The Poetry of Robert Frost Study Guide

The Poetry of Robert Frost by Robert Frost

BOOKRAGS

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Chapter 3, The Hired Man and Other People Summary

"Birches" is one of Frost's most quoted poems, and is the first poem presented in Untermeyer's third chapter. Frost opens with an observation of birches bent in contrast with the straight trees around them, and how he likes to think that a boy has been swinging on them in the midst of his tending the cows and doing his chores. He says that he knows it is the ice weighing them down, and describes in beautiful terms the color of the ice as it cracks and the idea that it looks like the dome of heaven has shattered and covered the ground when the ice shells come off the trees. Then, with his typical humor, he comes back to the image of the boy with a scold for Lady Truth for butting in about the ice. He plays with the boy and imagining his play for a while, and then says that he was once a swinger of birches, too, and would like to be one again. His idea is that the trip to the top of a tree would be a pleasure, as long as he could return to earth, since it is the best place for loving, refreshed by his short visit to heaven.

"Mowing" is an example of Frost's earliest poetry written as a sonnet, but still representative of his lifelong tone. It is written about his time cutting grass with a scythe and wondering what it whispered to the ground as he swung it back and forth. He decides it can't be idle daydream or fantasy, but truth in its simplicity to match the earnestness with which the blade cuts down both grass and flower and scares the snake below it, calling fact "the sweetest dream that labor knows".

"Mending Wall" is a poem comparing two opposing views of the barriers between neighbors. One speaker, the younger, and the narrator of the poem, says "something there is that doesn't love a wall", wondering aloud later in the poem whether fences weren't originally intended only there there were wandering animals that could harm another man's crops. His neighbor, with whom he walks along the fence to put back up the fallen stones, only says repeatedly that "good fences make good neighbors".

The next poem in line is entitled "The Mountain" and is another in which Frost speaks from the perspective of the younger voice in the conversation. This encounter is between a man who is visiting a place and is intrigued by a huge mountain with a village at its base and an older man who has lived there all his life. The older man knows all kinds of interesting things about the mountain, like that there is a fountain at its very top that is warm in the winter and cool in the summer, but never having climbed it himself, he can only repeat what he has heard. In answer to the visitor's astonishment at his never having climbed it, he explains that if he ever had to chase one of his cattle, or go after a bear, he might, but then in his overalls and hardly equipped for the hike. He speaks in beautiful and poetic terms about the mountain, noting that "the fun's all in how you say a thing" but leaves it to the younger man to explore the mountain.

"Brown's Descent" is a nineteen-stanza quatrain about a farmer who lives on a mountain visible to the whole village, and who can be seen walking around his property doing his chores by people in the village following the movement of his lantern. On one evening, when the snow was covered with a crust of ice, he was swept onto the ice by the wind in his clothes, and went sliding "willy nilly" down the mountain, giving the poem its secondary name, "The Willy Nilly Slide". The whole poem is a humorous description of his various postures and the places he passed on his slide, and concludes with his reconciling himself to the slide and casually taking the road the two miles back up to his house from the bottom of the mountain.

"The Vanishing Red" is a free verse poem about a Miller who didn't think a Native American had any right to voice any reaction to his "great big thumping shuffling mill stone" when he heard him give an exclamation of surprise on seeing it. Frost says there would be no understanding his feelings about Native Americans without going back to the beginning of a long story, but that hearing the story would keep you from thinking of the conflict in terms of who began the conflict between the races, as if the Miller must have been seriously wronged by a Native. He invites him to come and see the wheel pit and when he does, he shuts him in the trap door and returns alone giving instruction to the man with the meal-sack that he doesn't understand until he realizes what the Miller had done with the Red Man.

Next follows a trio of autobiographical poems, presented in the order in which they were written. Frost calls himself a poet in only the first, entitled "To the Thawing Wind", and it is followed by "A Lone Striker" and "Two Tramps in Mudtime". "To the Thawing Wind" is a series of couplets written to the wind that brings the warm after window. He asks it to bring the flowers, birds and exposed earth from under snow, and to thaw the glass in his window to invite the warmth into his study and drive him outdoors.

"A Lone Striker" is about his arriving at work at a mill a little tardy and so being locked outside the gates as penalty. He imagines what might be happening inside the mill as the yarn is wound and the people occasionally have to intervene and repair a break in the yarn as it spins. As he stands there, he admires man's ingenuity, but supposes that by contrast life and nature are more worth his time. He imagines a place with tall cliffs and trees, brooks, and is reminded of loves that need renewing and thoughts than need more thinking, and thinks that mill is nothing sacred, and if they need him to work in it, then they know where to find him.

"Two Tramps in Mudtime" is told in rhymed stanzas about a time when Frost was out chopping wood when two men came up and shouted that he should hit them hard. He reflects for several stanzas about his love for the season when water collects in wheel ruts and footprints above the frozen ground before the summer dries it up. He also observes that the men approaching him would be doing so in order that they could do the work he loved for aesthetic reasons for pay and survival, and so decides to let them do the work. He closes the poem with a reflection that one's avocation and vocation would be combined in his ideal, so that everything he did would be for heaven's and the future's sakes.

"Love and a Question" is about the moment when a man comes out of an autumn evening to ask for shelter for the night. The house at which he stops, however, is the home of a newly married man and wife, and the groom is faced with the question of whether to give the man some bread or money and send him off with prayers for his good, or whether to sacrifice his evening with his wife at the fire she is tending to give the man shelter. It is written in a much more the style of old ballads than his other poems, putting him, in the opinion of Louis Untermeyer, comfortably in the company of the world's classic poets.

"An Old Man's Winter Night" is a free-verse poem about a typical night in the life of a lonely old man. Frost frames the evening in the context of the sky the man looks out into from the room he entered for reasons he can't now remember. He wanders from room to room and thinks to himself that the moon is nicer on the snow than the sun for its ability to leave the icicles on the edge of his roof, and Frost ends the poem with the comment that an old man can only keep a house by similarly wandering absent-mindedly through it.

The next cluster of poems is presented as a representation of the very different characters Frost presents in his poetry. He presents them with "unpitying sympathy", presenting them honestly and affectionately, foibles and all.

The first is "The Gum-Gatherer" and is about a man the narrator meets along a mountain path and they exchange stories. He learns that the man lives in a cabin in the forest he understands will eventually burn with the rest of the forest, and makes his living like so many do, bringing eggs and berries into town to sell from what they have gathered in the woods. The man describes the process of gathering the gum from the trees, bringing it into town like brown crystals that reveal pink insides when you bite them. Frost concludes that it is a pleasant life he lives in the dim light under trees.

"The Investment" is a poem in ABBA rhymed stanzas. It makes a statement about what life is. He describes the place as one where living means staying in the same place, and among the old sameness, one house has been newly painted, and there is a piano arriving there. A young couple is moving in, and Frost wonders aloud in the poem whether it is an effort to keep some life and music in a life surrounded by other people "[sinking] under being man and wife".

"The Figure in the Doorway" is a narrative poem in rhymed couplets about a train ride through wooded mountains during which Frost notices a man standing in a cabin's front door. The man would nearly fills the cabin with his height were he to lay down inside it, but he observes that the man has everything he needs around his small cabin for a full life, the warmth and shelter of the trees, a garden, and the entertainment of the passing train.

"To A Young Wretch" is written from the perspective of a lover of the forest addressing a young man who cuts a spruce down out of it to become his family's Christmas tree. He discusses the grudging instinct in him as something he needs to balance with the good it is for the man's family, helping him to understand the war-god's fighting on two sides

of a battle, since each has its own good. He closes the poem expressing a wish that at the same time he grieves the loss the tree will experience of its home under the stars, he may accept its home under a Christmas star with all the joy of Christmas.

"The Wood Pile" was praised by Amy Lowell, poet and critic, as being perfectly true to fact without any imagery or sentimentality, truly observation but made beautiful in its wording. It opens by describing the woods themselves, all thin vertical lines making every view look like every other, until there is the distinction of a bird to follow. Frost notes that it lands on a tree with one between him and Frost, supposing that the bird expected him to be after one of his feathers. He notices next a pile of wood that has obviously been there for a few years, having aged to gray and been overgrown by clematis winding around it. He shifts his musing to the man who must have left it there, supposing that he must be a man whose attention shifts quickly to the next task at hand, if he could so quickly forget such a nice pile of wood and leave it there to warm the swamp with its decay.

"A Hundred Collars" is a strange encounter put down in free verse between a professor seeking a room and the newspaper collector with whom he will share the last available room in the town's only hotel. The professor is described in the opening of the poem as a man who seldom sees his family, although he keeps them well taken care of with a vacation home for the summers. He travels a good deal, and in the case of this trip, the very distinguished gentleman meets a verbose fellow-traveler who does his traveling by horse and buggy, meeting people at their homes and using his knowledge of their lives and worlds to shape the newspaper by which he is employed. The professor distrusts him at first, but the collector continues on with his stories of his travels unperturbed, even offering to send the man all the to-small collars he has kept since he was several sizes smaller, but that the professor wouldn't give him his address. The professor remains a little tense while the collector says he is leaving for a while and will be back when the professor is sleeping, so will knock in a way to identify himself and not scare him, leaving the professor to slide a bit down his pillow and try to sleep.

"The Star-Splitter" is a poem about a singular man with a singular focus, being so passionate about star-gazing, and feeling responsible to provide the ability to the people of his town, that he burns his house for the fire insurance and uses the money to buy a telescope. The discussion that follows allows Frost to discuss the fact that being social means being forgiving, since people come with all manner of foibles and to shun them all for their sins would mean running out of people with whom to be social. The man takes a job with the railroad, so he has nights free to gaze at stars, and Frost describes a night spent with the star-gazer with his telescope, the way the telescope split the stars the way one might split wood, and ends on a completely unromantic note. He observes that looking and looking through that telescope, they never knew any better where they were situated than they knew before they looked.

"The Housekeeper" is a dialogue between an old woman and a neighbor who is visiting looking for a man named John who has gone to the neighbor's house to talk to him, and so they have missed each other. The neighbor comes in to the house to hear the long narrative of the old woman and the conversation reveals in pieces as it transpires that

Estelle, who is the woman's daughter, has left, and that she had never been married to John. John had been raised by his mother, and so didn't know how to do a good deal of the work required on a farm, leaving Estelle to take care of the house, her mother, and the balance of the farm work John couldn't do. With Estelle gone, however, the woman is making plans to move out of the house, and the two wonder how he will find anyone to replace Estelle. It is only late in the poem that the woman reveals that Estelle has married someone else. John waited too long, and he enters the conversation at the poem's end, furious and ready to have his own say.

Next comes a series of five poems grouped together and entitled "The Hill Wife". The first, "Loneliness (Her Word)" is a woman's impression that she and the person she addresses get too emotionally involved in the coming and going of birds, and is written in ABCB verse. "House Fear" describes the residents of a house being afraid that someone might be in their house and waiting for them on their return to it and night, and so rattle the key in the lock to warn them to leave and leave the door wide open behind them until they have lit the lamp inside. "The Smile (Her Word)" describes a woman's impressions of a man who came begging for food, smiling what she thought was an insincere smile, either from pity at their being poor, inspiring him to beg instead of steal, or from amusement at their being married so young, inspiring him to smile at the vision of them old and dead; it ends with her imagining that he is still watching them from the road. "The Oft-Repeated Dream" is about a dream in which a pine tree outside a window that keeps trying the window latch and the fear of what the tree would do if it succeeded at opening the window. The final poem is entitled "The Impulse" and is about a childless wife who lives a lonely existence following her husband about his work outdoors until she finally runs away and hides, and he learns about her leaving him from her mother.

Love poems follow, the first of which is "The Telephone" revealing, according to Untermeyer, a particular insight into Frost himself. It is another conversation poem, this time between lovers, when one comes to the other and says that as he was walking, he leaned his head against a flower, and thought he heard her invite him to come. She says she only thought the thought, and he answered saying, then so he came.

"Revelation" discusses in four-line stanzas of metered, ABAB rhyming pattern the different approaches people take to relationships. Some keep themselves at a distance from people, teasing and posturing and aching to be known. Some speak only in the most literal terms, in the opposite extreme, hoping to inspire understanding. He warns in the final stanza that just as in the case of people who dodge the topic of God, everyone must eventually give themselves some kind of definition so there is ground on which people can meet them.

"Going for Water" is a description of a hum-drum daily task made whimsical and beautiful by its imagery, as he describes a small group of people who go out into the woods to gather water from a creek when their well went dry. He describes them hiding from the mood like gnomes who would play at revealing themselves and hiding again, and listen in their silence for the babbling water. He describes the sound it makes by

slowing down his visual description, calling out the individual water droplets like pearls falling into the water to become a silver blade.

"A Line-Storm Song" is a rhymed love poem issuing an invitation to come and be lovers in the rain. It describes the wet woods after a rain where the flowers are too wet for bees, the birds are hiding away, and rain falls from the branches when the wind blows. It is an idyll with a note of the fantastic, making reference to elves whose songs have filled the place, and the first and last of the four stanzas ends with the line, "and be my love in the rain". This poem ends the series of love poems in this section.

Next comes "Death of the Hired Man", and shares in common with "The Housekeeper" that the character most fully described is the only one who doesn't appear; in this case, it is the hired man. It is a love story of its own in that the wife depicted in it views the farmhand they discuss with understanding and compassion, while her husband remembers the hand's leaving on bad terms and doesn't care to renew his employment. She tells him the story of her having found the hand sleeping against the barn, and looking broken and at the end of his strength. She had taken him to the house and given him tea and tried to get him comfortable, but he was proud and determined that he was there to do a job. She recalls with understanding how he talked about another hand named Warren who was in college and by whom the hand had always felt out-done. He had since thought of ways of answering him, and how he could teach him to put up hay as well as he, since that was his particular skill. The wife urges her husband to be gentle and help him retain his dignity, thinking he had come home to die. Her husband proposes sarcastically that home must be the place where people have to accept you when you have to go there, and she answers that she thought home was where one didn't have to earn their acceptance. The husband goes reluctantly to talk to the man, and finds that he has died in the uncomfortable chair by the fire.

Chapter 3, The Hired Man and Other People Analysis

The third chapter begins with the poem "Birches" in which Frost demonstrates his surprising perspective of ordinary things, and the life they take on in his imagination. The poem is about his wish that the thing that bent down the birches was the swinging on them of little boys out for a swing in the middle of their chores. He fills the poem with beautiful images of the bent trees contrasting with the straight ones, and the fanciful girls they are, throwing their hair over their heads to dry. He imagines a whole life for the little boy, with no other games to play and finding supreme pleasure in the trees. He goes a step further and imagines that he is the little boy himself, exploring the entryway to heaven in the top of the trees, but knowing that earth's the right place for love, and being dipped back down to earth, having enjoyed both the coming and the going.

"Mowing" is an example of Frost's making beautiful and mystical the everyday task of cutting grass into hay with a scythe. He imagines the scythe whispering to the ground, and imagines that there is nothing more truthful than a blade cutting grass, using the blade as a metaphor for love itself.

"Mending Wall" demonstrates very effectively the ability of Frost to adopt both the voices of the young and revolutionary and the old and pro-establishment. The youth in the story is the narrator who observes his own resistance to the idea of walls between neighbors when there are no animals to keep away from crops. He wants to challenge the idea with the neighbor he is mending it with, but the man continues to answer that "good fences make good neighbors". In the end, it is the youth's respect for the man's comfort and preference that makes him a good neighbor.

"The Mountain" is another contrast between youth and age, when a young visitor comes to a village and is astonished at an old man's lack of curiosity about the mountain that stands at its edge. Frost enters effectively into both men's perspectives again, communicating the youth's excitement and curiosity as the old man tells him about the spring and the path that's so rarely traveled, and the old man's seeing it only as a feature of the landscape that defines his village and that he would climb if something made it necessary, and then only as far as necessity took him. Youth and age are contrasted as effectively as adventurousness and pragmatism, curiosity about an experience and satisfaction with a good story well told.

"Brown's Descent" paints the qualities Untermeyer supposes Frost saw as Yankee characteristics of humor, determination and madcap adventurous. Brown is a farmer whose life has always been methodical until one day when the snow takes him and he willingly submits to the wild adventure of a good slide, two whole miles holding his lantern the entire way, so that his adventure is viewable by the entire village below. The most revealing of Brown's actions, however, is the unaffected resolve he demonstrates when he gets to the bottom to walk up the cleared road that winds several miles back up the slope to his house, bowing, as Frost says, to natural law.

"The Vanishing Red" is a story told in matter-of-fact non-editorialized recording of observable facts about a white man's murder of a Native American with only the qualification that the reader would have to go back and see it from the beginning as the Miller saw the matter to understand his reaction. The first quote in the poem asks whose business it is of anyone else's what the Miller takes on himself to do, when he believes in just getting a thing done with suggests that there was some inevitable necessity in killing the Native American man, and one can easily wonder if Frost intended his attitude to be representative of a cultural attitude he observed more broadly among his countrymen. This poem is particularly interesting when read in conjunction with "The Gift Outright on page 250.

"To the Thawing Wind" uses beautiful imagery and description to show the reader the images of spring that play through the poet's imagination as he prays to the thawing wind to hasten the melting. He asks that even the glass in his window be melted so that his pages are so disturbed that he has no choice but to go outdoors in it. As much as it might sound like an expressed wish to escape his work, it is revealing of just how much he has the soul of a poet, that he even expresses his longing to go and be inspired to write by writing it.

"A Lone Striker" is another demonstration of what a poet's soul Frost has even in his perspective on the lives of working men and women. He describes what must be going on inside a mill with no lack of appreciation for its ingenuity or the skill of the people who kept it working, but contrasts it instantly with a description of the natural world from which those people who remained faithful to their jobs every day would be so closed off. Nature wanted exploring and the best stuff of life wanted living, and there was, afterall, nothing sacrosanct about a factory. It is in its essence a reminder and a plea to his readers to remember what is really important and sacred about life and to prioritize those things, in similar theme to his wishing to unite his avocation and his vocation in "Two Tramps in Mudtime".

"Two Tramps in Mudtime" immediately follows, and contrasts the observation of himself that when approached by men who have done the task he is doing out of necessity for survival he begins to think about what a pleasure he considers it to split wood just for activity, with the knowledge that these men are approaching him because even at this moment their survival rests on their finding work. He demonstrates again his understanding of his culture, but also of the individuals who live in it and their sharply contrasting experiences within its structure.

"Love and a Question" reads like a much older poem and presents a situation in which the priorities of romantic and charitable are set at odds. The man of a house answers the door to find an older gentleman outside weary from the road and in need of a place to stay, while indoors, his beautiful new bride is preparing a fire by which the two of them were to spend their evening. The poem ends with the question unanswered, and the reader in just the same conundrum as the poor groom looking into the face of the traveler.

"An Old Man's Winter Night" is a sensitive, intimately realistic look at an evening in the life of a solitary old man. The isolation of the dark night is expressed with vividly lonely words in the opening sentence, and the reality of the man's mental state in the lines that follow, as he stands in a room and wonders what it was that brought him there. The house bears the same signs of age and neglect one would expect to observe in the old man, creaking and slightly cluttered. Frost doesn't editorialize at all, just closes by commenting that that's just how an old man would keep a house, by wandering semi-blindly through it.

"The Gum-Gatherer" is a poem of admiration of the simplicity of a life in actual observation that he had only seen evidence of from the perspective of a shopper in the markets where the mountain goods were sold. He describes the tactile experience of life intimately immersed in nature with very complementary imagery, comparing the gun to jewels and describing the walk to the man's house with the same attention to the quiet, welcoming details that characterize his other pastoral poems.

"The Investment" gives a snapshot of a tired and dying town's observation of a young couple's moving in and painting their house, and moving in a piano, as if with the expectation of some life and color in their dilapidated little town. The closing line summarizes Frost's understanding of the couple's resolve, not to be weighted down by

the dullness of repetitive life in a changeless town, but to retain their determination to live, create and enjoy their lives from the start.

"The Figure in the Doorway" creates a whole character in the imagination of the reader in such a way that the reader feels as if he were along with Frost on the train ride passing by as much as if he were standing in the man's yard and surveying all that made his simple life possible in that wild and otherwise isolated place. He describes the man's life with respect for its efficient simplicity, and even regards his waving or not waving as his own prerogative, living, as he is, free from the expectations and constraints of civilization.

"To a Young Wretch" is a poem in which the opinion revealed in the title is being continuously reigned in to balance with the reasonableness with which the poet is trying to view the character he addresses. He writes to a young man who has chopped a tree out of his woods to take home and decorate for Christmas whom he can hardly forgive for the theft, but wants to view with charity. It is, in the end, a desire to live with the Christmas spirit that motivates him to put away his grief for the tree having lost its view of the woods, and the woods having lost the tree and wish the boy and his family joy of it.

"The Wood Pile" begins as a simple observation of a curiously abandoned pile of cut wood at the edge of a swamp and evolves into a contemplation of what sort of man would be so eager to move on to the next task that he would do one task with such care only to leave the work unused and wasted. The description is clean and matter-of-fact, and for that reason vivid and captivating to the imagination.

"A Hundred Collars" is a tangibly tense encounter between two very different men put into a rare and uncomfortable situation. Their personalities are both so well painted that the reader wishes for both of their sakes that they had not had to put up with each other at all. Frost is almost ornery in inserting the quirky detail about the collars just to introduce the possibility that this uncanny meeting might be prolonged with some effort at contact by the verbose newspaper man of the shy farmer.

"The Star-Splitter" is a story told with similar humor to the last, this time about a man who is so convinced that we are put on earth to see that he burns his house for the insurance money to buy a telescope. He takes himself not at all seriously, and one could suppose that Frost admired the idea of giving up the conventional for the sake of the thing that sparked one's passion. It is very like Frost's taking whatever job would allow him to write in order that his life might serve his passion. The only doubt put in the mind of the reader about Frost's sympathy with the man is in the final sentence when he poses the question of what we really learn by looking out. However, as soon as the reader contemplates the question, it is answered.

"The Housekeeper" is another conversation poem about a woman who, although we learn a great deal about her, and her actions are the topic of the conversation, we never get to meet. There are equal parts of humor and pain as the reader learns that the woman being discussed was never happy nor well-served in her relationship, and

likewise for the woman's mother who must now uproot and follow her to the home where she found those things. Frost's sympathy is observably split between the man who was never prepared for the life that was expected of him, and for the woman who worked and worked to make his life possible and had, in the end, to be the one to do the leaving.

"The Hill Wife" is a series of poems that, when taken together, depict fear, love and loneliness in vivid, tangible terms. The woman who speaks in the first person in the opening poem is heartbreakingly candid, as is the voice describing the "Oft-Repeated Dream". And, in a curious repetition on theme, the wife in "The Impulse" bears much resemblance to the woman who abandoned the man in "The Housekeeper", and earns even more sympathy as the reader watches her follow her husband unnoticed and alone before she goes.

"The Telephone" is a whimsical and youthful portrait of love, as one lover tells the story to another about his having heard her calling him when he bent his ear close to a flower, and so came. The lover plays along and asks what he heard, and the whole mood of the poem is as playful and hopeful as young love.

"Revelation" is a playful poem about the nuances in which we speak until someone who understands us comes along. He understands about people that we are most comfortable when, like children, we play hide-and-seek because we want to be found, but that we do want to be found even if it means revealing ourselves completely and literally as we invariably must if we want to be known.

"Going for Water" is an idyll about a couple playing with each other, the moon and the woods as they go into the woods to get water from a brook. He speaks in the voice of giddy young lovers playing at everything, even the very mundane task of getting water, so that it is a moment the reader wants to linger in and revisit.

A similar spirit speaks through "A Line-Storm Song" as one lover invites another to disregard the inhospitable wet woods and be his lover in the rain.

"Death of a Hired Man" is another kind of love poem, in which a man and woman are presented with the reappearance of a man who left their employ on bad terms, and has returned in a bad way. The husband resists welcoming him back and the wife urges him to be gentle, and all the conversations happen in natural rhythms that still describe the man so vividly that the reader comes to know him, as well as their differing perspectives in moment like their contrasting descriptions of home.

Chapter 4, Stopping By the Woods and Other Places

Chapter 4, Stopping By the Woods and Other Places Summary

Opening his chapter entitled "Stopping By Woods and Other Places", Untermeyer presents the poem entitled "Hyla Brook", a sonnet with an extra line, summing up its thesis in the 15th line. The poem describes a brook that has dried up, either retreating underground, so that one remembers its movement and the plants that grew alongside it the same way one remembers snow and the sleigh-bells that ran across it when they are out of season. He describes the leaves that now line the bottom of the dried bed and closes the poem by stating that "we love the things we love for what they are".

"The West-Running Brook" is another idyll, and a conversation between a man and a wife who come upon a brook running west where all other water flows east, toward the ocean. The woman says they should call it the West-running Brook, and her husband agrees. They say that they should make it theirs, and build a bridge across it, and be married, the three of them, and then she notices one wave falling over a rock, and tumbling white and backward toward the source. She says it is there just for them, and he says, no, that it has been there since the beginning, but she should have it as she may. He lapses next into reflection about how we all began in such a place, and all of us are represented very well in a wave paying tribute back to its beginning, its source. The poem ends when they agree that this would be the day they remember as when they said the things they said about the brook.

Next there follows a series of short poems, all about little things most of us have seen without ever giving thought to their beauty, and Frost in his poetry makes memorable. The first is called "A Patch of Old Snow", and in it he compares a patch of snow in the shady corner of a field to an old newspaper the rain has laid against the ground, and whose grime makes it look like newsprint from a day he's forgotten. In "A Time to Talk", Frost simply presents the idea that when a friend slows his horse in the road to greet him, he doesn't look at the work yet to be done, but puts down his tools and goes to the wall at the road for a visit. "A Boundless Moment" describes a moment when he and a friend saw something pale in the distance, and think at first that it is blooming flowers until, coming closer and remembering it is March, they conclude that it is a beech tree still wearing last year's leaves.

"Bereft" is arranged in three sets of five rhyming lines followed by a single, lonely line without a rhyme at the end. It is a poem about the wind changing to deepen its roar, with imagery of nature turning antagonistic as leaves coil up like a snake and strike at his knee. The character supposes that word must have gotten out about his being alone in the house, alone in the world, and the final line confesses that he has no one left but God.

"A Winter Eden" is written about Frost's seeing the world that exists lifted off the surface of the earth on a platform of deep snow and the way the living things continue to interact on it. He sees bright red berries and beasts lounging in the branches of an apple tree, visiting the place until it turns 2 o'clock and he has to return to work. He closes by musing that his visit might be too short to have been worth while to him, rousing his love of the natural world just enough for it to be painful to have to return to his work indoors.

"The Flower Boat" is about the common sight in fishing towns of the unused fishing dories finding themselves in the lawns of the people who are no longer using them and filled with flowers. He sees it from his place in the barber shop while fishermen exchange stories, and imagines that it is waiting eagerly for rougher weather and a chance to go and fill itself again with fish.

"The Census-Taker" is about a man whose job it is to count the people who live in a desert town with fewer and fewer residents each time he comes, until at last, in the day of this poem, he arrives and finds no one at all. The wind blows the doors open the closed, and the stoves are cold, and the houses themselves are falling to decay. He concludes that if there is anyone there, they are hiding, and shouts to the cliffs that if anyone is there, they should say so, or he will declare the place deserted. He is a little saddened by the conclusion that there is no one around, and concludes that he must want life to continue.

"A Brook in the City" is a description of a farm enveloped by a growing city written in rhyming couplets. Its attention centers on the brook running through the property and what will become of it. It is a place he has loved, but he wonders how many other people will ever miss it or even know it was there once it is covered with cement and rocks and blends into the rest of the square city.

"Evening in a Sugar Orchard" is a peaceful poem with rhyme scattered through it like the scattered stars and trees it talks about, as he describes the buckets with lids that hang off the trees to gather their sap, and the bear-skin rugs of snow that sit under them. He talks about asking the fireman to stoke the fire and send sparks into the sky, wondering if they will light the trees to compete with the light of the moon and seeing that, instead, the sparks just form extra constellations in the trees and continue to heaven.

"The Onset" is a poem about winter and his being mesmerized by its depth and cold, and dizzying as he looks up at the trees thinking he could fall victim to unending winter. But he reminds himself that as many times as winter has come and threatened to permanently freeze the earth, it has never remained forever, but spring has always followed, the snow running back down the mountain and leaving only birches and churches white behind it.

"Spring Pools" is about the puddles that sit under bare trees from the melted snow and reflect the sky perfectly, as well as the flowers that stand at their edges. Frost observes that the puddles will soon be gone like the flowers around them, drunk up by the roots of

the trees that grow above them, giving life to the leaves that are now only buds, and made into shade for the forest floor.

"In a Disused Graveyard" is written in four stanzas in ABBA rhyme scheme about a cemetery that people still visit, but where no one else is now being buried. A stanza is dedicated to suggesting that the stones assume that the living who visit it now will soon come back to stay, but the writer knows that no more people will be laid to rest here. He is tempted to be clever and tell the stones that men have developed a distaste for dying, and so have stopped doing it since, from their limited vantage point, the stones would probably believe it!

"Sand Dunes" is another poem in four stanzas, this one in ABAB rhyme pattern, about the ocean's waves changing to waves of sand so that, if the ocean cannot drown a man, she can bury him in sand. Frost pays tribute to the human spirit and intellect, however, when he suggests that if she intends to stop men from thinking, she will fail, the shells she leaves in exchange for their sunken ships just providing that much more about which men may think.

"The Birthplace" is a poem of rhymed couplets about the mountain that was the childhood home of a family of a dozen children. The place was tamed and subdued by the children's father, and was a hospitable home for them while they lived there. Then, the children grew up, and left the mountain, and it was able to return to its normal state, filled with trees.

In "For Once, Then, Something", the poet describes in the difficult-to-use hendecasyllabic verse a time when he was looking down into a well whose opening was overgrown with fern so that his reflection was surrounded by a halo of green against the clouded sky. He notices something white beyond his reflection deeper in the pool, but before he can identify it, a drop of water falls from one of the fern leaves and ripples the surface of the water so that he can't see what it was. He only knows that for a moment once, it was something.

"A Serious Step Lightly Taken" is a poem written in six four-line stanzas with rhymes at the end of the second and fourth lines. It is about a family's arrival at a place they found on a vague map where a stream ran between two hills, and a house could be gotten with a down payment of a dollar. It would become their family homestead, where they would farm for generations, growing their family and their fortune and mending every detail of the property when in needed mended for the span of three hundred years. Determined to see three hundred more, they have already seen six major wars and forty-five presidents.

"Tree at My Window" is written in four stanzas in ABBA rhyme scheme about the tree that lives just outside the speaker's window. He notes that the same way the tree has been tossed around by the wind, it has seen the speaker tossed around in dreams, and so they have a kinship; one of them is concerned with inner and one with outer weather.

"Sitting by a Bush in Broad Sunlight" is a five-stanza poem of couplets that observes that life came from the sun's interaction with the dust and primordial ooze, and contemplates the miracle of life's beginning. He contrasts the overt miracle of life with the subtle miracle of God's having revealed himself to humanity, and points out that both the miracle of life and the miracle of faith still persist in us, but makes no distinction about which is which, in fact pairs breath with truth and faith with the sun's first light.

"Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening" is a short four-stanza poem in AABA rhyme about a man who stops in the woods of a man he knows to watch the snow fall. He imagines that his horse must be confused at stopping where there is no farmhouse near, and listens to his ringing harness bells and the sound of the softly falling snow. The only thing that moves him from his place is that he has responsibilities and miles more to travel.

Chapter 4, Stopping By the Woods and Other Places Analysis

"Hyla Brook" presents the idea that even dried up and a shadow of itself, the poet loves the place for what it is, the memories it produces, and the promise of what it will be again, making it a poem both local and universal.

"West-Running Brook" unites the ideas of love pledging itself to eternity and the evolution of man against all odds. Both are work done to an exceptional end, and both have the admiration of the poet to the point that he closes with the couple memorializing the moment when they made the discovery and the pledge.

"A Patch of Old Snow" and "A Time to Talk" bring the reader's attention to the beauty of the details of life that we might otherwise overlook in the example of a patch of snow and an invitation to conversation. Both are things he has the option to overlook but chooses instead to immortalize.

"A Boundless Moment" describes a moment when imagination and reality combine and he sees spring in a moment when everything is still dormant. The moment's boundlessness comes from his momentary suspension of disbelief when he believes that what he sees is a flower. "Bereft" is a similarly expanded moment, but this time fear is the thing that is made into the moment in which the reader hangs.

"A Winter Eden" revisits the theme in "The Lone Striker", but is the moment recognized as beautiful and cut short by the necessity of returning to work. The reader's attention is hung and suspended in the beauty of the scene, so the bell's ringing comes as abruptly to the reader as to the man who must return to work.

"The Flower Boat" successfully paints the incongruity of a fishing boat taken out of its context and filled with flowers as is common in fishing towns as well as whetting the reader's appetite for the adventures at rough sea for which the boat must be longing in the midst of its humiliation.

"The Census-Taker" delivers the reader to a desolate and deserted desert town and moves him door-to-unanswered-door and back in time through the slow decay and desertion of the place until the moment that comes almost as a relief when the census taker shouts to the hills that the town is being declared deserted, so that he will never have to return there again. "A Brook in the City" gives the reader a similar feeling of sadness, but for the opposite reason; instead of a community being lost, a piece of nature is being lost to the growing community, so that only the memories of an isolated few will remain as proof that it was ever there.

"Evening in a Sugar Orchard" and "The Onset" use the setting of winter to present hopeful and uplifting themes, the first presenting the solace of stars peaking through trees and the second the promise that spring always follows winter, that winter never wins forever. "Spring Pools" similarly addresses the renewal of life as puddles on the forest floor one day are leaves in trees shading the same floor weeks later. And "A Disused Graveyard" similarly presents a strangely hopeful look at a graveyard in which no new people will be buried and where, for a moment people could tell the stones that would, and so allow them also to believe that people just weren't dying anymore.

"Sand Dunes" anthropomorphizes the ocean in such a way that suggests that she wishes to drown all the men she touches, and so feels hopeful about the sand dunes that continue on where her waves die for their ability to bury them. His hopefulness is that men's minds are continuously reinventing ways of living and exploring her, and so continue along in mutual trade with her.

"The Birthplace" gives tribute to a place where his family was born and raised and, after it had mad that contribution to them, returned to trees, making the reader happy to hear it, even while he was sure the place would even remember their names. In a similar immortalization of a fact that existed only for an instant, "For Once, Then, Something" immortalizes a well in which the poet's imagination was swept up in a moment of wondering what he saw in the water past his reflection once when it was, if only then, something.

"A Serious Step Lightly Taken" lightly tells the story of a family's choosing the place that would become their many-generations home and names their activities there in such a way as to make them sound as simple and wholesome as anything any family could hope to build their home in doing. Continuing in the theme of family, "Tree at My Window" establishes a kinship between human and plant that makes them seem like siblings and fellow travelers through the adventures of night.

The next pair of poems is "Sitting by a Bush in Broad Sunlight" and "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening", both using simple, short words to describe their respective scenes, and both presenting themes much deeper than their initial subject matter. The first poses the question of whether it takes more faith to maintain belief in the sun or in God, and the second moves from being swept up in a beautiful scene to the responsibilities that pull him away from it.

Chapter 5, The Runaway and Other Animals

Chapter 5, The Runaway and Other Animals Summary

Untermeyer opens the fifth chapter by explaining that Frost has an affection for animals that is universal across the animal, bird and insect kingdoms. He understands nature as well as the greatest of nature poets, better than his contemporaries, and is still transcendent of that category.

The first poem of the chapter is "The Oven Bird" and is about a bird who sings in the mid-summer the way some birds sing in spring when the flowers and trees are at their most fresh, blooming and fragrant. His song is reserved for the mid-summer when he makes the trees sing that have gone barren of flowers and dust has covered the roads. The wisdom Frost sees in the fact that the hot, tired green of summer past its bloom is the time the bird does his singing is that the bird shows the world what to do with diminished things.

"Our Singing Strength" is another poem about birds, this time about the birds who have come back north in spring during a snowfall that falls on warm ground and only covers the grass and trees, so that the only exposed ground for the birds to follow is the roads. The birds are of all different types newly returned to the north from their migration south for the winter, and are all singing together, so that their songs mingle together. Since the roads are all the birds have to follow, the voice in the poem talks about their filling the road ahead of him as he travels along it, and are gathered and ready even despite the bad weather to sing the flowers out of the ground for spring.

"A Minor Bird" is about a man who claps his hands and tries to scare a bird away who has been singing in his front yard but who, on thinking about it, realizes that a bird has nothing to do but sing the song he has been given, and that the fault might be in himself for wanting silence all day.

"Never Again Would Birds' Song Be the Same" is a love poem in ABAB rhyme scheme about the influence Eve's song, laughter and presence had on the birds' songs. He proposes that her eloquence could only have a positive influence on them, and that since the moment of their voices joining together with hers, the birds' songs would never be the same, and that was her whole purpose in coming.

"A Blue Ribbon at Amesbury" is written in tribute to a particularly beautiful hen who has just returned from winning the blue ribbon for best bird. He praises the colors of her feathers and narrates the thoughts of the farmer who contemplates breeding her as the Eve of a new race of beautiful hens. Instead, she lives the pampered life of a solitary hen who is fed her fill and spends the night in her coop with the harsh winter night kept safely away and urge the farmer to prudence.

"Looking for a Sunset Bird in Winter" is a poem in AABB rhyme and five stanzas about a sunset when the speaker thought he saw a bird and tried to follow it but couldn't find it again. Instead, he circled a tree twice only to find a single leaf clinging to a branch and a streak of clouds against the sky like the brush stroke of an artist through which a single star was peaking.

In "A Drumlin Woodchuck", Frost adopts the persona of a woodchuck, using the survival and world-interaction strategy of that animal as symbolism for some people's approach to life, hiding and remembering their small size in comparison with everything else, and so surviving for another day.

"The White-Tailed Hornet" records Frost's observations of a hornet, starting with praise of his nest and his ability to fly with such great speed and precision. He observes that a wasp would sting him without remorse and never understand for all his explaining that he was one of the reasonable sorts who understood about bugs and had no enmity with them. Watching him longer, he observes that the wasp is searching for a fly, and at first mistakes a series of nail-heads as flies, and after that a huckleberry, until Frost became downright skeptical of the instinctive intelligence of this particular bug. He reflects that humanity has come to view humanity as the erring species, and animals, ruled by their infallible instincts as the unerring race. He takes that thought further to surmise that men have undone their own expectations of themselves, giving away our greatness one piece at a time when we have shifted our standards for comparison from the gods and angels to the animals.

"Waspish" continues the theme of insect behavior with an observation of the self-assurance with which a wasp stretches himself tall on his wiry legs and readies his wings, not realizing that he is as perfectly designed and equipped as anyone else whose body is working to move them about.

"Departmental" is a satirical poem in simple, rhythmic couplets full of comical rhymes and imagination of what life in an ant colony might be. In its original printing, Untermeyer points out, the subtitle was "The End of My Ant Jerry", and its subject matter is that literally: the death of a house ant. The poem describes an encounter between an ant and a moth, and the unconcern with which he disregarded it, knowing that someone from the department for investigating the transcendental would be interested should he come across one. The same ant passes over a dead member of his hive with similar unconcern, knowing that there was a department for that, as well. And indeed, the Queen herself issued a decree about the precision with which the dead ant should be taken care of, and in the end there was only the official assigned to the task there to mourn the deceased, with no sentimentality, in mockery of a life Frost supposes has become too departmental.

"Design" is a contemplation of whether design or chance brought a white spider and a white moth together on a black night to a white flower, and is written in ABBA pattern in one long stanza. It is a curious combination of life and death - the lively spider, and the heal-all flower from which he hung, and the dying moth the spider held like a piece of

starched fabric. The visual beauty of the trio and the profundity of their contrasts are overwhelmingly significant to Frost, and he wonders if design governs a thing so small.

"Fireflies in the Garden" is written in a single stanza of AAABBB rhyme scheme, and describes the evening appearance of a group of fireflies aspiring to be stars. He notes that, of course, they never could attain the size, but come very near to playing the part of stars, but that they cannot sustain the act.

"Canis Major" is a short three-stanza poem in ABCB rhyme that describes the constellation as the great Overdog prancing across the night sky from east to west. In the final stanza, the perspective is revealed to be that of a dog on earth, the underdog, who resolves to bark with the constellation as it romps across the sky.

"Two Look at Two" is an idyll about a couple who are hiking in the country one evening, and come to the end of the traversable path when they see a doe standing on the other side of a wall. They watch her for a moment, and then she moves and snorts for them to stay, and around a tree comes her antlered buck. The two stand and look at the two for a long time, close to the wall and to each other, before the deer turn and walk along the wall away. The couple feels, at the end of the poem, as if earth was telling them that it returned their love.

"A Cow in Apple Time" is a short and light-hearted single-stanza poem of couplets in which Frost describes a cow who lives alone in a pasture and has gotten into the apples that have fallen from the trees. The sugar has gotten the best of her, and she has taken to jumping over walls and going from tree to tree to eat all the apples she can find. Her poor diet eventually affects her adversely, as much as she has been enjoying it, and her milk goes dry.

"The Bear" is an affectionate poem about a bear in the woods pulling on trees and lumbering over boulders, Frost musing that the world has plenty of room for the bear to spread out in, in contrast with the men who act more like bears in cages. Men pace back and forth, in constant conflict between their mind and their mood, and look into telescopes and microscopes with equal restless curiosity. The analogy then works with equal accuracy for both man and bear, and closes with an observation of the bear, rocking his head back and forth looking lovable and seemingly contemplating Aristotle happily in the woods.

The chapter closes with "The Runaway" about a young horse unaccustomed to New England snow, and Frost's observations of its behavior the first time he experiences the stuff. He is visiting a farm and watching for the horse, seeing it as a gray silhouette against the falling snow. It shakes its coat like it is shaking off flies and tries restlessly to get away, with no mother to tell him it will be fine. The poem ends with someone wishing whatever force was keeping him out of stall when all the other animals were in would inspire him to go inside.

Chapter 5, The Runaway and Other Animals Analysis

Frost's love of and sympathy for animals is the central theme of the fifth chapter, beginning with his affection for birds. "The Oven Bird" tells about a bird who sings in the saddest part of fall when nothing lives and no one else sings, and he therefore receives the more of Frost's affections for having the heart of a poet and knowing "what to make of a diminished thing". His affection spreads to all birds returning from their winter migration in "Our Singing Strength" and becomes an analogy for American strength of character as the birds sing, despite the bad weather, to sing the flowers out of frozen ground the same way Americans made homes where there was only wild.

"A Minor Bird", "Never Again would Birds' Song be the Same" and "Blue Ribbon at Amesbury" are all about very different birds, but all display similar affection for the race. The first is a confession for his wishing a bird would stop singing until he realizes that a bird should want to sing, and he should want to hear it. The second tells the story of Eve's influence on birds' songs and leaves the impression that he supposes that all the songs they now sing are love songs for the beautiful thing humanity was at its birth. And the third is about a prize-winning hen that only a true lover of birds could praise as heartily as Frost praises it, and identifies with the farmer who wants to make her immortal.

"Looking for a Sunset Bird in Winter" is a song in itself about a song Frost heard but couldn't attribute to any bird he could find, filling the poem with the rhythmic story of his searching. Similar evasiveness is attributed to the woodchuck whose persona Frost adopts in "A Drumlin Woodchuck" as he imagines life from that perspective and writes his interpretation in such a way that it serves as a metaphor for some people's retreating lives.

"The White-Tailed Hornet" and "Waspish" both affectionately examine those insects, first in contrast and then in comparison with the human race. Instinct is proven fallible and an unsuitable standard for human aspiration in the first, while the misplaced self-confidence of the wasp in the second poem serves to humble humanity as readers identify with his grandstanding. Departmental" ends the insect run, using the apparent bureaucracy of the ant kingdom to scold the coldness and indifference of the human tendency to the same.

"Design" and "Fireflies in the Garden" both examine the beauty to be found in creation, as if nature itself was aspiring to some standard of beauty it couldn't possibly understand, leading the reader to consider the question of whether they are guided by a Designer into their beauty, or whether our idea of beauty is created by their instinctive designs. Even animals seem captivated by nature's beauty as in "Canis Major" Frost affectionately watches a dog barking at the constellation he ardently admires.

"Two Look at Two" slows the pace of the poetry for the long moment two lovers share with two deer who stop fearlessly to watch them watching them at the end of a long walk. The lovers walk away believing that nature has approved their pairing, Frost

having walked the reader so gently and skillfully to that conclusion that he agrees, and joins him in highly regarding earth's approval.

The chapter ends with "The Cow in Apple Time", "The Bear" and "The Runaway", all examples of animals at their most animated, and bringing out the most affectionate and sympathetic of Frost's writing. The first follows a cow from tree to tree in drunken surrender to a newly discovered sweet, even beyond healthy enjoyment to the point that the cow's milk runs dry. Even so, Frost allows nothing but gleeful enjoyment of the animal's surrender. The second watches a bear act so like a child at play that Frost's comparison of him to a student of Aristotle comes as both a humorous poke and an affectionate flight of whimsy. The final poem is all sympathy as a young horse without its mother panics at its first experience of snow while the people can only look sympathetically on. Frost's depiction is all tenderness, and the line quoted in the opening poem seems impossible to doubt: "He prayeth best who loveth best all creatures great and small".

Chapter 6, Country Things and Other Things

Chapter 6, Country Things and Other Things Summary

Opening the final chapter, Untermeyer describes the driving force behind Robert Frost, and the things that always moved him to do exactly what he did even from a very young age. Presenting "The Road Not Taken", Untermeyer explains that Frost was always deliberate and driven in his life choices, but wanted, as he says at the opening of the final stanza, a story to tell, and so would say that taking the less travelled road made all the difference. The poem is arranged in four stanzas following ABAAB rhyme scheme, and describes a path that diverges in the wood, so that he has to make a choice. Each one is covered with leaves and looks in want of wear, each about the same as the other. He knew that paths that diverge at one point converge in others, and so he chose one over another just so he could say he had.

Next Untermeyer explains the universality of Frost's appeal because of his putting words to emotions everyone has felt. He describes material things with insight into their effect on the human heart, as in "The Need of Being Versed in Country Things". In this lyrical poem, Frost describes a farm property where the house has burned down, leaving only the chimney, and the barn has been left whole because the wind was blowing the fire away from it. He describes the way the flowers and birds had moved in with no mourning for the loss of the farmhouse, as people would, happy, in fact to make the place beautiful in the absence of what had previously been there.

"The Sound of the Trees" is a poem about the sound in trees making the speaker think that the trees must want to go somewhere. He wonders why people want to hear that sound so close to their homes, and how the trees still have so much to say now that it is evident that they only talk about leaving but will never actually leave. Still, he sits and thinks about going whenever he hears them, and thinks he will fall silent on the subject once he makes up his mind to go.

"In Hardwood Groves" is a commentary about the remarkable thing it is that the leaves that fall to the forest floor are the same leaves that eventually become the earth the roots pierce, and ultimately end up as new leaves on the trees themselves. Falling and decaying are necessary parts of the leaves' eventual reincarnation as leaves again. On a similar theme, "Nothing Gold Can Stay" is a short poem about the fact that so many gold things in nature, like the youngest leaves, and the golden paradise of Eden, cannot stay gold but change in the continuing evolution of nature.

"After Apple-Picking" is about the dreams a man has after he has spent a day picking apples high on a ladder and still feeling what he felt when he was picking. It is a multi-sensory description of the look of the apples through a glass he had taken into the trees, the feel of the apples in his hand and those that fall to the ground and are

therefore destined to become cider, and of the feel of the ladder under his feet, all still staying with him in his body as he settled into a nap after he was done.

"The Grindstone" is a description of a stone whetting wheel sitting under an apple tree in a yard looking like it's had years of use and wear, and Frost's imagining his having used it as a child to sharpen a blade with a man who looked like Father Time with a scythe and glowing spectacles. Frost turned and turned and the old man resisted so that the turning was even harder for Frost. It was up to the man how long they turned the wheel, and when the blade was sharp enough. While Frost worried about turning the wheel too long and wasting blade, he wanted to satisfy the man, and so would persevere until the man was satisfied.

"The Kitchen Chimney" is about an architectural money-saver of building a chimney so it started half way up the wall instead of at the floor, so they didn't have to buy as many bricks. The poem asks the builder not to put his chimney on a shelf, as the practice is called, as shelves are for clocks and vases and such, and half a chimney produces an unpleasant smell and stains on the walls. He asks for a whole chimney instead, so as not to be reminded of the castles he used to build in the air.

"Gathering Leaves" describes the otherwise mundane task of raking and bagging leaves with vivid imagery of their lightness in the bag, the noise they make, the feeling of their disappearing when he tries to gather them up in his arms, and the non-color, non-weight and non-usefulness of this thing he works so hard to gather, seemingly harvesting with no end in sight.

"A Leaf Treader" is about Frost's feeling such kinship to the leaves that he fears they will take him with them to death when they drop to the ground in the fall. He reminds himself that he has tread for many falls over leaves until they were a part of the earth, and that every year, he finds himself walking, still alive, in knee-deep snow.

"A Hillside Thaw" uses the imagery of silver lizards to describe the rivulets of water that run down the snow on warm, spring days. He describes lunging after them to try and catch them by their tails, and never can, but admires the moon's ability to freeze and hold them still in their tracks, as if it were a witch who cast a spell from her place high in the night sky. He wonders that if it takes something as powerful as the moon, he should have tried the task himself.

"On a Tree Fallen Across the Road (To Hear Us Talk)" is written in three stanzas in ABAB rhyme and describes a tree that the wind has thrown across the path in front of them, and Frost's surprise that a tree would think it could halt the progress of a race as ingenious and inventive as humanity. He imagines that the tree knows her efforts at stopping the people is in vain, since people, if they wanted, could grab the earth by its axis and set of adventuring on the planet through the stars themselves.

"A Passing Glimpse (To Ridgely Torrence on Last Looking into his 'Hesperides')" describes a moment in couplets when Frost sees, only in a flash out of the corner of his eye, a beautiful cluster of flowers while he is riding by on a passing train. He tries to

name all the flowers he knows it isn't, and wonders if anyone else will ever notice them. He closes by imagining that Heaven only shows itself to people on earth in glimpses such as his.

"Dust of Snow" is a short two stanzas in ABAB rhyme about a moment when a crow landed on a branch and brushed its dusting of snow onto Frost's head, lifting his spirits so much that he said it had redeemed a moment in a day in which he had expected to find no pleasure.

"Fire and Ice" is an epigram in which Frost contemplates which of the passions, love or hate, might destroy the world. More precisely, desire is what he calls fire, and said it is the more consuming of the two, so seems a likely choice. He immediately counters, though, that hate is certainly a strong enough force that it would also do the trick of ending the world.

"Riders" uses the metaphor of horseback riding for living on earth and guiding the progress of man. He says that birth is like mounting a horse bare-backed, and that the horse on which humanity is riding is headless and running wildly. The note of optimism is that humanity still has ideas we haven's tried.

"The Master Speed" uses another metaphor, this time speed to represent love, in a message to a young couple embarking on their lives together. A single long stanza is rhymed in an ABAB pattern, and tells the lovers that they have the ability to move through any current and the speed they like, or to stand completely still while everything around them hurries to its destruction. He urges them to unity, saying they have this invisible togetherness only as long as they are agreed that they are in partnership "wing to wing and oar to oar".

"My November Guest" is about the Sorrow that joins Frost as a guest in the fall while the world turns bleak before winter. He says that she loves the desolate look of the trees and the gray, heavy sky, and tries all fall to persuade him to love them, too. When, at the end of November, he finally does learn to love the month, he decides he could tell her, but she wouldn't believe him, and that the season is better praised when she does the praising, anyway.

"Storm Fear" is written in scattered rhyme and with lines of varying lengths, an ode to his waiting out a storm with his wife and child in their farmhouse. He describes the howling outside like an invitation to go out in it, and says there is no part of him that has to struggle to stay put. He says the three of them are the only ones awake to observe how the cold creeps closer to them as the fire dies and the road becomes so much harder to travel that the barn even seems further away. He wonders in the end of the poem whether they will be strong enough by morning to save themselves without help.

"Wind and Window Flower" is a poem anthropomorphizing a flower on a window sill and the passing winter wind in such a way as to explore a moment of admiration between them. The wind sees the flower from his passing and shakes the curtain aside to see what grew below the singing yellow songbird in its cage. While it ought to have been

concerned with the dead and lonely things of winter, it was trying to see better who was in the warm fire light beyond that window. The flower, however, leaned her head out of sight, and said nothing clever, and so the wind flew on.

"October" is one continuous stanza in eloquent and image-filled plea to an October morning to come on and bring its changes slowly. He asks that it linger over the process of dropping leaves, diffuse the light of the sun with mist, and take its time, if for no other reason than to spare the grapes that grow along the wall from the frost that has already bitten their leaves.

"Good Hours" is the first of four poems included in the group Untermeyer says are representative of Frost's fullest development as a poet in his later life, and is written in three AABB stanzas describing an evening's walk alone on a winter's night. The poet's company is merry, however, in the form of the merry people in the cottages up to their windows with snow, the sound of a violin and the youthful faces of couples through curtains. His whole trip out is brightened by such company, but the trip back found all the windows dark, so his steps were the only sounds to disturb the night's quiet.

"Pea Brush" is a six-stanza poem in ABAB rhyming pattern about a Sunday afternoon when Frost goes to his neighbor John's farm to see the birch branches he had said would work so well to let his peas climb and become bushes. He describes the simple details of his visit, like the heat of the day, the croaking frogs quieting their voices when he passed, and his finding them freshly cut and lying on the backs of trillium flowers in need of having their loads lightened.

In "I Will Sing You One-O", Frost uses short lines to move from himself lying sleeplessly in bed and waiting for the town clock to tell him the time to larger and larger perspectives on space and time. First he thinks about the snow falling and the winds meeting and separating in the streets. The clock chimes and he thinks of the other people in their beds both sleeping and awakened by the wind. His attention then moves to the planets and stars and the clock's chiming their positions, as well, and the stars so far away that they are moving and exploding into novas and remain unchanged to our eyes, as they have been doing since before men and nations began the interactions and antagonizations that have punctuated our history on earth.

"To Earthward" is a love poem in eight ABAB stanzas of short lines and vivid descriptions of the parts of earth he loves. He talks about living on the smells of plants that move on the air and the feeling of the plants and their dew on his hands. He longs for the hard and substantial of life and earth, represented by picking up his hand from having been leaning on it on the grass and sand and wishing he could feel the imprint of the earth on his whole being.

"The Gift Outright" is the first in a group of three of his most-quoted poems, also from his later life when his great mind had reached its fullest maturity. It is in free verse and a single stanza and is a poem of patriotism that opens with the idea that America belonged to Americans before the colonists belonged to it. He suggests something like manifest destiny, that the Europeans were entitled to the land they would have to win

with many wars, and by giving themselves to it and its possibilities. He calls the land unstoried and artless as if it was lying in wait to become what it was meant to become.

"A Considerable Speck" is a witty poem with a note of criticism at its end written with rhymed couplets of varying lengths. Its subject matter is a speck Frost notices on the page he is writing on, and pauses to study because he recognizes it to be moving of its own will instead of in the moving air of the room. He observes in it a desire to live and a sort of evasive action leading to eventual submission to whatever his fate may be at the hands of a clearly larger being. While he confesses that he is not the sentimental type regarding taking the lives of bugs, he explains that he recognized a fellow mind, and in a moment of criticism of some of the written word he had in his time examined, appreciated any display of mind on any page.

"The Silken Tent" describes a woman with the metaphor of a tent in a single stanza in ABAB rhyme. His description is as of a Native American teepee made of silk whose ropes have been dried of their dew and so loosen and blow about the single center pole. The pole supporting and uplifting the center of the tent signifies the spirit in her around which her beauty moves and is upheld, and that is itself anchored to all the corners of the earth itself. It would only be by going stiff and taut in any way that any hint of bondage would be felt.

"Good-Bye and Keep Cold" is a lyric about the life of a farmer in charge of many orchards who must leave one, written in rhythmic ABAB rhyme. He is bidding his young and dormant trees good-bye for the winter and hoping that they escape the nibbling mouths of rabbits, deer and grouse. Knowing he cannot stand at the edge of the orchard and threaten all the area's animals away with a stick, he has to hope instead that the weather remains cold enough that they remain dormant and without fruit to tempt them. He concludes that something, in the end, must be left to God.

"A Prayer in Spring" is a lyric in four AABB stanzas imploring God to grant people pleasure in the present moment of spring and not to let their attention move away from it to any other season. He asks that they enjoy the details like the flowers, the bees and the birds, and closes by saying that love is doing what God has sanctified and only waits for us to do.

"Into My Own" is the third lyric imagining that a line of old, hard trees didn't merely lead the way to a dark wood, but all the way to doom, so that he might follow them and explore the ends of life and time. He supposes, though, that while he would not soon be interested in turning back, those he had left behind would probably follow him and want him to return. He concludes, however, that on finding him, they would not find him changed, only more sure of everything he had believed before.

"Come In" describes in five stanzas and staggered rhyme a dark wood too dark to see at dusk, but still filled with songbirds. He thinks, as he passes that it sounds like they are inviting people in to lament. He doesn't enter, however, saying he wouldn't even if he was asked, and that he had not been.

In "Choose Something Like a Star", Frost begins by addressing a star in couplets. He praises the star's loftiness and mystery, and allows that night is necessary to bring out its brilliance. He asks for some word worth keeping and repeating from the star, and it answers only that it burns. When he can get no more specifics from it than that, he turns instead for wisdom in its steadiness and constancy, so that when men are tempted to praise or criticize too much, they can fix their attention on something like a star and so be tempered.

Next comes a list of poems chosen for their depth of feeling and seriousness of mood. Untermeyer points out that Frost was as deep and contemplative as he was light and humorous. These poems demonstrate that depth of contemplation and seriousness of tone and meaning.

"A Servant to Servants" is a long monologue from a woman servant in charge of feeding a houseful of men on a property containing a lake and a group of servants who have abandoned their lives of servitude to live on the land. She talks about wanting to express how she feels, or wanting to lift her hand, but says that those abilities have been stifled in her by years of doing things because she had to and over and over again because they didn't stay done. She has admired the lake, and known that she ought to think it beautiful, and tried to instruct herself in the ability. She says that she spent a little time in an asylum once, and describes a man in her family who went mad and had to be caged to keep him from violence against himself or someone else. She was born to the woman who married that man's brother after the man had died, and lived in the house with the cage where he had lived. She has always been told, since leaving that house and living a life of servitude, that the only way out of a hardship is through it, and saw her mental and situational state as something to be endured. The poem ends with her turning her attention back to the mass of work yet to be done.

"Directive" is a highly cryptic and symbolic poem made of old scraps of myths and presented with notes of sadness and nostalgia over the place it describes. The place is a ruin of a farm now overgrown and hard to get to, so that the way there is more like getting lost. Frost describes it and the way there with foreboding language about a glacier and its residual chill, the eyes that watch it, and advice to sing yourself a cheerful song about how this desolate and deeply wooded way was once someone's way to work each day. He describes a playhouse full of broken dishes and a house that is only now a cellar filling with lilacs like dough rising, and the brook that is the homestead's water source, and so close to the source that it still runs cold and calm. The place itself is described with inviting language, and advice to close off the way behind so that only you can be there, and use the goblet he got from the playhouse and hid like the Holy Grail. He closes the poem with an invitation to come and drink and be refreshed in a place beyond confusion.

"Acquainted With the Night" is a poem in four and a half stanzas in ABA rhyme that tells about times when the poet has walked through the night. He describes having left and returned through rain, looked down sad city streets and avoided eye-contact with watchmen to avoid explaining the timing of his walk, and listened to the voices that carry through cities while the clock chimes times that make no difference to him.

"Once by the Pacific" is a single stanza of couplets describing one particularly stormy night when Frost was observing the active surf. He says that large waves looked over the tops of smaller waves to contemplate ways of attacking the shore that made him glad the shore was backed by large cliffs, and the cliffs by a continent of land. He imagines that the ocean is readying for something violent before God ends creation altogether.

In "Happiness Makes Up in Height for What it Lacks in Length", Frost uses his familiar AABB single-stanza form to express his trying to imagine a time he knows must have existed when earth was not so bright and clear as it is on the clear and perfect day he is now experiencing.

Untermeyer introduces the poem "For John F. Kennedy, His Inauguration, With Some Preliminary History in Rhyme" by noting that March 26, 1962 was not only Frost's eighty-eighth birthday, but also the day President Kennedy presented him with the Congressional Medal at a White House ceremony, and that he was a guest of honor at a Pan American Union dinner in Washington D.C. His relationship with President Kennedy began when the president asked him to deliver a poem at his inauguration, in what would be the first time a poet was ever offered the honor. The sun had been in his eyes, and a cold wind nearly blew the page away, and so he abandoned the poem he had written for the event and recited "The Gift Outright" from memory instead.

The poem he had composed for the occasion, "For John F. Kennedy, His Inauguration, With Some Preliminary History in Rhyme", is arranged in couplets and moves from the honor and turning point in history it is for a poet to be a part of that occasion through points of history and the present moment that make America great. He praises the discoverers and earliest settlers of America, the founding fathers, and the profundity of the Latin approval of God printed on American currency. He notes that America's Declaration of Independence gave America the responsibility to demonstrate how democracy could and should be carried out, since all the world was watching her. He also acknowledges the upheaval and confusion that was present in the America he observed and admonished Americans to take courageous part in shaping and repairing her. He praised the technological advances being made, and the way their present success justified the outlawry and rebellion on which the country broke its teeth. He notes courage in the air in their era, and calls Americans to live and rule according to the divine design to which they made themselves answerable in a new age of poetry and power.

"Away" is the final poem in the book, written when Frost was in his eighties, and as fanciful and nimbly witty as his earlier and most accomplished work, in Untermeyer's view. It is written in six stanzas in short lines rhymed in ABAB pattern. He speaks in metaphor about his life, as if he is out walking in the desert, leaving behind friends he wishes an evening of wine and peaceful sleep, while he strikes out on his own. He is not cast out, but is leaving of his own free will, "bound away", to quote "Oh Shenandoah". He ends the poem, and qualifies his journey, saying that if he is dissatisfied with what he learns from having died, he may just return.

Chapter 6, Country Things and Other Things Analysis

The final chapter opens with "The Road Not Taken", and Untermeyer provides an insight in introduction to the poem in Frost's driving character, so that when it came time for him to make the choice about which road he would follow, there was really no question about which way he would go. His path is the one he chose for himself as a child. The same lifelong character makes itself evident in "The Importance of Being Versed in Country Things", as he views the destruction of a farm by fire as merely a new opportunity for plants and birds to make homes there. For them it was nothing sad, but one would have to understand about life in the country to see it from the natural world's perspective.

"The Sound of Trees" provides a particularly personal insight into Frost's inner workings as he makes a confession similar to the one about wishing birches bent because a boy was playing on them, confessing here that the sound of wind in trees has always made him wish for adventure. The restlessness of spirit that shows itself in poems like "The Lone Striker" is manifested most observably in his life by his owning five farms at a time and being able to move freely between them, so his being moved to set out when he hears the wind in the trees is as contiguous with what we see of his character as his setting his thoughts about them down in poetry.

The next pair of poems is "In Hardwood Groves" and "Nothing Gold Can Stay", and they both complement each other and speak from opposing perspectives on the same phenomena of spring. The first sees the puddles that lie on the forest floor as the stuff of the foliage that would shade that ground in the summer, and so suggests hope and renewal in an ongoing, eternal cycle. The second, however, wishes to linger on the moment of earliest new life, when the buds are still fragile, baby gold, the sunrise is at its most colorful, and Eden has not yet been corrupted; the golden moment of new life between the puddles and the foliage.

"After Apple Picking" transports the reader right into the physical memory of having been on a ladder picking apples down to the feeling of having to adjust to life on the ground after having worn out one's body standing on a ladder. It is a very simple and exact description of the physical feeling, whose artistic significance comes from its simple ability to translate that description into a soothing, rhythmic lyric.

"The Grindstone" is described in Untermeyer's introduction as a still life of the implement, evolving into a fantasized tale of interaction with it and gaining speed, as if driven by the wheel itself. In the end, it slows and shifts from fantasy to philosophy, when Frost bends his will to the master craftsman and says that he will be satisfied with his work when the old master is satisfied.

"The Kitchen Chimney" is another example of his being versed in country things, and his wish that his chimney be of the full, old fashioned kind. It is light-hearted, but serves as an easy metaphor for a wish that things be real and honest, solid and quality versions of themselves, and be called what they are if they are anything less. He scorns the idea of a chimney "on a shelf" by pointing out that shelves are for trinkets, and

delivers his request in the tone of a man who has no patience for a swindle masquerading as an innovation.

Fallen leaves dominate the next two poems and contrast each other sharply. The first, "Gathering Leaves" examines the chore as one that produces very little crop, and nothing useful, weighing almost nothing, and still requiring his time. He is, however, light-hearted and seemingly enjoying the chore. The second, however, focuses on the fallen leaves as foreboding of winter and his own death in a curious correlation. He has to remind himself that he has survived to walk on many snows and will do it again, but confesses being haunted by the thought every fall in an uncharacteristically gloomy march to an optimistic end.

"Hillside Thaw" and "On a Tree Fallen Across the Road (To Hear Us Talk)" are both poems that unite the cosmic with the earthly. The first compares the sun's creation of the silver lizards of water that run over the snow in the spring with the cooler moon's ability to freeze them in their tracks, and calls the cosmic orbs wizard and witch. The second imagines that a tree has fallen out of desire to stop his progress forward and confound human progress as a result. His answer to the idea is that, if man were so inclined, he would grab hold of earth by it pole and ride it off into space before it would allow its progress to be stopped. It is an attitude very like the one he takes in "The Gift Outright" (page 250).

Moments of beauty short enough to be overlooked are memorialized in the next two poems Untermeyer lists. "A Passing Glimpse" makes the suggestion that catching a cluster of flowers out of the corner of his eye, Frost has been allowed the kind of glimpse into heaven that heaven only allows in passing glimpses like that. Similar optimism about the intervention of the divine in taking initiative to bring joy into the lives of humans is demonstrated in "Dust of Snow" as Frost comments that the dust dropped on his head from a branch on which a crow landed lifted his spirits instantly, redeeming a day he otherwise had been dreading.

"Fire and Ice" introduces a list of poems meant to make common things deeply meaningful, uniting the simple with the philosophic with just a little guidance. This first poem contemplates the end of the world based on Frost's most basic insights into humanity, namely that both love and hate are equally likely ends to the world. He takes the train of thought in the opposite direction in the poem "Riders" when he cites the innovations that the human race has yet to try in driving its destiny into the future. Then, in "The Master Speed", he brings the virtue from the first poem together with the power humanity has over its own destiny in the second poem to apply those strengths to a couple starting their lives together. He says that they have the ability either to race from possibility to possibility ahead of the pack, or to stand perfectly still as the pack races toward its destruction as long as they are united in common purpose - "wing to wing and oar to oar".

The next four poems are grouped for their agelessness, all a part of his first published work, "A Boy's Will", and all as timeless and insightful as Frost is ever known to be. The first, "My November Guest" talks about the sorrow that hangs about him in autumn and

teaches him while she is there to love the sad beauty of the season. It is a wise perspective on the ability the human mind has to learn to see beauty in things it initially resists or regrets, and on allowing ourselves to be teachable in adverse circumstances. "Storm Fear" vividly paints a day during which Frost and his wife and child sit huddled together in their house while their world is covered with snow outside and even the barn gets further from their reach, told in the present-tense, so the urgency and panic are all the more tangible to the reader. "Wind and the Window Flower" tells a love story about two entities that can never be united, vividly presenting the moment of initial thrill to another being and lingering there long enough that the reader regrets their inability to become lovers. The final poem in the set, "October" asks a fall morning to bring its changes slowly, so that they can be lingered over and savored with beautiful imagery.

The next set, by contrast, are all written when Frost is much older, and all represent very different tones in his unmistakable voice. "Good Hours" takes the reader on a walk through the village past lighted and cheerful windows one way, and back through cold silence, after the good hours for walking. "Pea Brush" lets readers fall in love with branches cut for growing peas on, and sympathize with the flowers on which they are lying until Frost comes to claim them. "I Will Sing You One-O" moves the perspective from one man's bed to his city to the world and to the planet in the cosmos, uniting all of existence under the influence of time and man's inhumanity to man. "To Earthward" hangs long in the sensory experience of spring and its scents and ends with longing for a more intense experience of interaction with the earth.

"The Gift Outright" is a patriotic poem to America about how this land was here and waiting for them to settle and subdue it, and would be inspirational but for the conspicuous lack of any acknowledgment that a huge population of ancient cultures already inhabited it, particularly evident in the final lines which call it "unstoried, artless, unenhanced". This is the poem Frost delivered from memory when the poem he composed for John F. Kennedy's inauguration kept blowing from his hands.

"A Considerable Speck" is a witty commentary on his interaction with a bug on his writing page. He allows the reader to discover and examine it at the same pace as he, and to join him in surmising that he was a creature with a mind and a will, and was therefore worth respecting. His criticism of the writers of his day, only those unwilling to think for themselves, that is, comes in the final line when he confesses his relief at having found "on any page the least display of mind".

"A Silken Tent" presents a highly complementary metaphor for women whose spirits stand tall and unmoving, reaching toward heaven at their centers while their beautiful, silken selves move around it.

Next come a string of lyrical poems written in Frost's later life, as well, and following his return to the lyrical, his tendency in that direction increasing in proportion to his increasing convictions. The first is "Good Bye and Keep Cold", in which he concludes that he must leave some things in the hands of God, unable as he is to control every detail of his life, his crops or the world in which they live. "A Prayer in Spring" concludes that love is doing the things God has arranged and blessed for us to do and that lie

waiting; we have only to find the joy that exists abundantly in the details of the lives he has ordained for us. "Into My Own" ends with the famous line, "they would not find me changed from him they knew - only more sure of all I thought was true" following a contemplation of what insights he might gain from visiting heaven. "Come In" is an idyll about the holy beauty of a forest asking people to come in and repent, and his concluding that he, not being in need of repenting, hadn't been invited in. And finally, "Choose Something Like a Star" suggests that continuing to contemplate the larger, transcendent things is the only way to anchor our convictions and keep ourselves from too passionately praising or blaming any earthly thing.

In display of Frost's darkness, Untermeyer presents "A Servant to Servants" with the qualification that there is still beauty and hope even in Frost's visiting some of life's most heartbreaking themes. Similarly capable of seeming dark but ending with beauty and hope, "Directive" ushers the reader to an abandoned house that can serve as replenishing refuge from the confusion of life. "Acquainted with the Night" leaves the mystery unanswered as to why, but tells the reader about the aspects of night with which Frost has had occasion to become familiar. "Once by the Pacific" has all the rhythm and intensity of the surf beating the shore with growing force and describes a storm he sees building over the water. "Happiness Makes up in Height What it Lacks in Length" describes a man's experience of but one day of perfect happiness and calm and his judging the potential for all life from that isolated perfect day.

Untermeyer prefaces Frost's penultimate listed poem by telling the story of its writing, and how it was never read at the occasion for which it was composed. The poem itself comprehensively crystallizes Frost's opinion of America's history, present standing and future obligations to the world and to its founding documents and ideals. At the same time he was praising America for its revolutionary beginnings, he was calling for politicians to break with followers when they were in the wrong, and answer first to God. At the same time, he praised America's beginnings from revolution and outlawry and told her to cling to her free beliefs, praising her for her ability to compete on the world stage in an age of poetry and power.

The poem that closes the book is "Away", a farewell poem from Frost's late life in which he bids his friends peaceful evenings, promises that he carries no enmity nor regret, and playfully ends with the option of return still open, should death be other than satisfactory.

Characters

Robert Frostappears in Throughout

Frost's character is revealed to some extent in every one of his poems. He is revealed in his love for the natural world and the New England woods and seasons specifically, describing their most intimate details with detailed and nuanced understanding that could only come from affectionate and years-long observation. His sympathetic and admiring affection for animals is also readily observable in his poetry, even when he writes about the shortcomings of their instincts and the superiority of the human ability to reason, in his constant sympathy and respect for the animals and insects about which he writes. He also reveals a compassionate understanding of humans of every variety, and women in particular. His "Housekeeper", "Hill Wife" and "Silken Tent" all take broad views of the female race, as if he has spent a good deal of time considering their worlds and circumstances and had come to sympathize and admire the women who lived them. He is also a moralist, never preaching, but framing his thoughts in contexts that highlight their wisdom and envelope a broad cross-section of human experiences. He is a patriot, faithful to the ideals of the American experiment and the virtues manifested in those living the American experience. Overarching all that Frost is, he is throughout his writing life, a lover, both romantically inclined and eloquent in his expression of the thoughts he thinks in that category, and a lover of humanity as a race, aware of its foibles and shortcomings, but steadfast in his affection for it nonetheless.

Gardenerappears in Tuft of Flowers

The gardener who concludes that people work together, whether together or apart when he sees that the gardener who came before him left a tuft of flowers at the edge of a creek when he was cutting the grass before him.

The Boy with the Burning Glassappears in At Woodward's Gardens

The little boy who was burning the noses of monkeys caged at the zoo with his magnifying glass, never thinking that they would be able to do anything with it as smart as what he was doing, until they dismantled it and proved that it's knowing what to do with a thing that counts.

The Itinerant Preacherappears in Snow

The preacher who broke his trip at a farm between town and his town demonstrates Frost's love for the symbolic with his commentary on the page in the book on the table

as well as his affection for simple, country values as he found amongst his fellow New Englanders and that he gives to the preacher as monologue as he takes his rest.

The Man Who Doesn't Like the Wallappears in Mending Wall

Frost offers commentary in the voice of this man on the outdatedness and shame of a wall between neighbors breaking up a landscape on which there are no animals who might invade a field. He spoke the human tendency to prefer freedom to walls, but in the end respected the perspective that others might just prefer them.

A Lone Strikerappears in A Lone Striker

The man who preferred the natural world to the work world, and so didn't go back to work on a beautiful afternoon.

The Man Who Loves Treesappears in To a Young Wretch

The man who has to reconcile his love for trees standing under stars in a forest with his Christmas spirit and desire for the family who took the tree to enjoy it.

The Hill Wifeappears in The Hill Wife

The woman who lives a lonely life with her husband and finally flees it, and with whom Frost eloquently sympathizes simply by telling her story.

The Bearappears in The Bear

A childlike and wildly playing bear whom Frost facetiously calls a student of Aristotle.

The Patriotappears in For John F. Kennedy His Inauguration, The Black Cottage (Int

Frost defines a patriot as one who values the ideals on which his country was founded, believes the things the founding documents said should shape the future of his country, and will live by his convictions even when they are unpopular.

Objects/Places

Blueberriesappears in Blueberries

Fruits of the earth's wild plants that can give food or livelihood to their finder.

Goldappears in The Vindictives

The thing most wanted by a group willing to kill a king for it, and that drove them to their deaths when they were deprived of it.

Birchesappears in Birches

Frost imagines that, instead of ice, a child at play has bent them down, and he wishes for the same adventure to allow him to climb into heaven and, having visited, dip him back to earth again.

The Snow-Covered Mountainappears in Brown's Descent

The dwelling place of a farmer who slid inadvertently two miles down it, but whose winding ascending road was no hindrance nor annoyance to him when, once he reached the bottom, he had to walk several miles along it to get home again.

Factory Jobs

The obligation that provides to contest to the natural world from which people are closed off as long as they are doing them

Trains

Both when Frost sees the man living way off in the woods alone so efficiently and simply and when he sees a cluster of flowers he can't identify, he is studying the passing landscape from a train.

Treesappears in Throughout

Several poems, including "To a Young Wretch", "Two Tramps in Mudtime", "A Boundless Moment", "Evening in a Sugar Orchard", "The Sound of the Trees", "In Hardwood

Groves" and others include praise for the beauty, strength, changing character and aid to survival provided by trees

Waterappears in Throughout

Poems like "West-Running Brook", "A Brook in the City", "Spring Pools", "Snow", "In Hardwood Groves", "Sand Dunes" and "Storm Fear", as well as many others, record what a profound character water was, in its many forms, in Frost's life and imagination.

Farmsappears in Throughout

Much of Frost's country flavor and idea of beauty and virtue comes from his acquaintance with the implements of work, pace of life, scenery and people of the New England farms on which he spent so much of his adult life.

Leavesappears in Throughout

"The Road Not Taken", "Gathering Leaves" and "A Leaf Treader" all use leaves as illustrations of another point or story, and create vivid imagery of the cycle and renewal of life.

Flowersappears in Throughout

"Telephone", "A Passing Glimpse", "To Earthward" and "Pea Brush" all present flowers as innocent, romantic and hope-bringing elements in Frost's world.

Themes

The Wisdom Nature Offers

Frost finds wisdom in nature simply by slowing himself down enough to watch it as he passes through, and then thinking about his world through the perspective he finds when he is in it. The first example in the book is in the very first poem, "A Tuft of Flowers", when Frost observes about humanity that when our attentions are trained on the things of beauty we can share in common and preserve in order that others, man and beast alike, might also appreciate them, we unite ourselves with them in a bond that wouldn't have existed without those acts of preservation. It is a theme that can be broadened to much more than flowers and passed from one generation to the next.

Another good example comes from his fable in "At Woodward's Gardens" when the monkeys, who aren't evolved enough in the proud and hateful little boy's mind to make anything of his magnifying glass, take it from him and destroy it. He identifies the theme saying that it's knowing what to do with a thing that counts, and it is a lesson that can be broadened to teach a lesson to all of humanity, as well. There are some things that are just better destroyed, particularly when they are used by the strong to do harm to the weak.

He also takes wisdom from nature in the reverse, finding examples like "The Cow in Apple Time" and "The White-Tailed Hornet" in which the animal and insect kingdoms can be used to show men the wisdom and glory particular to humanity. In the case of the cow, he points out the gluttony and reckless abandon that eventually damages the health of the poor animal both in a humorous and sympathetic way but also in address to an audience of people who would identify such behavior as the self-destruction of an animal unable to reason enough to protect its own well-being. The hornet's flaw is also in its inability to reason, but the folly Frost points out is on the part of the people who have praised instinct as being a superior behavioral guide to human intellect, since it is supposed to be infallible. The fact that it can, in fact, and quite easily, be fooled in the case of nearly every beast is, for Frost the undoing of that argument.

Loyalty to Home and Country

Both New England and America as a whole are places that have Frost's loyalty to a passionate and permeating degree. His fidelity to New England's landscape and its people can be found in a number of his poems, and are often intertwined. "Two Tramps in Mudtime" describes both the pleasure of splitting the wood and his understanding and sympathy for men who do it because it is a skill they can make a livelihood. "The Gum-Gatherer" is similar in its mutual appreciation of the beautiful jewel-like sap and the men who supply both the gum and the fruit of the forest to the people of the towns. Even in "The Wood-Pile" and "To a Young Wretch", in which he doesn't understand or doesn't agree with the actions of the people around him, he deals with them with grace

determined to allow them the most pleasure they can glean from a landscape they obviously love as much as he does. There are also works like "The Lone Striker", "A Winter Eden" and "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening" in which the landscape itself becomes a temptation to abandon the work that makes life in that part of the country possible, but his fidelity to the society that has formed there proves itself in each, whether by his qualifying his statements with praise of the mill, returning to work in the poem, or reminding himself of his obligation to duty even while he soaks in a moment of natural beauty.

His loyalty to country are best observed in his poems, "The Gift Outright" and "For John F. Kennedy His Inauguration" when he proposes that Americans were destined to have and subdue this place, and from it to lead the world in democracy, morality, arts, science and anything else the world may play at. Even recognizing in poems like "The Vanishing Red" that there remained, even at the beginning of the 20th century when he wrote, a murderous violence in white men toward the people native to this place Europeans have claimed and called America, he continues to believe that Americans are fulfilling a divinely ordained destiny, and doing it in a way to be proud of, through to the very the end of his life.

The Value of Romantic Love

As any poet should, Robert Frost maintains a soft place in his heart for lovers, and gives it voice in several of his poems. Simple invitations to sweet and romantic moments can be found in such poems as "The Telephone" and "The Pasture", and the ecstatic play and dreams of burgeoning love in "Two Look at Two" and "Going for Water". They all speak of the first and most playful, blissful moments of love, and do so with complete appreciation of their joy and without a note of condescension or nay-saying. He writes with equal eloquence and understanding about the time when a couple has married and is starting their lives together in an increasingly cynical and antagonistic world in poems like "The Investment", "Love and a Question" and "The Hill Wife", recognizing the delicacy of the time when a relationship's precedents and patterns are being established as the soil in which life-long love will either grow or die. Love and romance are conspicuously absent in the conversations he records in "Home Burial" and "The Housekeeper", giving evidence of his recognizing the tragedy of the loss or abandonment of those things. And, finally, poems like "An Old Man's Winter Night" and "Snow" bring into bright relief both the reality and the contemplation of the possibility of one's life partner being taken away and the amputated life that would be left on the other side of such a loss.

Style

Point of View

Frost's point of view is that of a man who lived his whole life in love with poetry as a medium and people and the natural world as subjects. He says himself in "The Lesson for Today" that he had a lover's quarrel with the world, loving it unswervingly, but seeing the shortcomings of humanity as clearly as he saw its glories. But he writes equally about both, and over the course of his whole adult life, so while his perspective ranges from youth to age, and place to place, his timeless love for beauty, his humor and his wisdom remain consistent starting points from which he begins his writing. There are some poems in which he is speaking clearly from his own perspective, describing some beautiful place, or recording his own contemplations. In some, however, he adopts the persona of a character in a story he wishes to tell... in some poems, adopting the voice of every character speaking and effectively moving from one character to another so that each remains whole and viable as an individual and independent character.

Setting

New England is the dominant setting for the poetry of Robert Frost, specifically the hilly countryside scattered with farms and covered with woods and lanes and paths that cut through them. Even when Frost is discussing factories and mills, he writes as though he is close enough to nature to be called by it and swept up. He lived at the turn of the Century and 63 years into the 20th Century, so he saw New England in its adolescence, still full of undeveloped, unlogged land and densely dotted with small, farm communities and so spoke of that time and place. He also sets poems at the sea, having lived close to and around fishing villages on the coast. There are evidences of study and travel in poems like "The Bearer of Evil Tidings", set in the ancient Himalayas, "The Vindictives" in ancient Peru, and "The Census-Taker" in a southwestern desert town.

Language and Meaning

Frost uses several styles of poetry necessitating several changes in syntax in his poetry. There are vividly descriptive poems meant to communicate the beauty of places in which his language is graphic and carefully chosen for the delicacy of the images it conjures — some meant to produce physical impressions, as in "After Apple-Picking" and "To Earthward" and some meant to produce visual impressions, like "Hyla Brook", "A Boundless Moment", "A Winter Eden", "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening" and several others. There are also poems written completely in the New England style of conversation and given to those rhythms and styles of expression, so his word choice is meant to represent people and moods, as exemplified in "Snow", "The Death of The Hired Man", "The Witch of Coos" and "The Code". In other cases still, his goal is to elicit a certain mood or response, and so his language grows lofty and broadly sweeping, as

perfectly exemplified in both "The Gift Outright" and "For john F. Kennedy His Inauguration".

Structure

The book is organized in chapters in which the selected poems are categorized by theme. That format allows Untermeyer to comment on the things poems have in common and the evolution and themes of Frost's poems as manifested in groups of poems. Stories are grouped together, including many of his conversational poems; poems about people follow, so the reader becomes well acquainted with Frost's affection for the people of his region; places follow, so the reader is brought more deeply into the context of Frost's writing, and familiarized with his intense love for the natural world; animals come after that with several instances of light-heartedness and humor in which Frost provides both wisdom and compassion in the context of endearing stories. The final chapter is the most broadly themed and catches poems from several categories, nicely rounding out an understanding of his voice and his character. The organization works very well as an easily accessible reference or more involved study of the man through the lens of his work.

Quotes

"The creator, the artist, the extraordinary man, is merely the ordinary man intensified: a person whose life is sometimes lifted to a high pitch of feeling and who has the gift of making others share his excitement." page 1, Chapter 1

"Longfellow... in "My Lost Youth" wrote, 'A boy's will is the wind's will, and the thoughts of youth are long, long thoughts.'" page 8, Chapter 1

"... 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 favor." page 13, Chapter 1

"He accepts the world's contradictions without being crushed by them.... 'And were an epitaph to be my story / I'd have a short one ready for my own. / I would have written of me on my stone: / I had a lover's quarrel with the world.'" page 14, Chapter 1

"And feel a spirit kindred to my own; / So that henceforth I worked no more alone; / But glad with him, I worked as with his aid... 'Men work together, ' I told him from the heart, / 'Whether they work together or apart.'" "Tuft of Flowers", page 20, Chapter 2

"The mind — is not the heart. / i may yet live, as I know others live, / To wish in vain to let go with the mind — / Of cares, at night, to sleep; but nothing tells me / That I need learn to let go with the heart." "Wild Grapes", page 57, Chapter 2

"But i was going to say before Truth broke in / With all her matter of fact about the ice storm / I should prefer to have some boy bend them / As he went out and in to fetch the cows — / Some boy too far from town to learn baseball, / Whose only play was what he found himself, / Summer or winter, and could play himself." "Birches", page 91, Chapter 2

"It was no dream of the gift of idle hours, / or easy gold at the hand of fay or elf: / Anything more than the truth would have seemed to week / to the earnest love that laid the swale in rows / not without feeble-pointed spikes of flowers / (pale orchises) and scared a bright green snake." "Mowing", page 93, Chapter 2

"I don't suppose the water's changed at all. / You and I know enough it's warm / compared with cold and cold compared with warm. / But all the fun's in how you say a thing." "The Mountain", page 103, Chapter 3

"Enough of this! / He knew a path that wanted walking; / He knew a spring that wanted drinking; / A thought that wanted further thinking; / A love that wanted re-renewing." "The Lone Striker", page 110, Chapter 3

"You'd think I never had felt before / The weight of an ax-head poised aloft, / The grip on earth of outspread feet. / The life of muscles rocking soft / and smooth and moist in vernal heat." "Two Tramps in Mudtime", page 113, Chapter 3

"It is your Christmases against my woods. / But even where thus opposing interests kill, / They are to be thought of as opposing goods / Oftener than as opposing good or ill; / Which makes the war-god seem no special dunce / For always fighting on both sides at once." "To A Young Wretch, page 122, Chapter 3

"But once within the wood, we paused / Like gnomes that hid us from the moon, / Ready to run to hiding new / With laughter when she found us soon." "Going for Water", page 155, Chapter 3

"'Home is the place where, when you have to go there, / They have to take you in.' / 'I should have called it / Something you somehow haven't to deserve.'" "The Death of the Hired Man", page 163, Chapter 3

"So near to paradise all pairing ends: / Here loveless birds now flock as winter friends, / Content with bud-inspecting. They presume / To say which buds are leaf and which are bloom." "A Winter Eden", page 174, Chapter 4

"I know that winter death has never tried / The earth but it has failed... I shall see the snow all go down hill / In water of an April rill...." "The Onset", page 182, Chapter 4

"But tree, i have seen you taken and tossed, / And if you have seen me when I slept, / You have seen me when i was taken and swept / And all but lost." "Tree at my Window", page 187, Chapter 4

"Well, something for a snowstorm to have shown / The country's singing strength thus brought together, / That though repressed and moody with the weather / Was nonetheless there ready to be freed / And sing the wildflowers up from root and seed." "Our Singing Strength", page 195, Chapter 5

"Won't this whole instinct matter bear revision?... To err is human, not to, animal. / Or so we pay the compliment to instinct, / Only too liberal of our compliment / That really takes away instead of gives. / Our worship, humor, conscientiousness / Went long since to the dogs under the table. / And served us right for having instituted / downward comparisons." "The White-Tailed Hornet", page 205, Chapter 5

"The world has room to make a bear feel free; / The universe seems cramped to you and me. / Man 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 Bear", page 215, Chapter 5

"They spoke to the fugitive of my heart as if it were leaf to leaf. / They tapped at my eyelids and touched my lips with an invitation to grief. / But it was no reason I had to go because they had to go. / Now up to my knee to keep on top of another year of snow." "A Leaf Treader", page 232, Chapter 5

"Two such as you with such a master speed / Cannot be parted nor be swept away / From one another once you are agreed / That life is only life forevermore / Together wing to wing and oar to oar." "The Master Speed, page 238, Chapter 6

"It asks of us a certain height, / So when at times the mob is swayed / To carry praise or blame too far, / We may choose something like a star / To stay our minds on and be staid." "Choose Something Like a Star", page 258, Chapter 6

Topics for Discussion

In what ways does Frost's "lover's quarrel with the world" make itself known in his poetry?

Do you think Frost is optimistic about the enterprise of love? Give examples for your conclusion.

Do you agree with Frost's assessment of American destiny as presented in "The Gift Outright"? How do you think his geography or his era could have shaped his perspective?

In "I Will Sing You One-O", Frost's perspective moves from the very small to the cosmically large. What do you think was his uniting theme? What did he want to leave the reader thinking about?

Frost is equally complimentary of industry and innovation and annoyed at its obligating people to serve it. How do you think he would view the way industry has changed the face of the country or the lives of her people in the years since he lived? Use thoughts from his poems to support your answer.

Frost gives several examples of men living in solitude, but only "An Old Man's Winter Night" is sad. What is it that makes it so? Do the solitary lives of any of Frost's other characters affect you in a similar way? Explain.

Frost's animal stories are full of lessons for humans. Chose one and explain what lesson Frost was intending to teach and how.

Frost's very matter-of-fact recordings of people's conversations could almost be regarded as prose. What makes them poetry and why did they earn such praise from the people who identified them as some of Frost's best work?