



Robert Frost

(1874-1963)

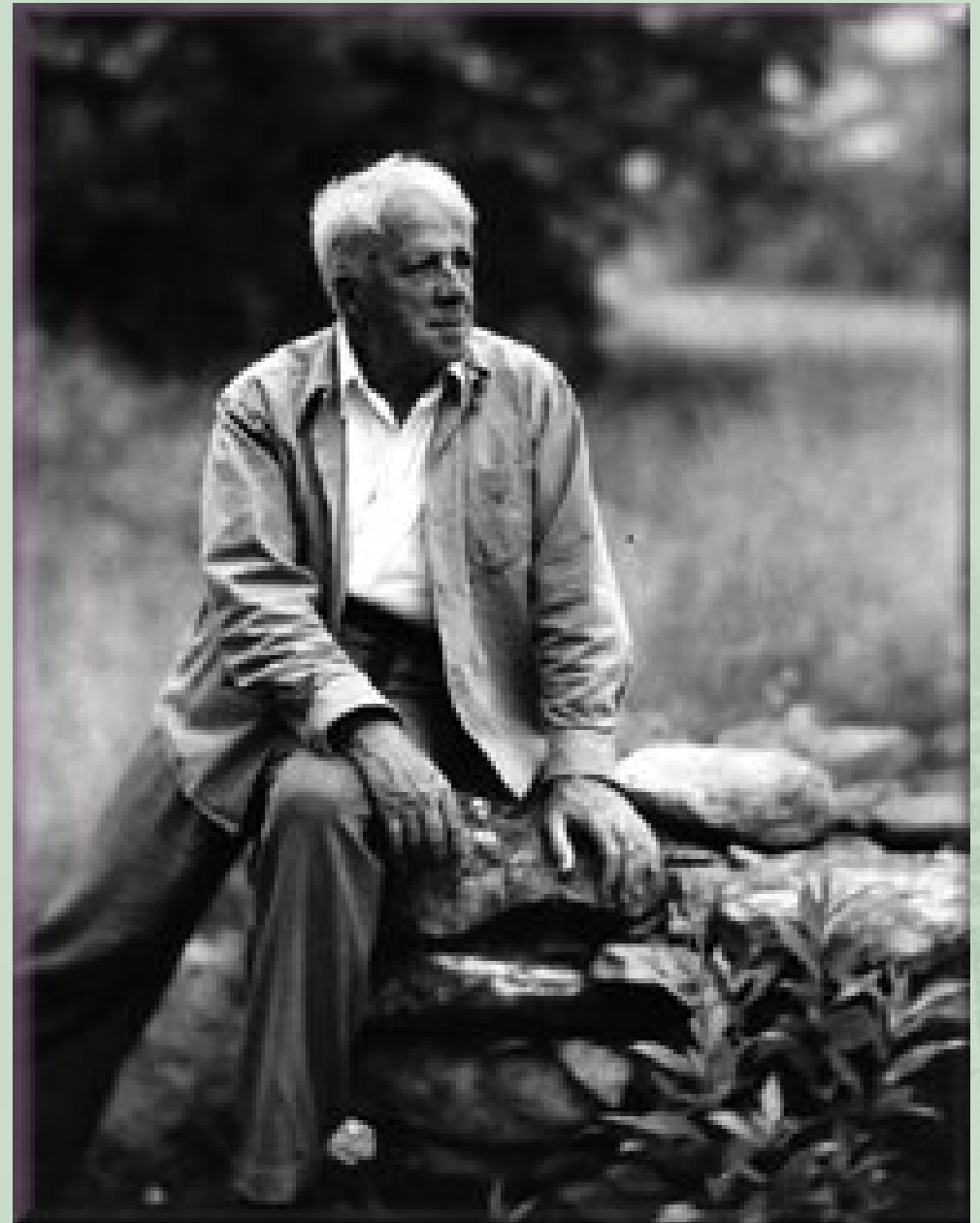


"A poem should
not mean, but be."
Archibald MacLeish

Frost's poems are concerned
with human tragedies and fears,
his reaction to the complexities
of life and his ultimate
acceptance of his burdens.



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His Importance

- America's most famous New England poet



His Poetry

- Traditional verse forms
- The plain speech of rural New Englanders
- “I alone of English writers have consciously set myself to make music out of what I may call the sound of sense.”



STOPPING BY WOODS ON A SNOWY EVENING



- "As I remember it, 'Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening' was written in just about that way, after I had been working all night long on 'New Hampshire.' But I must admit, it was written in a few minutes without any strain. Critics think I had that sort of all-night struggle before I could write the little poem I'm talking about. They must have heard me say, sometime or other, years back, that I wrote all night, in connection with 'Stopping by Woods.'



- But the thing I worked on all night had no struggle in it at all. It's in print, called 'New Hampshire.' . . . Then, having finished 'New Hampshire,' I went outdoors, got out sideways and didn't disturb anybody in the house, and about nine or ten o'clock went back in and wrote the piece about the snowy evening and the little horse as if I'd had an hallucination--little hallucination--the one critics write about occasionally. You can't trust these fellows who write what made a poet write what he wrote. We all of us read our pet theories into a poem."

Mertins, M.L.: *Robert Frost: Life and Talks-Walking*



The Woodpile



- Out walking in the frozen swamp one grey day
- I paused and said, "I will turn back from here.
- No, I will go on farther--and we shall see."
- The hard snow held me, save where now and then
- One foot went down. The view was all in lines
- Straight up and down of tall slim trees
- Too much alike to mark or name a place by
- So as to say for certain I was here
- Or somewhere else: I was just far from home.
- A small bird flew before me. He was careful
- To put a tree between us when he lighted,
- And say no word to tell me who he was
- Who was so foolish as to think what *he* thought.
- He thought that I was after him for a feather--
- The white one in his tail; like one who takes
- Everything said as personal to himself.



- One flight out sideways would have undeceived him.
- And then there was a pile of wood for which
- I forgot him and let his little fear
- Carry him off the way I might have gone,
- Without so much as wishing him good-night.
- He went behind it to make his last stand.
- It was a cord of maple, cut and split
- And piled--and measured, four by four by eight.
- And not another like it could I see.
- No runner tracks in this year's snow looped near it.
- And it was older sure than this year's cutting,
- Or even last year's or the year's before.
- The wood was grey and the bark warping off it
- And the pile somewhat sunken. Clematis
- Had wound strings round and round it like a bundle.



- What held it though on one side was a tree
- Still growing, and on one a stake and prop,
- These latter about to fall. I thought that only
- Someone who lived in turning to fresh tasks
- Could so forget his handiwork on which
- He spent himself, the labour of his axe,
- And leave it there far from a useful fireplace
- To warm the frozen swamp as best it could
- With the slow smokeless burning of decay.



Question

- In "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening," what might the woods and snow and dark symbolize?



Question

- What is the woodpile a symbol of?

