would certainly have to be set down as a simple bard with a gift for versifying but there is a lot more in Frost's poetry.

Frost's subtlety is of a quite different order: it becomes more apparent with continued reading. Since Frost does not regard explicit statement as an artistic blemish, one is not faced with an overwhelming obscurity to begin with. The type of art practiced by Frost possesses some advantage in aiming immediately at human experience. It does not result in a clear cut division of potential readers into an understanding elite and an unknowing mass; for it is
based upon the premise that imaginative literature can convey depth of experience to the few though it has some meaning on a more elementary level for the many. And a unique quality in Frost is that the primitive understanding of his writing—the type of response the poet himself tries to evoke in his lectures—does not do violence to the ultimate understanding which comes only after the reader has been familiar with the poetry for years.

Frost’s first volume, *A Boy’s Will*, published in London in 1913, is a failure as a collection. At its best, it can stand comparison with the later volumes. But the book lacks unity of tone; it represents the first grouping of a writer in search of a personal idiom. At its worst it echoes the accumulated poetic diction of the past: the poet dwells in a vanished abode with his strangely aching heart; his sorrow talks and he is reluctant to listen; he walks afield at dusk, carrying a worn book of old golden song yet never ventures into something novel, something unique.

In spite of this weakness, however, *A Boy’s Will* had a genius of its own that announced to a small circle of discerning critics the arrival of a new voice in poetry. One distinctive quality of the volume is the scene it reveals, for Frost had already decided to give his writing a local habitation and a New England name, to root his art in the soil that he had worked with his own hands for a decade before his sojourn in England. Not since Thoreau had anyone responded so sensitively to the particularities of a rural landscape. Aspects of the New England countryside flash through *A Boy’s Will*, through the good poems, and the trivialities. The reader finds himself in the midst of the wooded valleys and the wooded hills; he hears the blue jay’s screech and the whimper of hawks beside the sun; he comes upon the purple-stemmed
wild raspberry, the sodden pasture lanes of late fall, and the abandoned
cellar holes gradually being reclaimed by nature. For instance in the poem
‘The Tuft of Flowers’ he says—

‘I went to turn the grass once after one
   Who mowed in the dew before the Sun.
The dew was gone that made his blade so keen.
   Before I came to view the leveled scene.
I looked for him behind an isle of trees;
   I listened for his whetstone on the breeze.
But he had gone his way the grass all mown,
   And I must be as he had been—alone!

At first, as he relates so brilliantly in ‘The American Scene’, he felt as
he were wandering about in Arcadia. Six weeks of India summer weather
merged to form a gorgeous blur in his consciousness. But the question of the
value of New England rises perennially, and he could not ignore it. Why have
so many people called this land sterile, bleak, and hostile? Is it possible that
the traditional beauty of the countryside is really an illusion? Henry James,
who had removed himself from America and could trust the objectivity of his
vision, concluded that some sections of New England possess a powerful
beauty that one can not attribute to the charm of nostalgia. Though he had
discovered great natural beauty in New England, he had serious doubts
about the people themselves.

He failed to see that the scenic beauty, far from being an accident of
nature, resulted from a continuing interaction between the land and its
inhabitants. In short, he was out of step with Robert Frost’s people—the men and women of the hillside farms. He was a little too deeply impressed by the summer folk who lived in their admirable country houses until the end of the season and then left the land to the ‘quaint’ natives. When he discovered Frost’s black cottages and abandoned cellar holes—classic symbols of decay—he needed no further proof that an end had come for this particular human experiment. But Frost had no such qualms. He loved the New England countryside with all its drawbacks, he was able to see beauty in its as well, he could admire all that he saw around him and present it in his poetry.

Robert Frost’s poetry is simple enough in its way, but the writing of it must have been anything but simple, it being, in point of fact, most carefully and exquisitely contrived by a most sophisticated mind, as anyone who tried to imitate it would instantly discover. He writes of New England farmers and their underlings much in the same way, and with the like insight, as Wordsworth wrote of the Cumbrian ‘statesmen’ and cottages; and of the very unenglish New England country; and he is armed with a power for delineating character as keen as Browning’s, and a sense for atmosphere and colour in landscape comparable with that of the great English water colour painters, Girtin and Cozens and Cotman. There is something of the eighteenth century about him, with his exquisitely poised rhythms. You feel that, in art, he ante-dated Whitman by a full century, and is successive to him only in ideas. In comparison he makes Whitman appear a sophisticated barbarian, with only the attribute of personal vigour in equal balance between them; and no other American artist before his time save Poe seems to be
comparable with them. And Poe, though a great poet, was never so typically American as these two indubitably are. While writing of the beautiful rural natural surroundings of New England, Frost waxes eloquent. He gave full expression to the abundant beauty that he saw all around him—the clouds, the flowers, the hills—in poems like ‘A Line Storm Song’—

The line-storm clouds fly tattered and swift
The road is forlorn all day,
Where a myriad snowy quartz stones lift,
And the hoof prints vanish away.
The road-side flowers too wet for the bee
Expend their blooms in vain.
Come over the hills and far with me
And be my love in the rain.

During the early summer of 1913, Frost’s growing sense of his regional identity resulted in an impressive burst of activity. After more than twenty years of experimentation he suddenly brought to completion a well-matched set of seventeen poems—more than half of which critics of all persuasions have placed at or near the core of his most characteristic and distinguish acclaimed for poetry of the farm, he had not actually published much verse concerned with the regional world he had observed in New England. Although ‘The Tuft of Flowers’, ‘Going for Water’, and ‘Mowing’ are highly effective early pieces, their significance pales in comparison with the poems he gathered together in the three months following the letter to Bartlett, among them, ‘Mending Wall’, ‘The Death of the Hired Man’, ‘The Mountain’, ‘A Hundred Collars’, ‘Home Burial’, ‘A Servant to Servants’, ‘After Apple Picking’, ‘The Code’, ‘The Fear’, The Wood Pile’, and
another often anthologized piece he finally decided to omit from North of Boston, ‘Birches’. Drafts of three of these pieces including ‘The Death of the Hired Man’, may have been started as early as 1905, but Frost’s half year in the British literary community seems to have stimulated his commitment to a full poetic exploration of his experience in rural New England. This was no longer the poet who in 1907 had high hopes for poems like ‘The Vantage Point’ and ‘A Dream Pang’, while keeping ‘The Death of the Hired Man’ hidden under a bushel of ill-fated manuscript. Prior to his British adventure, he had neither the confidence nor the resolve to bring forth his vision of a region and its people. But later on, he realized that this was his real strength. So, we wrote about he area with love in his heart and clarity in his voice as in the poem—A Winter Eden:

A Winter garden, in an older swamp  
Where comes now come out to sun and romp  
As near a paradise as it can be  
And not melt snow or start a dormant tree  
If lifts existence on a plane of snow  
One level higher than the earth below  
One level nearer heaven overhead  
And last year’s berries shining scarlet red.

After the inspired productivity of May, June and July, Frost wrote to Bartlett again, rejoicing that ‘the next book begins to look large’ and listing its prospective table of contents. His elation was in part attributable to his swift success at fulfilling the commitment-the unconscious prophecy- he had made in the spring. Without question he had mastered ‘the poetry of the farm’. Noting that Bartlett had recently contributed articles to a farm journal, he made an observation that shows how conscious he had become of his new
artistic identity: ‘without collusion we have simultaneously turned our minds to run on rusticity’. The verb ‘turned’ is especially revealing here. It shows that several years after his departure from Derry, Frost suddenly reached a new awareness of the poetic possibilities of rural New England. But in the process of running his mind on rusticity and mastering the ‘poetry of the farm’, he also gained full control of his special poetic gift: his sensitivity to the speaking voice. He at long last firmly grasped that ‘right tone’ he had been groping toward for a decade or more. The rustic beauty of New England beckoned to him to give expression to it in his poems. And this is what he did with full gusto in countless poems like ‘The Mountain’:

When I walked forth at dawn to see new things,
   Were fields, a river, and beyond, more fields.
The river at the time was fallen away.
   And made a widespread brawl on cobblestones;
But the signs showed what it had done in spring:
   Good grassland gullied out, and in the grass
Ridges of sand and drift wood stripped of bark.

The source of all these strengths was the poet’s newly developed sensitivity to his regional background. His concerns with speech patterns and the sound of rural voices invest the book with great dramatic force. Additionally, his interest in the meaning of his own experience in the farm country of New England led him to unify the book not only by careful arrangement of its seventeen poems and skillful orchestration of its themes, conflicts, and images, but also by establishing a consistent point of view toward the region: the point of view of a sensitive, meditative observer.
Like *A Boy's Will*, *North of Boston* offers a faintly narrative evocation of its implied author. There are no glosses, of course, and no explicit references to the self conscious 'youth' of the earlier collection. But there is an overt link between the two books: a sentence on an unnumbered page between the table of contents and 'Mending Wall' in early editions of *North of Boston* states that 'Mending Wall' takes up the theme where *A Tuft of Flowers* in *A Boy's Will* laid it down'. By leaving 'the theme' indefinite (it is not merely the theme of 'A Tuft of Flowers', but a larger theme laid down' there), Frost intimates that 'Mending Wall'—and by implication, the remainder of the collection—is a continuation of the earlier volume. Even without this suggestion however, *North of Boston* demands to be read, not as a haphazard collection of lyrics, dramatic monologues, dramatic narratives, and dialogues, but as a poetic study of rural New England.

Pursuing his interest in natural speech, Frost shaped the voices of the individual poems into a larger dramatic form centred on his implied author, the observer whose discerning, refining, ordering mentality filters and unifies the diverse elements of the regional environment and New England is not just a part of his poetry but gives a universal feel to it. His love for the area, its beauty its scenes, its people and their rugged ways is clearly visible in his writings. Nature's bounty as bestowed upon New England by the creator gave Frost the impetus to give beautiful descriptions that enthralled his readers, young and old alike. Even in his later anthologies like *Mountain Interval*, *New Hampshire*, *West-Running Brook*, *A Further Range* etc. Frost gave full rein to his fascination for the natural beauty and people of New England by giving representation to them in all his poems.