ROBERT FROST AND THE NEW ENGLAND TRADITION

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ABSTRACT

ROBERT FROST and the NEW ENGLAND TRADITION

The evaluation of Robert Frost's place in the New England tradition is the thesis for the above titled work. Analyses and conclusions were based upon an examination of the poetry of Frost, and the poetry and prose of literary and religious figures prominent in the New England tradition, in addition to pertinent commentaries.

The examination was conducted under five categories: 1). the religious origin of New England thought as exemplified in Frost's treatment of man on earth and in heaven, 2). characteristic New England individualism modified by Frost's concepts, 3). rationalism revealed in Frost's power to portray New England's voice of reason, 4). the middle class nature of New England society illustrated in Frost's concern for the work experience of man, and 5). the marked tendency of New Englanders to read God's revelation in nature carried forward by Frost.

Conclusions reached as a result of consideration follow: The religious influence of the New England tradition is revealed in Frost's poetry in that he shares with the Puritans a realistic concept of the individual bound by the limitations of a God-directed natural environment. Frost

reveals also the Puritan's pragmatic acceptance of man's secular life and the Yankee's persistence and moral endeavor. On the other hand, not being a steadfast believer in orthodox religion, Frost cannot be said to approximate all the various shades of New England religious thought. His poetry reveals, rather, the moral and ethical influence of New England's religion.

Frost shares with the members of the New England tradition the belief that the individual has the right to live an independent life. He believes that the considerations of society should begin with the common man--the independent Yankee living close to his source of life. Unlike the dynamic spirit of nineteenth century New Englanders which called for offensive, aggressive action, Frost's view suggests a policy of separateness for the individual--of laissez faire--of reaction.

Frost has added to the New England tradition a faithful, earthy, contemporary representation of that section. Whereas other New Englanders have "reached out" so that their art resembles formal and literary diction, Frost has concentrated on interpretating the rationalistic voice of that region.

The genuine middle class nature of New England is revealed in Frost's preoccupation with the daily life of man. Frost's presentation of the New England Yankee concerned with his labor on earth is a realistic middle class concept

of the secular life of man.

Frost shares with the New Englanders the realization that events have more than surface meanings, and that these "inner" meanings can be perceived in nature. Whereas the New England divines interpreted the meaning of God's providences in nature, Frost endeavors intuitively to gather intelligence from man's relation with nature. Frost has added to the New England tradition also a dramatic portrayal of the forces of the elements on man, and man's valiant struggle and dogged determination to triumph over nature.

PREFACE

This thesis presents an analysis of Robert Frost's place in the New England tradition. In order to adequately arrive at conclusions, it was first necessary to define the New England tradition. It was also necessary to compare Frost's poetry with the literature of representative New Englanders.

My sources of information for the New England tradition were gained from reading, study, and lectures. The works I have mentioned in the bibliography are only the books and articles referred to or used as background for interpretation of the New England tradition in this thesis.

For the analysis of Frost's poetry I have considered all of Frost's available poems. The published volumes examined are listed alphabetically in the bibliography. In this connection, The Intervals of Robert Frost, a bibliography, (1947),proved helpful.

A list of books and articles which offered commentaries and criticisms was obtained from Contemporary American Authors by Fred B. Millett (1940), and from a Literary History of the United States by R.E. Spiller and others (1948). A selective list of magazine articles was secured from Louis Leary's Articles on American Literature Appearing in Current Periodicals, 1920-1945. This list was brought up to date by an examination of the periodicals with regard to Frost in the bibliographies of American Literature from 1945 to the present.

The books and magazines I was able to consider were those available at the Michigan State College Library, the Michigan State Library, and a few important volumes and articles obtained through inter-

library loan. The books examined included literary histories, histories of poetry, American literature anthologies, histories of American thought, and histories of religious thought, in addition to primary sources. While the material examined is not exhaustive, I am confident that I have covered the most important commentaries and critical analyses of Frost's work with relation to the New England tradition.

I trust that this thesis may prove useful to students interested in the New England tradition or Robert Frost, and as much a source of inspiration for those interested in research as it has been for me. I am grateful to Dr. Arthur J.M. Smith for his guidance during my reading, to Dr. Anders Orbeck for his instruction in the mechanics of writing this thesis, and to Dr. Claude M. Newlin for his guidance, for reading the manuscript, and suggesting improvements. My thanks are also extended to my teachers in the graduate faculties in English and History for their help in making this year of instruction beneficial as well as enjoyable.

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INTRODUCTION

Text books which consider modern American poetry give Robert Frost a place in the New England tradition. Thus Henry W. Wells in The American Way of Poetry states that Robert Frost is in the New England intellectual tradition as best represented in Emerson."[1] He states further that although "Frost's primary subject may be the heart of man ... his avowed theme is the soul of New Hampshire."[2] The new Literary History of the United States labels Frost a "metaphysical poet in the tradition of Emerson and Emily Dickinson."[3] Carl Van Doren sees Frost as a "Puritan-Yankee poet,"[4] while Howard Mumford Jones in Ideas in America observes that "Save for Robert Frost there is none who stands for the New England way"[5] now living.

In addition, critics writing for periodicals, point out similarities between Frost's poetry and the work of some outstanding New England writers: Anne Bradstreet, Whittier, Emerson, Thoreau, Emily Dickinson, and the more recent local colorists. These comparisons are naturally brief, and point the way to additional work instead of presenting a satisfactory picture. There is no detailed work, moreover, to date

1. Henry W. Wells, The American Way of Poetry (New York, 1943), p. 108.
2. Ibid., p. 107.
3. R.E. Spiller, Literary History of the United States (New York, 1948), p. 1190.
4. Carl Van Doren, Many Minds (New York, 1924), p. 58.
5. Howard Mumford Jones, Ideas in America (Cambridge, 1944), p. 218.

giving an analysis of Robert Frost's ideas in the light of the ideas of the New England tradition, in spite of the fact that it is generally agreed that Frost's work perpetuates the New England way of life.

Perhaps this lack of information is due to the fact that the New England tradition, until recently, has been so little understood and so ill defined. The origin of the New England tradition lies in the religious thought of the Puritans. The development of the tradition is an outgrowth of attributes of Puritanism modified by social and economic influences as well as environmental conditions.

Such a study has been begun at Harvard University by Perry Miller. His book, The New England Mind, uses the method of intellectual history for an analysis of the seventeenth century Puritan in his relation to God and the Universe. Mr. Miller promises an extension of his work to cover eighteenth century New England thought, and when this work appears a reinterpretation of the New England tradition might be possible.

In the meantime and in preparation for this study, the air might be cleared of some of the conflicting opinions which have obscured a conception of the New England tradition instead of clarifying it.

Is the spirit of New England tolerant or intolerant, conformist or dissenting, authoritarian or liberal? Immediately ideas come to mind to support both points of view. The difficulty seems to be that the New England character took on various aspects at different times.

As part of the Protestant revolution, the Puritans were non-conformists, revolting against traditional and formal worship. Having established their own theocracy on the shores of New England, however,

the Puritan fathers would countenance no dissenting voice.

Are we then to conceive of the New England tradition colored by the authoritarianism of the Puritan ministry? Or, are the ideas of such liberals as Roger Williams, such individualists as Anne Hutchinson, and such humanitarians as the Quakers, since they are part of the non-conformists strain, more important? Clearly an interpretation of the New England tradition must take into account both points of view. These ideas, non-conformist and authoritarian, have their roots in a highly personal concept--the right of the individual to make his own faith.

When individualism asserted itself, a world was created in which moral truth received prime consideration. Finally truth was crystalized into law, and the law upheld as dogma. Then reaction in the form of revitalized, personal revelation became so great as to obscure the old and bring to the fore the new. Thus Anglicanism was superseded by Puritanism on the shores of New England, Puritanism made way for Unitarianism, and Unitarianism for Transcendentalism. These changes were by no means complete or thorough, but the intellectual freedom which permitted the growth of so many shades of Protestant thought in New England must be considered an integral part of the tradition.

Does the New England tradition represent a free society or one which is highly regulated? Can one call the Puritan theocracy a free society? Can the Covenant which set up the distinction between Saint and Sinner, and governed the social and even economic life of each individual be termed democratic? Where in a Calvinistic, deterministic

world was there room for individual free will?

Our conclusion must be that thus bound by the "discipline of the Church"[1] the individual was not free to live a licentious life, but free to live a life of moral perfectibility. True, the strict regulation of Puritan life left its mark on the New England character, but along with a realization of the bounds imposed, came a determination to attain the highest good. The slimmer the margin of his success, the harder the Puritan tried to prove himself one of the elect. This characteristic is still revealed in the persistance of hard-headed Yankee endeavor undaunted by hardship.

The New England tradition cannot be dismissed readily in the criticism of Mr. Mencken or in the sentimental milieu of Mr. Van Wyck Brooks. Neither can the popular hazy multifarious concepts of contempt for the esthetic, strict adherence to "Blue Laws", or pruishness, and the like be permitted to prevail with any accuracy. The New England tradition must rather be defined in the light of its history.

1. Kenneth B. Murdock, "The Puritan Tradition in American Literature," from Norman Foerster, The Reinterpretation of American Literature (New York, 1928), p. 93.

Part I

THE NEW ENGLAND TRADITION

Chapter I

RELIGIOUS ORIGIN

The New England tradition has its roots in the religious nature of the Puritan theocracy. The resulting moral and ethical influence stems from this source--the theocracy--to pervade New England thought and action. The Puritan beginning offered at once a religious creed and a social code. Puritanism was an all encompassing philosophy of life in action.

To know the New England character we must examine Puritan religious thought. This thought reveals a strange dualism. It makes use of subjective insight as one element and thus becomes concerned with individuality. This preoccupation with personal destiny is a direct result of the effect of the Doctrine of Irresistible Grace, wherein the individual received a transmission of the Divine Spirit. The "influx of divine spirit"[1] was perceived immediately, "through an inward communication"[2] regenerating and sanctifying man.

Such an experience was apt to be interpreted by the emotional person directly. Since "everyman was naturally susceptible to this

1. Perry Miller, "Jonathan Edwards to Emerson", New England Quarterly, Vol. XIII, No. 4, Dec., 1940, p. 595.
2. Ibid., p. 596.

inward communication"[1] he did not need the intermediary of a priesthood to come to God. Thus the individual might become a law unto himself, might adopt, in fact, an Antinominian point of view. In his piety and emotionalism he might even reject Scripture for personal revelation--for the message of the "inner light."

The Puritan ministers recognized, however, that this was a dangerous interpretation--a threat to the existing order--and did their best to caution the people against such error. The Puritan theologians held "that while the soul does indeed have an access to God, it receives from the spirit no verdict upon any question, only a dutiful disposition to accept the verdict confirmed by Scripture, by authority, and by logic."[2]

This confirmation of the Divine message by parallels in Scripture, and analysis of learned theologians, forms the other element in Puritan dualistic religious thought. "Puritanism demanded that the individual confront existence directly on all sides ... that he test all things by the touchstone of absolute truth."[3] To accomplish this latter object all the rational powers of the individual were called into play. Puritanism became increasingly concerned with intellectual activity. The Puritan tradition came to be marked, therefore, by a "respect for books, for bookmen, for letters and

1. Ibid., p. 596.

2. Ibid., p. 596.

3. Perry Miller, The New England Mind (New York, 1939), p. 45.

for scholarship."[1] Education was necessary for this rational approach to religion. Finally through the Unitarian doctrine of the open mind, religion came to be interpreted in accordance with social and economic need.

In this span of religious thought, then, one might perceive at the extreme right the mysticism of Antinominianism, later to form the basis for the intuition of Transcendentalism. At the extreme left we can discern the "ethical rationalism"[2] of Arminianism from which sprang Unitarianism. Somewhere between lies the parent Puritanism a "synthesis of piety and reason."[3]

1. Murdock, "The Puritan Tradition in American Literature," from Foerster, op. cit., p. 95.

2. Floyd Stovall, American Idealism (Norman, Oklahoma, 1943), p. 10.

3. Ibid., p. 10.

Chapter II

INDIVIDUALISM

As a result of pious introspection, and from the desire to realize the divine fulness, Puritanism evolved the Covenant of Grace to counteract the determinism of original sin and the depravity of man. The Puritan was characterized by the "conviction that in a world emanating from all-good, all-perfect Being,"[1] man, though living as a maimed soul, "longs for deliverance ... for reinstatement in the created harmony."[2]

He was not to sit by idly, however; but to persevere in his search for God. The way was not easy, one could see. Man was weak and easily tempted, but "true faith must show itself able to stand up under punishment,"[3] to resist evil. The Saint even though sanctified by Divine Grace must prove himself one of the elect. Thus the seventeenth century Puritan, in his concern for the welfare of the individual, emphasized the mystic and the moral.

With the advent of the Eighteenth Century Enlightment, a more agreeable offshoot of Puritanism was evolved to keep step with the optimistic outlook of the time. Theologians dwelt not so much on the depravity of man, but on his goodness. By the Nineteenth Century, Unitarianism, incorporating this concept, had triumphed over

1. Miller, The New England Mind, p. 22.

2. Ibid., p. 22.

3. Ibid., p. 39.

orthodox Puritanism. Unitarians preached that men were the "happy recipients" of God's perfections, "in whom his wisdom and love ... substantially dwell."[1]

William Ellery Channing asked his congregation to remember that in men lie the "elements of Divinity,"[2] that the marks of God could readily be seen in a "liberal intellect,"[3] and that it was man's "proper work to approach God by the free and natural unfolding of ... highest powers of understanding, conscience, love, and the moral will."[4] Channing, in this way, called forth the greatest potentialities of man.

Carrying this note forward Emerson asked, "Who can set the bounds to the possibilities of man? Once inhale the upper air, being admitted to behold the absolute natures of justice and truth, and we learn that man has access to the entire mind of the Creator, is himself the creator in the finite!"[5]

This startling revelation called for self reliance, a greater emphasis on individualism, and a disregard for external authority and tradition. Faith in the dignity of human nature was renewed. Men were asked to explore their personal possibilities.

1. William Ellery Channing, The Works of William E. Channing, D.D., Vol. III (Boston, 1871), Sermon: "Likeness to God," p. 239

2. Ibid., p. 233.

3. Ibid., p. 247.

4. Ibid., p. 244.

5. Ralph Waldo Emerson, The Complete Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson, Vol. I (Boston, 1903), "Nature", p. 64.

Emerson reminded men that "Every spirit builds itself a house, and beyond its house a world, and beyond its world a heaven." He urged, "Know then that the world exists for you ... All that Adam had, all that Caesar could, you have and can do. Build therefore your own world."[1]

Sentiments such as these have proved to be powerful instruments in the hands of youthful adventurers in life, not only in New England, but wherever Emerson's works are heard and read. Ironically enough they "provide a vicious reinforcement to the most ruthless elements in our economic life,"[2] in addition to giving inspiration to such individualists as Thoreau and Frost.

Reveling in the rejuvenation of faith, the New England individualists preached the passionate doctrine of Transcendentalism--the "indwelling of divinity"[3] in the Universe and in Man. The arch-individualist, Thoreau, applying these doctrines in his daily life, "wrote a true declaration of independence"[4]--Walden. With Puritan Yankee perseverence, he rescued his soul from the economic devil and offered it to the Divine Spirit. Thoreau and the other Transcendentalists set for themselves a challenging ideal, to live a life of moral independence, to call forth the best within themselves.

1. Ibid., p. 76.

2. F.O. Matthiessen, American Renaissance (New York, 1941), p. 4.

3. H.C. Goddard, Studies in New England Transcendentalism (New York, 1908), p. 4.

4. Louis Vernon Parrington, Main Currents in American Thought, Vol. II (New York, 1927), p. 400.

Such a display of creative energy resulted in the Golden Age of New England literature. The writings of the Transcendentalists reveal youthful enthusiastic minds emancipated intellect occupied in constructive activity.

This was the last burst of glory before the nineteenth century envelopment of individuality by industrialism--the very envelopment which Thoreau fought against so vigorously. By the mid eighties the vitality of New England had been drained. Industrialism, "the toll of war, the Western rush, and the call of the cities had left behind the old and the conservative, and the helpless."[1] The New Englander had surrendered his individuality to the mass. Youth had left, in fact, the land of inspiration for the world of activity.

Those who remained to picture the New England scene wrote of what they found: "a social group inbred for generations and narrowly restricted to neighborhood limits."[2] The characters of the local colorist, Mary E. Wilkins Freeman, for example, live narrow lives of repression in direct antithesis to the Transcendentalists' lives of expression. The New England which had once represented the originality and individuality of youth had now grown old. Its utterances, aged too, were the fearful gasps of those clinging to the mold.

Out of such a weary background, twentieth century New Englanders,

1. Fred Lewis Pattee, A History of American Literature Since 1870 (New York, 1916), p. 237.

2. Ibid., p. 236.

born of "old" stock, and mature before they are young, still adhere to the romantic individualism of Emerson; only, repressed by the naturalistic determinism of the machine age, their voice carries not Emerson's joyous exuberance, but rather Frost's stubborn, reactionary, dryness and irony.

The individualists pictured by Frost are reactionary eccentrics, "impractical idealists victimized by a predominately materialistic society."[1] They are reactionary simply because, although descended from a glorious New England ancestry, they do not represent a present day social outlook. "Contemporary New Englandism is an inheritance, not a belief; a mode of behavior, not an idea."[2] The New England individualist engrossed in his hens or his telescope makes no great stir in present day American philosophy. In the words of Professor Whitehead, "The self-sufficing independent man, with his peculiar property which concerns no one else, is a concept without any validity for modern civilization."[3]

In an essentially "agrarian and craft"[4] economy the individualism of Thoreau presents a positive program. In the days of Thoreau and Emerson individualism as well as democracy were on the offensive, but democracy and forth-right individualism "have been on the defen-

1. Wells, The American Way of Poetry, p. 117.

2. Jones, Ideas in America, p. 2.

3. Matthiessen, American Renaissance, p. 77.

4. Ibid., p. 78.

sive for the last fifty years."[1] In fact we might even question whether individualism can be said to be part of the present American scene.

It follows, then, that the independent voice of Robert Frost is one of reaction. We might hope that the New England tradition of individualism as carried forward by Robert Frost would be more than a reactionary laissez faire doctrine; but perhaps we are unjustly expecting the poet to solve our complicated social, scientific, and economic problems, a task which no one has yet been able to accomplish. We might observe, however, that Robert Frost has very successfully solved his own personal problems by characteristic Yankee individualism.

1. Charles Howell Foster, "Robert Frost and the New England Tradition," University of Colorado Studies, No. II, Ser. B., 1945, p. 379.

Chapter III

INTELLECTUAL ACTIVITY--RATIONALISM

New England life was from the first founded on intellectual activity. Believing as they did in the necessity of strict adherence to the teachings in the Bible, the Puritans made provisions for education along with shelter in order that their children might learn to understand the guiding light of life--the Bible. To the Puritan way of thinking, an educated clergy was necessary to lead them in the ways of righteousness. Simultaneously, an enlightened laity was essential in order to understand Biblical interpretation.

"Schools of learning are approved and appointed of God," said Charles Chauncy in a Commencement Sermon, "and of great importance for the benefit of Gods people: Seeing that the Lord works with, and blesseth this means, for the laying up of provision, and making of supplies for the work of the ministry;"[1]

The study of the Bible was not the only interest of the Puritans. As heirs of the Renaissance, they shared with other humanists pleasure in the revival of classical learning and the discoveries of science. Charles Chauncy's defense of a liberal education is but one of many. He argues: "And who can deny but that there are found

1. Charles Chauncy, "Gods Mercy, shewed to his people in giving them a faithful Ministry and schooles of Learning for the continual supplyes thereof," (Cambridge, 1655), from Perry Miller and Thomas H. Johnson, The Puritans (New York, 1938), pp. 705, 706.

many excellent and divine moral truths in Plato, Aristotle, Plutarch, Seneca, etc."[1] Greek, Latin, and Hebrew learning was recommended to strengthen the testimonies of the Bible, with the result that an educated Puritan no matter what his vocation, was as well informed as any cultured gentleman of the day.

Education was not only a means of perpetuating the Puritan faith for themselves, but it proved a valuable instrument in religious controversy. Since the issues of the day were mainly intellectual interpretations of religion, the learned Puritan pen proved to be a mighty weapon against a formidable foe.

Although occupied in religious disputes with their English adversaries, the Puritans waged a more bitter battle against "enthusiasts" at home. "Enthusiasts," according to the Puritans, were those misguided individuals who pretended to receive instructions from God through immediate revelation. This, in the eyes of orthodox Puritans, was flying in the face of reason and intellect which urged that God speaks to men only through his revealed word in the Bible. So it was that the Puritans felt justified in condemning Antinominians and Quakers in the early 1600s, since these people defied the very basis of Puritan religious and social life.

The Puritans insisted upon a rational interpretation of religion. The reception of God's grace was not a transmission of information from God, they urged, but the heightening of powers already cultivated in man. If man were depraved by the fall, would he be able to

1. Ibid, p. 706.

reason, one might ask? The Puritans did not hold, however, that man was wholely corrupt or sinful. Man still possessed reasoning power, even if not inspired by God's grace. Man should increase his knowledge by study, observation, and experience. Although the Puritans maintained that learning alone would not get men into heaven, they believed, as a critic states humorously, that "by and large, men who are called by God will heed the summons all the better if they know Latin, Greek, and Hebrew."[1]

"Enthusiasm" confronted the Puritans again in the religious revival of the eighteenth century. Again the rational approach was urged. Charles Chauncy cautioned in 1743, "the passionate discovery of divine love is not a good evidence of election. The surest and most substantial Proof is Obedience to the Commandments of God, and the stronger the Love, the more uniform, steady and pleasant will be this Obedience."[2] The Puritans expected intensity of belief, but along with religious fervor, they insisted upon reserve in deportment. Man was to submit his experience to the understanding and reason for approbation.

From the rationalism of the early Puritans it is natural to expect the reasonableness of Unitarianism. Interpreting the Bible objectively and in the light of known experience, the Unitarians freed New England faith from the harsh dogmas of predestination, depravity,

1. Miller and Johnson, The Puritans, p. 21.

2. Charles Chauncy, Seasonable Thoughts on the State of Religion in New England (Boston, 1743), p. 26.

and original sin. They substituted instead, the doctrine of God's love for mankind and the freedom of all men. Rational Unitarianism, in fact, paved the way for the Renaissance in New England thought. The Unitarian doctrine of the open mind permitted the growth of the concept of the divinity of man in Transcendentalism.

Considering all three trends of New England's religious thought in the light of present day determinism, rational Puritan thought seems to have more in common with our modern conclusions than the smiling Unitarianism or the exuberant Transcendentalism. The Puritan doctrine of predestination, for example, seems not so much different from the modern theories of heredity and environment. The doctrine of election can easily be understood in the modern concept of the working of a blind fate. The bounds set on man's life by an all powerful God are the limitations imposed upon man's capacities in a scientific and industrial age. We lack, however, the Puritan's faith which enabled him to persevere no matter how hard his existence. Our modern mood is rather one of skepticism.[1]

No one is as much the master in portraying modern New England as Frost. In his realistic pictures of austere New England's "hard hills and harder certainties,"[2] Frost seems the Puritan himself. His characters are molded by their isolated environment. The weak are overcome and the strong struggle against blind forces. Frost's poetry,

1. Miller and Johnson, The Puritans, p. 63.

2. Louis Untermeyer, American Poetry Since 1900 (New York, 1923), 20.

however, does not transmit the seventeenth century Puritan's zealous faith. Instead, the modern skeptical temper predominates in his work. While seeming to rationalize, Frost sets forth no positive conviction workable for present day problems. His outlook is the uncertain one of the era.

Chapter IV

MIDDLE CLASS MOVEMENT

The New England tradition was not only religious in origin, but secular as well. The Puritan creed, for example, governed a man's whole life with a practicability amazing for its thoroughness. Second to his concern for his standing in heaven, was the Puritan's attention to his earthly calling. John Cotton points out, "Faith drawes the heart of a Christian to live in some warrantable calling; as soon as ever a man begins to look towards God, and the ways of his grace, he will not rest till he find out some warrantable Calling and imployment."[1] The Puritan considered it his duty to select a vocation and to work diligently.

The Puritan ideals of conduct were, as a result, those of an enterprising middle class. The dignity of labor was upheld. "They believed in material prosperity, and in working to attain it."[2] This does not signify that the accumulation of wealth was a selfish desire to be pursued for that end only. Man worked rather to serve the Lord and his fellow man. To quote a noted divine, "this is the

1. John Cotton, The Way of Life (London, 1641), from Miller and Johnson, The Puritans, p. 319.

2. Murdock, "The Puritan Tradition in American Literature," from Foerster, The Reinterpretation of American Literature, p. 97.

work of every Christian man in his calling, even then when he serves man, he serves the Lord; he doth the work set before him, and he doth it sincerely and faithfully, so as he may give account for it."[1]

If a man prospered, as he was apt to do by diligent attention to duty, discipline, and thrift, he was not to give himself over to self-indulgence, but to continue as before persevering in doing good toward mankind and in devotion to the Lord.

The middle class nature of Puritan life did not make for a leveling of society as might be expected. Differences in station were always apparent. There was an intellectual aristocracy, for example, made up of the ministers and the rulers of the colonies who formed a distinct class. There were eventually also the merchants who prospered. The upper classes, however, did not surrender themselves to ostentatious living. Such a course would have been against their principles and training. They continued instead to serve the community, to live economically, and to attend to their daily business. Marquand illustrates realistically the perpetuation of New England's ideals in his portrayal of George Apley. The Apleys' enterprising grandfather had made the family fortune, and the family was very well off financially, but Mr. Apley nevertheless drove himself with industrious resolve![2]

1. John Cotton, The Way of Life, from Miller and Johnson, The Puritans, p. 322.

2. John Marquand, The Late George Apley (Boston, 1937).

Idleness and preoccupation with frivolous amusements were frowned upon in Puritan society as sure opportunity for the workings of the devil. "Yet many diversions, if moderately indulged, were willingly countenanced as long as they did not lead to 'waste of time'."[1] Amusements participated in were those concerned with the events of daily living: "baptisms, weddings, funerals, barn-raisings, corn-huskings, quilting-parties, church-raisings, house-raisings, ship-launchings ... ministers' ordinations."[2] These were great occasions. In addition, church services and lectures as well as town meetings provided more serious, but extremely satisfying concerns. The Puritan's private leisure was also occupied to his advantage in pursuing a course of self improvement. This included usually not only the recording of his experiences for later personal perusal for their spiritual value, but a self imposed course of reading in the Bible, the classics, and the useful arts and crafts.

Frugality, utility, and hard-headed perseverence were the watchwords of the New England forefathers. Frugality governed men in their business and home expenditures. Utility was the criteria for a judgement given to the arts, crafts, and occupations. Only the useful was beautiful. Undue ornamentation in painting, sculpture, architecture, as well as literature was mistrusted. The early Puritan would have scorned, for example, the sermon adorned with many classical allusions.

1. Miller and Johnson, The Puritans, p. 393.

2. Ibid., p. 393.

Sermons were to be plainly written with one end in view--utility. They dealt with practical, everyday concerns, were organized simply, and clearly, and served to guide men through life. In these ideals of conduct the Puritan never faltered, but strove to carry them out with unswerving determination.

The early New Englanders were plain men "engrossed with their spiritual welfare and with their thrilling pursuit of what they construed as the Christian ideal in faith and conduct."[1] Their whole existence was given over with single resolve to living a life of the highest excellence. Though they knew that absolute perfection was unattainable, they bent every energy to attain it. By "self-analysis, meditation, and incessant soul-searching to drive out sin from one strong-hold after another"[2] the Puritan strove to triumph.

The Puritans were realistic in their daily contacts. Their bodily wants demanded that they live among men as men. They recognized that the world was full of disease, deceit, death, and calamity; neverless, man must endeavor to gain victory over all by patience, understanding, and labor. He must keep his faith alive in God's wisdom as the prime mover even though he might not wholly understand the reasons for his misfortunes. All events come to pass for some logical reason in the natural order of things. Therefore, man must not give himself over to undue grief in trial, but must maintain a calm

1. Murdock, "The Puritan Tradition in American Literature," from Foerster, The Reinterpretation of American Literature, p. 100.

2. Miller and Johnson, The Puritans, p. 283.

and rational exterior and trust in the intelligence of the Lord.

The New England temperament consequently reveals reserve, a reluctance to display excessive feeling. Whether this characteristic is the consequence of lives hardened by a harsh climate in the battle for self-preservation, a determined resolve to outwit a cruel fate, or a deep faith in God's will, it seems to have been an excellent defense mechanism in an environment where human life was constantly threatened by disease, fire, famine, storm, and Indian attack.

Minds less able to cope with the rigors of a demanding Puritan philosophy of life reveal characteristics of the New England tradition which mark a degeneration of Puritan ideals. In the works of the local colorists, for example, the characters reflect the conventions of inherited Puritanism without its earlier vitality. Reserve in times of distress becomes repression of genuine feeling. Awareness of a Calvinistic, deterministic existance, without the forefathers' illuminating faith, produced narrow limited lives. Unswerving conviction as to the merit of their own way of thinking produced a stagnant and conservative social group because it would not invigorate itself with foreign elements. The Puritan habit "of probing into the soul degenerated into the 'New England conscience' --where it is apt to remain as a mere feeling that everything enjoyable is sinful."[1] Otherwise the preoccupation with self-analysis has sometimes produced the brooding conscience. Where "zeal and

1. Miller and Johnson, The Puritans, pp. 62-63.

enthusiasm"[1] have not been balanced with "control and wariness"[2] excessive emotionalism--evangelicalism has resulted. Where the rational superseded without an inner faith, as most often happened, a dry deterministic philosophy crushed the spirit.

It takes a "tough minded" individual, as William James labeled the Puritan[3] to combine the attributes of soul searching and earnest worldly endeavor. This the founders of New England did. Their lives are forceful examples of "practical idealism."[4]

Succeeding generations have been unable to sustain life upon such a high level of intensity, but certain attributes have persisted so that while it is difficult to label writing, conduct, or mental attitude as those of the New England tradition, yet it is possible as a result of study to point out strains of New England thought in the work of some of her outstanding writers.

We can recognize, for example, "New England's dynamic and vital spirit"[5] in the work of Emerson. His revolt "against dead form and system,"[6] and his belief "that every man has an inward and immediate

1. Ibid., p. 60.

2. Ibid., p. 60.

3. William James, The Varities of Religious Experience (New York, 1902).

4. Murdock, "The Puritan Tradition in American Literature," from Foerster, The Reinterpretation of American Literature, p. 105.

5. Wells, The American Way of Poetry, p. 120.

6. Murdock, "The Puritan Tradition in American Literature," from Foerster, The Reinterpretation of American Literature, p. 101.

access"[1] to God are positive extensions of the Puritan way of thinking. Thoreau's manly independence and his "one-man revolution"[2] reveal the individualistic character of New England. "The intensification of the entire family life through isolation and climatic hardship"[3] as drawn by Whittier in Snowbound is certainly of New England. His realistic description in that poem of the admixture of spiritualism, materialism, religious piety, and idealism is typical of New England's rural manners, speech, and Yankee characteristics is also in the New England tradition.

More examples could assuredly be cited but these are perhaps sufficient to illustrate the genuine middle class character of the New England tradition. In the attention its adherents have given to secular life colored by moral endeavor, they are typical of the average middle class American as one is portrayed and said to exist. In the New Englander's emphasis on hard work to attain material prosperity he has followed capitalistic ethics, which unchecked, might have resulted in greater divisions in our society, but which certainly began as a middle class movement.

1. Miller, "Jonathan Edwards to Emerson," p. 589.

2. Henry David Thoreau, Walden and Other Writings (New York, 1937).

3. Wells, The American Way of Poetry, p. 54.

Chapter V

INTERPRETATION OF NATURE

The early New Englander's interest in the natural world is apparent to even a casual reader of Puritan literature. Nature was to be studied, however, not as an end in itself, but as a reflexion of God's will. In fact, it was the duty of man to examine nature for the providences of God. We see this sentiment categorically expressed by the minister, John Cotton.

> "And this is the end and use of the knowledge of natural things, as they are established by God and embellished with so many excellent virtues: namely that from the knowledge of them, we mount to knowledge and admiration of God. Therefore the usefulness is not small, which knowledge of natural things, considered piously and prudently, carries to the mind of the pious."[1]

Nature represented "the works of God, symbolizing his transcendent beauty and at the same time his unimaginable power."[2] Through observation of nature the Puritans constantly renewed their faith in a supreme and omnipotent Deity. His goodness was evident in the regular ordering of the seasons, in the magnificent growth of trees, bushes, and flowers. His mystery filled the wilderness. His glory was revealed in the heavens. Just as the Bible was the Puritan's intellectual inspiration, nature was the source for his spiritual experience.

1. Miller, The New England Mind, p. 212.

2. Norman Foerster, Nature in American Literature (New York, 1923), p. 14.

Jonathan Edwards poetical expression is a delightful example of the Puritan's appreciation of nature:

> "When we behold the fragrant rose and lily, we see His love and purity. So the green trees and fields, and singing of birds are the emanation of his infinite joy and benignity. The easiness and naturalness of trees and vines are shadows of His beauty and loveliness. The crystal rivers and murmuring streams are the footsteps of His favor, grace, and beauty. When we behold the light and brightness of the sun, the golden edges of an evening cloud, or the beauteous bow, we behold the adumbrations of His glory and goodness; and in the blue sky His mildness and gentleness. There are also many things wherein we may behold His awful majesty: in the sun, in his strength, in comets, in thunder, in the hovering thunder-cloud, in rugged rocks, and the brows of mountains."[1]

This practice of discovering symbols of God's presence in nature is seen to pervade New England thought from the spirituality of Anne Bradstreet's poetry to the eccentric providences of the Mathers, and until the present day. To the orthodox Puritan, God was the Prime Mover of all in nature. "Not a Sparrow falls to the Ground without his Providence, and therefore not without his decree, the one being an infallible Effect of the other."[2]

The Puritans held that God's spirit is manifested in nature, but they never would have inferred with the Transcendentalists that nature itself was divine. "God was the father and nature was the child."[3] God permits man to receive glimpses of his will in

1. Quoted from a manuscript, Allen, Jonathan Edwards, pp. 355-356, from Foerster, Nature in American Literature, p. 15.

2. Increase Mather, A Discourse Concerning the Uncertainty of the Times of Men, "Man Knows Not His Time," (Boston, 1697), Miller and Johnson, The Puritans, p. 345.

3. Foerster, Nature in American Literature, p. 15.

the universe--in nature, but he himself is an entity above and separate from all nature.

In spite of this belief in the deep and distant mystery of the Lord, the Puritans felt that they could still gain an insight into morality by a faithful observation of nature. One had but to persevere in his study. John Cotton advises, "there are Numberless Lessons of Morality, which by the Help of the Analogy between the Natural and Spiritual World ... we may learn from them."[1] The correspondence between the natural world and the spiritual world was thus encouraged, and "the disposition to read sermons in brooks and morals in stones seems thereby to have become ingrained in the New England nature."[2]

Among the spiritual and philosophical poems of Anne Bradstreet we find many observations of nature. Although her formal poems are classical and imitative in style of the popular poetry of the day, the "Contemplations," a series of thirty-three seven line poems are fresh and original. The following is almost modern in its realistic observation of detail. The poem also exibits the author's tender love of nature "as a symbol of God's creative will."[3]

> "I heard the merry grashopper then sing,
> The black clad Cricket, bear a second part,
> They kept one tune, and plaid on the same string,
> Seeming to glory in their little Art.

1. Miller, The New England Mind, p. 213.

2. Ibid., p. 214.

3. Stovall, American Idealism, p. 25.

Shall Creatures abject, thus their voices raise?
And in their kind resound their makers praise:
Whilst I am mute, can warble forth no higher layes."[1]

Wordsworth's example and theory of poetry regarding nature influences the nature writers of the New England tradition from this time forward; the literature is still dominated, however, by Puritan thought. We see the Puritan awareness of God's presence in nature in the poetry of William Cullen Bryant, for example. His "A Forest Hymn"[2] contains numerous references to the revelation of the divine in nature: God has created the trees.

"Thou didst look down
Upon the naked earth, and, forthwith rose
All these fair ranks of trees."

God is not only the creator, but he is forever present everywhere. In almost Jonathan Edwards' words, Bryant reiterates the philosophy of the emanations of God.

"But thou art here--thou fill'st
The solitude. Thou art in the soft winds
That run along the summit of these trees
In music; thou art in the cooler breath
That from the inmost darkness of the place
Comes, scarcely felt;...
--Nature, here,
In the tranquility that thou dost love,
Enjoys thy presence."

By observation of nature, Bryant could, like the Puritan divines, learn spiritual and moral truths:

"Written on thy works I read
The lesson of thy own eternity.

1. The Works of Anne Bradstreet, ed. by John Harvard Ellis (New York, 1932), p. 373.

2. William Cullen Bryant, The Poetical Works of William Cullen Bryant (New York, 1929), pp. 79-82.

> Lo! all grow old and die—but see again,
> How on the faltering footsteps of decay
> Youth presses—"

It is interesting that Bryant seems almost to proclaim the divinity of nature, in reality Transcendental philosophy, in his reference to the "indwelling Life" of the "delicate forest flower." This philosophy he expressed as a boy in "Thanatopsis,"[1] Man is one with nature—"a brother to the insensible rock," he wrote with youthful imagination. In the more mature "Forest Hymn," however, the one brief mention of "indwelling Life" is construed Puritan-like as "A visible token of the upholding Love,"

Bryant returns to the sterner evidences of God's power in the universe and almost in the language of Cotton Mather's sermon, The Voice of the Glorious God in the Thunder[2] writes:

> "Oh, God! when thou
> Dost scare the world with tempests, set on fire
> The heavens with falling thunderbolts, or fill,
> With all the waters of the firmament,
> The swift dark whirlwind that uproots the woods
> And drowns the villages; ...
> who forgets not, at the sight
> Of these tremendous tokens of thy power,
> His pride, and lays his strifes and follies by?"

The poet asks to be spared the "sterner aspects" of God's face and to see only the Lord's "milder majesty" and so to "conform the order of life" to the "beautiful order" of God's works.

Thus we can see that Puritan thought is alive in American Literature for almost two hundred years. From John Cotton's deep interest in nature as a revelation of God's will—from the tender

1. Ibid., pp. 21-23.

2. Cotton Mather, Magnalia Christi Americana, Vol. II (Hartford, 1853), pp. 363-372.

poetic sentiments of Anne Bradstreet to the earnest endeavors of William Cullen Bryant we can trace the awareness that nature reveals the majesty and glory of God. Nature is the spring from which morality flows. Nature is a symbol of divine attributes.

From the Puritan concept of the emanation of divinity in nature it is only a step further to proclaiming with William Ellery Channing the divinity of man. In the sermon, "Likeness to God," of this forerunner of Transcendentalism we can hear an echo of both Jonathan Edwards and Emerson.

> "The truth is, that the union between the Creator and the creature surpasses all other bonds in strength and intimacy. He penetrates all things and delights to irradiate all with his glory. Nature, in all its lowest and inanimate forms, is pervaded by his power; and when quickened by the mysterious property of life, how wonderfully does it show forth the perfections of its Author! How much of God may be seen in the structure of a single leaf, which though so frail as to tremble in every wind, yet holds connexions and living communications with the earth, the air, the clouds, and the distant sun, and through these sympathies with the universe, is itself a revelation of an omnipotent mind! God delights to diffuse himself everywhere. Through his energy, unconscious matter clothes itself with proportions, powers, and beauties, which reflect his wisdom and love. How much more must he delight to frame conscious and happy recipients of his perfections, in whom his wisdom and love may substantially dwell, with whom he may form spiritual ties."[1]

In his sermon, as in the writings of Jonathan Edwards, nature is still the recipient of divine radiance. Channing, however, here enlarges the concept of nature to include human nature. Emerson, in this same vein, envisages all nature and man as one. He preaches the Transcendental doctrine of the universal mind and expounds the theory of the Over-Soul.

1. Channing, Works, Vol. III, pp. 238-239.

Emerson pictures humanity "Embosomed for a season in nature, whose floods of life stream around and through us."[1] Personally and directly he is one with the universe and God:

> "Standing on the bare ground--my head bathed by the blithe air and uplifted into infinite space,--all mean egotism vanishes. I am become a transparent eyeball; I am nothing; I see all; the currents of the Universal Being circulate through me; I am part or parcel of God."[2]

This was a grossly unorthodox concept, for although the Puritans admitted the divine in the world, they would not go so far as to say that man or nature was divine. God was in the world but in an unexplainable and mysterious way according to Puritan theology. A Puritan divine declared, "the Lord fills both heaven and earth, yet He is not in the world as the soul is in the body 'but in an incomprehensible manner which we cannot express to you'."[3] To admit the divinity of man and nature as the Transcendentalists did, would be to place too great an emphasis on man and to obscure an omnipotent God.

Along with the new concepts, Emerson still expounded the ideas set forth by the New Englanders in preceding generations. In the same essay on "Nature" he preached that "visible nature must have a spiritual and moral side."[4] By reflecting on nature we can perceive

1. Emerson, Works, Vol. I, "Nature," Introduction.

2. Emerson, Works, Vol. I, p. 10.

3. Quoted from John Preston, Life Eternal (London, 1631, pt. II) with additions by Miller in "Jonathan Edwards to Emerson," p. 598.

4. Emerson, Works, Vol. I, p. 35.

the moral law. Emerson maintained that "the moral law lies at the center of nature and radiates to the circumference. It is the pith and marrow of every substance, every relation, and every process. All things with which we deal, preach to us."[1]

Nature for Emerson, just as for his Puritan ancestors, revealed universal truths. "Who looks upon a river in a meditative hour and is not reminded of the flux of all things? Throw a stone into the stream, and all the circles that propagate themselves are the beautiful type of all experience."[2]

We can perhaps see best the influence of nature on the New England mind in the works of Henry David Thoreau. His very language partakes of the flavor of nature. So intimate was his knowledge and understanding of natural things that his ideas about life are expressed in the terms one would use to relate an operation of the laws of nature. "Thoreau did not merely write verses to the evanescent beauties of the out-of-doors and stroll placidly through the fields after a stuffy day in the study; he made it his business to know everything that he could about nature from personal observation."[3] In this empirical tendency Thoreau is reminiscent of the rational Puritan.

Because Thoreau believed that nature offered inspiration for

1. Ibid., p. 41.

2. Ibid., pp. 26-27.

3. Brooks Atkinson, "Introduction" from Thoreau, Walden and Other Writings of Henry David Thoreau, p. XV.

the good and pure life, he tried always "to live in spiritual harmony with the great laws of nature."[1] Nature, to Thoreau, as to the other Transcendentalists was a visible evidence of God. The "circulations of God" were everywhere in the "flowing sail, the running stream, the waving tree, the roving wind."[2] To learn the magnificent workings of nature was to worship God.

Thoreau used the language of nature in order to urge men to live according to the moral law. To live a life of purity was to be most God-like. "Man flows at once to God when the channel of purity is open," he wrote.[3] "Chastity is the flowering of man; and what are called Genius, Heroism, Holiness, and the like are but various fruits which succeed it."[4]

Nature inspired Thoreau to the better life. "A single gentle rain makes the grass many shades greener. So our prospects brighten on the influx of better thoughts."[5] "Each day in the tranquil and beneficent breath of the morning" produces "a return to goodness" and causes "the love of virtue and the hatred of vice."[6] Thoreau passed his optimism on to others. "The life in us is like the water

1. Ibid., XIV.

2. Odell Shepard, ed., The Heart of Thoreau's Journals (Cambridge, 1927), Dec. 29, 1841, p. 41.

3. Thoreau, Walden, p. 197.

4. Ibid., p. 197.

5. Ibid., p. 280.

6. Ibid., p. 281.

in the river. It may rise this year higher than man has ever known it, and flood the parched uplands; even this maybe the eventful year, which will drown out all our muskrats."[1]

In Thoreau's life and work we can recognize all shades of the New Englander's interest in nature. The optimism and bouyancy which Thoreau exibits as a result of his kinship with nature indicates that he shares with the Transcendentalists in the revitalizing of the New England tradition. In the uniting of God, man, and nature, Thoreau expressed the view of the extreme leftists' individualistic tendency to adopt a "philosophy of innate direct intuitions."[2] The Puritans would have thought this a "much too Platonic"[3] concept. On the other hand in Thoreau's effort to find God and the good life in nature, and the testing of his divinity by experience, Thoreau was typical of the pragmatic Yankee-Puritan, a rugged New Englander.

Another outstanding literary representative of New England was John Greenleaf Whittier, a member of the Quaker faith. A critic describes Whittier as "one of the most genuine products of the folk culture of Protestant New England."[4] The religious feeling so characteristic of those who find a place in the New England tradition pervades his poetry whether it is concerned with political issues, home-life, or nature.

1. Ibid., p. 296.

2. Miller, The New England Mind, p. 278.

3. Ibid., p. 279.

4. Wells, The American Way of Poetry, p. 48.

Nature was to Whittier both a "relief from the world," and "a positive enjoyment in the field of beauty,"[1] In his poetry we find a genuine love of the country side which grew from his intimate acquaintance with rural areas. This excerpt from "The Last Walk in Autumn"[2] reveals his love for New England.

"Then ask not why to these bleak hills
I cling, as clings the tufted moss,
To bear the winter's lingering chills,
The mocking spring's perpetual loss.
I dream of lands where summer smiles,
And soft winds blow from spicy isles,
But scarce would Ceylon's breath of flowers
be sweet,
Could I not feel thy soil, New England, at my feet!"

In the same poem, the New Englander's character is revealed in a metaphor employing the New England climate and religious faith for impetous to achievement.

"Better to stem with heart and hand
The roaring tide of life, than lie,
Unmindful, on its flowery strand,
Of God's occasions drifting by!
Better with naked nerve to bear
The needles of this goading air,
Than, in the lap of sensual ease, forego
The godlike power to do, the godlike aim to know."

Whittier's poetic power in portraying New England's scenes is almost contemporary in its simplicity and realism. He comes nearer to Frost than any of the New England poets in a rejection of formal, literary speech, and an adoption of the unadorned rustic New Englander's expression.

1. Horace E. Scudder, ed., The Complete Works of John Greenleaf Whittier (Boston, 1894), Biographical Sketch, p. XVI.

2. Ibid., pp. 150-153.

The master, however, in expressing the economical tone of contemporary rural New England is Robert Frost. Like Thoreau, Frost's kinship with the country is not that of an observer, but of one to whom nature is the raw material of his trade. Frost does not, however, like the Transcendentalist natural-philosopher-poet, sing the joyous optimistic unity of his being in nature. Instead, Frost is concerned with nature as "man's source and environment" and its "influence upon him."[1] In his portrayal Frost conveys a "deep sense of a tremendous push and pull of nature upon man"[2] and simultaneously upon himself.

Frost does not simply describe man in his contact with nature, but he writes as he experiences: apple-picking, mowing, or chopping wood. He takes the reader along as he does his work. Nor is his account simply a surface telling. Each act is also significant for its symbol of a glimpse into the eternal mystery of life. In his use of nature as a medium of personal intuitive revelation, Frost is carrying on in the New England tradition.

1. J. McBride Dabbs, "In the Dark Woods," Yale Review Vol. 23:3, Spring, 1934, pp. 514-520. Quoted from Richard Thornton, ed., Recognition of Robert Frost (New York, 1937), p. 123.

2. Ibid., p. 123.

Part II

ROBERT FROST'S CONTRIBUTION to the NEW ENGLAND TRADITION

Chapter I

MAN and His RELATIONS on EARTH and in HEAVEN

Robert Frost is true to New England's landscape, climate, history, morality, and tongue. He has absorbed the manners and way of thinking from an inspiring source--the New England tradition--and reveals that influence in a contemporary setting. Frost is a realist. He writes of men and things as they are. He sees clearly the environment about him, and since this is New England, that region is his raw material.

This does not signify that Frost is a photographic realist. He employes the artist's privilege of choosing his media, characters, and situation. Since he is a poet, Frost sees vividly and dramatically. In true Yankee Puritan empirical fashion he writes in this way of his or his neighbors' experiences.

Experience. Frost's experience at mowing is the inspiration for a poem. "Mowing"[1] tells of a young man, Frost, himself, who

1. Robert Frost, The Poems of Robert Frost (New York, 1946), Modern Library, p. 20.

"takes up life simply with the small tasks."[1] He finds satisfaction in his work and through his labor--"his long scythe whispering to the ground"--an answer to his quest: "The fact is the sweetest dream that labor knows." Frost's conclusion is that we can test our lives pragmatically.

Another poem based on experience might well have been inspired by Thoreau's attitude:

> "I am amused to see from my window here how busily man has divided and staked off his domain. God must smile at his puny fences running thither everywhere over the land."[2]

Frost and his neighbor mend the wall that separates their farms.[3] This gives the poet an opportunity to question the concept that "Good fences make good neighbors." Frost does not object to his neighbor's idea, nor does he want him to change his way of thinking. If the neighbor did accept a different view, Frost had "rather He said it for himself," but the poet questions the need for a useless wall which even nature destroys. Frost challenges, too, the "literal-minded lover of tradition"[4]--this neighbor--who seems to him to be moving "in darkness" because he will not examine "his father's saying: ...Good fences make good neighbors."

When we seek Robert Frost he is usually working, but he will

1. Subheading of poem in A Boy's Will, 1913.

2. Shepard, The Heart of Thoreau's Journals, p. 43 (Feb. 20, 1842).

3. Frost, "Mending Wall," Poems, p. 35.

4. Louis Untermyer, ed., Modern America Poetry, (New York, 1930), p. 254.

always when "there is a time to talk"[1] stop to exchange ideas. In the words of the poet:

> "When a friend calls to me from the road
> . . . . . .
> I thrust my hoe in the mellow ground,
> Blade-end up and five feet tall,
> And plod: I go up to the stone wall
> For a friendly visit."

Frost invites us to come along with him as he goes about his work so that the reader becomes a co-worker in planting, apple picking, or going for water. This is, perhaps, one of his greatest appeals--the gift of being able to make the reader share in his experience.

Realism Aside from the purely personal poems, Frost has painted verbal pictures with revealing clarity--"unimpassioned vignettes of New England life."[2] They are by no means pleasing or romantic pictures. Frost's people are real, living and breathing people caught in a dramatic moment of intensity. Their lives reveal the background "of New England itself with its hard hills and harder certainties, its repressions, its cold humor and inverted tendencies."[3]

Frost gives us a "series of dramatic portraits of New England farm folk"[4] oppressed by the loneliness and isolation of the rural

1. Frost, Poems, "A Time to Talk," p. 133.

2. Percy Holmes Boynton, A History of American Literature (Boston, 1919), p. 468.

3. Untermeyer, American Poetry Since 1900, p. 20.

4. John Farrar, ed., The Literary Spotlight (New York, 1924), p. 213.

country. They are a representation of the decaying, inbred civilization of a declining New England, of the manners of a now worn out tradition; but in so far as the people exhibit universal human traits, Frost portrays "the lives of isolated and lonely people wherever in the world they may be."[1]

For example Frost tells of "An Old Man's Winter Night"[2]--an old man who was "a light to no one but himself." The man, with characteristic forgetfulness of old age had "clomped" down to the cellar for something, but had forgotten what it was he came for. "He stood with the barrels round him--at a loss," then resigning himself, he "clomped" off again up-stairs to sleep by the stove while the "thin frost" gathered "on the pane" in his empty rooms."

> "The log that shifted with a jolt
> Once in the stove, disturbed him and he shifted,
> And eased his heavy breathing, but still slept."

Carl Van Doren says appropriately that this poem represents the "loneliness of New England winters, the pathos of empty houses, the desolation of old age, the cruelty of the cold."[3]

Then there is the character study of Silas, the "worn-out incompetent"[4] hired hand who returns to the only "home" he has ever known to die.[5] We never see him in the poem, but in this realistic drama,

1. Ibid.
2. Frost, Poems, pp. 121-122.
3. Carl Van Doren, Many Minds (New York, 1924), p. 61.
4. Untermeyer, American Poetry Since 1900, p. 23.
5. Frost, "The Death of the Hired Man," Poems, pp. 37-44.

through the conversation of Mary and Warren, the farm folk, Silas becomes as plain as if he lived his life before our eyes.

Here as in Frost's other poems man is accorded dignity and respect for his effort and labor, no matter how insignificant that labor might be. "Silas' one accomplishment" was building a good load of hay. Now, when he has

> "nothing to look backward to with pride
> And nothing to look forward to with hope"

his mind wanders back to the time "four years since" when he and Harold Wilson worked at haying together. Harold had "finished school" and was "teaching at his college," but he wanted Warren to hire the boy back so that they could both "lay the farm as smooth." Silas kept thinking of "good arguments he might have used" in his conversations with the young scholar--a portrayal of a universal human failing, and in this case a pathetic one. Silas wanted "another chance to teach the boy how to build a load of hay" so that "he'd be some good perhaps to someone in the world" and not "the fool of books." So Silas falls asleep and dies. Although he is "worthless" in the eyes of the small world he lived in, he does not appear so in the treatment Frost accords him.

The characters of the poem "Snow,"[1] a trialogue, come to life in a highly dramatic presentation filled with suspense to the last. Frost presents Mr. and Mrs. Cole at whose isolated farm house, the minister, Meserve, stops in order to take a short rest before he

1. Frost, Poems, pp. 158-174.

ventures home in the snow storm. Reserve is revealed to be an imaginative egocentric individualist, generally misunderstood by the people and hated and feared somewhat by the Coles. He is robust, courageous, and God inspired in a way that is strange to the prosaic and practical Coles, but he is reminiscent, perhaps, of an imagined Puritan divine.

In the portrayal of his characters Frost carries on in the realistic tradition of the New England local colorists, instead of in the cheerful and optimistic vein of Emerson, Lowell, and Whittier. Frost is, however, also indebted to an earlier writer, Hawthorne. We can see a correlation between Hawthorne's psychological explorations of the soul and Frost's revelations of "inner states."[1]

More particularly we can recognize Hawthorne's influence when Frost "tells of twisted lives, families rotting like the houses they hide in, and old hates and superstitions, relics of the past housed in the dusty attics of the mind."[2] We see in Frost's austere portrayals both a kinship with Hawthorne's power as a psycho-analyst, and the local colorists' technique without their sentimental or romantic overtones. Frost's characters, like Mrs. Freeman's, sometimes live lives "distorted in spirit by the weight of a hidden burden."[3] Their characters represent, as one author states, "the stagnant waters"

1. Foster, "Robert Frost," p. 374.

2. Stovall, American Idealism, p. 180.

3. A. Newcomer, A. Andrews, H. Hall, Three Centuries of American Poetry and Prose (Chicago, 1929), p. 766.

of the once "vital tide of Puritanism."[1]

Consider the "bleakness of human life"[2] represented in "A Servant to Servants"[3] Here we have the portrayal of a "spiritually and mentally undernourished" farm wife, a woman whose feelings have been deadened by hard work, who had once drifted into insanity and who was afraid of becoming insane again. Yet, caught in the web of determinism, she maintains, since she can "see no way out but through"

> "I suppose I've got to go the road I'm going:
> Other folks have to, and why shouldn't I?"

"The Hill Wife"[4] is another revelation of how "by almost imperceptible degrees, a barren environment will throw the mind back upon itself until as happened so often in the early days in New England, it became unsettled."[5] A wife on a lonely farm becomes oppressed, shows symptoms of neurosis, and finally, possessed by fear, disappears.

In another poem--a skillful dramatic portrayal--"The Fear"[6] a woman who has apparently left her husband to live with another man

1. Ibid.

2. Halford E. Luccock, Contemporary American Literature and Religion (Chicago, 1934), p. 141.

3. Frost, Poems, pp. 74-79.

4. Ibid., pp. 137-140.

5. William S. Braithwaite, ed., Anthology of Magazine Verse for 1926 (Boston, 1926), p. 18.

6. Frost, Poems, pp. 107-111.

sees a man's face in the dark and thinks it is the husband she had left. She determines that "If the time's come to face it," that she alone would be "the one to put it the right way." The man turns out to be not her husband, but a visitor in the neighborhood out walking with a child. In her relief, the woman is over-come and faints. We perceive that she has lived her life in an environment where the individual was held strictly accountable for her missteps. Conscious of the immorality of her existence, she permits anxiety to drain away "whatever satisfaction the following of desire might have brought."[1]

This is to cite just a few of the excellent studies of men and women whose lives bear the stamp of austerity, repression, and depravity of a now devitalized Puritan determinism. However much Frost might sympathize with the people he writes about, though, he does "not wish to alter their lives."[2] He is not a reformer, but a keen analyist of conditions as they are.

No matter how grim the lives of his characters must seem to us, to Frost and the people of New England they do not appear so. To quote Dorothy Canfield Fisher, "To us his poetry seems the very distillation of human life as we know it, with its strong aromatic savor of both bitterness and pungent satisfactions."[3] Thus, if Frost represents the truth to the New Englander's point of view, what more

1. Amy Lowell, Tendencies in Modern American Poetry (Boston, 1917), p. 108.

2. Spiller, Literary History of the United States, p. 1190.

3. Dorothy Canfield Fisher, "Robert Frost's Hilltop House in Vermont," The Bookman, Vol. 64:4, pp. 403-403, from Thornton., Recognition of Robert Frost, p. 106.

is there to add? In accordance with early Puritan belief, man was to face the realities of life and not avoid them. This concept has persisted through the years to this day. Thoreau, one of the most realistic of New Englanders, writes:

> "I wanted to live deep and suck out all the marrow of life, to live so sturdily and Spartan-like as to put to rout all that was not life ... to drive life into a corner, and reduce it to its lowest terms, and, if it proved to be mean, why then to get the whole and genuine meaness of it and publish its meaness to the world;"[1]

The fact that Thoreau, Emerson, the other Transcendentalists, in fact, all those of the early nineteenth century found life at times "sublime"[2] marks the difference between Frost's representations and the Transcendentalists' cheerful outlook. The optimists, too, however, in Yankee fashion, aimed to know life "by experience."[3] It is their empirical tendency that Frost inherits--the faculty of testing life by experience, by facing its realities.

Man Against Nature Seemingly, twentieth century rural New England, drained of vitality, the victim of a declining economy, and peopled by the "left-overs of the old stock"[4] is not the smiling land of Emerson and Thoreau. Frost is keenly aware of the limitations of this environment and of human capacity. He knows intimately his surroundings and their effect upon the lives of his people. As Amy Lowell

1. Thoreau, Walden, pp. 81 and 82.

2. Ibid., p. 82.

3. Ibid., p. 82.

4. Amy Lowell, Tendencies, p. 107.

testified:

> "upon his heart are the articulate outlines of rock
> and hemlock, the angular sharpness of stone walls
> and white clapboarded houses against a hard blue sky."[1]

However, it is important to observe that in spite of the fact that Frost sees humanity, Puritan-like, limited by the natural world, time, pre-ordained fate, death, and frail human nature, man, somehow, because he is a thinking being, succeeds in over-powering or outwitting nature by sheer persistence. Of course the persistence which ultimately succeeds is also a Puritan characteristic.

Man, according to Frost, is a part of the stream and a contrary something too. He is the "white wave" which runs counter to the current in the brook.[2] In the river of life he is that which struggles upstream "against the eternal drift of things to emptiness."[3] In the words of the metaphysical poets of "West-Running Brook":

> "Speaking of contraries, see how the brook
> In that white wave runs counter to itself.
> It is from that in water we were from
> Long, long before we were from any creature."

--A curious statement of the theory of Darwinian evolution.

In this next section, which reveals the Puritan awareness of man's struggle against the elements, we detect amazingly enough a Transcendental identification of human life with nature. The brook itself

1. Ibid., p. 104.

2. Frost, "West-Running Brook," Poems, pp. 284-287.

3. Foster, "Robert Frost," p. 377.

is "life and love." The wave

> "flows beside us in this water brook,
> But it flows over us. It flows between us
> To separate us for a panic moment.
> It flows between us, over us, and with us.
> And it is time, strength, tone, light, life and love--"

We can imagine the slow but persistent rise of civilization in Frost's description of the progress of the wave:

> "It has this throwing backward on itself
> So that the fall of most of it is always
> Raising a little, sending up a little."

If we were to plot progress on a chart, we would find: It is the movement which does not go down into the "stream of everything that runs away," but the contrary independent spirit which finally is judged to have made man rise a little, to have brought man a little nearer to God. Frost describes the cycle of life:

> "Our life runs down in sending up the clock.
> The brook runs down in sending up our life.
> The sun runs down in sending up the brook.
> And there is something sending up the sun.
> It is this backward motion toward the source,
> Against the stream, that most we see ourselves in,
> The tribute of the current to the source."

The analysis of Mr. Stovall seems to interpret keenly the meaning of the last three lines above. Frost tells us that "the mind shows its kinship to God by the exercise of an independent will that counteracts the stream from which it rises and does not follow that stream into the abyss."[1] In this analysis Frost, like Emerson and Channing, sees rational, thinking man as the greatest tribute to God.

1. Stovall, American Idealism, p. 184.

Nature tries man in "On A Tree Fallen Across the Road."[1]

"The tree the tempest with a crash of wood
Throws down in front of us is not to bar
Our passage to our journey's end for good
But just to ask us who we think we are
Insisting always on our own way so."

Nature forces man to stop and evaluate his existence, but she cannot obstruct man from his final goal.

"And yet she knows obstruction is in vain:
We will not be put off the final goal
We have it hidden in us to attain."

Frost recognizes the "fundamental moral energy in human life"[2] and, like Emerson, believes in "man's infinite possibilities."[3]

Man may struggle in the winter storm through the "dark woods" yet precedent tells him, Frost says poetically in a Thoreauian vein:

"I know that winter death has never tried
The earth but it has failed:"[4]

Yet he is aware of the cruelty of winter:

"the snow may heap
In long storms an undrifted four feet deep
As measured against maple, birch, and oak,"

Even so, the winter will pass and man will triumph.

If we need more proof of the inevitable victory of man over nature, Frost tells us:

1. Frost, Poems, p. 256.

2. L. Lewishon, Expression in America (New York, 1932), p. 499.

3. Louis Untermeyer, "Our Singing Faith," Saturday Review of Literature, VII, January 17, 1931, p. 330.

4. Frost, "The Onset," Poems, p. 241.

"There is much in nature against us. But we forget:
Take nature altogether since time began,
Including human nature, in peace and war,
And it must be a little more in favor of man
Say a fraction of one per cent at the very least,"[1]

Romanticism A realization of the limitations of human achievement has given Frost a deep sympathy with those tried by the details of daily living. He expressed this sympathy subjectively, romantically even, in "Birches,"[2] desiring not to escape from life, but to retreat for a while.

"So was I once myself a swinger of birches.
And so I dream of going back to be.
It's when I'm weary of considerations,
And life is too much like a pathless wood
Where your face burns and tickles with the cobwebs
Broken across it, and one eye is weeping
From a twig's having lashed across it open.
I'd like to get away from earth awhile
And then come back to it and begin over.
May no fate willfully misunderstand me
And half grant what I wish and snatch me away
Not to return. Earth's the right place for love:
I don't know where it's likely to go better.
I'd like to go by climbing a birch tree,
And climb black branches up a snow-white trunk
Toward heaven, till the tree could bear no more,
But dripped its top and set me down again.
That would be good both going and coming back.
One could do worse than be a swinger of birches."

We see this same sentiment expressed romantically by Thoreau:

"You think that I am impoverishing myself by withdrawing from men, but in my solitude I have woven for myself a silken web or chrysalis, and nymph-like, shall ere long burst forth a more perfect creature, fitted for a higher society."[3]

1. Frost, "Our Hold On the Planet," Poems, p. 401.

2. Frost, Poems, pp. 127-129.

3. Shepard, The Heart of Thoreau's Journals, p. 263, (Feb. 8, 1857).

Frost's sympathetic treatment and consequently romantic overtones encompass also the young, the small, the frightened and lonely. Even though the poems are written in a realistic and clear style, we see the poet's heart go out to the lost and helpless. "The Runaway"[1] might be cited as a good example. Frost describes a young frightened colt running in the snow, and remarks,

> "'He's running away.
> I doubt if even his mother could tell him, "Sakes,
> It's only the weather." He'd think she didn't know!
> Where is his mother? He can't be out alone.'"

If we were to trace this romantic strain in the New England tradition, we could find many examples in both prose and poetry, inspired, however, not by the early vigorous New Englanders, but by the English Romanticists. Here is an observation by Thoreau of a rabbit that lived under his Walden hut in winter.

> "One evening one [rabbit] sat by my door
> two paces from me, at first trembling with
> fear, yet unwilling to move; a poor wee thing,
> lean and bony, with ragged ears and sharp nose,
> scant tail and slender paws. It looked as if
> Nature no longer contained the breed of nobler
> bloods, but stood on her toes. Its large eyes
> appeared young and unhealthy, almost dropsical.
> I took a step, and lo, away it scud with an e-
> lastic spring over the snow-crust, straighten-
> ing its body and its limbs into graceful length,
> and soon put the forest between me and itself,—
> the wild free venison, asserting its vigor and
> the dignity of Nature."[2]

We can see in Thoreau's writing a source for Frost's realistic perception as well as his sympathetic treatment.

1. Frost, Poems, p. 236.

2. Thoreau, Walden, p. 251.

Idealism The poet of keen sensibility is almost always an idealist. Frost is an idealist in outlook. He is an idealist with regard to man's achievement on earth. In the words of Frost, when man ultimately "lies pointed" as he "plowed the dust" should we judge him by his "mark," by the fact that man did or did not hit the "target? Frost maintains in the poem, "A Soldier,"[1] that man should be judged by his aim and ideals:

> "Our missiles always make too short an arc.
> They fall, they rip the grass, they intersect
> The curve of earth, and striking, break their own;
> They make us cringe for metal-point on stone.
> But this we know, the obstacle that checked
> And tripped the body, shot the spirit on
> Further than target ever showed or shone."

Search for Truth What, then, should be man's ideal? What is truth and how can man perceive it? Frost shows us that "truth is elusive" and comes to us in rare moments by "revelation."[2] He writes:

> "Once, when trying with chin against a well-curb,
> I discerned, as I thought, beyond the picture
> [of himself in the water]
> Through the picture, a something white, uncertain,
> Something more of the depths--and then I lost it.
> . . . . . .
> What was that whiteness?
> Truth? A pebble of quartz? For once, then, something."[3]

1. Frost, Poems, p. 290.

2. Stovall, American Idealism, p. 181.

3. Frost, "For Once, Then, Something," Poems, p. 239.

He thinks he catches a glimpse of truth in the well, but he cannot be sure. This experience is probably not unlike the Puritan's feeling in receiving a transmission of God's grace. In a moment the individual thinks he sees clearly, he feels that he perceives the ultimate truth.

Again Frost tells in "A Passing Glimpse"[1] that man perceives clearly only in short glimpses:

> "I often see flowers from a passing car
> That are gone before I can tell what they are,"

Man desires to know more:

> "I want to get out of the train and go back
> To see what they were beside the track,"

Man rationalizes:

> "I name all the flowers I am sure they weren't:
> Not fireweed loving where woods have burnt--
>
> Not blue bells gracing a tunnel mouth--
> Not lupine living on sand and drouth."

Then man wonders:

> "Was something brushed across my mind
> That no one on earth will ever find?"

He concludes in Puritan vein:

> "Heaven gives its glimpses only to those
> Not in position to look too close."

God, through his providences, gives mankind moments of wisdom. Man, however, must not presume to know that which is hidden by God. Man is depraved, and must be satisfied with only flashes of eternal truth.

It is for this reason that Frost believes in the work-ability of intuition. He maintains, "Calculation is usually no part in the first

1. Frost, Poems, p. 269.

step in any walk."[1] The heart intuitively decides as in the poem "The Road Not Taken"[2] written about his friend Edward Thomas, the English poet.

Frost takes "A Serious Step"[3]--buying a house--very lightly. He and his wife apparently bought a house with little thought that it would be their dwelling place for many years, and the home of their family for hundreds of years more. The poet feels that the message from the heart tells us immediately what recourse to take. In this concept Frost is leaning toward the left in Puritan thought. He reveals strangely enough the extreme Antinominian strain of thought --the philosophy which recognized decisions formed by "inner dictates."

Man and Heaven Although Frost is a member of no established church, he has absorbed the Protestant religious concepts of New England. Mr. Loggins quotes Frost to indicate that the poet feels the belief in God to be central in all human existence: "The self belief, the love belief, and the art belief, are all related to God belief."[4]

An analysis of Frost's "The Peaceful Shepherd"[5] will reveal that

1. Frost, Introduction, "The Constant Symbol," Poems, p. XVIII.
2. Frost, Poems, p. 117.
3. Frost, "A Serious Step Lightly Taken," Poems, pp. 429-430.
4. Vernon Loggins, I Hear America (New York, 1937), p. 204.
5. Frost, Poems, p. 277.

he is not a believer in blind obedience to an omnipotent diety, but rather an adherent of William Ellery Channing's liberal doctrines. Frost writes:

> "If heaven were to do again,
> And on the pasture bars,
> I leaned to line the figures in
> Between the dotted stars,
>
> I should be tempted to forget,
> I fear the Crown of Rule,
> The Scales of Trade, the Cross of Faith,
> As hardly worth renewal.
>
> For these have governed in our lives,
> And see how men have warred.
> The Cross, the Crown, the Scales may all
> As well have been the Sword."

The Crown of Rule--dogma--The Scales of Trade--materialism, business, commerce--and The Cross of Faith--tyranny in the name of Jesus --have governed the lives of men and caused war instead of the peace mankind hopes for.

Dogma and materialism have always been preached against in New England. The image of the Cross of Faith might just as well have been inspired by the sermon, "Unitarian Christianity Most Favorable to Piety"[1] by William Ellery Channing. It is here that the Unitarian minister expounds Unitarian doctrine and criticizes the Trinitarian sects for their adherence to a bloody faith which magnifies the role of Jesus as a martyr. It is almost necessary to see Channing's vivid description of the Trinitarian's worship of Jesus on the cross compared to the worship by humanity of a man on a gallows to appreciate

1. Channing, Works, Vol. III, p. 191.

Frost's condemnation of the "Cross of Faith."

This does not mean that Frost is an atheist. His faith in God is seemingly an ardent one. To quote him again: "God is that which a man is sure cares, and will save him, no matter how many times or how completely he has failed. The belief in God is a relationship you enter into with Him to bring about the future."[1] Here Frost expresses both the Puritan convenant concept of man's relationship with God, and the Unitarian view of a paternal God.

The poet reveals another phase of Puritan thought in the poem, "The Lovely Shall Be Choosers."[2] Here he writes of the predestination of human existence. In the poem the events in a woman's life have been predetermined, although within the pattern of her fate she is permitted free will. This is, undoubtedly, a hard concept for moderns to grasp, but it was not only clear, but rational and intelligent to the early Puritans. Predestination involved an ardent belief in a God directed world. Man's free will within this framework enabled him to live rationally within his natural limitations.

Still another concept of Protestant thought is analyzed in dramatic form by Frost in "A Masque of Reason,"[3] a comedy, whose characters are God, a very human person who looks like Blake's picture of him, Job, the bible character, his wife, Thyatira, a shrewish woman,

1. Loggins, I Hear America, p. 204.

2. Frost, Poems, pp. 281-283.

3. Robert Frost, A Masque of Reason(New York, 1945).

interested in "witch-women's rights," and the Devil.

In this poem Frost attempts to

> "Establish once for all the principle
> There's no connection man can reason out
> Between his just deserts and what he gets.
> Virtue may fail and wickedness succeed."[1]

With reference to this Frost states in explanation, "that mercy is to the undeserving. Only justice is to the deserving."[2] Presumably Job, since he was deserving, was treated justly at the end of his trial. However, still unsatisfied, Job asks God why he tortured him so. God answers that:

> "Society can never think things out:--
> It has to see them acted out by actors,
> Devoted actors at a sacrifice--"[3]

Job is still not satisfied and in rationalizing attempts to clarify the Puritan doctrine of man's will and reason in the scheme of predestination.

We can, however, see Frost's purpose in writing the poem during the World War II years in the statement he puts into the words of God. He--God

> "Found out the discipline man needed most
> Was to learn his submission to unreason;
> And that for man's own sake as well as mine,
> So he won't find it hard to take his orders
> From his inferiors in intelligence
> In peace and war--especially in war."[4]

1. Ibid., p. 4.

2. Reginald L. Cook, "Robert Frost's Asides on His Poetry," American Literature, No. XIX, 1947-48, p. 355.

3. Frost, A Masque of Reason, p. 12.

4. Ibid., p. 12.

To conclude the analysis of Robert Frost's concepts regarding man on earth and in heaven, we can choose the poem that is perhaps the best total demonstration of his art, method, and ideas. This is, in my opinion, "After Apple Picking."[1] In order to study thoughtfully this poem it is quoted here for reference:

My long two pointed ladder's sticking through a tree
Toward heaven still,
And there's a 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.
I cannot rub the strangeness from my sight
I got from looking through a pane of glass
I skimmed this morning from the drinking trough
And held against the world of hoary grass.
It melted, and I let it fall and break.
But I was well
Upon my way to sleep before it fell,
And I could tell
What form my dreaming was about to take.
Magnified apples appear and disappear,
Stem end and blossom end,
And every fleck of russet showing clear.
My instep arch not only keeps the ache,
It keeps the pressure of a ladder-round.
I feel the ladder sway as the boughs bend.
And I keep hearing from the cellar bin
The rumbling sound
Of load on load of apples coming in.
For I have had too much
Of apple-picking: I am overtired
Of the great harvest I myself desired.
There were ten thousand thousand fruit to touch,
Cherish in hand, lift down, and not let fall.
For all
That struck the earth,
No matter if not bruised or spiked with stubble,
Went surely to the cider-apple heap
As of no worth.

1. Frost, Poems, pp. 80-81.

One can see what will trouble
This sleep of mine, whatever sleep it is.
Were he not gone,
The woodchuck could say whether it's like his
Long sleep, as I describe its coming on,
Or just some human sleep.

At first reading the poem seems plain enough: a man is on a ladder picking apples.[1] He becomes sleepy, feels a certain "strangeness" because he had looked through a piece of ice that he had "skimmed" that "morning from the drinking trough." He half dreams and in his dream relives his labor. His dream, he says, is not like the woodchuck's sleep, but is a "human sleep."

We feel, inspite of the fact that the poem can thus be analyzed, that it is not to be "taken singly" or simply for its surface meaning, but in the words of Frost, "to be taken doubly." One must recognize that the poem has a deeper than surface meaning. "After Apple-Picking" is in accordance with so many works of art in the New England tradition a symbol for the interpretation of life. We see here again the device which Frost so often uses: the recognition of some deeper meaning in the commonplace.

Before we proceed with the poet's ideas, it might be well to examine his art and method of presentation. The poem is simple and casually expressed. However much it gives the appearance of casualness, though, we can be sure from closer examination, that the poem was very carefully executed. The lines for the most part are run-on lines, the

1. The following discussion is based upon an analysis by Robert Penn Warren, "The Themes of Robert Frost," Michigan Alumnus Quarterly Review, Vol. LIV, No. 10, December 6, 1947, pp. 1-11.

rhythm of the poem is so smooth, that we scarcely realize the rhyme. The thought is not only of reality--this world--but of a dreamworld also--of heaven. The concepts--heaven and earth--are not distinct, but are part of one another--"the literal world and the dreamworld overlapping, as it were, like the two sets of elements in a superimposed photograph."[1]

Rereading the poem with the ideas in mind that Frost is going to tell us something of man's work on earth, and its relation to his after-life, we see that he begins with man's yearning for heaven: "My long two-pointed ladder's sticking through a tree Toward heaven still." Man leaves his work unfinished because he is "drowsing off." The dreamworld is "strange," like the strangeness he felt from looking through a piece of ice he "skimmed this morning from the drinking trough," but he "could tell what form" his "dreaming was about to take." He could tell what the dreamworld, the world after work, would be.

It would be a reliving of the human world of work and effort, only more magnified, clearer, more wonderful:

> "Magnified apples appear and disappear,
> Stem end and blossom end,
> And every fleck of russet showing clear."

There will be a sameness even to the "ache" in the "instep arch" and the "pressure of the ladder-round."

But what of this man's life on earth? Was it going to bring a good life hereafter, or a bad one? We can get an answer in the retro-

1. Robert Penn Warren, "The Themes of Robert Frost," Michigan Alumnus Quarterly Review, Vol. LIV, No. 10, December 6, 1947, pp. 1-11.

spective estimate the poet makes of the work he did:

> "There were ten thousand thousand fruit to touch,
> Cherish in hand, lift down, and not let fall.
> For all
> That struck the earth,
> No matter if not bruised or spiked with stubble,
> Went surely to the cider-apple heap
> As of no worth."

There were many experiences to encounter. He approached them conscientiously, carefully, because all which were not so handled, must surely fail. This same experience will "trouble" or color his "sleep," his after-life. His "sleep" will be a meaningful one and not the empty sleep of a woodchuck, not the meaningless dream of nature. Man is distinguished from nature by his conscientious effort and experience.

From the poem, then, we learn that Frost feels "the here-after will be a repetition on a grand scale of life on earth."[1] But the poem also has other implications. It tells about Frost's attitude toward men here, now, on earth. He answers the question, what should be man's goal? What should be his ideal? It should be, Frost demonstrates in rational Puritan vein, a dedication to effort in the real world. What, then, should be man's values in this real world? Not mere accomplishment, for Frost does not mention the number of barrels of apples filled, but the value of human life is to be judged in terms of effort--in how he handles experiences encountered, the "ten thousand thousand fruit" touched, cherished in hand, lifted down, and "not let fall."

1. Robert Penn Warren, "The Themes of Robert Frost," Michigan Alumnus Quarterly Review, Vol. LIV, No. 10, December 6, 1947, pp. 1-11.

Finally we become aware of Frost's theory of art and of poetry which stems directly from Puritan thought. Poetry should not be art for art's sake alone, but should be useful. It should reveal the "literal world;" it should be taken from "the common body of experience, and must be a magnified 'dream' of that experience as it has achieved meaning, and not a thing set apart, a mere decoration."[1] Art should be a representation of real life and serve a utilitarian purpose.

1. Ibid., p. 10.

Chapter II

CONTEMPORARY NEW ENGLAND INDIVIDUALISM

The concept of individualism in Robert Frost's poetry is a reflection of the ideas inherited from the New England tradition modified by conclusions reached as a result of personal experience. With relation to personal experience, Frost's ideas of individualism might have been formed as a reaction against the prevailing spirit at Harvard when he attended in 1897. Harvard was then engulfed in an era of "disillusionment, pessimism, and scientism."[1] Against this atmosphere, Frost soon rebelled, and motivated by Emersonian self-reliance and William James' pragmatic idealism, he "returned to New Hampshire to write poetry of life as he knew it, to keep close to common human experience."[2]

This "protest against nearly all that science and the machine have done to our thinking and our lives"[3] is part of a very old American intellectual tradition. It is part of the New England Romantic revolt against growing industrialization.

Frost expresses his antagonism against the machine age in "The Egg and the Machine."[4] He describes the might of a great train

1. H.H. Waggoner, "The Humanistic Idealism of Robert Frost," American Literature, No. XIII, November, 1941, p. 210.

2. Ibid., p. 211.

3. Ibid., p. 208.

4. Frost, Poems, p. 305-306.

roaring past the helpless individual:

> "Then for a moment all there was was size:
> Confusion and a roar that drowned the cries
> He raised against the gods in the machine."

Man's revenge against the great machine is expressed rather ineffectually, it seems to me, by the fact that he was going to ruin the train by throwing a turtle's egg in its "goggle glass."

Mr. Yvor Winters points out that the "turtle egg--plasm--raw life--is capable of confounding symbolically the mechanical product of human reason,"[1] so would wreck the train, and make man victorious over the machine. The gesture seems, as Mr. Winters then states, very trivial. However, perhaps Frost meant it to be so. Man has not yet become the master of science and the machine.

Frost does not want to align himself with the social thought and action of his time. He prefers the freedom of nature--the freedom of the bear in the woods[2]--to the complications of our highly developed civilization which fosters rationalization, disputation, and scientific endeavor. "Man," Frost observes,

> "acts more like the poor bear in a cage
> That all day fights a nervous inward rage,
> His mood rejecting all his mind suggests."

The poet pictures the "scientific" enterprise of man:

> "The telescope at one end of his beat,
> And at the other end the microscope,
> Two instruments of nearly equal hope,
> And in conjunction giving quite a spread."

1. Yvor Winters, "Robert Frost: Or the Spiritual Drifter As Poet," Sewanee Review, Vol. LVI, No. 4, 1948, p. 578.

2. Frost, "The Bear," Poems, pp. 303-304.

Scientific research does not contribute to man's social stability, Frost concludes; Man still sways

"Between two metaphysical extremes."--

a "baggy" and "pathetic" figure.

It seems hard to believe, as is indicated in this poem, that Frost would want to reject all of man's efforts in scientific enterprise as merely blundering, and all of rationalization as merely useless disputation. True, scientific research and metaphysical speculation have not as yet brought mankind the peace, security, and stability he desires, but a return to unrestrained fundamental activity, to the "uncaged progress of the bear" would be a negation of all that man has tried to do through the ages.

In a less sarcastic mood Robert Frost recalls the "time he was a worker in the Arlington Mills at Lawrence" Massachusetts, and his desertion from "industry without prejudice to industry."[1] The moving and realistic "A Lone Striker"[2] portrays Frost forsaking the factory which in its many operations subordinates the individual to one menial task. He goes instead to the woods where on a cliff he "would be among the tops of trees."

We can perceive in this poem the Emersonian belief "that social institutions exist [only] to guard the self-reliant individual and that the individual must never lose his personality in the mass."[3]

1. Cook, "Robert Frost's Asides on His Poetry," p. 358.

2. Frost, Poems, pp. 309-311.

3. Wells, The American Way of Poetry, p. 61.

We can understand also that the "division of labor" to Frost, as to Thoreau, meant the destruction of the "potential balance of an agrarian world."[1]

Frost's objection to the regimentation of human life and the specialization of man's activities inspired him to write the humorous "Departmental or the End of My Ant Jerry."[2] He describes the "curious" ant race:

> "One crossing with hurried tread
> The body of one of their dead
> Isn't given a moment's arrest--
> Seems not even impressed.
> But he no doubt reports to any
> With whom he crosses antennae,
> And they no doubt report
> To the higher up at court.
> Then word goes forth in Formic:
> 'Death's come to Jerry McCormic,"

In place of participation in the activities of an interdependent society, Frost would have man as independent as "The Gum Gatherer"[3] who built himself a shack high in the mountain's pass. The poet thought this

> "a pleasant life
> To set your breast to the bark of trees
> . . . . . .
> And reaching up with a little knife,
> To loose the resin and take it down
> And bring it to market when you please."

Frost would have man return to the "stimulus" of his own "local environment,"[4] the preferable environment a rural one like that he

1. Matthiessen, American Renaissance, p. 97.

2. Frost, Poems, pp. 330-331.

3. Frost, Poems, pp. 153-154.

4. Wells, The American Way of Poetry, p. 120.

describes in "New Hampshire."[1] "The reflective poet hardly seems to realize that his views apply better to the New Hampshire village of a century ago than to any American town of today."[2]

Frost holds that

> "The having anything to sell is what
> Is the disgrace in man or state or nation."

New Hampshire which has just

> "One each of everything as in a show-case
> Which naturally she doesn't care to sell"

is his ideal state.

The people, "a community of harmless eccentrics,"[3] Frost would not change, but would have them just as they are. He remarks:

> "For art's sake one could almost wish them worse
> Rather than better."

He describes the people: "one real reformer" who would organize the world into "artists" and "boys," one man "who comes from Philadelphia every year with a great flock of chickens of rare breeds," one witch --old style," one company, evidently now not existing, "called the White Corpuscles

> "Whose duty was at any hour of night
> To rush in sheets and fools' caps where they smelled
> A thing the least bit doubtfully perscented
> And give someone the Skipper Ireson's Ride."

In addition New Hampshire boasts of an intelligent farmer, and also

1. Frost, Poems, pp. 179-193.

2. Wells, The American Way of Poetry, p. 120.

3. Ibid., p. 113.

"a man who failing as a farmer
Burned down his farmhouse for the fire insurance
And spent the proceeds on a telescope
To satisfy a life-long curiosity
About our place among the infinities."

As for Frost, himself, he'd

"choose to be a plain New Hampshire farmer
With an income in cash of say a thousand
(From say a publisher in New York City)."

It apparently does not occur to him to think that if there were no highly commercial and industrial New York, he would have no income from that source.

We can perhaps best understand Frost's concept of individualism in the light of present day conditions from an analysis of his poem, "Build Soil—A Political Pastoral"[1] delivered at Columbia University on May 31, 1932, before a national convention leading to the election of Franklin Delano Roosevelt. The year 1932 was one of the darkest periods of depression. It was in this year that Frost attempted to deal with America's social, political, and economic problems, and to reveal his ideas of the relationship of the individual to society.

Frost advises the individual to become self-sufficient:

"Plant, breed, produce,
But what you raise or grow, why feed it out,
Eat it or plow it under where it stands
To build the soil."

He advises further that man "make a late start for market," and that he

1. Frost, Poems, pp. 367-377.

"Steal away and stay away.
Don't join too many gangs. Join few if any.
Join the United States and join the family--
But not much in between unless a college."

If he were dictator, Frost writes he'd,

"let things take their course
And then ... claim the credit for the outcome."

In the midst of economic and social decay, Frost, the shepherd of the poem, could suggest nothing but neglect of pressing problems. When the country cried out for activity, Frost suggested a policy of inactivity. He could not think in terms of construction. One critic adequately describes the book in which "Build Soil" later appeared. The summary seems to be appropriate for the poem also: "The broad political outlook stemming from Emerson's romantic individualism has dwindled into Calvin Coolidge's reactionary laissez faire."[1]

We might contrast Frost's inaction with Thoreau's forthright Yankee action. When in 1859 Thoreau saw that Captain John Brown, then in jail, was to be killed for armed attempts to aid in the escape of slaves, he did not in this crisis sit by and suggest laissez faire. Against the advice of neighbors and friends, Thoreau hired a hall, sent out invitations, and on October 30, 1859 delivered the fiery address, "A Plea for Captain John Brown"[2] urging every citizen to take immediate action against a government which would enslave men and kill an innocent liberator. This is genuine Puritan-Yankee individualism. Frost's "one-man revolution" urging the individual

1. Wells, The American Way of Poetry, p. 109.

2. Thoreau, Walden and Other Writings, pp. 683-707.

to retire to his home and "let things take their course" seems very tame, indeed, along side of Thoreau's activity.

True, if we adopted Frost's way, if each individual the world over could separate himself from society, could in fact become self-sufficient, we would have no problems. However, this impractical policy does not adequately answer the problems of the individual in the present day interdependent society. The family, the town, the state, and the nation are not now the only groups in which the individual must play an active part. The individual must now become a citizen of the world--must lend his support to activities instead of withdrawing unto himself.

If, as Mr. Winters points out, "the individual is thus advised against any kind of political activity in a time of national collapse," this policy "could lead only to the withdrawal from public affairs of the citizen not concerned primarily with personal aggrandizement, and to the surrender of the nation to the unscrupulous go-getter, who is not governed by admirable aims."[1] This policy would in fact leave the control of activity to the most ruthless elements in our society and would inevitably result in dictatorship.

Frost's reactionary outlook is a far cry from the early Puritan's active participation in both political and religious matters. We can perhaps read in Frost's attitude with regard to individualism --an attitude which incidentally represents present day New England-- the reason for the lack of New England's command in contemporary American society.

1. Winters, "Robert Frost," pp. 575-576.

Chapter III

NEW ENGLAND SPEECH: THE VOICE of REASON

Robert Frost has adhered to the Wordsworthian requirement that poetry should be written in "common speech" more closely than Wordsworth had himself. This is not to say that Frost writes in dialect as did the New England local colorists, but the poet has been able to capture the tones of the human voice in his environment. He has put the Yankee spirit into poetry more often than any of the New England poets. In contrast the bulk of the poetry written by Emerson, Lowell, Thoreau, Bryant, and Whitter seems formal and literary.

Frost's aim in writing is to catch the tone of the human voice, and with this in his imagination to fit the word, meter, and if necessary the rhyme to this tonal pattern. He describes the process of obtaining the pattern of a poem by comparing it to overhearing two people talking behind a closed door. One would perceive the tones of the voices but not necessarily the words.[1] Frost has been able because of this gift to give us natural and at the same time highly rhythmical poetry. Consider for example the short lyric "Fire and Ice,"[2] which presents a view about a subject much discussed in Puritan times:

1. John Freeman, "Robert Frost," from Contemporary American Authors, ed., by J.E. Squire (New York, 1928), p. 40.

2. Frost, Poems, p. 232.

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

The rhythm here is so perfectly rendered that one scarcely notices the rhyme. Yet in spite of the fact that the poem is a lyric, it is not a singing lyric. Although Frost has written many lyrics "there is not much bel canto in his volumes"[1] as one critic has pointed out. The rhythm that Frost gives us is, rather, the rhythm of the voice of New England, the "voice of reason, of the intellect of prose; ... it walks, not flies."[2] The music that Frost has captured is one "from a race brought up on the English Bible." He has himself inherited their "simplicity of phrase"[3] and their economy of expression.

His poems seem spontaneous, natural, and casual even. One would imagine that Frost wrote his poetry as easily as it sounds to the ear; however, he has been known to postpone publishing for many years after he has written a poem, and has probably in the meantime revised many times. He has seemingly weighed each word carefully. We can feel this because his work takes on a "hardness of outline in keeping with the New England temperament."[4] An example might be cited from

1. William L. Phelps, The Advance of English Poetry in the Twentieth Century (New York, 1924), p. 238.

2. Van Doren, Many Minds, p. 55.

3. Amy Lowell, Tendencies, p. 128.

4. Phelps, op. cit., p. 238.

a poem which, Puritan-like, puts man in the mood to prepare for life after death:

"Nature's first green is gold,
Her hardest hue to hold.
Her early leaf's a flower;
But only so an hour.
Then leaf subsides to leaf.
So Eden sank to grief,
So dawn goes down to day.
Nothing gold can stay."[1]

A critic quotes Frost as saying that he is acutely aware that by the "arrangement and choice of words"[2] the poet can portray all human emotion. Thus Frost skillfully portrays humor, pathos, hysteria, anger, anxiety, conviction, fear, pity, cordiality, in fact, any and all emotion characteristic of the New England temperament. The poet is particularly gifted in the use of certain omissions and additions in blank verse to portray contemporary New England life. Amy Lowell described North of Boston as "halting and maimed like the life it portrays, unyielding in its substance and broken in effect."[3] Consider this excerpt whichrecords the conversation of a Yankee rustic.

"I've always meant to go
And look myself, but you know how it is:
It doesn't seem so much to climb a mountain
You've worked around the foot of all your life.
What would I do? Go in my overalls,
With a big stick, the same as when the cows
Haven't come down to the bars at milking time?

1. Frost, "Nothing Gold Can Stay," Poems, p. 235.

2. R.S. Newdick, "Robert Frost and the Sound of Sense," American Litature, No. IX, 1937, pp. 289-300.

3. Amy Lowell, Tendencies, p. 128.

Or with a shotgun for a stray black bear?
'T wouldn't seem real to climb for climbing it."[1]

Miss Lowell commented that this poem represents "the whole terrible inertia which has settled upon these people dwelling among the unyielding hills."[2]

In this next quotation we hear a New England minister express the conservative stubborn aversion to change which has intermittenly been the tragedy of this region:

"For, dear me, why abandon a belief
Merely because it ceases to be true.
Cling to it long enough, and not a doubt
It will turn true again, for so it goes.
Most of the change we think we see in life
Is due to truths being in and out of favour.
As I sit here, and oftentimes, I wish
I could be monarch of a desert land
I could devote and dedicate forever
To the truths we keep coming back and back to.
So desert it would have to be, so walled
By mountain ranges half in summer snow,
No one would covet it or think it worth
The pains of conquering to force change on."[3]

Here we have a "symbol of society turning to itself, of race turning back upon itself—symbol of the introversion and inbreeding which the property sense always motivates."[4]

Frost expresses skillfully the tired voice of a New England farm wife, once insane, and now living a dull, monotonous life overburdened by work.

1. Frost, "The Mountain," Poems, pp. 45-58.

2. Amy Lowell, Tendencies, p. 128.

3. Frost, "The Black Cottage," Poems, pp. 64-68.

4. Loggins, I Hear America, p. 205.

"Bless you, of course, you're keeping me from work,
But the thing of it is, I need to be kept.
There's work enough to do--there's always that;
But behind's behind. The worst that you can do
Is set me back a little more behind.
I sha'n't catch up in this world, anyway.
I'd rather you'd not go unless you must."[1]

From the Pulitzer Prize volume, New Hampshire, we might cite passages which reveal Frost's power to portray the "combination of fantasy and reality."[2] The poet's ability to create an atmosphere of horror through the conversation of a soul affected by a troubled conscience is according to a critic in the tradition of Hawthorne.[3] The poem, "The Witch of Coös,"[4] is "Hawthornesque in that it is, in a sense a study in the flowering of sin: the mother has gone mad keeping the horrible secret that she helped her husband bury her murdered lover in the cellar."[5] The witch reviews a part of her life:

"The only fault my husband found with me--
I went to sleep before I went to bed,
Especially in winter when the bed
Might just as well be ice and the clothes snow.
The night the bones came up the cellar-stairs
Toffile had gone to bed alone and left me,
But left an open door to cool the room off
So as to sort of turn me out of it."

She describes her encounter with the skeleton:

"So suddenly I flung the door wide on him.
A moment he stood balancing with emotion,

1. Frost, "A Servant to Servants," Poems, pp. 74-79.

2. Foster, "Robert Frost and the New England Tradition," p. 373.

3. Ibid.

4. Frost, Poems, pp. 221-226.

5. Foster, "Robert Frost and the New England Tradition," p. 373.

> And all but lost himself. (A tongue of fire
> Flashed out and licked along his upper teeth.
> Smoke rolled inside the sockets of his eyes.)
> Then he came at me with one hand outstretched,
> The way he did in life once; but this time
> I struck the hand off brittle on the floor,
> And fell back from him on the floor myself.
> The finger-pieces slid in all directions.
> (Where did I see one of those pieces lately?
> Hand me my button-box--it must be there.)

At the end the witch determines to unburden her mind by telling the truth:

> "Tell the truth for once
> They [the bones] were a man's his father killed for me.
> I mean a man he killed instead of me.
> The least I could do was to help dig their grave."

Although the total impression of Frost's poetry represents a New England which is autumn and winter hued, grim and forbidding, austere and narrow--a land where passion is kept in restraint, and where joy is "dashed with pain,"[1] yet there is humor and lightness of touch too in his presentations.

For example Frost tells humorously of the independent spirit of the cow:

> "Something inspires the only cow of late
> To make no more of a wall than an open gate,
> And think no more of wall-builders than fools.
> Her face is flecked with pomace and she drools
> A cider syrup. Having tasted fruit,
> She scorns a pasture withering to the root."[2]

Although Frost labels this next a child's poem, the human and humorous characterizations can be equally enjoyed by adults:

> "As I went out a crow
> In a low voice said 'Oh,
> I was looking for you.

1. Frost, "To Earthward," Poems, pp. 242-243.

2. Frost, "The Cow In Apple Time," Poems, p. 134.

How do you do?
I just came to tell you
To tell Lesley (will you?)
That her little Bluebird
Wanted me to bring word
That the north wind last night
That made the stars bright
And made ice on the trough
Almost made him cough
His tail feathers off.
He just had to fly!
But he sent her Good-bye,
And said to be good,
And wear her red hood,
And look for skunk tracks
In the snow with an axe—
And do everything!
And perhaps in the spring
He would come back and sing."[1]

With apparent casualness and in a happy mood Frost challenges the concept that the moon has unlimited freedom. Here he shows that man exercises power over the freedom of the moon:

"I've tried the new moon tilted in the air
Above a hazy tree-and-farmhouse cluster
As you might try a jewel in your hair.
. . . . . .
I put it shining anywhere I please.
By walking slowly on some evening later,
I've pulled it from a crate of crooked trees,
And brought it over glossy water, greater,
And dropped it in, and seen the image wallow,
The color run, all sorts of wonder follow."[2]

In "Brown's Descent or The Willy-Nilly Slide"[3] Frost describes somewhat humorously the persistence of the New England Yankee stock. Mr. Brown while doing his chores had been blown by a gale down a

1. Frost, "The Last Word of a Bluebird," Poems, p. 146.

2. Frost, "The Freedom of the Moon," Poems, p. 264.

3. Frost, Poems, pp. 149-152.

slippery slope. Frost remarks:

> "Yankees are what they always were.
> Don't think Brown ever gave up hope
> Of getting home again because
> He couldn't climb that slippery slope;
> . . . . . .
> He bowed with grace to natural law,
>
> And then went round it on his feet,
> After the manner of our stock;"

Frost seems thus to have absorbed all shades of contemporary New England expression. Although he is the master in portraying the voice of that region, we can trace in the prose and poetry of other New Englanders the same characteristic representations.

We can see Frost's aphoristic humor in one of Emerson's poems,

> "The mountain and the squirrel
> Had a quarrel,
> . . . . . .
> 'If I'm not so large as you,
> You are not so small as I,
> And not half so spry.
> I'll not deny you make
> A very pretty squirrel track;
> Talents differ; all is well and wisely put;
> If I cannot carry forests on my back,
> Neither can you crack a nut,'"[1]

Frost's recent didactic tone can be compared to Emerson's expression in "Saadi":

> "Let theist, atheist, pantheist,
> Define and wrangle how they list,
> Fierce conserver, fierce destroyer,--
> But thou, joy-giver and enjoyer,
> Unknowing war, unknowing crime,
> Gentle Saadi, mind thy rhyme;
> Heed not what the brawlers say,

1. Emerson, Works, Vol. IX, "Fable," p. 75.

Heed thou only Saadi's lay."[1]

Whittier's capture of winter tones was artistically expressed in "Snow-Bound." These lines are reminiscent of Frost's description:

"All day the gusty north-wind bore
The loosening drift its breath before;
Low circling round its southern zone,
The sun through dazzling snow-mist shone.
No church-bell lent its Christian tone
To the savage air, no social smoke
Curled over woods of snow-hung oak.
A solitude made more intense
By dreary-voicëd elements,
The shrieking of the mindless wind,
The moaning tree-boughs swaying blind,
And on the glass the unmeaning beat
Of ghostly finger-tips of sleet."[2]

The sympathetic, realistic, dramatic and sometimes humorous portrayal of animal life which Frost has recorded so successfully might have been inspired by Thoreau's prose treatment. Thoreau's description of an ant war, for example is reminiscent of Frost's handling of animal life.[3]

At times Frost has caught the tender pathos, the tragedy mixed with humor, the intense quality of Emily Dickinson. Compare the two following poems, the first by Emily Dickinson:

"God permits industrious angels
Afternoons to play.
I met one,--forgot my school-mates,
All, for him, straightway.

1. Emerson, Works, Vol. IX, p. 133.

2. Whittier, Works, p. 400.

3. Thoreau, Walden, pp. 206-209.

God calls home the angels promptly
At the setting sun;
I missed mine. How dreary marbles,
After playing Crown!"[1]

The next poem is Frost's "Not All There."[2]

"I turned to speak to God
About the world's despair;
But to make bad matters worse
I found God wasn't there.
God turned to speak to me
(Don't anybody laugh)
God found I wasn't there--
At least not over half."

One could make numerous comparisons in rhythm, treatment, and expression between Frost and other New England writers. Suffice to say that he has absorbed the voice of New England from both written and spoken word. Although the other writers might have excelled in various universal characteristics which makes their work live today, Frost is the undisputed master in most consistently representing in poetry the speech and spirit of the New England of his time.

1. Martha Dickinson Bianchi, ed., The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson (Boston, 1924), "Time and Eternity," XVIII, p. 189.

2. Frost, Poems, p. 367.

Chapter IV

WORK EXPERIENCE

Frost feels, like Thoreau, that man should "dwell as near as possible to the channel in which ... [his] life flows."[1] It is for this reason that Frost has endeavored always to keep in close touch with the soil. He writes as a man intimately acquainted with the tasks necessary to make a living in rural areas.

Frost not only describes realistically the work he or others are doing, but he assumes a scientific attitude toward this experience. The work described becomes a symbol for an idea, and simultaneously the revelation of some New England characteristic.

In the "The Code,"[2] for example, Frost tells of the experience of several men while haying. As a result of the highly dramatic action, the poet reveals the "ingrained ethical strain in the New England mind"[3] by showing that even so unsympathetic a character as the boss "should recognize the unwritten code which entitles the laborer to defend his personal dignity."[4]

In the poem,"Two Tramps in Mud Time,"[5] Frost relates an

1. Matthiesen, American Renaissance, p. 96.
2. Frost, Poems, pp. 83-86.
3. Wells, The American Way of Poetry, p. 112.
4. Ibid.
5. Frost, Poems, pp. 312-214.

incident in which

"Two strangers came
And caught me [Frost] splitting wood in the yard."

The following excerpt gives us an excellent description of Frost's work and at the same time illustrates the New Englander's restraint:

"Good blocks of beech it was I split,
As large around as the chopping block;
And every piece I squarely hit
Fell splinterless as a cloven rock.
The blows that a life of self-control
Spares to strike for the common good
That day giving a loose to my soul,
I spent on the unimportant wood."

The poet had, however, other purposes beside description and characterization. In the presentation of the next situation he expresses them. Two tramps stopped to watch Frost chop wood. They were lumberjacks, and

"thought all chopping was theirs of right.
• • • • • • • • •
That I [Frost] had no right to play
With what was another man's work for gain."

Frost, however, liked to chop wood; on the other hand, the lumberjacks needed the job. Frost agrees, then, that the lumberjacks had a better claim to the work than he:

"My right might be love but theirs was need.
And where the two exist in twain
Theirs was the better right--agreed."

The ultimate message which Frost wishes to leave with us, is the importance of combining avocation and vocation.

"My object in living is to unite
My avocation and my vocation
• • • • • • • •
Only where love and need are one,
And the work is play for mortal stakes,
Is the deed ever really done
For Heaven and the future's sakes."

Here, then, is a typical Puritan expression of the virtue of the good life which unites need and love. We have a reminder, too, that the good life--"the play for mortal stakes"--is to be lived in preparation for Heaven. Frost is also working in the "Tuft of Flowers."[1] He tells how he

> "went to turn the grass once after one
> Who mowed it in the dew before the sun."

He feels in his work a "kindred" spirit with the previous worker and concludes by proclaiming the fellowship of labor.

The realistic description of the work of "The Line Gang"[2] tells us that in the erection of the telephone and telegraph lines civilization is overtaking the forest:

> "Here comes the line-gang pioneering by.
> They throw a forest down less cut than broken.
> They plant dead trees for living, and the dead
> They string together with a living thread.
> They string an instrument against the sky
> Wherein words whether beaten out or spoken
> Will run as hushed as when they were a thought.
> But in no hush they string it: they go past
> With shouts afar to pull the cable taut,
> To hold it hard until they make it fast,
> To ease away--they have it. With a laugh,
> An oath of towns that set the wild at naught
> They bring the telephone and telegraph."

We feel that Frost somehow prefers the forest.

The work experience is used by Frost to tell us something of the character of the worker. An account of "The Wood-Pile"[3] which

1. Frost, Poems, pp. 84-85.

2. Ibid., p. 155.

3. Ibid., p. 112.

Frost saw while he was taking a walk through the woods is so clearly given that although the wood-chopper is never portrayed in the poem, we can see the unknown care-free rustic in this description of his neglected handiwork:

> "It was a cord of maple, cut and split
> And piled--and measured, four by four by eight.
> And not another like it could I see.
> No runner tracks in this year's snow looped near it.
> And it was older sure than this year's cutting,
> Or even last year's or the year's before.
> The wood was grey and the bark warping off it
> And the pile somewhat sunken. Clematis
> Had wound strings round and round it like a bundle.
> What held it though on one side was a tree
> Still growing, and one one a stake and prop,
> These latter about to fall."

Frost's estimate of the worker completes the characterization.

> "I thought that only
> Someone who lived in turning to fresh tasks
> Could so forget his handiwork on which
> He spent himself, the labour of his axe,
> And leave it there far from a useful fireplace"

We can see in Frost's portrayal of a man's work experience a correlation between his and Thoreau's interest in a neighbor's accomplishments. Compare, for example, Frost's Mr. Baptiste's interest in man-made tools[1] with Thoreau's account of the advice from his neighbor, Mr. Rice, in regard to a chest of tools.[2]

In Frost's poem, Baptiste critizes Frost's "bad axe-helve" and warns him since it was "made on machine," it would break. Baptiste then invites Frost to his house where the poet watches him make an axe-helve.

1. Frost, "The Axe-Helve," Poems, pp. 204-207.

2. Shepard, The Heart of Thoreau's Journals, pp. 222-223.

"He liked to have it slender as a whipstock,
Free from the least knot, equal to the strain
Of bending like a sword across the knee.
He showed me that the lines of a good helve
Were native to the grain before the knife
Expressed them, and its curves were no false curves
Put on it from without. And there its strength lay
For the hard work. He chafed its long white body
From end to end with his rough hand shut round it.
He tried it at the eye-hole in the axe-head."

While the Frenchman is working Frost and he talk of education and why Baptiste kept his children from school. This gives the poet an opportunity to suggest the superiority of self-made work and of the self-educated man. The poem is an appeal, too, for freedom in education.

In Thoreau's account of Rice, we see his preference for the unhampered life his neighbor leads. Rice is, however, in contrast to the poor Frenchman, Baptiste, the Yankee who "By good sense and calculation ... has become rich and has invested his property well, yet practices a fair and neat economy, dwells not in untidy luxury."[1] Thoreau described Rice, even so, as a self-made man:

"When I came to do a piece of work I used to
find commonly that I wanted a certain tool,
And I made it a rule first always to make that tool."[2]

Thoreau states further:

"Comparatively speaking, his life is a success;
not such a failure as most men's. He gets more
out of any enterprise than his neighbors, for
he helps himself more and hires less. Whatever
pleasure there is in it he enjoys ... To get his

1. Ibid., p. 223.

2. Ibid.

> living, or keep it, is not a hasty or disagreeable toil. He works slowly but surely, enjoying the sweet of it ..."[1]

We feel sure that Frost would have, like Thoreau, approved of Minott, "the poetical farmer."[2]

> "Minott is, perhaps, the most poetical farmer --who most realizes to me the poetry of the farmer's life--that I know. He does nothing with haste and drudgery, but as if he loved it. He makes the most of his labor, and takes infinite satisfaction in every part of it. He is not looking forward to the sale of his crops or any pecuniary profit, but he is paid by the constant satisfaction which his labor yields him. He has not too much land to trouble him,--too much work to do,--no hired man nor boy, but simply to amuse himself and live. He cares not so much to raise a large crop as to do his work well. He knows every pin and nail in his barn. If another linter is to be floored, he lets no hired man rob him of that amusement, but he goes slowly to the woods and, at his leisure, selects a pitch pine tree, cuts it, and hauls it or gets it hauled to the mill; and so he knows the history of his barn floor."[3]

Minott, is for Thoreau, as he would be for Frost, the ideal workman.

The interest that Thoreau and Frost have shown in men's work is in keeping with the early Puritan's devotion to his "earthly calling." The resulting ideals of such an interest are those of an independent New England middle class society. By revealing in poetry man's joy in labor Frost has gained a unique and prominent place in the New England tradition.

1. Ibid., p. 223.

2. Ibid., pp. 91-92.

3. Ibid.

Chapter V

THE INFLUENCE of NATURE

There is in Frost's handling of nature an empirical Yankee vein. We feel that what he writes of he has himself observed and experienced. We can truly say of him in the words of Emily Dickinson:

> "This was a a Poet--it is that
> Distills amazing sense
> From ordinary meanings
> And attars so immense
> From the familiar species
> That perish by the door,
> We wonder it was not ourselves
> Arrested it before."[1]

We can see Wordsworthian influence in that Frost is fond of writing of the common in nature. His expressions, however, unlike those of the English poet can be traced to influences in the New England tradition. He writes of common things in expressions that are uncommon. The resulting metaphors are thus new, surprising, and delightful. The familiar things described take on a new clarity:

> "A saturated meadow, is [2]
> Sun-shaped and jewel-small."

An old decayed New Hampshire town called Bow is

> "A rock-strewn town where farming has fallen
> And sprout-lands flourish where the axe has gone,"[3]

1. Further Poems of Emily Dickinson, ed. by Martha Dickinson Bianchi and Alfred Leete Hampson (Boston, 1929), p. 12.

2. Frost, "Rose Pogonias," Poems, p. 15.

3. Frost, "The Generations of Men," Poems, p. 87.

Frost is particularly gifted in the description of animals. Here is one of a bird:

> "The meteor that thrusts in with needle bill,
> And off a blossom in mid air stands still."[1]

The poet describes bees in a wall:

> "Fierce heads looked out; small bodies pivoted."[2]

Monkeys were observed:

> "They bit the glass and listened for the flavor."[3]

In Frost's keen observation and presentation of poetical pict
tures we can see a similarity between his work and that of Emily Dickinson's. Compare the following from Miss Dickinson with the excerpts from Frost. She describes a humming bird as:

> "A ROUTE of evanescence
> With a revolving wheel;
> A resonance of emerald,
> A rush of cochineal;"[4]

A snake is

> "A NARROW fellow in the grass.
> . . . . . .
> . . . . a whip-lash
> Unbraiding in the sun,--
> that . . . . . .
> . . wrinkled, and was gone."[5]

1. Frost, "A Prayer in Spring," Poems, p. 13.

2. Frost, "The Black Cottage," Poems, p. 68.

3. Frost, "At Woodward's Gardens," Poems, p. 335.

4. The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson, "Nature," XV, p. 86.

5. Ibid., XXIV, pp. 91-92.

Miss Dickinson describes the activities of the bumblebees:

> "South winds jostle them,
> Bumblebees come,
> Hover, hesitate,
> Drink and are gone."[1]

Each poem, like the miniatures of Frost, is a tiny picture bringing into play both observation and imagination.

Frost's descriptions of animals written in a conversational tone are quite different. The personality of the teller is then revealed as well as the action of the animal. His description of a runaway colt is well known:

> "A little Morgan had one forefoot on the wall,
> The other curled at his breast. He dipped his head
> And snorted at us. And then he had to bolt."[2]

The action of a hunter's hound is portrayed:

> "his hound works
> In the offing there
> Like one possessed,
> And yelps delight
> And sings and romps."[3]

Frost's dramatic, conversational descriptions like the two quoted above are reminiscent of Thoreau's realistic descriptions of the animals that he observed at Walden. The following is an account of the short flights of ducks on Walden Pond:

1. Ibid., XXXVIII, p. 99.

2. Frost, "The Runaway," Poems, p. 236.

3. Frost, "The Rabbit Hunter," Poems, p. 416.

> "I watched the ducks cunningly tack and veer and hold the middle of the pond, far from the sportsman; ... When compelled to rise they would sometimes circle round and round and over the pond at a considerable height, from which they could easily see to other ponds and the river, like black motes in the sky; and, when I thought they had gone off thither long since, they would settle down by a slanting flight of a quarter of a mile on to a distant part which was left free;"[1]

We see in Thoreau's description the same conversational tone as that used by Frost, sometimes even ascending to poetry. We feel the personality of Thoreau in his account. Like Frost, Thoreau is also interested in the dramatic action of the animals.

Thoreau's Transcendental poetry brings to the fore another consideration. A contrast must be indicated between it and Frost's nature poetry. Whereas Thoreau, for example, sings of the unity of his being in nature, Frost uses nature as a metaphor. Thoreau writes:

> "I cannot come nearer to God and Heaven
> Than I live to Walden even.
> I am its stony shore,
> And the breeze that passes o'er."[2]

Thoreau thus establishes his identity with nature. He is not merely, like Frost, viewing the elements as a spectator, although Thoreau does this too. Thoreau is one with nature.

Frost, on the other hand, as a spectator, interpreter, or dramatist, stands outside of nature. He can be said to express a mystical

1. Thoreau, Walden, p. 213.

2. Ibid., p. 175.

union with nature only in one poem, "Canis Major."[1]

"The great Overdog,
That heavenly beast
With a star in one eye
Gives a leap in the east

He dances upright
All the way to the west
And never once drops
On his forefeet to rest

I'm a poor underdog,
But tonight I will bark
With the great Overdog
That romps through the dark."

This poem, however, as was indicated, is the only one which might be interpreted in the Transcendental tradition; to consider it representative of Frost's expression would be a mistake. The poem is, rather, an imitation of modern mystical poetry. For the most part Frost's interest in nature is revealed to be a rendering of experiences and observations.

More than this, though, nature to Frost as to New Englanders from the beginning of settlement in America is a symbol of the divine. Nature is a source from which man can gain an insight into the wisdom God wishes to impart to us. Frost sees God's design extended even to the spider that had killed a moth and was now carrying it along a "white Heal-all flower":

"What had that flower to do with being white,
. . . . . .
What brought the kindred spider to that height,

1. Frost, Poems, p. 289.

Then steered the white moth thither in the night?
What but design of darkness to appall?--
If design govern in a thing so small."[1]

In familiar Puritan warning brought about by the recognition of God's providences in nature, Frost sees that we should be aware of disaster ahead.

"It looked as if a night of dark intent
Was coming, and not only a night, an age.
Someone had better be prepared for rage:
There would be more than ocean water broken
Before God's last Put out the Light was spoken."[2]

Bryant saw God in the hurricane, even as Frost saw danger coming, and as Cotton Mather saw God in the Thunder.

"Lord of the winds! I feel thee nigh,
I know thy breath in the burning sky!
And I wait, with a thrill in every vein,
For the coming of the hurricane!

And lo! on the wing of the heavy gales,
Through the boundless arch of heaven he sails;
Silent and slow, and terribly strong,
The mighty shadow is borne along,
Like the dark eternity to come;
While the world below, dismayed and dumb,
Through the calm of the thick hot atmosphere,
Looks up at its gloomy folds with fear."[3]

Similar poems could be cited from New England poets to show that an observation of nature brought to mind the power and glory of God.

Nature has always affected poets personally. The incident related in the next poem brings to Frost's mind past experiences:

1. Frost, "Design," Poems, p. 349.

2. Frost, "Once By the Pacific," Poems, p. 272.

3. Bryant, "The Hurricane," Poetical Works, pp. 116-118.

"The rain to the wind said
'You push and I'll pelt'
They so smote the garden bed
That the flowers actually knelt,
And lay lodged--though not dead.
I know how the flowers felt."[1]

The following poem reflects a mood of the poet:

"I have wished a bird would fly away,
And not sing by my house all day;

Have clapped my hands at him from the door
When it seemed as if I could bear no more.

The fault must partly have been in me.
The bird was not to blame for his key.

And of course there must be something wrong
In wanting to silence any song."[2]

Emerson strikes a personal note in his observation of nature much like that of Frost.

"I watched the singer with delight,--
But mark what changed my joy to fright,--
When that bird sang, I gave the theme;
That wood-bird sang my last night's dream,
. . . . . .
Knew my quarrel, how and why,
Published it to lake and sky,
Told every word and syllable
In his flippant chirping babble,
All my wrath and all my shames,
Nay, God is witness, gave the names."[3]

The bird in the woods reflected Emerson's mood just as the bird outside of Frost's window revealed his.

Nature can also affect Frost favorably. This next observation

1. Frost, "Lodged," Poems, p. 273.

2. Frost, "A Minor Bird," Poems, p. 274.

3. Emerson, "The Miracle," Works, Vol. IX, pp. 368-369.

reveals to Frost how "a crow can shake off, in a moment, snow from a branch and despair from the soul."[1]

"The way a crow
Shook down on me
The dust of snow
From a hemlock tree
Has given my heart
A change of mood
And saved some part
Of a day I had rued."[2]

Nature reflects the mood and emotions of mankind. It is through nature that we learn about human nature. A doe and a buck in "Two Look at Two"[3] reflects the love of two people:

"As if the earth in one unlooked-for favor
Had made them certain earth returned their love."

In addition to the empirical Yankee strain of recounting observation and experience, and the Puritan trait of being able to see symbols in nature, Frost is aware of the effect that man's surroundings have on his life. His dramatic accounts in this respect are without parallel in the poetry of the New England tradition. Whereas the other poets present ideas in the usual formal and literary manner, Frost deals dramatically with real people subdued by their environment or struggling against it.

In one poem, "The Mountain,"[4] Frost tells how the great mass

1. Untermeyer, American Poetry Since 1900, p. 16.

2. Frost, "Dust of Snow," Poems, p. 235.

3. Frost, Poems, pp. 246-247.

4. Ibid., pp. 45-49.

held the people in the town of Lunenburg as by a force:

> "The mountain held the town as in a shadow.
> . . . . . .
> I noticed that I missed stars in the west
> Where its black body cut into the sky.
> Near me it seemed: I felt it like a wall
> Behind which I was sheltered from a wind."

The storm is a dangerous antagonist in this next excerpt:

> "When the wind works against us in the dark,
> And pelts with snow
> The lower chamber window on the east,
> And whispers with a sort of stifled bark,
> The beast,
> 'Come out! Come out!'—
> It costs no inward struggle not to go,"[1]

The elements are great forces which beat at a lonely, defenseless man in the twilight of life:

> "Where had I heard this wind before
> Change like this to a deeper roar?
> What would it take my standing there for,
> Holding open a restive door,
> Looking down hill to a frothy shore?
> Summer was past and day was past.
> Sombre clouds in the west were massed.
> Out in the porch's sagging floor,
> Leaves got up in a coil and hissed,
> Blindly struck at my knee and missed.
> Something sinister in the tone
> Told me my secret must be known:
> Word I was in the house alone
> Somehow must have gotten abroad,
> Word I was in my life alone,
> Word I had no one left but God."[2]

Although nature works thus against man, man nevertheless uses his power of thought to over-rule nature. In "Stopping By Woods on

1. Frost, "Storm Fear," Poems, p. 11.

2. Frost, "Bereft," Poems, p. 275.

a Snowy Evening"[1] man has the ability to make the little horse stop "To watch ... [the] woods fill up with snow." Man has the ability to think at the end of the poem that he must not linger, but that he must go to keep his "promises."

Frost reveals by implication in "Our Singing Strength"[2] that the New Englander in his encounter with an unrelenting environment might be deeply affected, but he finally emerges triumphant. Birds are described beaten by the storm and yet they persist in going ahead. The determination, the hardiness, and the courage of New England are thus illustrated.

Man can not only overcome the forces of nature, but he can in fact direct the great forces.

"Before man came to blow it right
The wind once blew itself untaught,
And did its loudest day and night
In any rough place where it caught.

Man came to tell it what was wrong:
It hadn't found the place to blow;
It blew too hard--the aim was song.
And listen--how it ought to go!

He took a little in his mouth,
And held it long enough for north
To be converted into south,
And then by measure blew it forth.

By measure. It was word and note,
The wind the wind had meant to be--
A little through the lips and throat.
The aim was song--the wind could see."[3]

1. Frost, Poems, p. 238.

2. Ibid., pp. 257-258.

3. Frost, "The Aim Was Song," Poems, p. 237.

Frost is aware of the powerful might of nature, but he is optimistic enough to reveal that man can win over its great force.

Chapter VI

ESTIMATE in RETROSPECTION

Although Frost is a living exponent of the New England tradition, he cannot be said to approximate all the various shades of thought which interested the men of New England. Frost is not a steadfast believer in orthodox religion. He cannot claim the intellectual curiosity or attainments of the early Puritan divines. He would repudiate, for example, the scientific interest of Jonathan Edwards. Frost's scope is narrower than that of the Puritan divines instead of being inclusive of all their ideas and accomplishments.

Frost shares with the Puritans, however, a realistic concept of the individual bound by the limitations of a God-directed natural environment. He reveals the Puritan's pragmatic acceptance of man's secular life. Frost represents in his poetry also, Puritan-Yankee persistence and moral endeavor.

By his own admission Frost has been influenced by Emerson, yet he does not perpetuate in its entirety Emersonian philosophy. Emerson borrowed freely from cultures outside of his region. Transcendentalism, for example, owes much to oriental thought and English and German Romanticism, although the philosophy sprang from the mystical element in Puritanism. Emerson's style is youthful and varied. He sings the divinity of man and the glory of a radiant universe. Emerson was a preacher, criticizing, correcting, inspiring.

Frost is the keen analyst describing vividly people and conditions as they are. Since he sees a tired, old, narrow New England group, he is not convinced, like Emerson and Thoreau, that man is divine. Frost sees man, rather, with the eyes of his Puritan ancestors, forever striving, persevering against tremendous "inner" and environmental odds. Like Thoreau, however, he believes that the considerations of society should begin with the common man--the independent Yankee--living close to his source of life.

Unlike the dynamic spirit of nineteenth century New Englanders --of Channing, Emerson, Thoreau, and Whittier--which called for a reexamination of men's ideals in the light of contemporary knowledge, Frost's view expresses a "live-and-let-live attitude."[1] In the midst of crises Frost's predecessors demanded active participation in civic affairs. Frost suggests that the individual retire from anything but his own local activities; Frost advocates a policy of separateness--of laissez faire--of reaction. Whereas the men of New England stood for offensive, aggressive action, Frost, wishing to extricate himself from present day confusion suggests inaction--retirement.

To have adopted the outlook of previous New Englanders, to have approximated anything like the all-inclusive philosophy of Emerson, for instance, Frost would have to reflect the various phases of contemporary society. In the words of one critic, he would have to transmit to us the philosophies of "Marx, Freud, Spengler, Pareto, the

1. Winfield Townley Scott, "Frost's Seventh Book," Poetry, No. LX, 1942, p. 147.

discoveries of modern physicists, biologists and mathematicians."[1] Frost does not represent contemporary American thought; he represents contemporary New England thought and life which have ceased to be a leading force in American intellectual life. America has gone forward and New England has remained clinging to the remnants of once vital convictions.

Those convictions and traits are evident in Frost's work. He shares with the members of the New England tradition the belief that the individual has the right to live an independent life and that this life should be concerned with moral endeavor while facing the realities of human existence. Frost shares with New Englanders also the realization that events have more than surface meanings. In his attempt to interpret the "inner" meaning of occurrences he is following in the footsteps of those who recognized God's providences in a world controlled by his Supreme Being. Although aware of the precariousness of man's existence, Frost is able to reveal somewhat humorously the eccentricities of a steadfast New England group. He is able to portray with characteristic Yankee understatement the thoughts of men and women who accept life as is and yet who persevere in spite of their limitations.

Frost has added to the New England tradition a faithful, earthy contemporary representation of that section. Whereas other New Englanders have "reached out" so that their art resembles formal and literary diction, Frost has concentrated on interpreting the voice of his

1. Foster, "Robert Frost and the New England Tradition," p. 379.

region. Frost has added to the New England tradition also a dramatic portrayal in poetry of the forces of the elements on man, and man's valiant struggle and dogged determination to triumph over nature.

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