ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation: DIGITAL FROST: ACCESSIBILITY AND PUBLIC HUMANITIES

Setsuko Yokoyama, Doctor of Philosophy, 2020

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His frequently recirculated televised reading at President John F. Kennedy's inauguration ceremony attests to the fact that Robert Frost is often remembered as one of the iconic popular poets of the early twentieth century. What is less remembered today is the fact that Frost gave talks and readings at universities, colleges, and other public venues for nearly five decades to make poetry accessible to general readers. These talks epitomize Frost's dedication to the democratic discussion of literature and daily discourse as he demonstrated, through humor, how to practice auditory attentiveness to the figures of speech used by poets, scientists, politicians, and other authority figures. Though central to his career and his contribution to American culture and literary history, Frost's public performance as a genre has long been overlooked primarily due to the inaccessibility of audio recordings housed in archives.

Digital Frost: Accessibility and Public Humanities investigates how best to redress such critical neglect of Frost's public talks and readings through the

development of a pilot audio edition and the discussion of theoretical underpinnings of the very edition's design. As part of the larger effort to build a cross-intuitional platform in partnership with literary scholars, special collections librarians, Frost's family members and friends, as well as the poet's literary estate and publisher, the pilot audio edition tests the feasibility of critical collaboration and expands on the disciplinary responsibility of textual scholarship. In its accompanying chapters, *Digital Frost* contests the seemingly monolithic discourse around "accessibility" via analyses of its sociohistorical meanings from archival, literary, disability, and digital studies perspectives. *Digital Frost* argues that only when technical accessibility is concomitantly considered from a sociohistorical perspective, are we equipped to invent a culturally appropriate access design for online literary collections.

DIGITAL FROST: ACCESSIBILITY AND PUBLIC HUMANITIES

by

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Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of the
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Advisory Committee:
Dr. Martha Nell Smith, Chair
Dr. Matthew Kirschenbaum
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Dr. Alexis Lothian

Acknowledgements

My interest in literary archival scholarship stems from my undergraduate days in Kyoto, where I watched my BA thesis advisor Mark Richardson work with stacks of Xeroxed Robert Frost manuscripts in his office as he edited the poet's prose and letters. It was also Mark who, upon learning my interests in scholarly editing, suggested I read writings by Martha Nell Smith.

The first article I picked up was "Computing: What's American Literary Studies Got to Do with IT?" (2002), and I was elated by her investigative approach to knowledge production. In the article, Martha Nell detailed how electronic publishing could shed light on the otherwise opaque editorial process where a handful of experts' critical opinions were prone to become and be presented as "facts" and "truths" about Emily Dickinson. Since I joined her *Dickinson Electronic Archives* research team in 2014, I also started to share the methods of critical textual inquiries with my undergraduate students as we examine the logic and norms of a literary world that had failed to register Emily and Susan Dickinson's collaborative enterprise. As you read the following chapters, I trust it shows how Martha Nell's scholarship has been formative for me.

Matthew Kirschenbaum's *Mechanism* (2008) was another defining work that expanded my understanding of textual scholarship and why I wished to pursue my doctorate at the University of Maryland. In particular, Matt challenged the common notion that "digital" equates "immaterial" by examining the materiality of electronic text. The images he incorporated to show the microscopic traces of inscriptions on a hard disk surface offered the perspective for me to always pause at the common

discourse and wonder at the implications of ever-effacing media. Also, through the Digital Studies in the Arts and Humanities (DSAH) program Matt directed I have learned to practice humanistic inquiry of digital technologies.

I was fortunate that my first exposure to digital humanities on the UMD campus was the #transformDH conference in 2015, where I met Alexis Lothian and other scholars who were centering social justice, accessibility, and inclusion as they worked to transform their research, pedagogy, and activism in the Digital Age. I owe this community of scholars my commitment to redress historically repressive relations preserved in the literary archives, and as I envision my postdoctoral work on linguistic imperialism, scientific racism, and the technologies that enabled and continue to enact violence on indigenous and immigrant communities.

I met Trevor Owens through UMD's iSchool course "Introduction to Digital Arts Curation" in 2016 because questions concerning sustainability and preservation of my project were integral to its early formation. Trevor also helped me keep my discipline-specific assertions in check as I navigate interdisciplinary archival spaces. In particular, our initial conversations about historically contested power dynamics between literary scholars, historians, archivists, and librarians have assisted me in practicing critical collaboration that revolves around close listening.

After all, such attentiveness is the very thing poetry encourages, just as I saw in the undergraduate course on American Literature David Wyatt invited me to sit in on. As we contemplated a quiet, gradual, and hard-to-see oxidizing process of woods described in Frost's poem "The Wood-Pile" and wondered why the poem's narrator must speak of "the slow smokeless burning of decay" of woods by the frozen swamp,

I was reminded once again of the importance of minding my word choices and arrangements. Carefully chosen words expand our perceptions when foregrounding physics and wonders of this world and assist us in pronouncing and projecting as we answer to the want of warmth around us.

All this is just to say that I am grateful to my dissertation committee members who have taught me to ask the right kind of question that would then lead to the formation of a world that is a bit more livable for all.

Beyond my committee, I am thankful to collaborators who have helped materialize the pilot audio edition of Frost's public talks and readings. Given their contributions were indispensable to the development of theories and practices of this editorial research, I detail their roles in Chapter Four. With that in mind, I will be brief here in thanking a circle of Frost scholars, special collections librarians, the poet's family members and friends, who guided me through the mores of working to publish the poet's archival materials. In particular, Mark Richardson, Donald Sheehy, and Lisa Seale helped me prepare the project proposal in 2015 for Frost's granddaughter Lesley Lee Francis and the Estate of Robert Frost, and again in 2016, as I worked on the access model report to explore different publishing options. Natalie Gerber and Chris Mustazza also helped me illustrate the significance of making audio poetry collections available online with our joint presentation in 2017 at the annual Robert Frost Symposium. Carole Thompson, Nancy Nahra, Robert Hass, and others have helped manage the digitization fund through a non-profit organization, Friends of Robert Frost. I am also grateful to Mike Kelly at Amherst College, as well as Jay Satterfield and Morgan Swan at Dartmouth College, for

partaking in the pilot project while we figured out how best to meet different interests of multiple stakeholders of our cross-institutional project. Last, but not least, thank you, Christine Kirchner, for helping me cross-examine transcriptions of talks and for testing out different editorial methods that are unique to literary audio recordings.

In writing this dissertation, I was lucky to have a group of friends and colleagues to bounce off ideas and to keep me accountable. Specifically, I am grateful for the DSAH writing group hosted at the Maryland Institute for Technology in the Humanities (MITH) every Thursday even as we have shifted to a virtual space in light of the COVID-19 outbreak. Thank you, Purdom Lindblad, for leading by example and centering ethics of care with everything you do, including the running of our writing group. Kyle Bickoff, Jeffrey Moro, and Andy Yeh, thank you for letting me reach out to you whenever I am cobbling together my outlandish ideas. DB Bauer and Eva Peskin, I am always at awe of your rigorous training in Women's Studies and would love to keep learning from you. Jenny Schollaert, Brienne Adams, and Misti Yang, the writing group is always better with your and ginger snaps' presence.

Beyond school, I am lucky to have crossed paths with you, Anna Storti and Molly Benitez. How you integrate your lived experience into scholarship has led me to reflect on my relationship with the U.S. critical race and gender discourse and with academia at large. Thank you Doğa Can Su Öztürk, Pinar Acar, and Avin Vijay for our daily hotline and for reminding me to always celebrate the difference. Anjali Sharma and Nahid Ahmadian, thank you for being a comrade at home and in the office, respectively. Thank you Fernando Compadre, Lily Samimi, and Veronica Fossa for your occasional and always timely check-in to put things into perspective.

Mario Maffei, you knew all of my behind-the-scene struggles, believed in my ambitious dreams, and cheered at every milestone along the way. I wish you could see what I have made. Lastly, thank you, Mama Yoko, for all the care packages to sustain me and for helping me brainstorm negotiation strategies. You champion grace in everything you do. Thank you, Papa, for making it okay to want absolute silence when we write in the morning and for reserving the English language as the vehicle for heartfelt conversations. And Tatsu for being a cool cat.

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List of Abbreviations

Collected Prose	Frost, Robert. *The Collected Prose of Robert Frost*. Edited by Mark Richardson. The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007.
CPPP	Frost, Robert. *Collected Poems, Prose, and Plays*. Edited by Richard Poirier and Mark Richardson, Library of America, 1995.
Frost at YMHA	Frost, Robert. Frost at YMHA, New York, 1946–1947? Robert Frost Collection, Series 3: Audio-Visual Material, Subseries E: Recordings, Tapes, 072, Archives and Special Collections, Robert Frost Library, Amherst College, Amherst, MA.
Letters	Frost, Robert. *The Letters of Robert Frost: Volume 1, 1886–1920*. Edited by Donald Sheehy, Mark Richardson, and Robert Faggen, Harvard UP, 2014.
Notebooks	Frost, Robert. *The Notebooks of Robert Frost*. Edited by Robert Faggen, The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2006.
Robert Frost Speaking on Campus	Frost, Robert. *Robert Frost Speaking on Campus: Excerpts from His Talks, 1949–1962*. Edited by Edward Connery Lathem. W. W. Norton, 2009.
SL	Frost, Robert. *Selected Letters of Robert Frost.* Edited by Lawrence Thompson. Holt, Rinehart and Winston. 1964.
UMass Commencement	Frost, Robert. Speech during Commencement Week, University of Massachusetts, Amherst, 1958 July 7. Robert Frost Collection, Series 3: Audio-Visual Material, Subseries E: Recordings, Tapes, 171, Archives and Special Collections, Robert Frost Library, Amherst College, Amherst, MA.
UMass Remarks	Frost, Robert. Remarks at the University of Massachusetts, 1957 Oct. 31. Robert Frost Collection, Series 3: Audio-Visual Material, Subseries E: Recordings, Tapes, 049, Archives and Special Collections, Robert Frost Library, Amherst College, Amherst, MA.

List of Illustrations

List of Audio Recordings

Introduction

What is the first thing that comes to mind when thinking about Robert Frost today? Many might recall his performance at President John F. Kennedy's inauguration ceremony in 1961 or his role as a Consultant in Poetry to the Library of Congress in 1959. Still others remember his poems more personally from their high school textbooks or brush him aside as a white, male, canonical author. Regardless of how one feels about the poet, it is no accident that in 2020 popular literary magazine *McSweeney's* opens its humorous article "Famous Lines of Poetry Revised for the Age of Coronavirus" with a parody of Frost's poem for readers who are practicing social distancing: "Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—I took the one less traveled. Duh."[1] That is, Frost's poetry has long become part of the common lingo for many and can provide comic commiseration for our collective lot in light of the global pandemic.

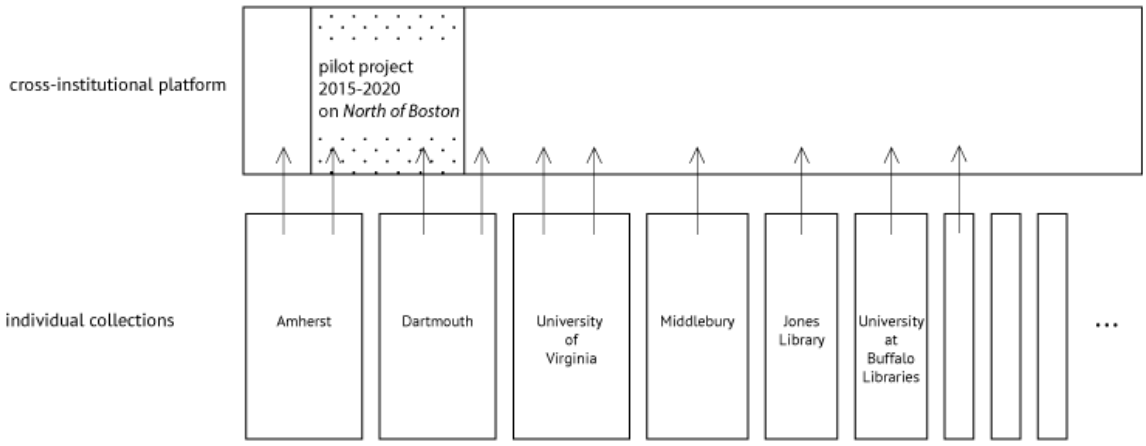
What is less known today is that Frost gave many playful talks and readings at universities, colleges, and other public venues between 1915 and 1962 to make poetry accessible to general readers. During his talks, Frost often made mischievous commentaries on the political climate of his time and cautioned against the warmongering rhetoric that spurred the proliferation of atomic bombs and the looming tension of the Cold War.[2] On other occasions, he entertained the audience by demonstrating his humorous rhyming exercises using his "heavy-duty" poems such as "Departmental," in part educating the readers with his auditory attentiveness to

[1] Pell, "Famous Lines of Poetry Revised For the Age of Coronavirus," 18 March 2020.
[2] Frost, Frost at YMHA, 00:12:18.10, and 00:19:52.10.

language.[3] As if to prove his ur-mission statement to "be a poet for all sorts and kinds," these talks epitomize Frost's dedication to the democratic discussion of literature and daily discourse; he demonstrated how every participating member of society must investigate figures of speech used by poets, scientists, politicians, and other authority figures.[4] There is no denying that these talks were central to the formation of his career as a popular poet and to the mid-twentieth-century American literary scene. Frost's public performances as a genre, however, have long been overlooked primarily due to the inaccessibility of their audio recordings housed in archives.

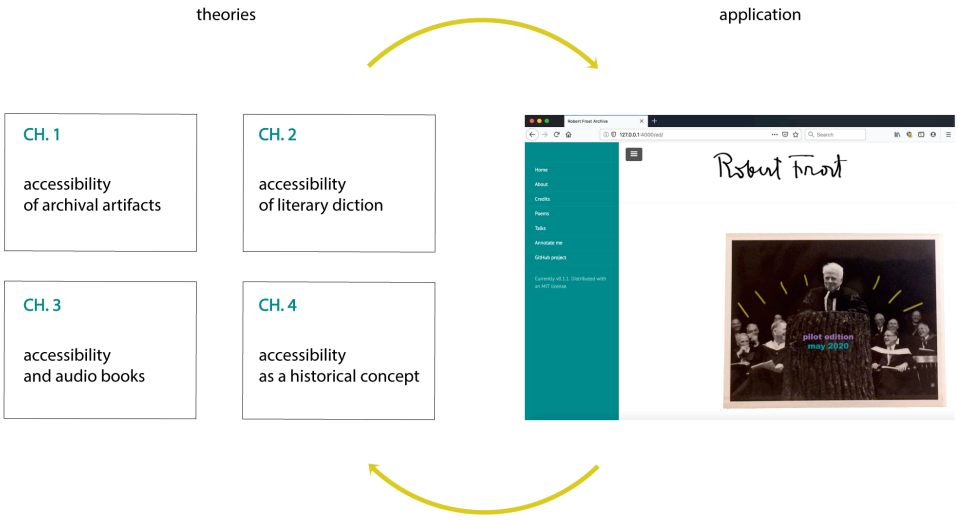
Digital Frost: Accessibility and Public Humanities investigates how best to redress critical neglect of Frost's public talks and readings by developing a pilot audio edition. As part of the larger effort to build a cross-institutional platform in partnership with literary scholars, special collections librarians, Frost's family members and friends, as well as the poet's literary estate and publisher, the pilot audio edition tests the feasibility of critical collaboration and expands on the disciplinary responsibility of digital textual scholarship at large [Fig. 1].

[3] Frost, Frost at YMHA, 00:50:13.60; Remarks at UMass, 01:00:24.10; UMass Commencement, 00:53:54.70.
[4] Frost, *Letters*, 154; Frost, "Education by Poetry," 721-2.



[Fig. 1: Cross-Institutional Platform Overview]

In particular, *Digital Frost* contests the seemingly monolithic discourse around "accessibility" via analyses of its sociohistorical meanings from archival, literary, disability, and digital studies perspectives. *Digital Frost* argues that only when technical accessibility is concomitantly considered from these sociohistorical perspectives are we equipped to invent a culturally appropriate access design for online literary collections. To that end, each chapter self-reflectively examines how historicized and localized understanding of accessibility of Frost and his works should inform the very design of the pilot audio edition [Fig. 2].



[Fig. 2: Multimodal *Digital Frost* Dissertation]

Chapter One begins with the transmission history of Robert Frost's public talks and readings—or the lack thereof—to identify the root cause that has led to their gradual receding from public memory, despite some early and continuous scholarly efforts to prepare their audio recordings for print publication since the 1930s. Specifically, Chapter One reevaluates and reworks some of the literary editorial conventions that have long stifled Frost and his contemporary and posthumous editors alike. One such custom is the dichotomous classification system that has sorted Frost's literary enterprise as either "verse" or "prose," with the understanding of the latter as something that is closely associated with formal essays. As a result, Frost and his editors have long characterized his informal public "talks"—especially when transcribing them for print publication—as a subpar form of expression that call for

extensive revision and transformation to a more formal piece of writing.[5] Instead, *Digital Frost* treats talks as a distinct genre, citing their unique stylistic and pedagogical values, which are reflective of Frost's main tenets as a poet to encourage auditory attentiveness to language. Additionally, *Digital Frost* suggests scholarly editors reorient critical editorial discourse from the ones that concern the accuracy of transcriptions—which tend to resort to ableist arguments—to the ones that invite readers to the kind of critical textual inquiries that weigh the limits of written notations with the benefits of carefully prepared transcriptions as captions for readers with varying abilities.[6] That is, in preparing the transcription to accompany the digitized audio recordings, I center the difference each editor brings to the table and that of readers the pilot audio edition wishes to serve.

Chapter Two anticipates possible repercussions of developing an online audio edition by analyzing the reception histories of the sound of Frost's poetry, and how perceived accessibility of his literary diction and public persona led to misapprehensions of his works. Early in his career, Frost envisioned becoming a popular poet—rather than elitist—by writing in vernacular language.[7] Frost's effort to communicate the eloquence of the vernacular, however, was not immediately successful because of existing biases against the setting of his poetry: rural New England. Frost's contemporary literary critics in the 1910s celebrated his diction for its simplicity and credited the poet for rightly capturing village-speak, a testament—

[5] Thompson, *SL*, 437, 461; Richardson, xix, 239-241.
[6] Sitar (2007), 367; Rich.
[7] Frost, *Letters*, 154.

as far as critics' understanding went—to the backward and unsophisticated region.[8] Moreover, critics projected their literary desire to further romanticize Frost's register by marking, amplifying, and even racializing, the difference.[9] Informed by these historical instances where Frost's literary works were used to exemplify an essentialist understanding of New England language, the pilot audio edition cautions against the invocation of familiar biases, especially concerning Frost's unusually dramatic reading of rural New England Poems in the late 1940s and 50s. Namely, I keep them embedded in their original context of talks as Frost delivered them by reissuing, contrary to the editorial conventions, each archival audio recording in its entirety. Traditionally, many of my editorial predecessors have extracted the poetry reading from its larger context and, in turn, obscured Frost's effort to directly engage with controversies around the early reception of his works.[10] My minimal editorial intervention prompts Frost's twenty-first-century readers to listen to Frost's careful disclaimers and framings and to reflect on their own assumptions and impressions of the poet's occasional dramatic readings.

Chapter Three proposes further historicization of our listening practices by challenging the illusion of immediacy the digitized audio recordings might imply. Unlike multitudes of disclaimers Frost offered for his expressive reading of dialogue poems, he mostly read his works in a measured style and offered no rationale for such intoned performances. As a result, Frost's silence on the default reading style now presents the situation where it is all too easy for his twenty-first-century audience to

[8] Pound, "Modern Georgics" (1914); Lowell, "North of Boston" (1915) and *Tendencies in Modern American Poetry* (1917).
[9] "A New Poet of the Hills," 5; Lowell (1917), 125.
[10] Sheehy (1997); Lathem (2009).

conflate the performance style that required no explanation some seventy years ago with what is common today. Just as his critics in the 1910s resorted to a reductionist interpretative practice—where Frost's works were put to reconfirm, rather than test, their pre-existing notions about rural New England—our contemporary critical discourse around poetry performance currently enjoys characterizing poetry readings in binary terms: dramatic or monotonous.[11] If the early-twentieth-century reception history is any indication, the pilot audio edition provides a way for Frost's twenty-first-century readers to resist reading anachronistically and instead consider the highly localized reading and listening practice that was unique to the time and space Frost and his contemporary audience occupied. To that end, Chapter Three details how Frost's interrelated key literary investments—"the sound of sense," "saying poems," and "the ear readers"—reverberate with larger societal interests in sound reproduction in the early twentieth century. Additionally, Chapter Three sheds light on the migration history of Frost's audio recordings via such material signifiers as the hissing of the reel-to-reel tape, and expands on the throughline between the early twentieth-century hearing science and the more recent sound engineering behind the MP3 file format that has enabled the continuous transmission of Frost's audio recordings to date.[12] Taken as a whole, the pilot audio edition invites Frost's twenty-first-century readers to listen to ever-receding material and analyze sociohistorical contexts of his default reading style.

Finally, Chapter Four cautions against the ideological underpinnings of open access advocacy discourse which has long presented the inaccessibility of online

[11] MacArthur.
[12] Sterne (2012).

resources as a source of contention between two groups of people: those who work as gatekeepers of works and those who strive to liberate works for the public good.[13] Such a conceptual framework, however, circumvents the careful examination of a range of open access models adopted by existing scholarly editions of literary works that anticipate, encourage, and, at times regulate their ultimate usage based on their agenda. As an antidote to access advocacy discourse and its often readily accepted talking points, I argue that open access be treated as a spectrum and reconstruct the assumed contentious relationship between hacktivists and gatekeepers into one where all participating partners need to discuss their varying interests because no literary edition can be produced in a vacuum. Relatedly, I have devised the interdependent open access model for the pilot audio edition of Frost's public talks and readings to overcome some of the institutional and legal constraints special collections libraries and Frost's literary estate faced concerning the digitization and the consequent open-access publication of archival recordings. Namely, I have streamlined the copyright permission management process for all participating partners through my editorial work and, in turn, cemented the mutually beneficial working relationships among all involved parties who are motivated by the collective desire to provide a well-curated public-facing platform for Frost's twenty-first-century readers.

Digital Frost's chapters draw textual evidence from three, selective public talks and readings featured in the pilot audio edition. These are the talks Frost delivered between 1946 and 1958: a commencement speech at the University of Massachusetts, remarks at the University of Massachusetts, and a talk at the YMHA

[13] Stallman "Why Software Should Not Have Owners" (circa 1994); Swartz, "Guerilla Open Access Manifesto" (2008).

in New York City (now known as 92nd Street Y). These talks have never been published in any scholarly editions before, and, when taken together, they showcase Frost's playful and educational repertoires as well as his diplomatic approach to navigate popular misapprehensions of his rural New England poems.

Chapter 1: Between Tyranny of Prose and Tonal Transcription: Editorial Challenges of Robert Frost's Talks

Robert Frost delivered talks and readings from 1915 until the final year of his life, practicing, in effect, what we would today call public humanities.[14] Despite his initial stage freight, Frost increasingly excelled at engaging his audience at public talks, and the audience size grew over the span of forty-seven years.[15] Usually, each talk event in the last two decades of Frost's career lasted about an hour, and the first fifteen-minute or so was always dedicated to his talking: commenting on the introductory remarks, warming up to the audience, and setting up the stage for a series of poems he was to read later. Such a portion of the event was filled with his signature quips, as his contemporary newspapers liked to say, charming the audience members right off the bat. His talking style was also distinctively informal—in comparison to his more formally structured poems—so much so Frost joked about it being the only "free verse" he indulged in.[16] As popular slam poetry anthology published in 2003 put it, "Robert Frost was probably the twentieth century's greatest U.S. performance poet."[17]

Frost's talks and readings as a genre, however, have received little attention from his academic and general readers today. Such critical neglect is in part technical.

[14] For working definitions of public humanities among historians see: Brennan, Lubar, and Rosenzweig. Looser's *MLA Profession* article also illustrates a compelling case for literary historians to practice public humanities.
[15] Thompson (1966) 79; Faggen 6; Allison 611.
[16] Frost, "Remarks at UMass," 0:06:49; *Robert Frost Speaking on Campus*, 140.
[17] Quoted in Hoffman (2011), 10.

Audio recordings of his talk events are housed in university archives, presenting geographical challenges to many readers. And even when readers can afford to travel to the archives, audio recordings on reel-to-reel and cassette tapes often require digitization first. Sometimes, readers and researchers are asked to cover the digitization fees before being able to judge the relevancy of what is on the tape. Such technical inaccessibility of Frost's public talks, of course, can be resolved by systematic digitization of Frost's audio collections and through consequent online publication. Imperative, however, is that I do not resort to mere technological solutionism but investigate sociohistorical aspects of Frost's talks that have led to the current inaccessibility of audio recordings in the first place. That way, the editorial process for an electronic audio edition can address the root cause of inaccessibility and devise corresponding, ethical curatorial practices informed by the transmission history of Frost's public talks, or the lack thereof.

What follows first analyzes a transmission history of Frost's talks and conundrums faced by my editorial predecessors in the early twentieth century—including Frost himself—which stemmed from literary conventions of their times. I then discuss how editors started to prepare transcriptions for posthumous print publication as a means to provide access to the records of Frost's public talks beyond their original attendees. Because of the emergence of electronic publishing in the late 1990s, transcriptions are no longer the only option to publish Frost's talks today. Still, they continue to serve people who are deaf or hard of hearing and all who conduct search by keywords. I, therefore, conclude with my editorial rationale for producing

transcriptions to accompany audio recordings, which center preservation of the tone of Frost's talks as well as projection of a more inclusive tone of textual inquiries.

Tyranny of Prose Format

Reflecting on Frost's talks delivered for Harvard University's Norton Lecture series in 1936, a reporter illustrated the warm reception of the poet from a thousand attendees from all walks of life: "Mr. Frost, gray-thatched and smiling, gently addressed his audience as though they were townsfolk of his adopted Vermont hills, gathered round the cannonball stove of the village store. It was a mixed gathering—students and professors, children and patriarchs, intellectuals and the unlearned, brought together despite the rain by a love of that magic which translates bare words into quivering things of pure emotion."[18] The other newspaper article concurred: "There can have been very few occasions in the history of such public events in Greater Boston in our times when there was so much friendliness concentrated under one roof and directed at one man."[19]

Such an exuberant reception from his general readers was not an anomaly during the nearly five decades of Frost's career, almost as if to fulfill the prophesy he penned in a letter back in 1913 to "be a poet for all sorts and kinds."[20] Frost's penultimate talk delivered at the University of Detroit in 1962, for instance, drew over 8,500 people and exceeded the venue's seating capacities.[21] It was doubtless Frost's recent visit to the USSR on a cultural exchange trip appointed by President

[18] Dame.
[19] Holmes (1936).
[20] Frost, *Letters*, 154.
[21] News reports on the University of Detroit talk event originally quoted in Seale (2005), 10.

John F. Kennedy that attracted many audience members. Regardless of his growing fame—or because of it—6,500 seats were reserved for high school students at a reduced rate, ensuring the diverse age-range of Frost's audience.[22] In addition to appealing to a wide range of age groups, Frost's performance venues varied geographically. For example, Frost regularly performed at culture community centers such as 92nd Street Y in New York City, as a part of the YM-YWHA Poetry Center's annual programming during the 1950s.[23] He also visited remote places such as Gloucester in a Northern shore of Massachusetts, to deliver a talk at the local high-school auditorium in 1953, prompting a newspaper to report the extraordinary event with much enthusiasm: "Robert Frost gave Cape Ann its greatest literary event since Ralph Waldo Emerson spoke at the Lyceum on March 5, 1845."[24]

Given the extent to which Frost led public life as a poet who "bards around," it is surprising how his talks and readings have largely slipped out of our literary consciousness today especially when the academics are now reconsidering the ways to engage with the general public beyond academia.[25]

Part of the reason for such neglect is the inaccessibility of collected accounts of Frost's public talks compared to his poetry books. Twice during Frost's lifetime, Henry Holt and Company released collected editions of poetry—*The Collected Poems of Robert Frost* (1930) and *Complete Poems of Robert Frost* (1949)—including all of Frost's poetry books published at that time. Holt then published *The*

[22] Ibid.
[23] See "Subscription Series 1956-1957," "Readings, Lectures, Plays by Contemporary Poets, November 1957-1958," and "The Twenty First Season of The Poetry Center: Nineteen Fifty Nine-Nineteen Sixty."
[24] Bethell. Also see Damon.
[25] The term "barding around" is originally quoted in Lathem, xi.

Poetry of Robert Frost (1969), with Edward Connery Lathem as an editor, to add to the 1949 edition Frost's final and tenth poetry book *In the Clearing* (1962). Today, beyond original Holt editions, there are multiple trade editions of Frost's poetry books that are readily available including Random House's Everyman's Library Pocket Poets edition (1997) and the Penguin Classics edition (2015), as well as more lucrative Digireads Publishing's *The Road Not Taken and Other Poems* (2017) and Canterbury Classics' leather-bound edition (2019).[26] Within the sphere of scholarly editions, Richard Poirier and Mark Richardson added previously uncollected ninety-four poems to Lathem's 1969 edition in their *Robert Frost: Collected Poems, Prose, and Plays* (1995) published by Library of America.

Meanwhile, most of Frost's public talks remain uncollected except for a few scholarly efforts that offer glimpses of more than seven hundred public readings Frost delivered in the period between 1940 and 1962 alone.[27] For example, Reginald Cook published *Robert Frost: A Living Voice* (1974) from the University of Massachusetts Press, detailing the records of Frost's twelve talks delivered at the Bread Loaf School of English at Middlebury College between 1953 and 1962. Cook's edition, unfortunately, is now out of print. Lisa Seale also published four, single transcriptions of talks in The Robert Frost Society's *The Robert Frost Review* journal since the early 2000s. Seale's transcriptions have been available to the society members, and, as of January 2020, to those who have access to electronic journal repositories such as

[26] Canterbury Classics is one of the five imprints of Printers Row Publishing Group, which reproduces classics in modern aesthetic formats including leather-binding. Digireads Publishing is a subsidiary of Neeland Media LLC which is in operation since 2003. *The Road Not Taken and Other Poems* reprints Frost's first three poetry books that are technically in public domain.
[27] Richardson, 238.

JSTOR and EBSCO.[28] The only trade edition of talks currently in circulation is Edward Connery Lathem's *Robert Frost Speaking on Campus* (2009) published by W.W. Norton & Company, which showcases excerpts of forty-six talks delivered between 1949 and 1962.

The biggest reason why it was not until 1974 Frost's talks were collected for print publication is because Frost had aborted a series of prior attempts since the early 1930s. For instance, when Harvard University nominated Frost to deliver the aforementioned Charles Eliot Norton lectures in 1936, part of the agreement was to subsequently publish the talks through the university press.[29] As Frost customarily delivered his talks without notes, he was at first reluctant to the publishing arrangement. Given the incredible opportunity, however, Frost resolved to have a stenographer record his talks.[30] A year after the Norton lectures, Frost remained hesitant with the idea of publishing his talks in print and confided in his literary critic friend Sidney Cox about the daunting editorial process as he toiled with stenographic records: "My public talks owe any felicity they may have to the fact that they are gone on the wind. I wrote down not a word for Harvard last year and it would have thrown me off my phrasing to have known of anyone's taking notes on me in my audience. But I am resigned to what I am in for."[31]

I argue that, beyond the virtue of ephemerality, Frost's reluctance to prepare his talks for print publication was further complicated by his conflating two modes of text. Despite a considerable difference between stenographic records of talks

[28] Seale (2003), (2005), (2016), (2018).
[29] Richardson, x. Parini, 301-5.
[30] Parini, 301; Richardson, xxix.
[31] Thompson, *SL*, 437.

(notations of spoken expression) and written essays (formally constructed writing), for Frost, they were both "prose," i.e., something that was not in verse. Two years after the Harvard talk and still no publishable manuscript in sight, Frost conceded his aversion to written records of his talks in a letter to English Professor R.P.T. Coffin who requested the poet's notes for remarks he delivered at the annual Poetry Society of America dinner in 1937. In response, Frost tortuously evaded Coffin's request by citing the only exception he had made to publishing prose—per his conflated definition—was the preface he wrote for his contemporary poet Edwin Arlington Robinson's book *King Jasper* (1935) before dodging Coffin's inquiry altogether: "I thought I was about ready to let [lectures] set when I accepted the Harvard invitation to deliver them in writing after delivering them by word of mouth. Something in me still fights off the written prose."[32]

While the monolithic definition of prose did more harm than good to the editors of talks, Frost's stance on prose—as far as his definition was concerned—was consistent. Earlier in 1921, Frost had already turned down a literary critic Van Wyck Brooks' request to provide essays to be published in the journal Brooks edited.[33] In a letter to Brooks, Frost noted he kept deferring to publish prose: "I used to say prose after thirty; then in the thirties, prose after forty. Still distrusting myself at forty odd, I now say after fifty. Out of what we don't know and so can't be hurt by, poetry: out of knowledge, prose."[34] In the late 1930s, Frost also halted joint efforts between his early biographer Robert S. Newdick and Frost's publisher Holt to publish a collection of prose, citing it would be discourteous should it come out before Harvard's lecture

[32] Thompson, *SL,* 461.
[33] Richardson says the journal in question is most likely *The Freeman*. Richardson, ix.
[34] Quoted in Richardson, ix.

collection.[35] In the end, neither collection materialized, as Frost eventually, and allegedly, destroyed the transcriptions of his Harvard's talks.[36] In a letter addressed to historian and editor Bernard DeVoto in 1937, Frost expressed his annoyance with the pending business with Harvard: "I have decided to let you make the English Selected Poems your occasion rather than the prospective Harvard essays because I dont [*sic*] want any more depending on those essays than already depends. I am inhibited badly enough over them as it is. Damn the essays. Our little grand-daughter Robin (under three) says her Uncle Bob in Billings Montana distinguishes between nice damn and terrible damn. Well I am thinking of terrible damn."[37]

But it was not exactly the aversion against the written essay format that debilitated Frost's will to prepare his Harvard talk for publication. As Mark Richardson has shown, prior to publishing poetry in earnest in 1913, Frost already had a good amount of his essays published. For example, at his high school in Lawrence, Massachusetts in 1891, he published his articles and editorials in *High School Bulletin*. After graduation, Frost had a short stint as a newspaper journalist for *Daily American* in 1895. Most notably, he published multiple short stories in *The Eastern Poultryman* and *Farm-Poultry* magazines between 1903 and 1905.[38] As Richardson has illustrated, in later years Frost published more essays that had to do with his public status. Such examples include an essay titled "A Day of Prowess" Frost penned for the *Sports Illustrated* magazine in 1956, in which he mused on the

[35] Richardson ix; Sutton 227.
[36] Thompson (1970), 675.
[37] Thompson, *SL,* 437.
[38] The complete run of original appearances in these industry journals is now housed at the National Agricultural Library in Beltsville, Maryland and is available through an online exhibition curated by Emily Marsh. See "Frost on Chickens: A National Agricultural Library Digital Exhibit."

role of baseball games in the United States; "The Future of Man" based on the symposia he attended in 1959 to address contemporary societal issues with fellow panelists such as philosopher Bertrand Russell, biologist Julian Huxley, anthropologist Ashley Montagu, and Novel Prize-winning geneticist Hermann J. Muller; or "A New England Tribute" essay in 1961 which was included in the official program of JFK's Inaugural Ceremonies.[39]

Concerning the publication of his talks, it appears Frost struggled with what I call tyranny of prose, i.e. formality associated with written essays that are published in the codex, print format. As far as Frost's assertions for prose were concerned, transcriptions of his informal talks were divergent from the acceptable and familiar essay format and called for conversion through extensive revision. Frost seemed to have struggled with this unique challenge, which stemmed from irreconcilable differences between the spoken and written texts. Even when he did consent publication of his talks—rather than avoiding or aborting the effort altogether—Frost remained perplexed as to how best to prepare his talks for print publication. In a letter written to an editor of the *Amherst Graduates' Quarterl*y in 1948, Frost agreed to the suggested editorial emendation but with much reluctance: "The temptation is to go even further than you with this and round it into a real piece. But perhaps that wouldn't be fair to those who heard it as a speech or talk. They might feel bamboozled. It hurts like everything not to bring my point out more sharply."[40]

Frost's unease about the informality of talks, moreover, was not without its ground. When Frost did convert his talk into an essay format, the piece gained certain

[39] Frost, "A Day of Prowess" (1956), "A New England Tribute" (1961). Richardson, xvii, 350.
[40] Richardson, xix.

legibility among his contemporary and future editors. One such example is his well-known essay "Education by Poetry" (1931). Now largely recognized as an essay that illustrates the importance of education in metaphors—so that one would know how to critically investigate the figures of speech in science, history, and politics—"Education by Poetry" was originally delivered as an address before the Amherst College Alumni Council on November 15, 1930. As Richardson's collation analysis suggests, Frost extensively revised the talk's transcript by reconstructing and fine-tuning his spoken remarks in order to convert the piece into the record of a more formal lecture. By removing local references shared between him and the Amherst College audience, the authorial intent of revision seems to have lied in enabling the piece to be self-contained and independent of its original context.[41] As if to indicate how extra miles taken to revise the talk would gain legibility and its further transmission, the piece was first printed in *Amherst Graduates' Quarterly* (February 1931)*, Boston Evening Transcript Magazine* (February 1931)*,* and *Amherst Alumni Council News* (March 1931). The piece was also collected in Hyde Cox and Edward Connery Lathem's *Selected Prose of Robert Frost* (1966) and Poirier and Richardson's Library of America edition of *Robert Frost: Collected Poetry, Prose, and Play* (1995), as well as in Richardson's *The Collected Prose of Robert Frost* (2007).

The tyranny of prose, moreover, also indicates the historical unease around ephemerality and informality of talk events even among Frost's scholarly editors. In preparing *The Collected Prose of Robert Frost*, Richardson defined many talks as informal workshops and collected the ones only when there was empirical evidence

[41] Richardson, 270-2.

of Frost's revision, which Richardson understood to be the indication of the poet's intent to represent the material in a more formal manner for publication.[42] According to this rubric, some of the informal talks prepared for publication at the hand of others such as "What Became of New England?" and "Poverty and Poetry" were left out of Richardson's 2007 edition of prose even though they were previously collected in his 1994 Library of America edition under the rubric of "Lectures, Essays, Stories, Letters."[43] What have been omitted by the new classification of these pieces are the records of Frost's defending rural New England and its hardworking class of people against elitists in literary circles and colleges—something I discuss in detail in Chapter Two.

As information scientist Geoffrey C. Bowker and sociologist Susan Leigh Star have shown, any classification is both pragmatic and political.[44] I argue the treatment of talks under the exclusive class of written, formal essay has not done due diligence to the unique genre of informal talks. More importantly, removing the informality of Frost's talks is a disservice to the audience members who participated in the talk event and reported that Frost's poetry was "transformed by his colloquial charm and interpolated explanations, given with complete informality."[45] Continuous omission of informality from Frost's talks subsequently dismisses certain receptions—often the ones from the general audience—as if they are not up to par with the publishable transmission and reception history of Frost. Moreover, such an exclusive editorial

[42] Richardson, 239-241.
[43] Ibid.
[44] Bowker and Star.
[45] Anon. "Robert Frost Outlines Artistic Aims Before Audience at Union Reception," 16 November 1921.

practice keeps constituting a partial image of Frost, the author, who did not mumble or meander unlike the rest of his audience members.

No editors today quite know what Frost had in mind when he asked his former student and friend Jack Hagstrom in 1959 to start collecting any tape recordings and phonograph records of his talks and recitations for Amherst College.[46] But I trust publishing the digitized audio recordings of Frost's talks would alleviate Frost's historical editorial anxiety about being judged by inadequate measurement. Additionally, by publishing the digitized audio recordings of Frost's talks in their audio format, I hope to reintroduce the informal tone of Frost's talks that was integral to the welcoming atmosphere of his talk event. That is, by letting go of the tyranny of formal prose, I let the public reception reemerge, that is, the reception from a mixed audience members including a "youngster and poem-scarred veteran" in Westtown, Pennsylvania, as well as that of a crowd at Stanford who was "filled with enthusiasm, audibly greeting the announcement of certain poems with delighted recognition, ready to recite some of them right along with the speaker, and calling for encores."[47]

Transcribing for the Tone

As literary editors started preparing records of Frost's talks for posthumous publication in the 1970s, they, too, were confronted by the constraints of print modality, a ready publication medium of their times. Without the author's supervision, their editorial intervention would never reach the degree by which Frost converted his talk "Education by Poetry" into a formal essay. Rather, the main goal of

[46] Kelly. Thanks to Mark Richardson who helped me transcribe the letter.
[47] Longstreth; Nichols.

editors has been to make the archival records of Frost's talk events available through print publication, just as how they would prepare archival manuscripts or personal letters of the poet. That is, for the editors in the 1970s and 80s, publishing transcription of audio recordings was a common and familiar option unlike me who can entertain publishing talks in their audio format owing to the diffusion of scholarly electronic publishing method since the late 1990s.

Questions concerning how best to produce transcriptions of talk events, however, remain as relevant today, and this time for the purpose of accommodating Frost's twenty-first-century readers with and without disabilities. While I detail the importance of accompanying audio files with transcription from the disability studies' perspective in Chapter Three, let me first examine how historical debates within the field of Frost's textual scholarship has imagined best editorial practices for preparing transcriptions of Frost's public talks.

To date, the biggest challenge has been determining the degree of editorial emendation. Every editor working with the audio recordings of Frost's talks has supplied punctuation to spoken remarks for legibility so that a writing-specific graphic marker could assist readers to understand meanings as well as the dynamic composition of informal speech, which unfolds, adds, and amends over time. Whether to make further editorial interventions such as polishing the syntax or grammar, however, has been left to each editor's informed judgment. For example, Reginald Cook in preparing his *Robert Frost: A Living Voice* (1974) adopted silent editing, a common technique to make minor and inconsequential emendations that do not alter the fundamental meaning of what's been said. When adopting silent editing, editors

usually define general, global policies for the changes they introduce but do not offer detailed, localized records of every single change. Silent editing, therefore, assumes the best intentions of editors, prioritizes the legibility of a reproduced text, and assists readers who wish to investigate the formation of text to focus only on the changes the editor deems subject to debate.[48] For Cook, Frost's syntax, repetition, and mumbles were subject to such partial emendation:

> Of the several problems encountered in preparing a transcription of the Frost tapes, the first and the most persistently recurrent has been syntactical. He started sentences and left them dangling when intrusive thought deflected the original intention. Secondly, he was repetitious, which made necessary judicious excision. Thirdly, and certainly the most frustrating was the occasional word murmured unintelligibly in low register, which will forevermore remain unclear. These three problems—syntax, repetition, and unintelligibility—have been in part obviated by emendations. Since his sentences, like those in relaxed conversation, tend to trail into one another, divisions had to be made. I assumed the responsibility of punctuating the sentences and organizing the paragraphs according to the apparent central thought. I have cut some repeated phrases but added nothing not indicated by inserted brackets.[49]

Cook's editorial labor—which is often inaccessible to readers—mostly concerned reformatting informality of spoken expression in accordance with the formality and

[48] "Guidelines for Editors of Scholarly Editions," MLA.
[49] Cook, 31-32.

legibility of a written essay, and with bare minimal intervention. He also curated a certain reading experience as he edited out frustration of not being able to decipher murmured words, so that his readers can focus on the main ideas Frost sought to communicate without being distracted by what they cannot understand. That is, through his editorial work, Cook emphasized the semantics he considered central to the given talk.

Readers of Cook's edition, then, are presented with the highly mediated text that is reflective of Cook's interpretation of the talk event. Additionally, as silent editing does not leave the records of minor edits, readers are positioned to trust Cook's informed judgment. Even in the short passage, there are small markers that inadvertently indicate the temperament of Cook as the editor. Unlike other Frost's editions produced after the 1990s that show little traces of editorial intervention in the text, Cook's transcription retains his role as an interlocutor of the talk event at Middlebury College's Bread Loaf School of English. Indeed, Cook directed this intensive master's summer program for teachers and other professionals between 1946 and 1964. Also, the credibility of Cook's text in part relies on his actual attendance to the talk event, and Cook did not shy away from embedding himself as participant and reporter—a stylistic choice that is reminiscent of an ethnographer. The following is Cook's transcript for Frost's talk delivered on June 30th, 1955. I reproduce Cook's text here in length to illustrate its legibility as well as Cook's subtle stylistic choice seen in his supplementary annotation in square brackets:

> I thought if I came up again some evening, I'd like to talk about Puritanism—in Greek, Roman, Early Roman, New England, and Later

> Roman—and right out of the head, not out of my books. I'm one of these people who read some. You can see how little I depend on books for anything I do. They [his books] are in such disorder that they're very fresh to me whenever I happen on one that I've been looking for. [*Laughter*] *A Pleasant Night*: I haven't seen that for twenty years. I'll have to get that down and read it. But I can't get a talk out of it. I'll just have to come up and talk off the cuff, as they say, about Puritanism and the greatest poem that it produced: *Comus*. You thought I was going to say something else, I see. Shall I say that Puritanism didn't repent, you know? It relented a little and became Unitarianism. I've found it relenting. [*Laughter*] I'll come up and talk about that.[50]

Coupled with the larger objectives of Cook's edition to offer personal insights on Frost's literary enterprise based on his cordial relationship with the poet, Cook's transcription offers a collegial representation of Frost's talk events. Indeed, in talks featured in Cook's edition, Frost is seen laughing at Cook's routine requests for the poem "Come In," which entertains a thrush's last song of the day at dusk. Cook transcribed the exchange, suggesting his friendly relationship with Frost with his annotation in square brackets:

> One more. Something else. Don't ask me afterwards why didn't I "say" something. Tell me now. What is the last one I'll say? See if I know it. [I called out "Come In" and "Directive."] Everybody ought to

[50] Cook, 76.

> smile when Doc Cook asks for "Come In." That's his specialty, isn't it? Doc and the thrushes. [*Sarcastically*]"[51]

Also implied in Cook's transcription is an amicable relationship between Frost, Cook, and the summer program attendees—so much so the poet's sarcastic humor was welcome and well-taken.

Of course, Cook's editorial emendation is not without its critic. James Sitar, for instance, criticized too much "cleanups" in Cook's transcription, noting, in his unpublished book, that it fell short of capturing the informality of Frost's talks: "Cook presents his transcriptions to stand as pseudo-essays presented by Frost, complete with a polished syntax. This format excludes of Frost's somewhat half-realized thoughts and directions. Much of Frost's tone and rhythm, I feel, is lost in the Cook transcriptions. This loss can be attributed to Cook's aforementioned cleanups. This essay-like impression, which is difficult to miss when reading his transcriptions, is misleading. In presenting the text of the Bread Loaf talks as such, Cook gains a sort of publishable quality, but loses the genuine Frostian element."[52]

In preparing transcriptions for seven of Frost's talks delivered at Dartmouth College's Great Issues Lecture series between 1944 and 1961, therefore, Sitar utilized punctuation not to impose formal syntax structure but to denote the pace of Frost's speaking. For example, Sitar employed ellipses to reproduce the tempo of Frost's talk as the poet self-corrected, added, and expanded on what he had just said. The transcription prepared by Sitar, therefore, reproduces the process of how Frost articulated his thinking. Additionally, Sitar's commas indicate the tempo of Frost's

[51] Cook, 114
[52] Sitar in the Preface to his unpublished "Robert Frost Seven Dartmouth Talks" (2001). His transcription was gifted to Dartmouth College Library and can be consulted upon request.

quipping rather than marking a syntactical unit. As seen in the first sentence of the following transcript, Frost's self-reflective utterance "I suppose" is not segmented by commas (despite the syntactical norms), indicating Frost said it in one breath, and without a pause:

> I've always made considerable claims for poetry in my heart I suppose and made some rather humorous ones…with my friends. I had to. Or else you know, or else. (laughter.) But I wouldn't claim…I would claim them in the spirit of poetry. Now there's two ways to take the world that are safe. One is as a joke, take it humorously. Learn to take a joke and so learn to take the world with…by the help of jokes. You gotta do that cause, one knows that from the people he knows. He knows the kind of people who don't and how lost they are. Then there's a still…better way…not better, another way…side-by-side with it, perhaps a little, one might claim, if he was claiming a lot for poetry you know, claim a little higher. But to take poetry right is to take life right.[53]

In comparison with Cook's transcript, Sitar's transcript illustrates a more pensive Frost. Also captured with Sitar's non-syntactical use of commas is Frost's tendency to rush when least expected such as when he wrapped up the talk and hurried off the stage as if to shy away from the prolonged applause from the audience.[54]

In addition to the transcripts prepared by Sitar and Cook, there is another method of transcription that warrants comparison: a verbatim transcript prepared by

[53] Sitar (2001), 12.
[54] Anderson.

India Tressault for the Middlebury College's special collection. Unlike the previous two editors, the editorial intent of Tressault's transcript is not part of the record. Tressault could have produced her transcript as a part of archival processing work, finding aids, or for the purpose of accompanying audio files for the library's online exhibition. Regardless of her intention, Tressault's transcript is now a part of the Middlebury College's online collection *Robert Frost at Bread Loaf (RFBL)* since circa 2006. Unlike Cook's transcription with numbers of editorial emendations, Tressault's transcript reproduces Frost's every utterance including his misspeaks, mumbles, and fillers. And, as a result of such a verbatim approach, Tressault notates the tempo of Frost's speech through interspersed dashes just as Sitar did the same with ellipses. Here is Tresasult's transcript for the talk delivered at Middlebury College on June 30th, 1955, the same passage also transcribed by Cook:

> I thought if I came up again in the, uh, to the, uh, some evening, I'd like to talk about Puritanism in Greek, Roman, early Roman, New England, and later Roman. And, uh, I l—n —right off the, right out of the head, you know, not, not of my books. I'm one of these people that reads some. But my, you can see how little I depend on books, uh, for anything I do. They're in such disorder that I ca—that I, uh, [unclear] they're very fresh to me whenever I happen on one that I been looking for [laughter]. I have *Pleasant Night.* I haven't seen that for twenty years and I'll get that down and read it. But it, I can't get a l—a talk out of it; I just come up and talk off the, off the cuff, as they say, about Puritanism and the great, greatest poem that it produced, the,

> uh, *Comus.* You thought I was gonna say something else I see [laughter]. [Unclear] And, uh, and the, the, uh, shall I say the, uh, Puritanism didn't repent, you know, it relented a little and became Unitarianism [laughter]. That's the fi—final relenting. I'll come up and talk about that.[55]

In comparison with Cook's text, Tressaul's text establishes its credibility differently. Tressault transcribed all kinds of semi-lexical sounds as well as what she could not decipher. Coupled with rendering Frost's speech mannerism with colloquial spelling as she heard it (e.g. "gonna"), Tressault's text communicates transparency and earnest effort to report what is recorded on the tape.

Despite the difference in the degree of editorial emendation and the purpose of preparing transcriptions, Tressault, Sitar, and Cook all had one thing in common: the limit of transcription to reproduce the tone of Frost's talks. There are ways, however, to complement this through explicit annotation practices to mark other sound-specific signals. For instance, Lisa Seale has specifically annotated different kinds of audience laughter in her transcription of Frost's talks delivered at Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion in Cincinnati on April 2, 1960 (e.g., light laughter, a burst of laughter).[56] Transcribing laughter in this instance assists readers to imagine how Frost's jokes were received. Seale also transcribed environmental sound when it adds to contextual information such as siren heard in the background of Frost's talk event at the Fountain Street Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan. In the notes, Seale elaborated how this particular talk event on November 19, 1959, received a bomb

[55] Tressault.
[56] Seale (2018).

threat from a prankster, causing the firemen and police officers to arrive at the venue with the siren at about two-thirds into the talk.[57] Concerning other non-lexical sounds, Cook occasionally annotated the tone of Frost's remarks by supplying the transcript with square-bracketed annotations, noting whether Frost said things sarcastically, mischievously, empathetically, questioningly, or with clear and particular accentuation.[58]

What I am equally concerned about regarding the tone, however, is the tone of textual inquiries the different modes of transcription might evoke from the twenty-first-century readers. Here, the concern is beyond that of accuracy or interpretative priorities reflected in the transcriptions. Rather, it has to do the look of transcriptions and its unconventional relationship with the legacy of Anglo American textual scholarship. That is, just as Frost himself conflated the written essay and the transcription of spoken words as "prose" and subsequently struggled with the notion that the talks were not up to par with the formality of essays, I anticipate there will be some readers who would be troubled by the very issue.

For instance, consider possible consequences of Tressault's transcript getting characterized as being too "messy" in comparison with that of Cook, which Sitar evaluated as too "clean." I speculate such a figurative language—which has also entered our contemporary common lingo when describing the nature of a data set—could evoke an unproductive tradition of textual scholarship.[59] For example, it is hard to imagine a verbatim transcript serving as textual evidence in literary criticism, a discipline that has long entertained the implications of so-called "corrupt" text. A text

[57] Seale, (2003), 23, 30.
[58] Cook, 51, 59, 60, 63, 120, 122, 155, 158, 169, 186, and 189.
[59] Rowson and Muñoz.

of literary work can be considered "corrupt" when readers consider it does not faithfully represent a certain version of the work due to clerical errors of scribes and typesetters. Such accidental and the inadvertent textual condition have long solicited amusement among textual scholars.[60] The idea of "corruption," moreover, is usually set against either the notion of ideal work or the absolute authorial intent. Under the former framework, it is considered that even authors themselves cannot always render the work in its true, ideal form. Hence, the argument goes, editors may "correct" the work through eclectic editing, deciding what the author could have meant.[61] With the latter framework, the author has the final say over their work. Therefore, just as Richardson did for his latest collection of prose, editors prioritize one version of text overseen by the author and use it as a copy-text.[62] Regardless of which school of Anglo American school of thought one might follow, critiques of the textual condition are nevertheless closely tied with sociohistorical significance of the author and the work.

Once the notion of textual corruption comes into play, a history of Frost's textual criticism is far from kind. For example, when Harvard University Press published Robert Faggen's *The Notebooks of Robert Frost* in 2007, the initial reviews anticipated the edition of notebooks to rekindle the general readers' interests in Frost. However, reviews quickly turned from a celebration of newly gained access to Frost's notebooks housed in Dartmouth College's special collections library to mistrust and

[60] Shillingsburg, 52-55.
[61] Bowers' eclectic editing aims to construct the ideal work based on the readings of various manuscripts. With this method, editors assume authorial intention and reserve their right to revise and rewrite the work as they believe the author must have wanted. For more detail, see Bowers' *Essays in Bibliography, Text, and Editing* (1975).
[62] Greg's copy-text rationale privileges a version of the text that is overseen by the author and encourages editors to use that as base text. For more detail, see Greg's "The Rationale of Copy-Text" (1950).

suspicion about the quality of Faggen's transcriptions. As Faggen's defenders articulated, Frost's notebooks are personal records of the poet; the poet jotted down ideas and events as he saw fit without ever dreaming of getting them published. Frost's writing, as a result, is idiosyncratic and self-referential as any personal journals might prove to be. However, Faggen's edition quickly became a source of literary scandal, spurred by journalist Motoko Rich's *New York Times* article. Rich first picked up Sitar's review "Frost's Great Misgiving" published in Oxford University Press's scholarly journal *Essays in Criticism*. In the article, Sitar questioned the accuracy of Faggen's text based on his cross-examination, citing numerous misreading and unmarked omissions.[63] Sitar's peer review would have been a sound practice had it not resorted to questioning Faggen's ability. Considering Faggen's editorial rationale where he reported the challenges inherent to the writings in personal notebooks, Sitar expressed his doubts about Faggen's editorial competency: "It is not my experience that Frost's late handwriting is 'almost…indecipherable.' I was able to make out almost all of the text of the four notebooks with some study and patience."[64]

To make things worse, *The New York Times* article further tapped into sensationalism as it paired Sitar's assessment with another review written by William Logan. If Sitar's language was not already ableist, Logan ensured that point did come across in his review of Faggen's edition:

> Obliged though readers must be for this unknown Frost, the transcription is a scandal. To read this volume is to believe that Frost

[63] Sitar (2007), 367-370.
[64] Sitar (2007), 367.

> was a dyslexic and deranged speller, that his brisk notes frequently made no sense, that he often traded the expected word for some fanciful or perverse alternative.[65]

The irony of Logan's criticism though is that Frost always employed idiosyncratic spelling. As seen in many letters addressed to his friends, acquaintances, and literary business partners, Frost did not care for a standardized spelling and even joked about his indifference.[66] Logan's criticism, therefore, stems from his desire to uphold his idea of an author—what general literary editorial conventions have constructed—as he further incited controversies over Faggen's edition. Sitar is also not to be blamed entirely for the accusatory tone of his review, as it merely speaks to a larger disciplinary legacy that needs to be reimagined. As Julia Flanders has argued, it is high time scholarly energy among textual criticism shifts from "rhetoric of 'fidelity' and 'accuracy' to the goals of interpretive power and readerly choice."[67]

Seen in this light of the recent history of Frost's textual scholarship, it is obvious the question of how best to transcribe Frost's talks —at times equally informal and idiosyncratic as his jottings in notebooks—is no frivolous matter. That is, without proper moderation, the pilot audio edition might lead to the resurgence of ableism among Frost's textual scholarship.

[65] Quoted in Rich's *New York Times* article.
[66] *Letters* 37, 177, 458.
[67] Flanders (2005), 41.

Editing Talks as a Genre of its Own

Reflecting on her attending Frost's talk event at Dartmouth College in December 1952, a woman named L. W. Johnson painted the scene of her anticipation as she and other audience members waited for the poet to appear on the stage. Around her were college students, who—she would later witness—would adapt a line from Frost's poem for a romantic banter, and an elderly lady who had just rushed in to take a seat with her dog-eared copy of *Collected Poems*, telling Johnson she attends every talk whenever Frost is in town by traveling two hours from Pinkham Notch to Hanover, New Hampshire. Johnson and her husband, too, were regular attendees of Frost's talk event. On this particular day, however, they happened to stumble across the event during their walk and decided to join in on the crowd because, admitted Johnson, "the hall was warm and we were cold."[68] They were nonetheless enthusiastic, reported Johnson, and waited for the poet as they adjusted their hearing aids: "We slipped unobtrusively […] into a seat in the rear and turning our Sonotone up for maximum receptivity, prepared to enjoy another of those renowned evenings full of sly country wit and canny backwoods wisdom."[69]

That Frost's talks attracted diverse age groups is one of the testaments to Frost's reach. For the pilot audio edition of Frost's talks, then, the recordings must remain as accessible as possible including his twenty-first-century readers who are deaf or hard of hearing, so that they too can enjoy Frost's talks just as L. W. Johnson did on a cold December night in 1952. One way to ensure such accessibility is to accompany the audio recordings with their transcriptions regardless of the

[68] Johnson.
[69] Johnson.

disagreement over their stylistics from other textual scholars. As Gregory Downey and Elizabeth Ellcessor's studies have shown, new technologies have often replaced existing media regardless of the consequences for people with disabilities. For example, Downey shows how the advent of talkies in the 1930s pushed silent films into obsolescence. Citing the lack of financial benefits to cater to deaf and hard-of-hearing communities, film industries dismissed useful affordances of the silent film, which made the audience follow its storyline by visually reading title cards inserted between pictures.[70] Another example is Amazon's Kindle interface. In 2012, notes Ellcessor, Amazon removed the text-to-speech function from Kindle, following the legal challenge posed by the Authors Guild concerning the text-to-voice function of Kindle 2 distributed since 2009. Instead of negotiating with the guild concerning authors' royalty fees, Amazon avoided the controversies altogether at the cost of readers who are blind. As a result, though Kindle Paperwhite released in 2012 was marketed as an improvement of Kindle 2, it was a regressive development for blind readers.[71] Worse yet, the device reintroduced disability.

In preparing transcriptions of Frost's talks to enable multiple access points for people with and without disabilities, I formulated my editorial rationales in relation to precautions voiced by disability historians as well as existing discursive frameworks set by Frost's textual scholars. First, I treated the talk as a literary genre of its own by embracing its unique stylistic value and by emphasizing its dynamic, temporal compositional structure. Despite the common impression that Frost was speaking off the cuff, there was usually a thematic throughline in his hour-long talk event. Or, as

[70] Downey, 17-52.
[71] Ellcessor, 145-6.

Lisa Seale best put it: "Some of Frost's talks are like meandering, conversational letters, while others are like spoken essays, still associative in their organization, still conversational, but always circling back to a central theme or metaphor."[72] In order to shed light on the internal organizational structure that is unique to talks, their transcriptions need to be legible enough. I, therefore, adopted the minimal editorial emendation approach of Cook rather than Tressault's verbatim method. Additionally, I opted out of Sitar's usage of punctuation, which reflects the tempo of Frost's speaking, especially because Frost's utterance tends to get jumbled up when he was too thrilled in anticipation of the argument he was about to make. Temporally accurate transcription of Frost's remarks using Sitar's approach in such instances can muddle up the meaning.

Take, for example, how Frost opened his talk at the University of Massachusetts on October 31st, 1957 by responding to the introductory remarks that presented the poet as "a living American scholar, a man thinking, a man doing."[73] Frost quickly identified multiple thematic threads in such introduction, associated them with his main tenets as a poet, and unpacked all key ideas through an anecdote. Among such topics were his disdain for theories without practice and his ideas on education through poetry, which seeks to nurture attentiveness to language. Frost was especially excited to tell a story about his encounter with a man who did not attend closely to what Frost was saying. According to the anecdote Frost told, the man in question thought Frost was teaching that animals could not think when, in fact, Frost was discussing about thinking through metaphors. In explaining what he meant by

[72] Seale (2000), 106.
[73] Frost, Remarks at UMass, Introduction.

education in metaphorical language, Frost hurried to illustrate his point with examples regardless of being stumbled over his minor slip. Had I adopted Sitar's method to supply punctuation to reflect the tempo of how Frost said the following in one breath, the transcription would be grammatically hard to follow. With the temporally accurate transcription, it is not immediately clear what the self-correction "I mean, can't think" sought to cancel out:

> I didn't mean dogs can't talk. But I mean, can't think, but I mean, grown-up human beings can't think for me, unless they make metaphor, innuendo, intonation, hints, double meaning, double entendre, symbol…all of these things.[74]

Frost proceeded to talk while hearing what he had just said and decided to correct himself, and Sitar's method is hard to capture such a temporal override. By adopting Cook's usage of punctuations as a form of minimal emendation, however, I could clarify the meaning of the same passage:

> I didn't mean dogs can't talk. I mean, can't think. But I mean grown-up human beings can't think, for me, unless they make metaphor, innuendo, intonation, hints, double meaning, double entendre, symbol—all of these things.[75]

The transcription in this instance is not strictly accurate but it delivers the same message and without introducing changes that are too consequential to the meaning or to the stylistic choice of Frost. More importantly, modified transcription ensures that Frost's rebuttal is clear: Frost doesn't mean dogs cannot think but he sure thinks

[74] Frost, Remarks at UMass, 0:03:40.00.
[75] Ibid.

humans cannot think unless they know how the language operates. The passage is especially complex due to the double negation used to express Frost's understanding of dogs' cognition, something he had already addressed earlier: "I often watch them thinking."[76] As the talk progressed, even the slippage "dogs can't talk" added to its complex layer, as if to suggest—to us, the twenty-first-century readers—that his audience members' attentiveness to language grew by the minute. By the time Frost was reading the poem "One More Brevity"—which depicts how a human tries to understand what a dog might be thinking while trying to tend to the dog's needs—the audience seemed to have found the accidental, yet not irrelevant, throughline in the talk. The audience responded to a line in the poem with laughter—"'Twas too one-sided a dialogue, / And I wasn't sure I was talking dog." [77] Frost, in response to the audience laughter, noted "It brings up that subject, doesn't it? Can dogs talk?"[78] As a transcriber, therefore, I needed to ensure his earlier statement is clear enough for both visual and auditory readers of the audio edition to catch this dynamic unfolding of the talk event.

Second, I sought to moderate reactionary reading practice based on the look of transcription as much as possible by determining an appropriate degree of editorial emendation regarding Frost's habitual fillers such as "uh" and "you know," something Lathem entirely omitted in his *Robert Frost Speaking on Campus* (2009).[79] While I risk the seeming inconsistency with my treatment of fillers, I took a hybrid approach of Cook and Tressault's methods and decided whether to transcribe fillers,

[76] Ibid., 0:01:09.90.
[77] Ibid., 0:31:15.60.
[78] Ibid.,
[79] Lathem, 171.

depending on the degree of semantic importance they carried during the talk. Frost's repetitive use of "you know" for example, presents a unique case. While it was often used to fill the silence, sometimes Frost actually tested whether the audience was getting the joke and accordingly determined the need for further elaboration. More importantly, Frost regularly hedged his statement with frequent you-know-s, especially when criticizing literary critics or his contemporary writers. In these instances, without his interspersed you-know markers, Frost's remarks would seem too judgmental in tone when transcribed. Regardless of whether Frost was conscious or not, the markers nevertheless gestured that Frost was trying to be generous with his disagreement. The markers also contributed to establishing the rapport between him and his general audience without making enemies with other literary professionals.

For instance, in the following passage, Frost's repetitive you-know markers alluded to the assumed common understanding between him and the audience that the literary world and its lingo can sometimes come across as snobbish and elitist. Frost's point was not to disrespect anybody. Rather, he sought to draw a fine line between those who are elusive owing to their belief that their taste in literature is too exclusive to be understood by the general audience and those who are ambiguous as they embrace the multitude and complexity of literary works. Frost's argument is subtle, and the you-know markers help pace the delivery:

> Someone asked me today, what hypergraphic meant. And I said, "Where'd that occur in a poem?" And I said, "Were all the words like that?" [laughter] If so, I knew who got up the vocabulary. [laughter] And, again, it seems rather self-conscious. Seems as if, when you got

to the age of poetry and voting and things like that, you could trust yourself to say anything that came into your head, you know. Or anything that came, any motion—we won't say of the heart but any motion of the mind. I won't call it ideas but motion of the mind. Gesture of the mind. Say to people, you know, "You are proud." The people in front of you, whoever they happen to be. You can do a little. You can't do this. And the waves, the filaments of the minds, you know. See if they can wave it too. That's what you are asking when you read a poem. Now there is this to be said about the people who deliberately go away from one kind of audience. After thinking of them a long, long time, I decided to make one line of poetry to set them right with me. You see, they are my friends, too. So I put it this way to myself. "Some mystery becomes the proud."[80] Let them their pride, their loftiness, their haughtiness, and some mystery becomes them. And again, you wouldn't want my formula. I know that some child said that he'd hate to be the result of planned parentage. [laughter] Is that in *The New Yorker*? Somewhere? Sounds like *The New Yorker*? And the same, you know, with the poems. I'd hate to plan a poem to any particular audience. And still again is that notion, you know, this coyness, this allusiveness, this little pride when somebody asks you a flat question and wants to flatten the whole thing out. You make what's almost a tricky answer. And this innuendo, this intonation, there's this all-this-sort-of-thing you play with. Poetry is

[80] A line from "Choose Something Like a Star," *CPPP*, 365.

> what you might call a delicate excess of that kind. It's an excess. Like some of the other excesses. [laughter] But it's a sublimation, you know. Use the word. A sublimation of excesses.[81]

With a demonstratively meandering way to make a case for excess in poetry, Frost's you-know markers signal a certain degree of discreetness for people he critiqued. That is, the markers enabled necessary ambiguity to keep people in question unnamed, and without sounding too abstract. By keeping the you-know markers, in this instance, I ensured that the transcription reflects the tactful tone and tempo of such exchange between the poet and his audience.

Third, I fashioned the transcriptions in a way so that it could double as index and metadata of audio files not only for people who are deaf and hard-of-hearing but also for all whose online search method largely relies on keyword search. Setting aside the sound pattern recognition search system High Performance Sound Technologies for Access and Scholarship (HiPTAS), our contemporary search function heavily relies on linguistic search.[82] Therefore, coupled with the effort to streamline copyright management workflow which I detail more in Chapter Four, my transcription needs to serve as the index, and complements archival finding aids of participating libraries. As such, I opted out of highly interpretative annotative practices such as seen in Cook's identifying different modes of audience laughter. I did annotate historically specific references in the footnotes, however, as the relevance of common cultural reference decreases over time. Some such historical references include "newsreel," a documentary film concerning the contemporary

[81] Frost, Frost at YMHA, 0:01:59.20.
[82] HiPSTAS.

affairs shown in cinemas, or "the Book-of-the-Month Club," founded in 1926 which provided its subscribers selective, recently published books.[83] Moreover, I annotated factual information that justified some judgment calls regarding transcriptions of Frost's hard-to-decipher utterance. They mostly concern place names such as a fictitious town of "Mudville" from Ernest Thayer's highly popular baseball poem "Casey at the Bat," and "Shrewsbury, Vermont," which was one of the locations for the NBC's 90-min documentary series "Wide Wide World."[84] Given the time-consuming process of preparing transcriptions, I needed to prioritize references that were immediately relevant to the given talk's main subject matters. Annotations can be further improved in the future, of course, including probing into passing references Frost made during the talk event such as a scrubwomen's strike at Harvard University he briefly mentioned during the YMHA talk in 1957.[85]

Beyond practical implications of transcriptions, I determined the degree of editorial meticulousness in order to illuminate the process of transcription labor that is often opaque and inaccessible to general readers. Thinking beyond its implications within the field of literary archival scholarship, moreover, the inaccessibility of transcription and captioning work in general has historically enabled gradual exploitation of labor and the consequent disservice to people with disabilities who rely on carefully prepared transcriptions. As Ellcessor notes, for-profit websites such as YouTube and Google have long circulated audiovisual materials and other websites with inaccurate captions and inadequate HTML tags under the premise that

[83] Frost, UMass Commencement, 0:12:21.3 and 0:02:41.10, respectively. Rubin, 94-98.
[84] Frost, UMass Commencement, 0:02:41.1, Remarks at UMass, 0:06:49.00.
[85] Frost, Remarks at UMass, 1:00:53.6.

any caption is "better than nothing."[86] Untrustworthy captions, however, are not only debilitating to people who rely on the closed caption or web browser's text-to-voice function but reintroduce disability rather than removing it.[87] Such ableist justification to settle on insufficient transcriptions suggests for-profit corporations' incompliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 and the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.[88] Moreover, for-profit corporations' justification exacerbates historical trivialization of knowledge workers who produce transcriptions. As Downey has shown, for example, court transcribers used to be a highly respected profession when it was predominantly practiced by male stenographers. According to Downey, male stenographers were paid twice: once for the hours spent in the courthouse transcribing, and again for their polished transcripts by the courthouse, attorneys, and other clients. Corresponding the court's efforts to streamline such double payment system as well as to mechanize operation—first in the 1900s with the spread of shorthand and typewriting technologies, and later in the late 1950s with the emergence of magnetic tape recording technologies—the trade experienced feminization and consequent reduction in female transcribers' salary.[89] While male stenographers held their transcripts as intellectual property and were compensated accordingly, the same work carried out by female stenographers and typists were considered clerical and menial—so the argument went—not deserving of the pay equivalent to male stenographers.[90]

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[86] Ellcessor, 1-3.
[87] Ibid.
[88] "The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, Title IV, Telecommunications"; "UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Article 21, Freedom of Expression and Opinion, and Access to Information."
[89] Downey, 103-151.
[90] Ibid.

Seen in this light, moreover, there is a troubling tendency among large cultural institutions such as Library of Congress or Smithsonian today that resort to crowd sourcing and volunteer workers to transcribe their newly digitized collections.[91] Indeed, their intent lies in inviting the public to enjoy their cultural heritage and perchance contribute, through transcription, to the increase in the collections' online searchability. Soliciting volunteer workers, however, perpetuates the idea that transcription and consequent peer-reviews do not require rigorous training in subject knowledge or research-based methodological awareness. Additionally, not only does such crowd-sourcing practice undermine the value of transcription labor but it also relies on the leisure class to assist the production of metadata of cultural collections. Studies have shown how even courthouse documents prepared by professional reporters reflect class biases; reporters routinely correct misstatements and grammatically incorrect remarks of attorneys and judges while retaining the non-standard usage of working-class speakers, preserving, in essence, the idea that people from the working class are inarticulate.[92] As I examine in detail in Chapter Two, biases against working class informed the early reception histories of sound of Frost's poetry, so I accordingly opted out of crowd sourcing as a means of public engagement for the pilot audio edition of Frost's talks.

Instead, I prioritized educational values of critical collaboration in order to challenge historically sexist and ableist justifications that have long undervalued transcription and captioning labor, just as Frost used his talks to teach how to appreciate his poetry. Additionally, I centered autonomy of transcribers as knowledge

[91] "Library of Congress Crowdsourcing Effort Challenges People to Explore Folk and Music traditions"; "Smithsonian Digital Volunteers."
[92] Downey, 109.

workers and treated the editorial rationale as something that is subject to continuous refinement based on the seminar style discussions among transcribers per Frost's encouraging intellectual freedom among his readers. In particular, I modeled a critical collaboration workflow after *Dickinson Electronic Archives* (*DEA*), an electronic scholarly editorial project that has long investigated the politics of editorial labor concerning publication histories of writings by Emily Dickinson.[93] As current Head Project Manager of *DEA*, I usually work with multiple transcribers to prepare manuscript images of Dickinson's writings for publication. For *DEA*, transcribers first work with the manuscripts individually, and then come together to discuss their editorial process, and together as a team formulate the most appropriate rationale to collate and encode transcriptions. For the pilot audio edition of Frost's talks, I worked with Christine Kirchner, who has a previous training in textual scholarship through the *DEA* internship program I co-teach, and has been working with me on various *DEA* projects since Summer 2018 as a research assistant. Based on her previous work experience with literary archival records, I arranged an additional, hour-long training specifically tailored for working with Frost's archival audio recordings. She then spent approximately three hours each on recordings of Frost's talks, and marked the difference in the transcription that I had prepared, using the track change function of the Microsoft Word software program. Based on discussions with Kirschner, I made the final editorial decisions, of which summary I have detailed above.

In valuing educational benefits of textual inquiry, I also foregrounded the different abilities of transcribers. That is, instead of keep constructing the idea of an immaculate author through equally impeccable work of scholarly editors, I strove to

[93] Smith, Hart, Werner (1997).

reorient the focus on language diversity of Frost and his editors alike, and to encourage readers of the pilot audio edition to practice generous listening. In particular, I sought to develop the edition based on what feminist scholar AnaLouise Keating calls invitational pedagogies that center "intellectual humility, flexibility, and open-minded attitude," and acknowledge my ever partial knowledge and my willingness to be wrong with my assessment of Frost's archival audio recordings.[94] Such an approach, of course, is not new among Frost's textual scholarship. In needing to compensate for the limit of publishing transcriptions without accompanying audio recordings, Cook, too, concluded his editorial rationale, articulating how the transcripts will always remain an approximate representation of past events: "transcripts are as accurate a notation of Frost's speech habits as we are likely to find and are only limited by the proficiency of the mechanical instrument and the ear of the transcriber."[95] Though Cook gave more weight on prominence of Frost's speech than his proficiency as an editor, Cook's acknowledging the limit of transcriptions also meant trusting the edition's readers to consult notations with some stipulations rather than treating it as definitive text or measuring Frost's speech habits against the idea of an authoritative speech mannerism.

Speaking for myself, I had trepidation that, as a bilingual person for whom English is her second language, my lack of historical knowledge about English's idioms might impair abilities to transcribe Frost's talks. Oddly enough, through this experience I found myself sharing Frost's dread imposed by the tyranny of prose and its supposed prestige. Additionally, it was not too hard to imagine whose ability

[94] Keating, 24.
[95] Cook, 35.

would be put on trial first—in accordance with the twenty-first-century social power dynamism based on my race, gender, and nationality—should Frost's talks transcribed by me seem to deviate from the norms of standard English. Such an absolute model of intelligence, however, is not only counterproductive but it also misrepresents the fact that our individual knowledge is, in reality, always partial. That is, there is always more we do not understand than we do especially when reading the archival artifacts, which are themselves partial remainders of past events. The question of accessibility, then, is to address the idea of exclusive literary prestige that has led to the gradual inaccessibility of Frost's talks and their public receptions, and to reimagine and enact how his twenty-first-century readers might benefit from the kind of textual scholarship that nurtures inclusivity on behalf of Frost who wished and became "a poet for all sorts and kinds."[96]

[96] *Letters*, 154.

Chapter 2: Poetics and Politics of the Sound of Sense: Robert Frost's Dramatic Performance of Rural New England Poems

Known by many for his performance at President John F. Kennedy's inauguration ceremony in 1962, Robert Frost achieved great popularity in the early twentieth century. Today, he remains a popular, anthologized poet many of us encounter through K-12 educations, and we assume, for the most part, his work to be straightforward. Such perception might be slightly challenged when one encounters Frost again in a college English class where a professor attempts to counter the simplicity of Frost's popular appeals in order to shed light on the complexity and the intellectual acumen of his works. Such pedagogy can be an entertaining way to introduce critical inquiries to college students, and serves as a beloved liberal arts repertoire with the underlying premise that the perceived simplicity is to overcome. Similarly, literary scholars such as Richard Poirier and Frank Lentricchia established the exigence of their groundbreaking scholarship by first lamenting how Frost's simplistic popularity had contributed to the neglect of his serious studies in academia.[97]

While the general academic amnesia might have necessitated Poirier and Lentricchia to situate Frost within the lineage of American intellectual figures or amongst a company of more cerebral-leaning modernists for academic legibility in the 1970s and 90s, I argue that the very notion of Frost's accessibility—both in terms

[97] Poirier, *Robert Frost: The Work of Knowing* (1977), xxii; *Poetry and Pragmatism* (1992), 94; Lentricchia *Modernist Quartet* (1994), 70.

of his literary diction and public persona—need not be set aside today. On the contrary, with the growing academic interest in public humanities, the notion of accessibility and its popular appeal warrants careful examination. Particularly, considering how I wish the online edition of Frost's public talks and readings to serve the general audience in addition to academic readers, it is imperative that I analyze how Frost navigated the idea of accessibility on page and behind the podium and inform the pilot audio edition accordingly.

To that end, I first probe into the early reception history of the sound of Frost's poetry as it reveals the complex mechanism of perceived simplicity both the poet and his critics exploited in the 1910s. In particular, I analyze how a combination of Frost's seemingly accessible language and the inaccessibility of rural New England mores led the critics to project their racially essentialist understanding of the English language. I then examine three of Frost's talks delivered between 1946 and 1958, to investigate how the poet himself responded to the problematic early characterization of his works later in his career. Based on the observation of such reception histories, I conclude with my editorial rationale, which seeks to mitigate possible reproduction of biases seen in the form of listener misapprehensions, partially in anticipation of computational phonotext analysis the audio edition may spur.

Exploit of the Sound of Rural New England

Reception histories of the sound of Frost's poetry reveal how the notion of accessibility was both a key to, and a problem for, Frost's literary endeavors since the beginning of Frost's career as a published poet. For Frost, accessibility was largely a

matter of establishing himself as a democratic poet rather than elitist. According to the now-famous letters addressed to his friend and former student John Bartlett between July and November 1913, Frost envisioned a specific kind of success as an author. First, in part motivated by the desire to make a living as a poet by the scale of book sales, Frost was interested in having greater popularity among general readers in addition to critical acclaim from a small literary circle. Having published his first poetry book *A Boy's Will* in April—which attracted favorable reviews from contemporary writers in London such as Ezra Pound and F.S. Flint—Frost professed his strategic plan to Bartlett back in North America:

> You mustn't take me too seriously if I now proceed to brag a bit about my exploits as a poet. There is one qualifying fact always to bear in mind: there is a kind of success called "of esteem" and it butters no parsnips. It means a success with the critical few who are supposed to know. But really to arrive where I can stand on my legs as a poet and nothing else I must get outside that circle to the general reader who buys books in their thousands. I may not be able to do that. I believe in doing it—dont [*sic*] you doubt me there. I want to be a poet for all sorts and kinds. I could never make a merit of being caviar to the crowd the way my quasi-friend Pound does. I want to reach out, and would if it were a thing I could do by taking thought.[98]

In envisioning the kind of authorship, Frost's particular class sentiment shone through. His need was to butter his "parsnips" by the support of literary mass market, set against the want of Pound of being "caviar" to the crowd.

[98] Frost, *Letters*, 154.

Incidentally, Frost's literary intervention coincided with his desire to provide relatable literary works for the general readers. That is, rather than following his British predecessors' efforts to perfect the technicality of prosody, Frost was invested in versifying what he called "the sound of sense," emotional truths reflected in the tones of everyday speech. Writing to Bartlett on July 4th, Frost almost symbolically declared his independence from the recent English literary investment in assonance, i.e., mastery of the repetition of the sound of vowels for musical effect in poetry. Instead of fine-tuning the assonance theory, Frost invented for himself—as far as nobility of any inventions are concerned—a literary principle that celebrated eloquence of speech. I quote the letter in length here as Frost best articulated his craftsmanship to mark the occasion:

> To be perfectly frank with you I am one of the most notable craftsmen of my time. That will transpire presently. I am possibly the only person going who works on any but a worn out theory* of versification. You see the great successes in recent poetry have been made on the assumption that the music of words was a matter of harmonized vowels and consonants. Both Swinburne and Tennyson aimed largely at effects in assonation. But they were on the wrong track or at any rate on a short track. They went the length of it. Anyone else who goes that way must go after them. And that's where most are going. I alone of English writers have consciously set myself to make music out of what I may call the sound of sense. […] The best place to get the abstract sound of sense is from voices behind a door that cuts off the

> words. […] Those sounds are summoned by the audible imagination and they must be positive, strong, and definitely and unmistakeably [*sic*] indicated by the context. The reader must be at no loss to give his voice the posture proper to the sentences. […] The sound of sense, then. You get that. It is the abstract vitality of our speech. It is pure sound—pure form. One who concerns himself with it more than the subject is an artist. But remember we are still talking merely of the raw material of poetry. An ear and an appetite for these sounds of sense is the first qualification of a writer, be it of prose or verse. But if one is to be a poet he must learn to get cadences by skillfully breaking the sounds of sense with all their irregularity of accent across the regular beat of the meter.[99]

At the bottom of the letter, Frost amended his "theory of versification" to "principle" of versification, indicating his subtle but conscious effort to express his ideas in laymen's terms. Taken as a whole, the letter is a pledge to produce the kind of work that is not entirely driven by a literary theory but written with an ear for the appreciation of the tone of spoken language.[100]

Granted, while Frost tried to distance himself from a highly theoretical literary enterprise, his intervention was nevertheless in concert with the historical debates among literary professionals. Just as Algernon Charles Swinburne and Alfred Tennyson—who sought to increase the flexibility of English prosody by loosening accentual-syllabic metrical system—Frost broke away from the conventional meter,

[99] Frost, *Letters*, 122.
[100] Frost, *Letters*, 123.

which expected each line of a poem to have a certain amount of syllables and accents in the even positions, and in accordance with the competing theories originated in French, Anglo-Saxon, and Latin prosody.[101] By proposing to let speech sounds dictate composition, Frost sought to overcome the kind of literary enterprise that suffered from its by-the-book approach: "Verse in which there is nothing but the beat of the metre furnished by the accents of the pollysyllabic [*sic*] words we call doggerel."[102] Dog Latin, that is. Instead of swearing by a theory, Frost adapted existing English prosody and simplified it into two basic meters he would later call "strict iambic and loose iambic."[103] In so doing Frost opted out of the need to wrangle the cadence of American speech to make do with the existing formal theories, to please the critical few and at the expense of alienating his general readers.[104]

Considering these literary aspirations to appeal to the general readers in addition to highly specialized literary critics, it was both natural and ingenious that his poetry collected in such books as *North of Boston* (1914) should be written in vernacular. The vernacular enabled Frost to showcase his craftsmanship in versification—i.e., the ability to work out the irregular intonation of everyday speech in accordance with strict or loose iambic metrical structures—while demonstrating his appreciation for ordinary folk and their expressions. Take, for example, a poem "A Hundred Collars," in which Frost flexed his versification muscle as he illustrated an encounter between a local and a college professor who is visiting a small village in New Hampshire. In the poem, Professor Magoon misses the train and reluctantly

[101] Hartman, 21; Martin, 48-78.
[102] Frost, *Letters*, 123.
[103] Frost, *Collected Prose*, 149.
[104] Frost, *Letters*, 154.

decides to take a lodge in Woodsville though he thinks "Woodsville's a place of shrieks and wandering lamps."[105] As the luck would have it, the only option available for the professor is to share a room with another man named Lafe, a burly drunkard who works as a loan collector. Frost, depicting the first encounter of these characters, skillfully arranged their dialogue by aligning their utterance with the iambic pentameter format as if to illustrate how this peculiar pair needed to navigate their confined space for the night. By the end of the first exchange, and in anticipation for Lafe's gradual intimidation of Professor Magoon later in the poem, Frost let Lafe establish his dominance formally by letting him take up all the spaces an iambic pentameter had to offer (i.e., five sets of stressed and unstressed syllables in a line). For the ease of metrical examination, I have supplied numerical annotation at the bottom of each line:

'Lafe was the name, I think?'
1 2 3 4 5 6

'Yes, *Lay*fayette.
7 8 9 10
You got it the first time. And yours?'
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8

'Magoon.
9 10
Doctor Magoon.'
1 2 3 4

'A Doctor?'
5 6 7

'Well, a teacher.'
8 9 10 11

'Professor Square-the-circle-till-you're-tired?[106]
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

[105] Frost, *CPPP*, 49.
[106] Frost, *CPPP,* 51.

Frost's readers do not need to be familiar with the theoretical prosody in order to appreciate the tension between Lafe and Professor Magoon. But Frost's mastery of iambs underpins and amplifies the very tension of two characters for readers who are concerned with the art of versification. As our contemporary fantasy writer Patrick Rothfuss recently put it, "Frost wrote consistent, beautiful iambic language, and you would never know. […] You don't realize you are reading iambic anything because it's perfectly natural and perfectly flawless. Which meant he sweat blood into it."[107]

Save for a few exceptions, however, Frost's artistry was not immediately obvious to his contemporary poets and literary critics due to inaccessibility of rural New England mores as well as existing biases against the region.[108] Many of Frost's contemporary writers celebrated *North of Boston*'s diction for its simplicity and credited Frost for rightly capturing village-speak, a testament—as far as critics' understanding went—to the backward and unsophisticated region.[109] In a way, his critics did agree with Frost that his subject matter was not bourgeois. Their interpretations, however, stemmed more from the critical aversion to rurality as opposed to Frost's more amicable relationship with the region's villagers and townspeople. As Pound put it, "Mr. Frost's people are distinctly real. Their speech is real; he has known them. I don't want much to meet them, but I know that they exist, and what is more, that they exist as he has portrayed them."[110] Or as Amy Lowell

[107] Rothfuss.
[108] A few exceptions include a review written by Harold Monro in 1914. See Hoffman (2014) for a detailed analysis of Monro's poetics and his possible influence on Frost.
[109] Pound, "Modern Georgics" (1914); Lowell, "North of Boston" (1915) and *Tendencies in Modern American Poetry* (1917).
[110] Pound, (1914), 129.

described it, "[Frost's] words are simple, straightforward, direct, manly, and there is an elemental quality in all he does."[111] That is, according to Lowell, Frost exceled at illustrating the rural New England town "in all its ugliness."[112]

Critics' preconceived notions about rural New England also influenced their praise of Frost's metrical form. For instance, American poet and co-editor of *Poetry* magazine Alice Corbin Henderson applauded Frost's metrical structure in *North of Boston* as appropriately dull concerning the book's subject matter: "There is no denying that his insistent monosyllabic monotony is irritating, but it may be questioned whether any less drab monotony of rhythm would have been so successful in conveying the particular aspect of life presented."[113] In a similar vein, Lowell commended Frost's occasional deviation from iambic pentameter to be indicative of rural New England's conservative culture, which putatively refused, as Lowell saw it, to adapt to the external forces that demand change—be it industrialization of its wider region, its young population's exodus to cities, or a demographic shift with Canadian and Finnish immigrant populations taking up its abandoned farms. In Lowell's unapologetically derogatory words of praise: "[Frost's] people are left-over of the old stock, morbid, pursued by phantoms, slowly sinking to insanity."[114] And the corresponding meter used in the poems: "halting and maimed, like the life it portrays, unyielding in substance, and broken in effect."[115]

In addition to their tendency to characterize *North of Boston* as a tale of peasants, critics often projected their literary desire to further romanticize Frost's

[111] Lowell (1915), 81-82.
[112] Ibid.
[113] Henderson, 254.
[114] Lowell (1915), 81.
[115] Lowell (1915), 82.

register by marking, amplifying, and even racializing, the difference. Encouraged by their interpretation of Frost's simplistic lingo as a sign of inexperience, critics routinely offered unsolicited advice on how to improve his poems. In particular, they lamented the lack of dialect in *North of Boston* as a lost opportunity for Frost. For example, an article published in the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* noted that without dialect, Frost's vernacular is somewhat artless, "merely the plain, straightforward speech of plain, straightforward people."[116] Similarly, Lowell argued that Frost should have employed the regional dialect and a corresponding phonetic spelling to assist the reader in reproducing a tone of speech unique to rural New England. Otherwise, Lowell wrote, "New England turns of speech would lose much of their raciness without the peculiar pronunciation which accompanies them."[117] The ideal writing style for Frost to model after would be, noted Lowell, that of short story writer Alice Brown or satirical poet James Russell Lowell. The inscription style Lowell offered as an example from J. R. Lowell's *The Biglow Papers*—"We're curus critters: Now ain't jes' the minute / That ever fits us easy while we're in it"—not only suggests the kind of speech sound Lowell was expecting in Frost's quintessentially rural New England poetry, but also her patronizing approach to publicly point out that Frost fell short of mastering the genre of vernacular literature. That is, as Lowell saw it, the genre which had traditionally employed dialect as a literary device to illustrate local color, such as seen in Edward Eggleston's *The Hoosier School-Master* (1871), George Washington Cable's *The Grandissimes: A Story of Creole Life* (1880), Mary Murfree's *In the*

[116] "A New Poet of the Hills," 5.
[117] Lowell (1917), 125.

Tennessee Mountains (1884), and Charles Chesnutt's *The Conjure Woman, and Other Conjure Tales* (1899).[118]

Beyond the question of literary lineage, Frost's contemporary critics' language mirrored the political climate of their time, and that of rural sociology, in particular, an emerging academic field that concerned socio-economical and spiritual strains of rural America.[119] As Donald Sheehy has shown, emboldened by its claims to scientific methodology and empirical evidence, rural sociology sought to reform the living conditions of agricultural regions.[120] Part of the discipline's ethos, however, was often tied to eugenics arguments, especially when dealing with generational poverty, inbreeding, and psychological ailments seen among rural communities.[121] Regardless, such academic discourse saturated the political consciousness of the reading public via numbers of editorials, sermons, magazine articles, and books, and culminated in President Theodore Roosevelt's appointment of a Commission on Country Life in 1908.[122] In short, rural sociology discourse resulted in offering a common frame of reference for Frost's contemporary readers.[123] Indeed, tropes in the federal commission's 1909 report that concerned the effect of isolation, poverty, and the lack of education among rural communities reverberated in Amy Lowell's 1915 assessment of *North of Boston*, the book she considered to be a realistic depiction of the region:

[118] Jones, 1-13; 37-63.
[119] Sheehy (2014)
[120] Sheehy (2014), 239.
[121] Sheehy (2014), 239; Barron, 31.
[122] Sheehy (2014), 217.
[123] Sheehy (2014), 239.

> In "Black Cottage" we have the pathos of the abandoned house, after the death of the stern, narrow woman who had lived in it. In "A Servant to Servants" we have a woman already insane once and drifting there again, with the consciousness that her drab, monotonous life is brining it upon her. "Home Burial" gives the morbidness of death in these remote places; a woman unable to take up her life again when her only child had died. The charming idyll, "After Apple-picking," is dusted over with something uncanny, and "The Fear" is a horrible revelation of those undercurrents which go on as much in the country as in the city, and with remorse eating away whatever satisfaction the following of desire might have brought. That is also the theme of "The Housekeeper," while "The Generations of Men" shows that foolish pride in a useless race which is so strange a characteristic of these people. It is all here—the book is the epitome of decaying New England.[124]

Sociological descriptions of rural New England became so prevalent and prescriptive it largely obliterated alternative frameworks for Lowell and other critics to assess Frost's *North of Boston*. In this regard, the rural sociology discourse subordinated Frost's poetry to serve as another evidential account and kept fulfilling the official narrative.

Another external factor that has informed Frost's early reception history was the poet's initial social status within literary circles. The gap in the interpretations of *North of Boston*'s register between Frost's own and those of his contemporary critics

[124] Lowell (1915), 81.

in the 1910s implies certain power dynamics in publishing. For instance, ever since the publication of *A Boy's Will* in 1913, Pound had considered Frost's literary style to be "that of the untutored child" and offered unsolicited advice on how to improve his verse—just as Amy Lowell would toward *North of Boston* and Susan Hayes Ward (the first editor Frost reached out in 1894) had done the same concerning "My Butterfly: An Elegy."[125] In so doing Pound sought to acculturate Frost rather than reflecting on his own assertions about the emerging poet and his cultural, working-class background. Frost, in turn, seldom confronted his critics in the 1910s, and kept his annoyance and frustration to personal correspondence with his friends and other business associates. The only exception he made to this strategy was when Lowell published her aforementioned analysis of Frost's eschewal of dialect. In a letter Frost wrote: "And for the fun of it you might record in the margin of your book that RF makes no merit of not having used dialect in North of Boston. He says he doesn't put dialect into the mouths of his people because not one of them, not one, spoke dialect."[126] At the end of the day, however inadequate their reviews and assessments might have been, it was nevertheless welcome publicity for a budding poet to have Pound and Lowell—prominent literary figures of their times—discuss his work.

As I will shortly discuss in the following section, Frost's response to misapprehensions would soon take a public turn, in part supported by his growing success as a nationally renowned poet. It is equally true, however, that Frost's perceived simplicity encouraged his contemporary literary critics to project and impose whatever interpretations they saw fit. While Frost had been comfortable with,

[125] Frost, *Letters*, 116, 132.
[126] Frost, *Letters*, 579. The incident is originally cited in John F. Sears, "Robert Frost and the Imagists: The Background of Frost's 'Sentence Sounds.'"

lenient enough with, or even benefitted from his critics' misapprehension, the early reception history of the sound of his poetry proved to be at times classicist and came at the expense of people who were historically on the receiving end of prejudices against their accents and regional dialects.

A Public Poet in Action

By 1943, Robert Frost had won four Pulitzer Prizes. And by 1950, his financial aspiration to reach out to "the general reader who buys books in their thousands" had been achieved as seen in an industry journal *Publishers Weekly*.[127] The journal reported in its March issue that Frost had sold 250,000 copies of his original Holt editions, leading a list of other best selling contemporary poets such as John Masefield, Edna St. Vincent Millay, Carl Sandburg, and T. S. Eliot (who had sold 160,000 copies). Additionally, *Complete Poems of Robert Frost* published a year prior had already sold 11,000 copies, noted the journal, in the age when the average sales of modern poetry in the U.S. were between 1,000 and 1,500 copies.[128] There were doubtless multiple factors that had contributed to Frost's success, including his winning multiple awards, his publisher's concerted advertising efforts, and the poet's frequent public appearances. With regard to presenting himself as a democratic poet, public talk events offered Frost an opportunity to directly address his general readers without relying solely on critics to shape the common perception of the poet and his work. And audio recordings of Frost's public talks and readings between the late 1940s and 1950s illuminate how Frost sought to remedy the inaccessibility of rural

[127] Frost, *Letters*, 154.
[128] "Modern Poetry Sells in Quantities Or Almost Not At All." *Publishers Weekly*, vol. 157, no. 12, 25 March 1950, 1487-1489.

New England local mores he seemed to have taken for granted at the beginning of his career.

First and foremost, Frost addressed the common misapprehension of his rural New England poems not so much to correct the record but to humanize the lives depicted in his poems by contextualizing and reframing the account from his perspective as a rural New England transplant himself. He thereby introduced, in effect, a more evened access to the societal norms of the region without sacrificing the nature of literary works that is meant to encourage various interpretations. For example, during a 1958 commencement speech at the University of Massachusetts, Frost shared an anecdote about a man living in a small town just like Ripton, Vermont, where he lived, in order to complicate the common idea of poverty in the region. Frost noted that regardless of what social workers assumed, there was only one house that could be considered poverty-stricken—a "one-house slum"—if one should try so hard to find such a place in the area.[129] If one did find a shanty, added Frost, the house always attracted people late into the night and that "the people in it are jaunty about it."[130] Frost further illustrated that there was obvious material scarcity that might trigger social workers—the owner of the house used his tablecloth as a blanket and slept in the kitchen corner while his guest hanged around—"social workers better let them alone."[131] In telling this story, Frost kept his humorous tone throughout to offer enough local contexts for his audience while refraining from telling them what to think of the situation in question. To the audience members whose laughter seemed to indicate they agreed with the non-sentimental depiction of

[129] Frost, UMass Commencement, 00:16:33.40.
[130] Ibid.
[131] Ibid.

the one-house slum, Frost concluded in a restrained yet playful tone: "one has to be versed in country things to know how to take them."[132]

Frost also tactfully challenged the misapprehension of critics without completely forsaking them during the talk events. Instead, he discussed some of the remarks made by his critics in order to establish a rapport with his audience members, to encourage interpretative freedom, and to demonstrate—as "a poet for all sorts and kinds"—how not to exclude others who might be misguided.[133] For example, during the YMHA talk event in circa 1946, Frost jokingly called out the audacity of a critic who claimed that Frost had struggled throughout the night to compose a poem, "New Hampshire." It was especially amusing, noted Frost, because there was a common understanding among Frost and his other critics that the poet wrote "New Hampshire" in a single sitting and then proceeded to write another—famously, "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening."[134] Frost nevertheless concluded it was all right to take guesses and that he was looking forward to spending time with this critic friend soon in summer. As a matter of fact, Frost always semi-ironically referred to critics as "friends"—especially when he was critiquing them—signifying his intention was not to vilify them and that disagreement and friendship were not mutually exclusive.[135] Regarding the sociological interpretation of "The Death of the Hired Man," Frost gently let his audience know, to him, humanism was what mattered the most in the poem:

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[132] Ibid.
[133] Frost, *Letters*, 154.
[134] Parini, 208.
[135] Frost, UMass Commencement, 00:30:13.90.

> I found many times, the poem like this is a test with people. My friends, they don't get it, you know. They don't know the spirit of it. Here is a man, his wife, and a hired man at the point of death. But you have to be versed in country things to get it right. Some gets somewhere near it. You can get too much sociological significance out of it, you know. It isn't meant like that at all. It's about human things.[136]

Compared to some of the languages Frost used in personal letters to express his displeasure about some critics, his careful framing at the talk event was not accidental. That is, Frost refrained from accusing his contemporary critics for failing the bigotry test or for trying Frost who became, in return, an inadvertent beneficiary of the prejudice against rural New England.

In another example of measured nonchalance towards misapprehension, Frost joked about how not to worry too much about getting things right by demonstrating the malleability of a language.[137] In so doing, Frost undermined the authority of some early reviews that treated his poetry as an evidentiary account of the lot of rural New England by unknowingly exploiting the inaccessibility of local mores. Following the admittedly difficult reading of "Directive," a poem that depicts a desolate village getting taken over by vegetation, Frost sought to make light of the situation during the YMHA talk event in circa 1946. He first acknowledged it was one of the many poems better read on the page and proceeded to turn the situation into a learning opportunity by demonstrating reader-response theory, as it were. He first cited how, when he was

[136] Frost, UMass Commencement, 00:20:05.40.
[137] As in how Ferdinand de Saussure analyzed the arbitrary relationships between the signifier and the signified in his *Cours de Linguistique Générale* first published in 1916.

young, he was too innocent to be aware that some of his readers had never kneaded bread and therefore had no mental image for "a dent in dough."[138] By the same token, noted Frost, somebody who had never read *Arabian Nights* would not know—and rightly so—the source for the poem's original reference to "forty firkins."[139] Subsequently, considering different readers' responses to his poem "One Step Backward Taken," Frost laughed at how his depiction of rushing water had led some of his readers to claim that the poem was a commentary on the atomic bomb, Karl Marx, or something altogether nonsensical.[140] There was no accusatory tone in Frost's telling how readers sometimes took and ran with the metaphorical affordances of his poems as far as they could. Rather, the tone suggests Frost's amusement as he himself admittedly did the same with other writers' work. As an author of poems, noted Frost, he strove to pin down the concrete descriptions just right and then leave subsequent interpretations and misinterpretations to chance.[141]

Concerning the lasting expectation among the audience members for Frost to perform his poems in a rural New England dialect, Frost mostly read his poems in a careful but rather monotonous style, as if to imply reading otherwise would undo his versification—something I discuss further in Chapter Three. There were poems, however, Frost preferred to read in a more dramatic manner, such as "The Death of the Hired Man" and "The Witch of Coös," and his unusually expressive delivery speaks volumes about how the poet met a certain expectation of the audience while not entirely submitting to popular demand despite his approachable and friendly stage

[138] Frost, Frost at YMHA, 00:43:43.50.
[139] Ibid.
[140] Frost, Frost at YMHA, 00:47:33.50.
[141] Frost, Frost at YMHA, 00:43:43.50; UMass Commencement, 00:12:21.30.

mannerism. In reading these narrative poems, Frost often offered a disclaimer first by expressing regret about his poems being co-opted by rural sociology. In 1937 he noted: "Twenty years ago I published a little book that seemed to have something to do with New England. It got praise in a way that cost me some pain. It was described as a book about a decadent and lost society."[142] With such a disclaimer, it was then a matter of trust between the poet and his audience members that adopting different voices for characters was in part practical—so that the audience could follow which character was speaking—and that Frost's intention was not to caricature.

Frost's dramatic performance also indicates how he turned the problematic early reception history on its head under the very guise of being one of the simpletons afforded by the rural sociology discourse. Particularly concerning the reading of "The Witch of Coös" —a semi-fictional ghost story told by an old mother and her son to a visitor—Frost often amplified the tone of the poem's elderly woman character. While Frost cautioned the audience not to be "too amused by what's really terrible" (alluded adultery and murder that had taken place in the characters' house), he also underscored the entertainment aspect of storytelling and the performativity of characters in the poem and of Frost behind the podium: "I am old enough to read it like an old crone. And I can do it. I ought to be a lady but I am not. I'm polite. But not a lady."[143] Frost would usually add another cautionary annotation to further set a humorous tone and to dissuade his audience from thinking the poet employed a dialect: "This witch was no lady and I don't pretend to talk her dialect—I don't write

[142] Frost, *CPPP*, 755.
[143] Frost, UMass Remarks, 00:44:34.70.

a dialect. But I talk her way a little bit. A little bit her tone."[144] These precautions were standard practice for Frost whenever he read "The Witch of Coös," and they always elicited laughter from the audience. By gradually establishing boundaries, Frost offered the audience a framework to refrain from certain interpretations while encouraging to situate themselves in the shoes of the poem's narrator, who "stayed the night for shelter at a farm / Behind the mountain, with a mother and son, / Two old-believers."[145] Most importantly, Frost offered just enough framing for the audience to see the two sides of rural sociology thorough his performance, as he subverted the conventional power relations and entertained a situation where country folks put on a show for interlopers to pass the time. By exaggerating the fantastic aspect of "The Witch of Coös," Frost's performance acted as a critical commentary on sociologists, who were often oblivious of the fact that they, too, were studied in return by the locals.

Additionally, Frost's fixation on particular sounds of the vernacular during the talk event suggests the poet's diplomatic approach to resist the formal account of rural New England's way of living. That is, Frost used the informality of spoken language to evade his criticism of social reformists, who often sought to prescribe a better way of living in the agricultural regions through formal studies and reports. Frost, of course, was not the only one who held a strong opinion about rural sociology. As historian Hal Barron has shown in his study of late-nineteenth-century Chelsea, Vermont, rural populations were rather sanguine about the nature of country life despite dystopian official accounts. And "by rejecting the Country Life

[144] Frost, Frost at YMHA, 00:27:11.30.
[145] Frost, *CPPP*, 187.

Movement," noted Barron, rural inhabitants often rejected an entire world view, i.e., "a perception of the nature of the industrial revolution and a vision of a progressive society planned by social scientists and run by professionals."[146] Considering the growing concerns for professionalization, Frost demonstrated, during the YMHA talk, how he believed it was amiss to work for the wage alone without any aspect of pleasure and self-fulfillment. In offering annotative comments on the poem "Two Tramps in Mud Time," Frost painstakingly explained how the piece concerned the ethics of work by challenging conventional dichotomies such as vocation vs. avocation—only to avoid taking a moral high ground by concluding on the seemingly whimsical note of slang:

> There's a trap in there. In the line there I didn't set on purpose, I guess. "The work is play." People all say that. His work is his play. That isn't what it says there. "The work is play for mortal stakes." His work is a gamble, you see. For life or death. That's what I am saying there. And people miss that. "The work is play for mortal stakes, / Is the deed ever really done." You know you can bet your bottom dollar on saving Europe. And you don't know if somebody else that'll do another, you know. We have two slangs, haven't we? Bet your bottom dollar. And the other is: you bet your life. See? Somebody that'll bet his life will always beat the fellow that'll bet his bottom dollar. Ain't that right? I think so. That's what I'm talking about there. Betting. You betcha life. Said that way. You betcha life. [applause][147]

[146] Barron, 50.
[147] Frost, Frost at YMHA, 00:26:10.60.

During the commencement address at the University of Massachusetts, Frost also commented on his revision plan for the poem to have his point come across more easily by hyphenating the term so that the line in question would read "the work is play-for-mortal-stakes."[148] He then added, "Play-for-mortal-stakes, that is not just play but play-for-mortal-stakes. The big gamble. The real big gamble of life. I mean to make that very serious."[149] While his stance on the labor issue was firm and consistent, Frost nevertheless concluded on a diverting note for the YMHA audience—"You betcha life"—as if any more insistence on the meaning of work might alienate the audience.[150]

Unclear is whether the applause of his YMHA audience acknowledged Frost's stance on work or his animated mode of speech. Regardless, Frost's dramatic performance served as a way to please those who wanted Frost to be "folksy" while not entirely neglecting the opportunity to make a political statement for those who understood.[151] For example, Frost had a repertoire of jokes to accompany "Provide, Provide," a poem that preaches, in satirical declarative, life values measured by youth, fame, money, power, and other societal pressures that compel one to be industrious and accumulate wealth. During his talk event at the University of Massachusetts on October 31st, 1957, Frost first sat the tone for the performance:

> Then, let's see. Well, another kind of thing. Another kind of voice entirely. This is called "Provide, Provide." See, you wouldn't know

[148] Frost, UMass Commencement, 00:40:32.90.
[149] Ibid.
[150] Frost, Frost at YMHA, 00:26:10.60.
[151] Parini, 106.

how to say that. I've read the poem so I know how to say it. "Provide, Provide," like that, you see? Like your grandmother. [laughter][152]

Following the reading, Frost shared an anecdote from the time when he performed the poem for a Washington D.C. audience. Ever so discreetly, Frost recalled how he appended the poem with an additional line on that occasion, especially tailored for his progressive friend Henry Wallace who served as Secretary of Agriculture, Secretary of Commerce, and Vice President under the Franklin D. Roosevelt's administrations.[153] Echoing his resistance to rural sociologists and policymakers prescribing better ways to live, Frost ad-libbed based on the already slangy diction of the poem to tease the kind of unsolicited governmental intervention Wallace would advocate:

> The first time I read it was in Washington. Right in the height of everything. Right in the height of everything. [laughter] And right in front of me was very prominent person. Almost as prominent as you could have, but not quite. And…how delicately I say these things. [laughter] And he was right down in front of me. So when I got to the end of it like that, I came down. I like to tell this, how you project it, this tone is so much of a poem, you see? It's the whole of it. The whole thing. The tone that's in it, the context. I came down on it, you know, "No memory of having starred // Makes up for later disregard, / Or keeps the end from being hard. // Better go down dignified / With

[152] Frost, UMass Remarks, 1:00:53:60.
[153] Poirier 258; Evans, 172-3.

boughten friendship at your side / Than none at all. Provide, provide!"

And then I said, “Or somebody else will provide for ya.” [laughter][154]

Regardless of one’s position on social welfare programs during the early twentieth century, Frost’s joke was intricately weaved out of historical connotations that concerned rural sociology. While Frost enjoyed his political quipping, he employed a unique combination of informality, nonchalance, and humor to entertain rather than weaponize the difference of opinions.

Besides, Frost always had the last elusion card up in his sleeve, as it were, to indicate literary critics should not take everything he said too literally. As he would have a character from Lunenburg, Massachusetts in the poem called “The Mountain” admit, sometimes “all the fun’s in how you say a thing.”[155] Inevitably, dramatic readings evoked familiar misapprehensions from some audience members, and incidentally caused some of the newspaper articles to lovingly refer to Frost as a venerable minstrel of New England.[156] As Charles Bernstein has observed how the effect of our contemporary poetry performance lies in creating “a space of authorial resistance to textual authority” and in destabilizing what is written, Frost’s performance often multiplied access points for his audience members—be it Frost’s confirming and complicating his folksy ways, sharing his political take on social welfare programs in the early twentieth century, or however one feels about Frost’s

[154] Frost, UMass Remarks, 01:02:36.90.
[155] Frost, *CPPP*, 48.
[156] “The New Poet” in the *Evening Star* (1958); Mary McGrory’s “Personal Views of One Robert Frost” in *New Britain Herald* (1960); David Miller’s “A ‘Tramp Poet’ Chats with a ‘Ruffian’” in *New York Herald Tribune* (1962).

sense of humor on a given day—precisely because many of his early reviews denied multifaceted interpretations.[157]

No More Abstraction

For a long time, audio recordings of Frost's readings were published without his contextual annotations, occasion-specific framings, or commentaries on their reception histories. As far as his studio recordings are concerned, Frost usually read his poems in a measured monotonous style, evading, in effect, association with the rural sociology discourse almost altogether. By the time the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) published a studio recording of Frost reading "Mending Wall" and "After Apple-Picking" among other poems in 1951, for example, the reviews retained few concerns about regionalism. Instead of characterizing Frost's performance as a testimony to dull, devolutionary rural New England, teachers praised Frost's reading style as a sign of sophistication. Writing for the NCTE's journal, Emma Mae Leonhard reported how her students were delighted by the moments of "heightened and intense simplicity" in Frost's performance.[158] Another review published in the *Speech Teacher* journal noted that Frost's voice "brings to the microphone the same universality, the same breadth of understanding and the same depth of feeling, that his pen has given his verse."[159] Listing titles recorded on four sides of phonograph records, a reviewer named HLM described, "Each is simple enough for a child to understand."[160]

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[157] Bernstein (1998), 10.
[158] Leonhard, 112.
[159] HLM, 67.
[160] HLM, 67.

But here is the rub. Presented in a highly abstract context, the seeming simplicity of Frost's literary language continued to encourage problematic interpretations to exemplify a racially essentialist understanding of the English language. Having praised the accessibility of Frost's register, HLM shared what they considered a misguided usage of NCTE recordings among their colleagues. And HLM's observation reveals how a varying degree of xenophobia, nativism, and the perceived "sound of sense" (the tone of ordinary speech Frost versified) informed different speech teachers' assessment of Frost's audio recordings:

> The dramatics coach or teacher of phonetics who seeks an example of "New England dialect" for his students will find nothing germane to his purpose in these records, but there is no other facet of teaching of speech they cannot illuminate. […] Here is pure poetry, purely read—and yet it is being used (in at least one class in voice and articulation) as a model of the best American English conversation a Chinese student can listen to. Native students of voice and articulation can learn lesson in voice production and in projection from Mr. Frost.[161]

HLM did note the lack of New England dialect as a warning. However, they did not lament, unlike Amy Lowell thirty-odd years ago, how Frost's performance would have been better had he employed the regional dialect. Instead, HLM reported how some speech teachers perceived more natural cadence than the meter in Frost's performance, and considered the recording fit for English as a Second Language (ESL) education despite the implications of an assimilative pedagogical insight. While others, including HLM themselves, regarded Frost's recording was too good

[161] HLM, 66.

for foreign students to understand and that "pure poetry, purely read" was for born and bred Americans, despite the non-homogeneity among American students.[162] Whether it was for a remedial speech class or for exclusive elocutionary lessons, Frost's language was nevertheless considered nationally valuable and yielded to jingoistic rhetoric around speech pedagogies.

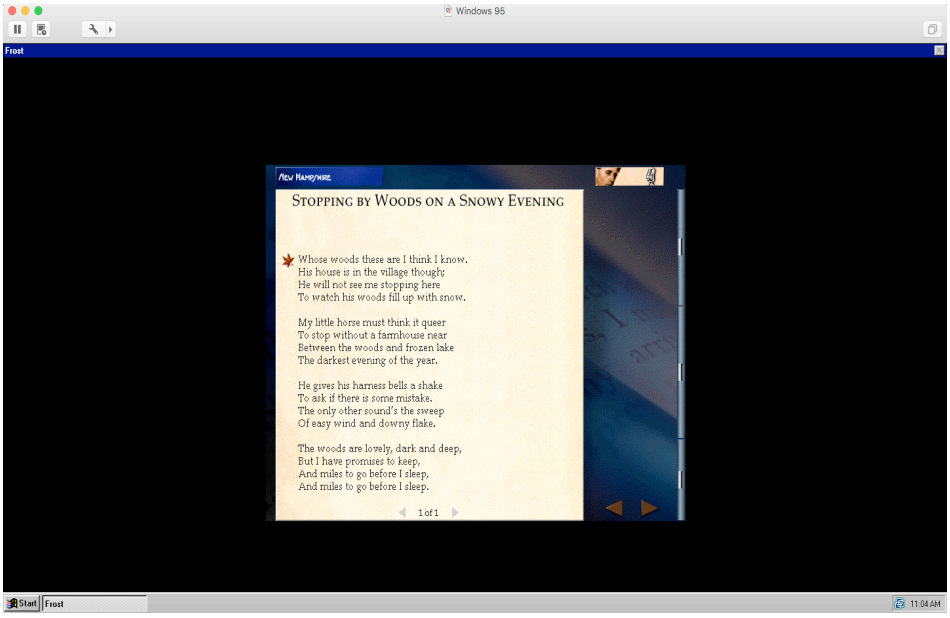
Given how the perception of Frost's register can morph with the political climate of a given time, I have informed my editorial rationale largely in accordance with how Frost himself addressed the early reception histories of rural New England poetry. That is, contrary to editorial conventions set by my predecessors, I have kept every poetry performance in its original context so that Frost's words of caution could keep forestalling reproduction of listener misapprehensions that come at the expense of people who have historically found themselves on the receiving end of prejudices against their accents some critics and teachers love to hate.

Traditionally, Frost's scholarly editors have abstracted poetry readings from their historical and material context to facilitate easy consultation in a classroom setting. Those editors adopted a critical editorial practice informed by New Criticism, the idea that literary text is a self-contained, self-referential object. For example, a multimodal CD-ROM edition *Robert Frost: Poems, Life, Legacy* published in 1997 featured, for the first time, audio recordings of Frost's reading his own works as an integral part of scholarly publishing efforts.[163] Edited by Donald Sheehy, the edition

[162] Ibid.

[163] Given the edition was developed for Windows 95 and Mac OS 7.1, it is no longer compatible with the modern operating systems. Using a virtualization software program such as VMware, however, the interface design can be reconstructed. While audio and audiovisual files remain divorced from the text files on the VMware virtual machine, file directories stored on the CD-ROM complements such partiality. College professors who have taught Frost's poetry using the edition tell me that they routinely use the edition as a collection of audio files. (Thank you, Jonathan Barron and Priscilla

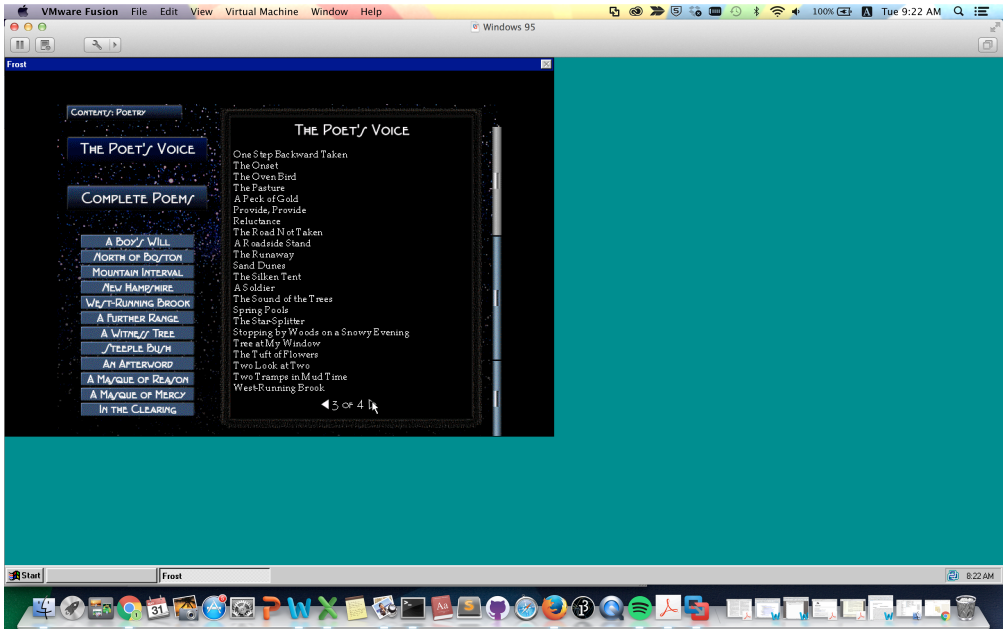
offered sixty-nine, single audio files of Frost's poetry performance, and enabled consultation in two ways. First method was to listen to audio files as they supplemented the digitally reproduced text of Frost's ten poetry books. About one in every three poems featured in the edition was paired with a corresponding audio file, and readers could listen to Frost's performance and read the text along, guided by a moving leaf icon that kept track of the line [Image 1].



[Image 1: The read-along function of *Robert Frost: Poems, Life, Legacy*]

The second method was to consult the audio recordings through "The Poet's Voice" section, which cross-listed all sixty-nine audio files in an alphabetical order [Image 2].

Paton, for sharing your usage of the edition at the 2015 Robert Frost Symposium in Derry, New Hampshire.) For the purpose of my analysis, I rely on the regenerated interface on the virtual machine as well as the un-compiled file directory to assess the edition's curatorial rationale.



[Image 2: "The Poet's Voice" section on *Robert Frost: Poems, Life, Legacy*]

The CD-ROM edition was groundbreaking, but by pairing a poem with one version of the performance, it inadvertently implied that poetry performance, as well as the corresponding text of the poem, is static. The edition also reinforced the existing desire—such as seen in HLM's review of the NCTE recording—to naturalize Frost's performance as authoritative. Moreover, the edition's agnostic attitude towards the provenance of each audio file rendered some audio recordings from the talk events as merely informational; the edition included annotative commentaries from un-known talk events, clipped and abstracted from their original sequence of events.

Divorcing particular poetry performance from its original context, moreover, has created a peculiar ground for an emerging reception history of the phonotext of Frost's unusually dramatic performance. Chief among them is Frost's known performances for "The Code," the poem depicting the town-bred farmer getting acquitted with the local farmhand mores and the pride they take in the work they do.

Stored in the CD-ROM edition as "P2CODE.MOV," Frost's performance of the poem was long considered an outlier among sixty-nine poems that were largely performed in a more measured manner—so much so a handful of Frost scholars considered it an "Easter egg," a hidden treasure buried among the usual and intoned performances.[164] The audio file also led some Frost scholars to wonder whether Frost was committing ventriloquy, putting on the voices of local farmers he had no right to claim.[165] Incidentally, Chris Mustazza's work on the Columbia University Speech Lab recordings has recently revealed the existence of a nearly identical audio recording of "The Code" among Columbia's ethnopoetics collection developed between 1931 and 1942.[166] Run by dialect researchers George W. Hibbitt and William Cabell Greet, notes Mustazza, the Speech Lab started recording poets' performing their own works when Vachel Lindsay reached out in hopes of recording his performance for prosperity.[167] Frost was invited to record his performance twice—first in 1933 and again in 1934—and he read "The Code" among eleven other poems.[168] Within the context of Speech Lab recordings, Mustazza characterized Frost's performance of "The Code" with full credit to its theatrical value: "The aural mise-en-scéne is crafted through Frost's application of regional dialect, foregrounding the localism of the worker and dampening his accent for his performance of a generic employer."[169]

[164] My observation is based on the informal conversations at the 2017 Robert Frost Symposium, Bennington, Vermont.
[165] Ibid.
[166] Mustazza, "New at PennSound";
[167] Mustazza, *Speech Labs,* 147.
[168] Mustazza, "New at PennSound"; "The Speech Lab Recordings"
[169] Mustazza, "New at PennSound."

My publishing Frost's talks in their entirety then is an effort to complement and augment the emerging reception history of literary archival recordings, and to invite others to gain a multifaceted understanding of poetics and politics of speech sound in the early twentieth century. Mustazza's description of Frost's performance is insightful especially because the poet's immediate audience members for the Speech Lab recording were Hibbitt and Greet, who were invested in studying regional dialects. Hibbitt, for example, traveled around the United States collecting sounds of dialects and accents in places like Little Compton, Rhode Island and the Appalachian, setting an immediate precedent for Alan Lomax's ethnomusicology endeavor.[170] Greet also conducted fieldworks such as recording "the tidewater speech" of Williamsburg, Virginia, "the coastal type" of Lubec, Maine, and "the Delmarva speech" in the region that ranges between Delaware, Eastern shores of Maryland, and Virginia, as well as studio recordings where he had fourteen thousand summer school attendees read the same story "Grip the Rat" for a controlled linguistics analysis.[171] When coupled with Frost's routine disclaimers during his talk events in the 1940s and 50s based on his reservations about the early reception of his rural New England poetry in the 1910s, Frost's decision to work with the Speech Lab further cautions us in 2020 against his façade of approachability, which has historically encouraged his readers and critics to interpret his literary art through familiar frames of reference based on the assumption that his craft ought to be self-explanatory.

[170] Mustazza, *Speech Labs*, 160, 235.
[171] Greet, "A Phonographic Expedition to Williamsburg, Virginia" (1931), "A Record from Lubec, Maine" (1931), "Delmarva Speech" (1933), and "American Speech Records at Columbia University" (1930), 334, 339. The practice of having participants read the same material is still prevalent today as seen in George Mason University's ongoing Speech Accent Archive project.

For example, his collaboration with Hibbitt and Greet aligns with Frost's nuanced take on the sound of rural New England that he strove to convey through his performance during the talk event. That is, Hibbitt and Greet belonged to a particular school of linguistics, that was invested in the difference of speech sound based on, in the words of Mustazza, "an anti-assimilationist understanding of identity."[172] In December 1934, two months after the second recording session with Frost, Greet published in an academic journal *American Speech* a call for more poets and writers to participate in the recording project he now called the Contemporary Poets Series. That Greet published the call, as well as numbers of his academic articles, in *American Speech* is no accident, and it is but one indication why Frost might have agreed to participate in the dialect researchers' effort during the project's formative years. The journal's mission, as defined by one of the founders Louise Pound in retrospect, centered around what we would call today language diversity. Upon Greet's request, in his capacity as an editor, to contribute to the journal's twentieth anniversary in 1945, Pound recalled how the founding editors struggled to differentiate its effort from that of their contemporary elocutionists, who largely promoted their exclusive understanding of the English language:

> When we launched it, it was difficult, for a time, to persuade the public that our new magazine was not to be another dealing with "Better English" or "Correct English" or what used to be called "Elocution," but was to be philological.[173]

[172] Mustazza, *Speech Labs* 157.
[173] Greet, "An Editor Looks Back" (1931), 168.

While I will further probe into Frost's relation with elocutionary tradition in Chapter Three, suffice it to say that Frost was in a company of those who were interested in discussing the varieties of speech sounds at the time when remedial speech science and psychoanalytical diagnosis of speech impediments were dominating the discourse.[174]

Additionally, publishing Frost's talks in their entirety assists us in further historicizing our listening practices. The reel-to-reel documentary recordings of Frost's self-reflective performance in the 1940s and 50s offer an insight of the period between two defining eras: the age of phonographic recordings for ethnographic studies between the 1890s and the 1930s and the time of mass-commercialization of audiotapes in the late 1960s when poets and recording artists started to experiment with the technology.[175] As Brian Hochman and Jonathan Stern have shown, early ethnographic recording efforts originated in the 1890s were galvanized by the notion that "disappearing" cultures of indigenous peoples in North America must be preserved. Such a narrative framework was not only hypocritical given the historical settler-colonial violence enacted on indigenous communities, but it was also based on the discourse of linear progress, which imagined a human society to evolve in three consecutive stages: savagery, barbarism, and civilization.[176] Paired with such fiction was the narrative around the development of corresponding writing systems—picture-writings, hieroglyphs, and the alphabet—which presented a society that centers literacy superior to the one that revolved around orality.[177]

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[174] Jones, 64-97.
[175] Shaw.
[176] Hochman, xiii; Stern (2003), 27, 312, 315.
[177] Hochman, 11, 13.

The similar sentiment reverberated in the 1910s when Amy Lowell described Frost's rural New England characters as "left-over of the old stock, morbid, pursued by phantoms, slowly sinking to insanity," as if they were on the blink of extinction at the wake of urbanization and the growing mobility of migrant workers.[178] It was the idea of social progress—rather than the reality—which subordinated country ways as backward, but the notion that "the old stock" was either going to be replaced or die out also cast a shadow to Greet's observation in the 1930s, as he faced resistance from residents of Williamsburg, Virginia to participate in his research project:

> It was rather difficult to secure subjects. People do not like to be specimens. The citizens of Williamsburg were more sensitive in this respect than the visitors and newcomers from Richmond, Newport News and Norfolk. Though we came to admire as well as to collect examples of Williamsburg speech, we felt like intruders, and, of course, were. The dialect hunter must suffer the ignominy of his position. It is difficult to explain the purpose of his study, however hard he tries, however patient his hearers. […] The population of Williamsburg was not so homogeneous as we had expected. A number of the old citizens have died in recent years, and new people have come to this quiet town. At a diner of the Rotary Club, only five of the thirty-five men present had been born in Williamsburg. However, we secured a number of records of old citizens, white and black.[179]

[178] Lowell (1915), 81.
[179] Greet, "A Phonographic Expedition to Williamsburg, Virginia" (1931), 162-3.

It is these historical sentiments that in part informed Frost's unusually dramatic performance of rural New England poems during the 1940s and 50s. And his multitude of precautious originally addressed to his immediate talk attendees could, and should, continue cautioning his twenty-first-century audience against the reductionist inquiries that render his literary works as evidentiary records to reconfirm whatever preconceived notions.

When reissued in their entirety, audio recordings of Frost's public talks and readings encourage us to ask the right kind of questions that would expand our understanding of others and to keep the dominant political discourse of our times in check. In this regard, the interface design is a political statement in its own right as it seeks to reorient historically repressive relationships preserved in the archival collections and to moderate careless consumption of online resources, just as Jessica Marie Johnson and Avery Dame-Griff have advocated with a design critique of the *Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database* and precautions concerning the development of *Transgender Usenet Archive*, respectively.[180] The *Transgender Usenet Archive*, for example, reconstructs six transgender-themed online forums between 1994 and 2013 in order to provide access to historical records of communal support, coping mechanisms, and debates related to transgender politics.[181] According to Dame-Griff, among many ethical concerns for the publication of *Transgender Usenet Archive* was the privacy of individuals who had posted on the forum as well as the possible harassment enabled by the renewed technological access. As a developer, Dame-Griff addressed such concerns by adopting the three-tier interface design. Upon visiting the

[180] Johnson; Dame-Griff.
[181] Dame-Griff, "If It Gets Us Talking, It Can't Be Bad."

collection, a user is first met by a consent form. In order to proceed, a user must agree that they use the site only for "non-commercial, personal, teaching, learning or research reasons."[182] Upon consent, the user is then presented with an interface that resembles the Google Ngram Viewer, which enables search using the keyword of their choosing.[183] To consult the full text beyond the Ngram search result, the user needs to take a note of the text's unique serial number and move to a separate database for a further query. In effect, the *Transgender Usenet Archive*'s interface design works as a filtering process necessary in the age of Internet trolls. That is, the number of necessary steps to consult the full text might be just enough trouble for bots and other online harassers to navigate the collection while not entirely deferring the researcher's ability to conduct their search.

For those who wish to carry out a computational phonotext analysis of Frost's archival audio recordings, the pilot audio edition similarly demands a careful examination of the nature of each poetry performance. With each performance embedded in an hour-long audio recording, readers must critically reflect on such a procedural step as "cleaning"—as our contemporary computing-speak goes—all markers that make Frost and his audience unique, and ask to what end a certain level of abstraction might be warranted in exchange for larger statistical insights. In this regard, I have adopted Frost's mischievous attitude and resist the popular desire afforded by recent technical capabilities that could computationally categorize the poet and his works. By deliberately featuring Frost's readings that are woven with his commentaries, re-readings, and interactions with the audience, I inaugurate the audio

[182] Dame-Griff, *Transgender Usenet Archive*.
[183] Ibid.

edition of Frost's archival recordings with his distinctive performance style—a style so idiosyncratic Frost himself was adamant in calling his lectures "talks" and defined his reading practice as "saying" poems. My editorial provisions, of course, cannot forestall all kinds of misapprehensions. But when all is said and done—by reissuing talks in their entirety, and with additional annotative notes providing historical context—the audio edition would be another "test with people," as the poet's twenty-first-century readers both within and beyond academia will inform the continuous reception history of the sound of Frost's poetry.[184]

[184] Frost, Speech during Commencement Week, 00:20:05.40.

Chapter 3: Saying Poems for Ear Readers: Robert Frost's Measured Performance

Technical access to previously secluded cultures often gives the illusion of immediacy. When coupled with haughtiness—as Robert Frost liked to call it—the sense of immediacy could mask the inaccessibility of local mores and embolden problematic misapprehensions just as Frost's contemporary literary critics initially characterized his rural New England poems. As seen in Chapter Two, Frost addressed the inadequacy of his critics and sought to reorient his readers' attention to the humanity of rural New England characters as he started giving public talks and readings. With existing stereotypical depictions of rural New Englanders as clodhoppers with a heavy regional accent, Frost always offered a multitude of disclaimers and careful framings whenever he delivered an exceptionally expressive reading of his dramatic dialogue poems. The pilot audio edition, therefore, keeps each reading of poems embedded in Frost's annotative notes, as he drew a fine line between entertainment and education. In so doing, my edition centers historically problematic assertions concerning the sound of rural New England, and invites, in turn, Frost's twenty-first-century audience to reflect and historicize their own expectations for the poet's performance.

Concerning his usual, less dramatic reading style, Frost seldom shared his rationale. This default reading style is the subject of this chapter as it poses another unique challenge to Frost's twenty-first-century audience. I argue that, coupled with

the immediacy the audio edition presents, Frost's silence on his regular performance style could efface how listening is a historically situated practice. That is, having little words of caution addressed directly to the audience creates a situation where it is easy for Frost's twenty-first-century audience to conflate the performance style that required no explanation some seventy years ago and what is common today. Worse yet, when being able to hear how Frost usually performed his poetry masks the inaccessibility of why the poet read the way he did, the audio edition presents a familiar condition for reductionist interpretative practices to which Amy Lowell and others fell prey. With regard to our contemporary frame of reference, Marit MacArthur has recently analyzed our common, impressionist categories we often use to discuss different poetry performance styles such as restrained vs. expressive, formal vs. conversational, and skeptical vs. humanist. Regardless of the difference in terminologies, notes MacArthur, these binaries roughly reflect the two modes of reading style that fall on a spectrum ranging between monotonous incantation and dramatic enactment of the work.[185] To such twenty-first-century ears schooled in Anglophone North America then, Frost's usual, measured performance style might be identified as the familiar, monotonous poetry reading.

Indeed, any literary works are to encourage readers' interpretative freedom. But if the early-twentieth-century critics' reductionist approach is of any indication, I need the pilot audio edition to also provide a way for Frost's twenty-first-century readers to keep our contemporary frame of reference in check and to contemplate on the highly localized reading and listening practice that was unique to the time and space Frost and his audience occupied during the first half of the twentieth century. In

[185] MacArthur.

what follows, I first detail the basis for my editorial rationale by illuminating how Frost's reading style is informed by period-specific conditions. In particular, I probe how Frost's interrelated literary investments in "the sound of sense," "saying poems," and "the ear readers" addressed larger societal interests in sound reproduction during the early twentieth century. I then discuss my editorial rationale, which seeks to resist the immediacy of digitized audio recordings by retaining as much material signifiers as possible, and invites Frost's twenty-first-century readers to pause and further investigate the sociohistorical condition of the poet's reading style.

The Sound of Sense and the Telephony

Frost initially failed to anticipate the implications of cultural distance between his neighbors and literary circles in cities in the early 1910s. The remoteness of rural New England, however, was not news to critics such as Ezra Pound and Amy Lowell. For example, Lowell considered that the cost of the countryside's geographical inaccessibility manifested in its residents' worrisome temperaments. In her book *Tendencies in Modern American Poetry* (1917), Lowell characterized the figures in *North of Boston* as "twisted," "tortured," and "insane" and wished the telephone could have done more to alleviate psychological tolls stemming from the region's isolating winter.[186] Lowell, of course, was not the first to indicate such technosolutionism. The "Report of the Country Life Commission"(1909) prepared by Theodore Roosevelt's administration also named the telephone as one of the major infrastructural necessities to improve the wellbeing of agricultural communities.

[186] Lowell (1917), 106.

Together with roads and postal services, noted the federal report, the telephone was key to increase cooperation among individual farmers who were geographically scattered and increasingly on the westward move, as well as to improve their wives' societal involvement beyond their domestic obligations on the farm.[187]

While policymakers, sociologists, and literary figures alike prescribed the telephone as an antidote to isolation in rural New England, Frost had a slightly different relationship to this communication technology in his Derry, New Hampshire residence circa 1907.[188] For Frost, the telephone was a means of entertainment and a tool to learn the speech patterns of his townspeople. According to a biographical anecdote shared by the poet's daughter and a generation of local historians in Derry, Frost—who was a San Francisco native and rural New England transplant—studied the cadence of his neighbors by eavesdropping on their conversations on the telephone.[189] Unlike today's landline or mobile phone services, Frost was a subscriber of the party line with eight others. That meant whenever the phone rang, all subscribing residents on that phone line received the call. They identified the call's designated recipient based on the personalized ring tones, but there was nothing to prevent others from listening in on the conversation.[190]

The party line was a common telephone service in the rural area and across the United States until the 1940s, and eavesdropping was a common form of

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[187] *Report of the Country Life Commission*, 47; Barron, 32, 37, 39, and 41.
[188] Director of Derry Museum of History Richard Holmes won the auction in 2013 and purchased a 1907 phonebook issued by New England Telephone and Telegraph Company. The directory shows that Frost was indeed a subscriber of a party line, and it confirms the oral history shared between Holmes' predecessors at the museum and Frost's daughter Lesley Frost. See Holmes.
[189] Francis, 223-224; Holmes. For the technicality of how the party line worked, see Fagen 122, 466, and 570.
[190] Holmes; Fagen, 570.

entertainment and local gossip.[191] Such an affordance of the party line, however, offers a capacious frame of reference through which to re-examine Frost's literary investment in "the sound of sense." According to Frost, "the sound of sense" is undeniable emotional truth reflected in the tone of human expressions, the underlying sentiment of "voices behind a door that cuts off the words."[192] Frost considered this tone of colloquial expression as a raw material for his poetry, and when the occasion presented itself, he was not too shy to assist literary critics in articulating the poet's authorial intent. Writing to the editor of *Boston Evening Transcript* William Braithwaite in 1915, Frost explained his literary interests:

> It would seem absurd to say it (and you mustn't quote me as saying it) but I suppose the fact is that my conscious interest in people was at first no more than an almost technical interest in their speech—in what I used to call their sentence sounds—the sound of sense. Whatever these sounds are or aren't (they are certainly not of the vowels and consonants of words nor even of the words themselves but something the words are chiefly a kind of notation for indicating and fastening to the printed page) whatever they are, I say, I began to hang on them very young. […] I made the discovery in doing The Death of the Hired Man that I was interested in neighbors for more than merely their tones of speech—and always had been. I remember about when I began to

[191] Fischer, 47; Brooks, 100, 116-7, and 267.
[192] Frost, *Letters*, 121.

> suspect myself of liking their gossip for its own sake. […] I like the actuality of gossip, the intimacy of it. [193]

Following this correspondence, Braithwaite praised how poems collected in *North of Boston* reflected the tone and the meaning of "absolute actuality and intimacy with life."[194] With Frost's framing, Braithwaite characterized "The Generations of Men" as a poem about playfully intimate exchanges between distant cousins and "The Death of the Hired Man" as a poem about human decency and learned compassion of a married couple who takes in their exhausted ex-farm worker.[195] The contrast between Braithwaite's review and the ones by Lowell and others seen in Chapter Two is stark. With Braithwaite and Frost's framing, readers of *North of Boston* poems are positioned to overhear—as if through the party-line telephone—private conversations that are tender, vulnerable, and earnest, something not necessarily meant for public consumption.

Such social interactions on the party line would not have been possible, of course, if not for the acoustic researchers dedicating themselves to the field of study called psychoacoustics, the discipline Jonathan Sterne's recent historical study on MP3 file format has brought to light.[196] Spearheaded in the United States by Bell Laboratories since 1925, psychoacoustic research similarly concerned the tone of speech just as Frost entertained "the sound of sense." In devising the ways to improve the profitability of telecommunication services, the Bell Lab Director Harvey Fletcher sought to determine the general limit of human hearing. That way, the lab could

[193] Frost, *Letters*, 264-6.
[194] Braithwaite.
[195] Ibid.

[196] Sterne (2012)

determine the least viable sound quality among average hearing persons and enable the American Telephone & Telegraph Company (AT&T) to optimize its existing phone lines by removing the extra, unnecessary sound frequencies that are mostly irrelevant to human perception.[197] Fletcher's book *Speech and Hearing* (1929) details how he tested a range of sound frequencies for different consonants, syllables, and sentences in order to determine how best to convert and reconstruct speech sound into electronic waves and back.[198] What is most interesting for the purpose of this chapter is how, for Fletcher, the intonation of speech sound was a confounding variable for his observation. Just as Frost prided himself in being able to guess the overall meaning of "voices behind a door that cuts off the words," Fletcher considered his test result would be inaccurate if his sound samples carried too many sociocultural signifiers in their tones.[199] Fletcher, therefore, managed his experiment by largely focusing more on phonetic sounds than the sentence sound and by randomizing words order to avoid associative guesses based on lived experiences.[200]

These efforts of acoustic research are important in order to historicize "the sound of sense" of Frost and to speculate what qualitative psychoacoustics of the same time period might look like. While acoustic researchers observed the quantifiable measurement of human perceptions to enable just enough reconstruction of speech sound, Frost observed the social aspect of sound signal reconstruction by entertaining the mishearing and willful interpretation of a telephone conversation. For example, Frost's poem "The Telephone" collected in *Mountain Interval* (1916)

[197] Sterne (2012), 40-55.
[198] Fletcher, 3-63.
[199] Frost, *Letters*, 121; Fletcher, xiv.
[200] Fletcher, 5-10.

reverberates the popular first exchange between Alexander Graham Bell and his assistant Thomas Watson as they fashioned the first working telephone in 1876. In Frost's poem, Bell's "Mr. Watson, come here. I want you." is reinterpreted as intimate exchange masked by coyness between two people: [201]

'When I was just as far as I could walk
From here today,
There was an hour
All still
When leaning with my head against a flower
I heard you talk.
Don't say you didn't, for I heard you say—
You spoke from that flower on the window sill—
Do you remember what it was you said?'

'First tell me what it was you thought you heard.'

'Having found the flower and driven a bee away,
I leaned my head,
And holding by the stalk,
I listened and I thought I caught the word—
What was it? Did you call me by my name?
Or did you say—
Someone said "Come"—I heard it as I bowed.'

'I may have thought as much, but not aloud.'

'Well, so I came.'[202]

[201] Fagen, 11-12. While the official history published by Bell Labs offers Watson's account, the record of Bell's journal housed at the Library of Congress shows that Bell marked his utterance as: "Mr. Watson—come here—I want to see you." See Bruno for the images of Bell's journal entry.
[202] Frost, *CPPP*, 114-5.

Of course, Frost was not the first or the only writer the telephone inspired at that time. In his "A Telephonic Conversation" (1880) Mark Twain observed the peculiar nature of overhearing one-sided conversation when sharing a space with somebody who is on the phone, and Frank Kafka in "My Neighbor" (1917) depicted paranoia over the possibility of a next-door neighbor eavesdropping on the business conducted over the phone. Frost's illustration, however, differs from these frequently cited works of Twain and Kafka substantially.[203] That is, Frost's poem does not concern the reconstruction of a conversation but entertains that of speech sound—just as acoustic researchers would—all the while focusing on the emotional urge that drives the exchange between two characters.

Frost's qualitative approach to psychoacoustics, as it were, is not accidental given his knowledge in William James' *Psychology: The Brief Course* (1882), which he studied during his short appointment at Harvard as a special student between 1897 and 1899. Frost also taught James's *Psychology* as a teacher at the Plymouth State Normal School in 1911 before leaving for the UK to pursue his literary career as a published poet. Among various topics covered by James, *Psychology* included physiological descriptions of hearing organs such as the external ear, the middle ear (tympanum), and the internal ear (labyrinth), as well as descriptive illustrations of sound characteristics such as tone, loudness, pitch, timbre, and noise.[204] As a part of his attempt to offer a holistic account of human perception, James also offered a

[203] I originally came to know these works cited in Sterne (2012), 46-7.
[204] James (1892), 54-66.

chapter on "the stream of consciousness," the concept popularized by Frost's contemporary writers such as James Joyce and Virginia Woolf.

Concerning Jamesian influence on "the sound of sense" of Frost, a more developed version of "the stream of consciousness" best exemplifies how the characters of "The Telephone" reconstruct what they heard while projecting the outcome that they find most agreeable. Because, as James would put it, "'Reality' is in general what truths have to take account of."[205] According to James' explanation of the general transitive states of human perception, reality is constantly oscillating between the flux of sensations and sense making:

> When we talk of reality 'independent' of human thinking, then, it seems a thing very hard to find. It reduces to the notion of what is just entering into experience and yet to be named, or else to some imagined aboriginal presence in experience, before any belief about the presence had arisen, before any human conception had been applied. It is what is absolutely dumb and evanescent, the merely ideal limit of our minds. We may glimpse it, but we never grasp it; what we grasp is always some substitute for it which previous human thinking has peptonized and cooked for our consumption.[206]

Despite the disciplinary differences in the focal point, Jamesian description illuminates how both Fletcher and Frost entertained the very moment of transient human perception by manipulating the vibration frequency of sound using the

[205] James (1907), 593.
[206] James (1907), 594. A list of books Frost owned and now housed at the NYU library indicates Frost had a 1910 reprint of James' *Pragmatism: A New Name for Some Old Ways of Thinking.* Virginia Smith kindly shared with me the list she had from her previous Frost research trip to NYU.

audiometer and attending to the "voices behind a door that cuts off the words," respectively.[207]

As far as Frost was concerned, "the sound of sense" was but a rare material for the poet to subsequently practice versification.[208] There were others, however, who were increasingly interested in "the sound of sense" during the first half of the twentieth century. As a matter of fact, some of their works demonstrate Frost's literary concept better than any of his performance the pilot audio edition can offer. For example, in order to test the patterns in word association—the very aspect of human perception Fletcher sought to avoid—behavioral scientist B.F. Skinner developed what he called the "verbal summator" in 1934, the audio recordings produced to mimic the sound of "speech heard through a wall."[209] Even better example, thanks to Mara Mills' historical research, is a psychologist Sydell Braverman's Auditory Projective Test that was designed to offer the audio equivalent of Hermann Rorschach's projective inkblot test. Produced in collaboration with a blind radio scriptwriter Hector Chevigny with the support from the American Foundation for the Blind (AFB), Braverman arranged actors to perform a deliberately nonsensical script in order to facilitate a projective test among people with visual impairments [Audio 1].[210]

[207] Frost, *Letters*, 122.
[208] Frost, *Letters*, 123.
[209] Originally quoted in Mills (2016). A sample verbal summator is available on the B. F. Skinner Foundation website.
[210] Mills (2016).

[Audio 1: AFB Auditory Projective Test]

The auditory projective test demonstrates yet another attempt to reproduce the very moment of sense-making through hearing. As far as the audio recording of "the sound of sense" from the early twentieth century is concerned, AFB's auditory projective test is as close as it gets.

Despite the possible expectation among Frost's twenty-first-century readers that the audio edition of his public readings might provide immediate access to his much-celebrated literary principle, it bears repeating that "the sound of sense" in its raw form will not be available. As Frost noted in his letter to John Bartlett, "the sound of sense" is nothing but uncooked ingredients for poetry:

> But remember we are still talking merely of the raw material of poetry. An ear and an appetite for these sounds of sense is the first qualification of a writer, be it of prose or verse. But if one is to be a poet he must learn to get cadences by skillfully breaking the sounds of sense with all their irregularity of accent across the regular beat of the metre.[211]

[211] Frost, *Letters*, 123.

What would be available on the audio edition, however, is Frost's performing the versified sound of sense as well as the legacy of quantitative psychoacoustics in the form of MP3 file format, but more on this later.

Performing the Versified Sound of Sense

At first glance, the versified sound of sense strikes as a print specific art form. As Frost set himself to work out the rhythm of language and the metrical structure of poetry, some of our contemporary readers enjoy testing how the formal tension between the two sound measurements heightens.[212] For such readers, when the tension corresponds with the poem's meaning, the better. Take, for example, the poem "Mending Wall." In this poem, a protagonist calls up a neighbor beyond the hill to restore a stonewall between them. Despite him initiating the meeting, the protagonist mischievously interrogates his neighbor why they should keep fixing the wall when neither of them keeps the cattle that could trespass. The neighbor does not seem to catch on or wittingly ignores the question. He instead resorts to a truism: "Good fences make good neighbors."[213] The poem entertains what exactly makes a stonewall and neighbors *good*. Is it about mutually committing to the annual need of demarcating geographical boundaries? Or is it more to do with retaining a certain psychological distance to prevent possible disputes when the other party is spurring on with a language game during manual labor? There is no one right answer to this

[212] For a careful examination of Frost's art of versification, see Timothy Steele's "'Across Spaces of the Footed Line': The Meter and Versification of Robert Frost." My thinking is informed by Natalie Gerber's presentation "Exploring the Scholarly Value of a Digital Frost Collection (Audio and Video) in the Sound Studies Era" at Robert Frost Symposium hosted by Frost's granddaughter in 2017.
[213] Frost, *CPPP,* 39-40.

question, of course. But there is a way to examine the formal composition of this poem to see how the poet tells the story: scansion.

Prosodists have long used scansion as a technique to examine how a poet interweaves the rhythm and the meter to formally amplify a meaningful tension in a poem. The expectation for the iambic pentameter, for example, can be marked with five sets of weak and strong beats, using letters "w" and "s." Set against the artificial metrical pattern is the syllabic accent of the English language. Each syllable of a word is either unstressed or stressed, and is marked by a hyphen "-" and a forward slash "/." While how one scans is always subject to debate, this particular iambic pentameter line in "Mending Wall" exemplifies how the discrepancy between the rhythm of language and the metrical structure coincides with the very question of the poem:

_ / _ / / / _ / / / _
He only says, 'Good fences make good neighbors.'
w s w s w s w s w s e.m.

The rhythm of the English language accentuates the monosyllabic "good" while the metrical structure anticipates a weak beat, creating the formal tension that corresponds and heightens the very idea "Mending Wall" entertains.

Given the print-specific modality of scansion, its use for public reading raises a question. Can a scansion technique withstand the temporality of a live performance as Frost's twenty-first-century readers consult the audio recordings? Are there more appropriate hermeneutics for Frost's measured performance style? How did Frost's contemporary audience listen to his blank verse?

As a matter of fact, Frost's craftsmanship was barely recognized on the printed page except for some British literary critics who were themselves concerned with formal poetry. Chief among them was Harold Monro, editor of literary magazine *Poetry and Drama* and owner of Poetry Bookshop in London. In a 1914 review, Monro praised Frost's mastery of blank verse including his liberty with metrical structure:

> Mr. Frost appears to have studied the subtle cadences of colloquial speech with some peculiar and unusual apprehension. The jerky irregularity of his verse is due to the fact that the laws of emotional value have evidently overmastered the rules of prosody. […] The rhythm of his verse escapes the usual monotonies of stress; its current follows the stresses of what it relates; it is like an indicator passing along some continuous fluctuating line, or it has the sound of a swift and excited voice.[214]

It is not a coincidence that Monro—unlike Ezra Pound or Amy Lowell—would take a note of Frost's versification technique without having his judgment clouded by the preconceived notion about rural New England. After all, Monro was an advocate for Georgian poetry that largely celebrated rural working class as a poetic subject matter just as how Frost treated his townsfolk.[215]

Monro's literary enterprise also offers another period-specific perspective, which suggests less print-medium centric approach to poetry performance and its subsequent evaluation measurement: elocution. Probing the historical formation of

[214] Monro (1914).
[215] My understanding of Georgian poetry is largely informed by Robert Ross's *The Georgian Revolt 1910-1922*.

Frost's performance style suggests that to say that Frost performed the way he did in order not to undo the act of versification would be a gross understatement. That is, to the twentieth-century audience, elocution, also known as the art of speaking verse, was alive and well, and Frost was in part responding to the norms of his time with his reading style. Anticipating Poetry Bookshop's opening in 1912, Monro proudly announced his commitment to poetry and noted his beliefs in "its persistent cultivation and discussion, and in its interpretation through the art of speaking verse."[216] Centering the public reading at Poetry Bookshop, Monro treated books on the shelves as something equivalent to music scores, notations to refresh a reader's memory.[217] Frost—then a Glouchester resident, living a hundred mile West to London—visited the opening of Monro's bookshop in 1913. Though he did not have an invitation at this invitation-only event, Frost was nevertheless welcomed by Monro and his London literary circle.[218] There are no records of Frost revising the bookshop for public reading events before his departure to the US in late 1914. But the list of contemporary poets and literary critics who performed at the bookshop—including Lascelles Abercrombie, Wilfrid Wilson Gibson, and W.B. Yeats—indicates how Monro's venue and its mission would be hard to miss for someone who moved to England to establish himself as a poet.[219]

While Frost would develop his unique mode of reading—"saying" poems—Monro's desire to reform the art of speaking verse illuminates how anti-theatrical reading style emerged in the early twentieth century UK. Concerning Monro, he made

[216] Monro (1912), 499.
[217] Grant, 73-4.
[218] Hibberd, 120.
[219] Hibberd, 122.

conscious efforts to amend the traditional elocutionary practice in England, which was full of theatrical physical gestures. For example, a popular manual *Practical Handbook on Elocution* (1904) suggested pointing to the sky to illustrate an appeal to heaven or bending forward with stretched arms to illustrate supplication.[220] Monro considered that such theatrical gestures distracted the audience from the literary work itself. Inviting a range of readers and treating the bookshop as a workshop space for public performance of poetry, Monro observed and analyzed his preference for the readers who could be an "instrument rather than representative" to poetry.[221] Monro's desire to prioritize poetry over performer was in part strategic, as he wished to popularize poetry without commodifying the readers' celebrity. He noted: "from the very beginning, I have striven to suppress the curiosity about poets, and to stimulate an interest in reading poetry, and its appreciation, and above all in listening with full and concentrated attention to verse read aloud."[222]

Monro's enthusiasm for an unobtrusive poetry reading style can be problematic especially when situated among a larger tendency of elocutionists to impose what they considered good speech mannerism in the early twentieth century. As Mark Morrison has shown, elocution and recitation manuals in England had long upheld a particular enunciation and pronunciation style as "proper" and "natural" during the Victorian era, and even as those manuals' appeals gradually shifted from the leisure class to the middle class by the 1910s.[223] Seen within this context, Monro's desire for the voice of a reader to recede to the background in service to poetry

[220] Grant, 71.
[221] Quoted in Grant, 73.
[222] Quoted in Grant, 80.
[223] Morrison, 54-60.

presents a concerning tendency of his time to assert and efface the power of a certain class of people. That is, the kind of class sentiment Bernard Shaw captured in *Pygmalion* (1913), where a flower girl Eliza Doolittle agrees to Professor Henry Higgins' phonetics lesson in exchange for the prospect of passing as a duchess.[224]

Fascination for the deviation from the proper pronunciation of the English language—complete with implications for class-consciousness—was not an anomaly to the UK. In the United States, set against the high and middlebrow art performance scenes such as salons, lyceums, and Chautauqua was vaudeville, which added a uniquely American racialization into the mix of elocutionary tradition. Vaudeville often commoditized the accent of immigrants in cities, poking fun of the mishearing and misunderstanding stemming from the very divergence. Various ethnic groups and their accents were also used as stage props, and made vaudeville extremely popular.[225]

Vaudeville as a genre was so popular that Frost's contemporary American poet Vachel Lindsey sought to promote his work by identifying his performance style as "the higher vaudeville."[226] The 1931 audio recording of Lindsey reading his infamous poem "The Congo" suggests what a highly theatrical, vaudeville-adjacent reading sounded like. Performing a poem that mimics a missionary's ethnographic report on the "savage" population in the Congo regions, Lindsey enacted the lines to

[224] Shaw, 30. I first came to know Shaw's work as it was frequently cited at the disciplinary intersection of media and literary studies. Within the media study, Friedrich Kittler discusses how the sound storage technology enabled scrutiny of a dialect, using Shaw's work as an example. See Kittler, 27. Within the context of literary studies, Michael North and Mark Morrison discussed the idea of language "purity" in the early twentieth century Anglophone based on their extensive analysis of Shaw's work, and their arguments have been formative for my observation here. See North, 3-8, as well as Morrison, 60-64.
[225] Jones, 161-181.
[226] Mustazza, 99.

paint the sonic picture [Audio 2]. In a manner I would only hope is a demonstrative critical commentary, Lindsey accelerated when depicting impassioned Congolese as they encounter the Western civilization, switched between the temporally measured and the rushed readings as if to mirror opposing orderliness between the missionaries and the locals, burst onomatopoeia of the battle between the two parties, and sang in a low, murmuring voice the warnings against the Congolese voodoo practices:

[Audio 2: Vachel Lindsey reading part one of "The Congo" in 1931]

As this performance was recorded as a part of speech science research at Columbia University, it is hard to measure how the live audience usually reacted to the performance of Lindsey, the self-identified troubadour. Nevertheless, it is by association with vaudeville—among the variety of voicing practices that were available in the early twentieth century—Lindsey sought to attract his audience.

As for Frost, he seldom discussed his intoned performance style. But when he did, he described it in relation to that of trained actors (per elocutionary tradition) and with a slight adjustment by consistently identifying—however subtlety—his performance style as "saying" poetry. Referring to the challenge of performing the versified sound of sense, Frost confided in the Dartmouth College audience in 1960:

> I can't quite say out loud to you here the way I hear the poem in my mind's ear. I've heard actors and actresses—a few, a very few—who got such an exquisite reproduction of the tone of voice meant in a sentence of writing that I worshipped 'em. That's something that's followed me all my life. I've gone to hear the great ones—to see that their difference is just that, something exquisitely close to the truth of the tone that's intended. And there is something there that is to be caught, you know. You don't just make it any way you please.[227]

Indeed, earlier in his career—in 1936, to be precise—Frost critiqued how some actors made clodhoppers out of the characters of "The Death of the Hired Man." He said: "I had to timidly but firmly inform the actors that their 'clodhoppers'… had been to college."[228]

Most importantly, Frost's remarks to the Dartmouth audience show not so much an expression of modesty or a confession of his inadequacy as a reader. Rather, they reflect Frost's strategic association with a less racially charged popular performance style tradition: humorous monologue. For example, Frost routinely referenced to Ernest Thayer's baseball poem "Casey at the Bat" to establish a rapport with his audience and to joke about the type of popularity he was seeking.[229] In accordance with the anecdote Frost told during his talk at the University of Massachusetts in 1957, his generations of readers were so familiar with the poem "Casey at the Bat" that it could serve as a common ground for jokes among strangers

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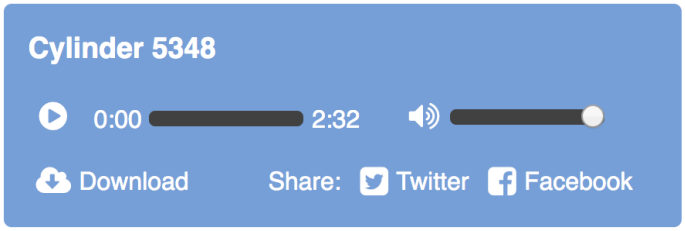
[227] *Robert Frost Speaking on Campus*, 116.
[228] Dame, "1000 Pack University Hall to Hear Robert Frost Interpret His Poems." *The Ohio State Lantern*, May 22, 1936.
[229] Frost discusses the poem in his article "A Day of Prowess" published in the 1956 *Sports Illustrated*; Frost, UMass Remarks, 00:06:49.0.

on the train or on the university campus.[230] Originally written by Thayer in 1888, the poem illustrates a scene with a star baseball player Casey and his impassioned five thousand supporters in the ballpark as Casey's team is on the verge of losing the game. The poem was first popularized by entertainer Russell Hunting as a part of his Irish monologue series including "Casey Taking the Census" and "Casey at the Telephone." Hunting's performance for the Columbia Graphophone Company recorded on a wax cylinder in 1898 offers how a dramatic rendition of a poem at the turn of the last century sounds [Audio 3]:



[Audio 3: Russell Hunting performing "Casey at the Bat" in 1898]

More familiar to the twenty-first century U.S. audience is an even more dramatic version performed by actor De Wolf Hopper recorded in 1909.[231] By using over-the-top pitch fluctuation, change in tempos, and various volume of his voice, Hooper enacted a poem to humorously demonstrate emotional stakes of the baseball game [Audio 4]:

[230] Frost, "Remarks at the University of Massachusetts in 1957," 00:06:49.
[231] Peter Armenti reports that the Library of Congress celebrated the 125th anniversary of the poem by having Washington Nationals radio broadcaster Dave Jageler record his reading, and suggests that the fans of the poem should compare Jageler's reading to that of iconic Hopper.

[Audio 4: Hopper performing "Casey at the Bat" in 1909]

Though Hunting and Hopper's performances do not sonically resemble Frost's measured reading—especially in terms of the emotional charge—the fact that the main character is Irish has little to do with the subject matter of the poem or the performance style has an important implication for Frost who sought to focus on the humanities of rural New England characters despite the literary and general entertainment markets' desire to racialize the difference to monetize local colors.

This particular genealogy of Frost's usual performance style illustrates how Frost carved out his unique reading practice in the twenty-century literary performance soundscape. In addition to differentiating himself from the elocutionary tradition of "speaking" poems by cultivating the style he identified as "saying" poems, Frost also positioned himself away from actors and entertainers by investing in what he called "the ear reader" of poetry. As noted in his notebook penned circa 1918-21 and during public talks delivered in the 1940s and 50s, Frost was interested

in the difference between "the ear reader" and "the eye reader."[232] For Frost, the ear readers attended to the "fullest flavor of the book" when compared to the skimming practices of eye readers.[233] Such desire to encourage an auditory attentive reading style and an appreciation of his versified sound of sense reinforce each other. And when put to practice, his measured performance style is but a demonstration of how he read his poetry books as the ear reader himself. Following Frost's talk event at Stanford in 1953, Dorothy Nichols reported for *Palo Alto Times* that Frost "was acutely conscious of the rhythm, the flow, though he read for meaning."[234]

In other words, through non-theatrical reading style, Frost achieved not only to move away from a quick consumption of his celebrity or of the rural New England caricatures but also to project a slower and more contemplative reading practice of poetry books. Frost's "saying" poems for "the ear readers" in this sense reflects his democratizing pedagogical principles. Covering Frost's talk event hosted by the English Club of Greater Chicago at Northwestern University, Fanny Butcher quoted Frost's discussing pedagogy. Comparing the difference in the methods of teaching literature when he was a student and what he observed in 1954, Frost had this to say:

> Fifty years ago there were no live poets around classrooms—only dead writers. […] We never had a chance to try our own judgments of taste… The position of writers and their work was all settled; you had no right to think differently about their work than you were told… Then they began to have us [writers] around this way [lecturing and

[232] Frost, *Notebooks*, 174-5; Frost, *Robert Frost Speaking on Campus*, 25-6, 56, 80, and 86.
[233] Frost, *Notebooks,* 174-5.
[234] Nichols, "Robert Frost Warmly Received by Large Audience at Stanford." *Palo Alto Times*, 8 December 1953.

> teaching] and it was for the purpose of offering something that was not already settled.[235]

Coupled with Frost's effort to accommodate the interpretative freedom of his readers, Frost eluded the possibility of establishing the authoritative interpretation of his works. If there was an interest among his audience members to witness the glimpse of authorial intent in the way he read the poems, they hardly ever received Frost's interpretation. Rather, the authorial intent remained on the versification, and Frost retained that tension between the rhythm and the meter with his measured performance, and with a slight giveaway to the tone of speech sound.

Editing for Ear Readers in the MP3 Era

Incidentally, Frost was not the only one who was concerned with the ear reader. The talking book project—a collaborative effort launched in 1932 by the American Foundation for the Blind and the Library of Congress—was also interested in promoting the ear reader of phonograph books among the finger reader of the Braille.[236] Beyond the difference in the assertion of an alternative method to being the ear-reader (either haptic or visual), there is a generative affinity between the talking book production team's mandating anti-dramatic narration and Frost's measured performance. That is, for both Frost and the talking book project, the measured performance of literary works was instrumental in making literary works accessible to all, i.e., a means through which to cultivate the ear reader and ensure their interpretative freedom.

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[235] Original supplementation in square brackets by Butcher. Butcher, "The Literary Spotlight." *Chicago Sunday Tribune Magazine of Books*, April 25, 1954.
[236] Rubery, 59.

By juxtaposing the efforts of Frost and the talking books project in retrospect, I do not resort to what David Mitchell calls "a narrative prosthesis," a historical tendency to use disability as a mere trope for the promotion of new technology.[237] Rather, I intend to further amplify the period-specific interest in sound reproduction in the early twentieth century and to propose a particular genealogy for future editors of archival audio editions, where technical and literary accessibility will have concomitantly, and continuously, shaped the audio editions of literary works. For example, the idea for the phonographic book emerged as early as 1878 when Thomas Edison publicized his invention of the phonograph. It was among the list of possible applications of the phonograph including documenting court testimony, providing elocution educational materials, playing music, and preserving the voice of dying family members.[238] While there were three to five-minute long recordings of poets and novelists reading and recording their works—most famously Alfred Lord Tennyson and Charles Dickens—it was not until 1932 the phonographic book experienced further development, spearheaded by Robert Irwin, Director of the American Foundation for the Blind.[239] Irwin, who had "always dreamed of books on phonograph records ever since [his] first hearing of a squeaky Edison cylinder," made the concerted efforts to materializing the phonographic book.[240] In addition to helping to pass the bills for the financial support from the Congress, Irwin got in contact with the early patent holder of the phonograph, collaborated with a print house for production, and established a laboratory where engineers tested different replay speed

[237] Mitchell, 17.
[238] Edison.
[239] Camlot (2003), 153; Rubery 9, 59-60.
[240] Majeska, 1-5.

and determined how to cut more grooves in an inch on a disk in order to enable non-disruptive reading practice without needing to switch the disc every three minute.[241]

While the medium for talking books would shift from the phonograph, tape, and eventually to the digital, the narrative guideline has remained somewhat consistent since the 1930s, reflecting, in a way, the project's principles, "that all may read."[242] Just as Frost settled on "saying" rather than "speaking" poems, the talking book project team similarly debated whether to use the term "narrator" or "reader" with the latter indicating the elocutionary tradition. As the talking book project focused on reproducing an audio copy of a print book—rather than producing an abridged or a dramatized rendition of the book—they adopted what Matthew Rubery calls "a straight reading."[243] The 1995 guideline, of which principles are still shared among the narrators today, describes a unique modality of narration for the talking book project:

> It has often been said that narrating an audio book is an art, and to a great extent that is true. Narration is an art form related to acting and oral interpretations, but it is neither. Rather, it is a niche in the performing arts that blends some elements of both. Ideally, narration is translating the written word to the spoken word in a way that is as consistent as possible with the intent of the author. At the least, it is translating the written word to the spoken word in a way that is

[241] Koestler, 130-152; Majeska, 7-53.
[242] *That All May Read: Library Service for Blind and Physically Handicapped People* (1983). The history of the talking book is also a record of ever-expanding inclusivity. The project was initially limited to the legally blind adults, but it would be soon expanded to cover children, and eventually everybody whose physical impairments pose a challenge to reading print books.
[243] Rubery, 86.

> intelligent and agreeable to the listener. The task of reading aloud for the purpose of producing an audio book original master recording is called narration, and the person who performs the task of narration is called a narrator. Narrators are also frequently called readers because, after all, their task is reading aloud.[244]

In essence, the talking book project preferred non-theatrical reading and advised narrators to see themselves as "transcribers of the book."[245]

It is not coincidental that the talking book project focused on producing an audio copy of a print book. From the beginning, it was important for Irwin that talking books would be seen as complementary to Braille books, and to imply that talking books would not challenge the hard-won pride of people with visual impairment that they were capable, despite the existing biases, of intellectual activities including reading.[246] This explains how some early experiments with sound effects were met by positive reviews as well as chagrin by the community.[247] The talking book needed to cater to readers rather than "listeners" or "audience" which might imply less interpretative agencies. When Frost recorded for the talking book project in 1959, his usual reading style inadvertently matched the talking book project's narration guidelines to serve the ear readers.[248]

Considering the design of my audio edition of Frost's public talks and readings, the same principle of the talking book project—"that all may read"—

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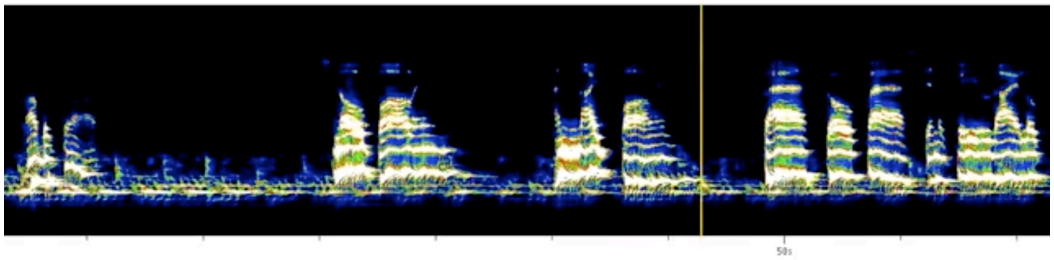
[244] "The Art and Science of Audio Book Production," 2. Thanks to the National Library Service librarian Meredith Beckhardt for pointing me to this manual upon my request for historical guidelines for the talking book.
[245] Rubery, 95.
[246] Rubery, 71, 74-5.
[247] Rubery, 91-2.
[248] Upon request, the digitized recording can be consulted at the Library of Congress Performing Arts and Reading room. The reference number can be found here: https://lccn.loc.gov/93842985.

governs some of the editorial decisions. First, despite the conscious effort among literary scholars to promote literary phonotext as a primary text to alleviate the traditional tendency which has long prioritized typographical text, the pilot audio edition is equipped with both audio recordings and their transcriptions so as not to exclude readers with hearing impairments.[249] In particular, by putting equal weight on the audio recordings and their transcriptions, I caution against the possible resurgence of repressive elocutionary traditions motivated by the sheer availability of digitized audio recordings and the sound spectrograph, a popular data visualization technology often employed by our contemporary literary scholars [Image 1].



[Image 1: The sound spectrograph of Frost's reading "Dessert Places," July 1939, Iowa City] [250]

Elocution was often weaponized against people with disabilities in the early twentieth century and through the deployment of different sound inscription technologies. For instance, just as the fictional character Professor Henry Higgins in Bernard Shaw's *Pygmalion* (1913) is depicted as the author of *Universal Alphabet*, Scottish

[249] Camlot (2015), 19-29.
[250] Clement, "William A. Owens introducing Robert Frost."

elocutionist Alexander Melville Bell—father of Alexander Graham Bell who is known as the inventor of the telephone—promoted his invention of physiological alphabets in his book, *Visible Speech: The Science of Universal Alphabet or Self-Interpreting Physiological Letters, for the Writing of All Languages in One Alphabet* (1867). As Mara Mills has shown, Bell's physiological alphabet not only incorporated ableist human anatomies to the phonetics inscription system but also led to the consequent conformist education of deaf students.[251] The sound spectrograph is the latest rendition of Bell's visible speech based on experimental speech pathology research conducted between the mid-1940s and 50s under the sponsorship of the Bell Labs.[252] As the physiological alphabet sought to teach the "right" posture of speech organs for the "right" pronunciation, the sound spectrograph was employed as a corrective technology for deaf students to master the "normative" pronunciation as they monitor the graphic rendition of their speech sound.[253]

A comprehensive social history of the sound spectrograph is yet to be written and is beyond the purview of this chapter. However, there are enough indicators to be wary of the legacy of elocutionary tradition reinforced by the signal processing technology of the given time, including the concomitant evolution of the telephone and deaf education led by Alexander Graham Bell whose view was influenced by the eugenics discourse of his time. [254] It is also not too hard to imagine how the availability of the sound spectrograph and its usage as a corrective technology would exacerbate the residue of xenophobic elocutionary pedagogy that once upheld, in the

[251] Mills (2010), 40-1, 48. Gitelman also observed Bell's inscription system. See Gitelman, 59.
[252] Mills (2010), 40; Potter et al., 287-324.
[253] Mills(2010), 37-38.
[254] Sterne (2003), 31-42.

1950s, Frost's audio recordings as the ideal American English for Chinese immigrant students to study.[255] Therefore, I extend Frost's defense against rural sociology—which was emboldened by "its claim to scientific methodology and empirical evidence"—and ensure, against the popular allure of the sound spectrograph, that his audio edition would not willingly cater to the reproduction of assimilative elocutionary practices.[256] Providing transcription of audio recordings is but one way to keep acknowledging that the same set of technologies which enabled the talking book for blind readers had affected people with hearing impairments differently and that their historical experience should not be set aside when discussing the significance of analyzing literary phonotext with the sound spectrograph. Instead, just as Frost contemplated on the interchangeability of tools and weapons concerning historical working-class uprising with pitchforks, we should question the implications of using the sound spectrograph as an analytical research method or assistive pedagogical tool today and ask: "But was there a rule / The weapon should be / Turned into a tool?"[257]

Second, in providing transcriptions of Frost's "saying" poems, I informed my editorial rationale in accordance with his effort to demonstrate how he read poems on the printed page. That is, I reproduced the typographic format of previously published poems and interweaved additional transcriptions of Frost's utterance that are unique to live performance. Traditionally, transcribers of Frost's talks (e.g., Reginald Cook, Lisa Seale, and India Tressault) as well editors of other literary audio archival

[255] HLM, 66.
[256] Sheehy, 217.
[257] Frost, "The Objection to Being Stepped On." *CPPP*, 460. Frost, UMass Commencement, 00:07:26.50.

collections (e.g., "The Sir George Williams Poetry Reading Series" on the *SpokenWeb* website and *PennSound*) have all left the text of poetry untranscribed primarily due to copyright restrictions. Copyright regulations are no frivolous matter, and they were also defining factors for the talking book project (Irwin ensured that the non-commercial use of talking book was an integral part of the agreement in order to get the publishers of commercial authors on board).[258] While there are other factors where negotiating copyright terms is not a feasible option for some editors today, had I bypassed the negotiation, would the pilot audio edition deprive readers who are hard of hearing of experiencing how Frost said his poems.

In producing such a hybrid text that is at once a reproduction of the printed text and a transcription of the performed text, I used the following approach. For the typographically accurate representation of Frost's poems, I used the Library of America edition, *Robert Frost: Collected Poems, Prose, and Plays* (1994) as my base text. Frost often carried his *Collected Poems* (1939) or, in later years, *Complete Poems* (1949) to his talk events. But he also occasionally read poems from the forthcoming books. Given there are little records (audio or written) on which exact edition of poetry books Frost read from at each talk event, I decided to rely on the Library of America's critical text prepared by Richard Poirier and Mark Richardson. Transcriptions that add to and amend the Library of America text represent Frost's "saying" style: his constantly offering in-line annotative commentaries, restarting the poem from the top two stanzas in, omitting certain stanzas as a rule (e.g., the last stanza of "The Witch of Coös" or the fifth stanza of "Two Tramps in Mud Time"),

[258] Rubery, 72-3; Koestler, 132-133.

and substituting a bookish word for a more ear-friendly word (e.g., "Atones for" with "Makes up for" in "Provide, Provide").[259]

The hybrid textual condition is also reflected in the formality of the audio edition's interface design. Namely, I opted out of modular design, which is meant to enable the most efficient digital editorial procedure, because efficiency was the very currency that drove the measurement of human hearing for profits and marginalized those who diverged from the average hearing population.[260] The pilot audio edition adopts a minimal computing edition template called "Ed" developed by Torrent et al. at Columbia University. The "Ed" operates as a theme template of a static website program called Jekyll. Based on the modular logic, a Jekyll website is composed of various stand-alone documents.[261] For instance, I could have independent documents for each static text of poems as printed in the Library of America edition. That way, each time Frost reads a particular title, Jekyll can render the set text. In theory, such a modular approach is meant to spare editors from repetitive action of transcribing the same text across multiple talk events, and to assist ease of maintenance. Meaning, if I fix my typo in the reproduced text of "Mending Wall," that change would be reflected in all transcriptions across multiple talk events during which Frost read the poem. Naturally, such a modular approach did not accommodate the need to transcribe the mode of "saying" poems, something indispensable to the audio edition of Frost's

[259] Omission of the last stanza of "The Witch of Coös" (YMHA 00:28:14, UMass Remarks 00:45:48); Omission of the fifth stanza of "Two Tramps in Mud Time" (YMHA 00:23:17, UMass Commencement 00:37:10); Replacement of "Atones for" with "Makes up for" in the poem "Provide, Provide" (UMass Remarks, 01:00:53).
[260] Mills (2011), 120, 123, and 133.
[261] "Tag Filters," *Jykell*.

public readings. Thus every poetry performance is treated as a unique instance despite Jekyll's affordances.

Lastly, concerning the non-speech sound of archival audio recordings, hisses and distortions related to the materiality and the aging of magnetic reel-to-reel tape are kept to serve Frost's twenty-first-century readers as signifiers of the recording's physical conditions. Coupled with occasional remarks of Frost's commenting on the function of a microphone—which was necessary for successful transmission and recording of his utterance—the less than crisp archival audio recording invites reading of Frost's talk events within a larger media ecology of the early twentieth century. The inception of magnetic tape recording, for example, dates back to as early as 1878 as American engineer Oberlin Smith sought to reduce the phonograph's background noise.[262] Compared to the phonograph's analog mechanics of recording and replaying the sound by writing and reading the groove patterns, Smith followed the basics of telephony where the sound was converted to electronic signals.[263] Fritz Pfleumer and other German engineers further developed the concept of magnetic recording since the 1920s as they experimented with different types of tape (e.g., paper, cellulose acetate, polyester), magnetizable coating elements (e.g., pulverized ion particles, carbonyl iron, iron oxide, gamma ferric oxide), different current directions (e.g., direct current or alternating current), as well as various replay machines.[264] American electronics company Ampex started producing their own versions of tapes and replay machines in 1948. Most of Frost's talk events are recorded on the polyester tape, known for its strength compared with the acetate tape

[262] Brøvig-Hansen, 133.
[263] Brøvig-Hansen, 133.
[264] Engel.

but for its shortcoming in its stretchiness (something that can be observed in the partial distortion of the 1957 talk event at the University of Massachusetts).[265] As Frost spoke through the microphone, his voice was converted into electronic signals, which then magnetized the iron particles on the running tape. As sound recorded on the reel-to-reel tape went through its format conversion into the digital, the magnetized signals were reconstructed for the one last time for Frost's twenty-first-century readers.

The MP3 file format, which enables easy online transmission of audio recordings, too, carries the period-specific materiality. As Jonathan Stern has shown, MP3 is one of the latest renditions of sound reproduction technology stemming from the early twentieth-century psychoacoustics.[266] As a part of analog-to-digital conversion, replayed signals of the magnetic reel-to-reel tape were originally sampled at the 44.1kHz rate (44,100 frequencies per second) with a bit depth of 16 bits or higher in order to retain as many signals as possible from the original recording. The resolution for the reformatted sound, therefore, is high. While such uncompressed, high-resolution files serve the purpose of preservation copies, their data size poses a challenge to online distribution. The MP3 format solves this challenge by compression. In addition to discarding extra, mostly irrelevant sound frequency to average hearing persons—seen briefly in the first section of this chapter—MP3 format further encodes signal and noise and masks the latter by volume or frequency differences of the two.[267] Masking technique, especially, owes to early psychoacoustic research at the Bell Labs conducted by R. L. Wegel and C.E. Lane in

[265] During the reading of "One More Brevity" at UMass Remarks, 00:31:15.
[266] Sterne (2012).
[267] Sterne (2012), 96-127; Schroeder et al.; Hacker, 26-36.

1924, German psychoacousticians Eberhard Zwicker and Richard Feldtkeller's work since 1933 (published and popularized in 1967), as well as international standardization efforts led by Karlheinz Brandenburg and others in the late 1980s and the early 1990s.[268] The difference between the compressed and the uncompressed sound is not quite audible to most human ears by design. However, Frost's twenty-first-century readers would be experiencing sound signals encoded and decoded in accordance with the quantitative psychoacoustics research just as they listen to its qualitative counterpart, the sound of sense—versified.

[268] Sterne (2012), 96-127.

Chapter 4: The Rest, Talk: The Open Access Spectrum and Robert Frost's Pilot Audio Edition

Writing to a fellow poet and novelist John Cournos in 1914, Robert Frost described his poetry book *North of Boston* as predominantly concerning speech sound: "One thing to notice is that but one poem in the book will intone and that is 'After Apple Picking.' The rest talk."[269] Besides his fascination with the tone of spoken expression—which he often discussed with the audience during the public talk event—Frost also enjoyed good conversations with his friends and acquaintances.[270] It is not coincident that many biographical accounts prepared by his contemporaries concerned their memories of walking and talking with the poet for hours on end.[271] Frost's spouse, Elinor Miriam White also shared a similar investment in friendly talks, as seen in the address "Conversation as a Force in Life" which she delivered as Robert's co-valedictorian of the Lawrence High School in 1892.[272] Granted conversations as a genre seldom enter the realm of academic debates—unless as anecdotes to illustrate a later, larger theoretical observation—it is no news that many scholarly enterprises start with a thought-provoking exchange. The same was true for Frost scholars, special collections librarians, and Frost's family members and friends at the annual Robert Frost Symposium hosted by the poet's granddaughter Lesley Lee Francis in 2015, as we discussed the possibility of developing an online

[269] Original punctuation. Frost, *Letters*, 209.
[270] Frost, *Letters*, 206, 234, 342, 343, 354-5.
[271] Mertins, vi-viii; Hagstrom.
[272] Thompson, 129; Sutton, 29.

public platform to make Frost more accessible to his twenty-first-century readers whose first encounter with the poet and his works might be online.

While there was a vague consensus at the symposium that the platform must be open-access, it was not immediately clear what that might entail for Frost's works, many of which remain under copyright protection. For instance, our contemporary discourse concerning open access has long advocated for making scholarly articles publicly available. If researchers wish their work to be searchable online and consulted without fees, they may publish their works through open-access journals or share their works through open-access repositories (practices known as Gold OA and Green OA, respectively).[273] Publishing scholarly editions of literary works in an open-access manner, on the other hand, is less straightforward—so much so even open access expert Peter Suber's seminal works avoid the matter.[274] By and large, there is also a collective silence within the field of textual scholarship regarding the rationale behind electronic editions' access models. Based on passing remarks in published articles or in the hallway conversations with senior editors who are willing to share their behind-the-scenes stories, it appears as if the topic of access models is too trivial, too managerial, or too sensitive to warrant serious public debates. However, as I have shown, only when technical accessibility is concomitantly considered from a sociohistorical perspective, are we equipped to invent a culturally appropriate access design. Scholarly electronic editions of literary works and their

[273] Suber (2012), 6.
[274] Suber has been leading the academic discourse on open access largely within the context of scholarly journal publishing practices. For history and basic concepts of open access, see his *Open Access* (2012). For a collection of his essays—through which he refutes common misconceptions of open access publishing—see *Knowledge Unbound* (2016).

access models are no exception to careful examinations of their ideological underpinnings.

To that end, I first examine the access advocacy discourse. In particular, I evaluate how some conceptual frameworks can be counterproductive to fostering critical collaboration among multiple stakeholders that is necessary for the development of Frost's electronic edition. I then propose the alternative framework to the one that upholds open access as an ideal every editor must abide by, and suggest we treat open access as a spectrum. Subsequently, I demonstrate how the reoriented open access framework enables the analyses of access configurations of existing online literary editions, as they both deliberately and inadvertently anticipate, encourage, and, at times regulate their ultimate usage. I conclude with the rationale for the access model that I devised for the pilot audio edition of Frost's public talks and readings based on the conversations among all interested parties that collectively determined the most appropriate access model for us.

Access Advocacy Discord

Following his talk at the Browne and Nichols School in Cambridge, Massachusetts in 1915, Frost promised the school's co-founder George Browne that he would further articulate the ideas around auditory attentiveness and composition, i.e., how good writing reads like one is listening to the writer speak. In response to Brown's request to incorporate the poet's idea into the school's pedagogy, Frost wished they had met sooner—the time when he, too, was a full-time teacher at the Pinkerton Academy in Derry, New Hampshire, revising its curriculum to reflect more

informal and conversational pedagogy before deciding to leave for England in pursuit of his literary career.[275]

His exchange with Browne was not the only instance when Frost was seen discussing his ideas through informal exchanges with friends. The record suggests Frost was convinced by the significance of his ideas and persuaded others in ways they could see the benefits for themselves. Writing to then high-school teacher Sidney Cox in 1914, Frost thanked him for joining the collective literary enterprise to promote the idea of auditory attentiveness to challenge the skewed emphasis on grammatical correctness in language education. The letter shows Cox and Frost's strategizing their plan of action with much enthusiasm. Frost wrote: "It may take some time to make people see—they are so accustomed to look at the sentence as a grammatical cluster of words. The question is where to begin the assault on their prejudice. For my part I have about decided to begin by demonstrating by examples […] till I establish the distinction between the grammatical sentence and the vital sentence. The grammatical sentence is merely accessory to the other and chiefly valuable as furnishing a clue to the other."[276] Most importantly, Frost closed the letter with what appears to be key factors for any collaborative relationships—gratitude for partaking in the campaign, trust in overcoming obstacles, and acknowledging his interdependence—even if his playfully grandiose tone was just for the fun of it:

> And thank yourself for all you are doing for me. I need it in this game. I should like a good talk or three with you. On the war if you choose. On anything. You are going to do a lot all round I know. Your

[275] Frost, *CPPP*, 937.
[276] Frost, *Letters*, 233.

> opinions are worth listening to because you mean to put them into action—if for no other reason. But there is no other reason as important. What a man will put into effect at any cost of time money life or lives is what is sacred and what counts. As I get old I don't want to hear about much else. I have nearly written myself tired for tonight. Write often and keep my courage up.[277]

In light of expected oppositions, Frost's strategy—in a quintessential poet style—was to show his ideas in "poetry every time [he] sat down to write" rather than to tell, in a separate book, implications of auditory attentiveness in composition and education at large.[278] Frost would go on to discuss a further developed version of his ideas during the talk "Education by Poetry" in 1930. Concerning the nascent stage of Frost's ideas, his non-argumentative approach helped enlist teachers and critics to spread the ideas.

The access advocacy in the United States, on the other hand, has long based its argument on oppositional framing and by claiming the moral high ground. Prompted by its call-to-action agenda, access advocacy had often been the result of a dichotomy between two groups of people—those who work as gatekeepers of works and those who strive to liberate works for the public good. For example, early advocates such as software engineer Richard Stallman and hacktivist Aaron Swartz established the tone for the formative years of access movement in the late 1990s and through the 2000s, as they called out the lockdown culture in software engineering industries and university libraries, respectively.[279] For Stallman, restricting

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[277] Frost, *Letters*, 235.
[278] Frost, *Letters*, 232.
[279] Stallman "Why Software Should Not Have Owners" (circa 1994); Swartz, "Guerilla Open Access Manifesto" (2008).

modification to a software program in an effort to protect the intellectual property of engineers meant denying others the opportunity to thoroughly engage with the program. Swartz, in a similar manner, opposed the privatization of knowledge seen in closed scholarly journal database systems, a mechanism that privileged those who were affiliated with affluent research institutions. For both Swartz and Stallman, the access movement was a way to advocate for social justice, a resistance against those who would regulate the possibility of more democratic production of knowledge. Stallman and Swartz, of course, were in part responding to a larger, period-specific sentiment. As communication scholar Fred Turner has shown, digital utopianism—a notion that a rise of the Internet would lead to a revolutionary social movement—dates back to the rhetoric of New Communalists in the 1960s, and was a prominent driving force in the early days of the World Wide Web development.[280] The idealistic concept also reverberated in the humanities, and it resulted in such works as McKenzie Wark's *A Hacker Manifesto* (Harvard University Press, 2014), where the question of access was an interclass struggle. Wark illustrated how there were a "vectoral" class that profits off of the theoretical concept of the work and a class of hackers who seek to subvert such a class structure.[281] Within such a conceptual framework, as Wark saw, file sharing was a tactic to elude the system of The Man and desktop publishing was a strategy to bypass the middleman.[282]

While the liberatory rhetoric of access advocacy undoubtedly helped popularize the cause, not every intermediary involved in the development of an online platform is a gatekeeper or subscribes to the axioms of access advocacy. Worse, when

[280] Turner.
[281] Wark (2004).
[282] Wark (2007).

arguments on behalf of a just cause start to become dogmatic and lose critical nuance, they can do more harm than good. Consider the case of Kimberly Christen, the Director of Plateau People's Web Portal, who was met with reactionary criticisms for her content management system Mukurtu after its coverage in a BBC radio program in 2008. Developed collaboratively with members of an indigenous community Warumungu in Australia, Mukurtu adopted the community's cultural protocol to manage access to their ancestral collections. That meant access was determined in accordance with Warumungu custom, and by such factors as the individual's age, gender, and kinship. To Christen's dismay, BBC's online forum was soon filled with anti-censorship and anti-digital rights management arguments, echoing the talking points associated with access advocacy. While the notion of "control" meant curation for the Mukurtu development team, the connotation interpreted by the BBC audience was the abuse of power that denies the world's access to Australia's cultural heritage. In response, Christen argued that even a seemingly benign concept such as "public domain"—a notion commonly celebrated among access advocates in the Anglophone—can be used to further exploit indigenous communities, which have historically suffered from the imposition of Eurocentric legal concepts that plunder. Christen publicized the need to critically investigate the rhetoric of neoliberal-leaning access advocacy in order not to perpetuate the legacy of global colonialism.[283] Systems librarian Tara Robertson also argued how uncritical adaptation of open access discourse could lead to the reproduction of unjust power relations, citing the case of the online publication of a lesbian erotica magazine *On Our Backs* (1984-2004). According to Robertson, the entire run of the magazine was accessible on the

[283] Christen.

Internet through a company called Reveal Digital, which works with university libraries to identify, crowd-fund, digitize, publish, and manage online collections on the company server.[284] While Reveal Digital boasted its capacity to "help reveal a library's hidden collection," contribute to the scholarly discourse, and to do so within the boundaries of its legal obligations, Robertson argued it was unethical to circulate the magazine without further consent from models who had only agreed to have their images circulated among a small, queer community at the time of the magazine's original production.[285]

Needless to say, the power relations among collaborators for Frost's pilot audio edition fundamentally differ from instances Christen and Robertson illustrated. By my comparison, I do not mean to discuss questions around Mukurtu, *On Our Backs*, and Frost's archival recordings on an equal footing. Rather, I hope to extend the kind of mindfulness Christen and Robertson practiced to the field of textual scholarship, where the access advocacy discourse has largely evaded critical scrutiny. Additionally, that self-appointed access advocates can be oblivious to their own biases underscores how I need to be self-reflective of open access concepts and their ideological underpinnings.

As for the pilot audio edition of Frost's public talks and readings, the concept of "piracy" defies the edition's easy alliance with the access advocacy discourse. Today, when used by those who wish for more stringent intellectual property regulations, piracy means copyright infringement. Such a negative connotation of the term is often used to denounce access advocates, and it is increasingly a license for

[284] Ithaka, "Reveal Digital Joins Ithaka."
[285] Reveal Digital; Robertson, 232.

large, multinational corporations to assume more power over individuals.[286] In response, academic access advocates such as Lawrence Lessig argued for legal reformations to reflect and embrace the creative process that is historically derivative, receptive, and generative.[287] Gary Hall likewise sought to reclaim the term by revisiting its ancient Greek etymology *peira* and peiraō, so that the term might mean "trial," "attempt," and "test" rather than theft—to encourage a more generous mode of sociocultural interactions.[288] McKenzie Wark, in a similar manner, appropriated the term for the producing class, where bootlegging and pirating is a means to convert the scarcity mentality into the one based on abundance.[289]

For Frost, the threat of piracy had different kinds of implications as it defined his early struggle and the later success in regard to managing his copyright and legally binding contracts. According to the socio-bibliography study of Pat Alger, owner of the largest private Frost collection, American publisher Henry Holt and Company inquired Frost's British publisher David Nutt in 1914 about the publishing rights arrangement. As Nutt only agreed to the sales of sheets, Holt purchased 150 sets of sheets of *North of Boston* so that the book could be bound and published in the United States.[290] Having seen enough pre-orders to exhaust the initial 150 books before the scheduled publication date, Holt requested 200 more sets of sheets from Nutt. However, as fate would have it, there was a delay in response to this cross-Atlantic communication, in part due to the turmoil of World War I. Having waited for about a month for Nutt's response, Holt ended up setting and binding a fresh

[286] Stallman; Halbert, 25-81.
[287] Lessig (2004), 17-79; Lessig (2008), xiii-xxii.
[288] Hall, 16.
[289] Wark (2004).
[290] Alger, 299. Parini, 156.

American edition without Nutt's explicit permission.[291] In a letter to Nutt, Holt justified their action as a precaution against piracy within the U.S.:

> We published "North of Boston" on February 20th, and our first supply was immediately exhausted. Now we find ourselves without any supply for a month, and piracy threatened. So to protect your interests and those of the author, we are forced to reset both of Mr. Frost's books [*A Boy's Will* and *North of Boston*] here in order not only to forestall piracy but also to take advantage of the present interest in Mr. Frost's work.[292]

The story, of course, can be told from multiple perspectives—just as how the implications of "control" meant different things to the BBC audience and to the Mukurtu development team. Seen from Nutt's standpoint, Holt's move itself could be interpreted as an act of piracy, justified to prevent others from practicing piracy. From Holt's perspective, it was a matter of precaution.

For Frost—who was traveling back to the United States from war-struck Britain by ship and was not directly involved in the negotiation—the incident marked something else entirely. That is, it was an end to his defunct relationship with Nutt, which had gone wrong since the firm agreed to publish his first book *A Boy's Will* in 1912. Elated by finding a publisher who was willing to print his work at his first try, Frost signed the contract that promised his first five books to be published by Nutt.[293] Their relationship soon went south as Frost's newer poems (later to be collected in his *North of Boston*) started appearing in periodicals. Nutt considered Frost to be

[291] Alger, 299-300; Crane, 15-18.
[292] Crane, 17; Thompson, 573-4.
[293] Alger, 329; Frost, *Letters,* 77.

violating their contract and refused to send Frost a proper account for royalties generated from the sales of *A Boy's Will*.[294] As such, when Frost wrote to his friend back in England in April 1915—two months after his return to the U.S.—he told the turn of an event with glee:

> One really good piece of news is that Madame Nutt has lost both books: Both have been pirated and will be on the bookstands in an American edition someday this week. The thing was put through in rush to be beforehand with someone else who was about to pirate them. Madame Nutt has herself to thank: it is no job I put up on her. The pirate had bought sheets of the book of her and sold them all out before the day of publication. He asked so quickly for more that she saw her opportunity and began haggling. I believe he offered her something for the American rights. He spent a month or so wiring and writing and then getting wind of what some rival was up to decided to take matters into his own hands. The pirate, I dont mind saying, is my very dear friend Alfred Harcourt the moving spirit in the firm of Henry Holt & Co.[295]

Upon Frost's return—still indentured to Nutt—Harcourt also arranged a check of $200 ($5,122.34 in today's value) to ease the financial straits of the poet and promised a ten-percent royalty of all sold copies of Frost's first two books while Holt waited on Nutt's response.[296] Harcourt became such a trusted business partner, Frost wished to support him when he founded the publishing firm of his own in 1919—only

[294] Alger, 328-9; Frost, *Letters,* 337.
[295] Frost, *Letters*, 274.
[296] Alger, 330.

to decide otherwise to avoid the further complications of having his books printed by multiple publishers.[297]

For the pilot audio edition of Frost's talks and readings, featuring *North of Boston* poems as its focal point, then, the notion of piracy is not straightforward. Rather, it is indicative of the historical circumstances that continue to inform possible arrangements of publication to date. Per Gary Hall's definition, the pilot edition is a trial run for the long-term development of Frost's digital platform while I work with Raian Khan and Michael Helferstay, who manage Holt's copyrights as a part of Macmillan Publishers' operations, as well as with Peter Gilbert, Executor of Robert Frost Estate and Trustee of Robert Frost Copyright Trust. As of this writing, Holt owns the right to reproduce the text of poems and the Estate needs to grant permission to publish the audio recordings and the text of Frost's remarks that is not under Holt's copyright. Through my informal conversation with these participating partners I have come to understand—and continue to articulate—what would be the optimal access model for Frost's audio edition.

Another ill-equipped concept of existing access advocacy is the notion of "gatekeeping," a concept designed to call out whoever gets in the way of access. Given no literary platform can be developed in a vacuum—especially concerning the twentieth-century U.S. works under copyright protections—the adversarial access advocacy framework has little use in fostering the necessary collaboration between scholarly editors, special collections librarians, literary estates, and other stakeholders. Contrary to the access advocacy discourse, the critical neglect of Frost's talks as a genre is not so much a result of gatekeeping but a combination of personal,

[297] Frost, *Letters*, 644.

technological, and financial obstacles that have conglomerated over the past eighty-odd years. As I have shown, Frost was hesitant to have his talks published in print during his lifetime. Based on his remarks in personal correspondence, Frost scholars have long speculated his reluctance had to do with either a strategic plan to first establish himself as a poet—rather than a writer of prose—or a disinclination to engage in the daunting process of transforming the transcription of talks into publishable prose.[298] In any case, literary scholars are accustomed to respecting the preferences of the author, though many had sought to persuade the poet otherwise during the 1930s. In the meanwhile, it has become increasingly difficult for special collections libraries to enable researchers' consultation of reel-to-reel tapes owing to the lack of replay machines and the fear of damaging the tapes before creating the digital copies first.

Additionally, the oppositional framework around gatekeeping not only fails to take into account the possibility of conversations among all interested parties in good faith but also falls short of factoring shifting conditions such as the necessity of copyright protection and the author's exclusive rights to assume royalty income for certain duration of time. Just as large multinational corporations in 2020 tend to assume more power than what the current U.S. copyright law warrants, there had been individuals who asserted their right to demand the author's rights to be waived. In 1939, as a response to a complaint from a Rutgers University professor, Holt justified the necessity of reprint fees to secure income on behalf of Frost. Written by Holt's Manager of Trade Department, the letter suggests how often the publisher received unreasonable demands to offer literary works for free:

[298] Parini, 301-4; Thompson, 444-7; Richardson, ix-xii.

> I am sorry you feel as you do about our position in regard to Robert Frost's poem WHAT FIFTY SAID. We are not in an easy spot as regards handling the rights of Mr. Frost's poems. Not a day passes but what one or more people wish the right to use some of his work without paying for it. Many of these requests are of the most legitimate sort, but it is essential that we protect Mr. Frost's income by charging for the use of his work. One of the tragic things about the modern poet's lot is that though many people admire him, few will pay any money for his work, and in Mr. Frost's case I feel particularly strong because he is a man who writes very slowly, produces a limited amount of work each year, and has lived in virtual poverty for decades before achieving his present position. I can see your side of the case perfectly, but I hope you will be able to see ours as well. May I add that had you paid for the privilege of using this poem not one cent of your permission fee would have gone to ourselves.[299]

If only our contemporary cease and desist letters that have long intimidated parents recording and posting home videos on YouTube or university students with their satirical blogs had half of the cordial tone as the Holt's letter, might our popular debates around copyright infringement assume more civility.[300]

At the end of the day, what determines the most adequate access design comes down to the question of priorities. Soon after Frost had signed the fateful contract

[299] A letter from the Manager of Trade Department to Professor James LaPoe at Rutgers University, New Brunswick, New Jersey. The letter is in Princeton University's Henry Holt and Company Collection.
[300] McSherry; Nazer.

with David Nutt, he learned that two other American publishers were interested in printing his poetry books: Thomas Bird Mosher of Portland, Maine, who specialized in fine-press editions, and Richard G. Badger from the Gorham Press in Boston. Frost especially regretted not being able to work with Mosher, and started a conversation in earnest to work with him as his American publisher. Compared to the approach of Nutt—who tracked down a magazine publisher and demanded fees for quotations and banned Frost from talking with other publishers—Frost's negotiation tactic focused more on interpersonal relations and on ensuring the means to reach his American readers. Writing to Mosher in 1914, Frost opened the letter by gesturing he trusted Mosher's judgment: "I am content to leave it that way. Anything you care to give. It is not for me to make terms with you. All I have in mind is to reach through you an American public. So long as you get me read I shall ask no questions about royalties."[301] In part following such Frost's ur-mission, the objective of the pilot audio edition, therefore, has been to provide a public platform for Frost's twenty-first-century students, critics, and teachers to cross-examine, analyze, and augment the scholarly arguments made thus far, and for readers of all levels to enjoy and be edified by the poet's art.

Open Access Spectrum

New media theorist Lev Manovich has argued that one of the most unique features of digitized and digital artifacts is their "remixability."[302] That is, when different objects are reformatted into the digital format, the form enables extensive

[301] Frost, *Letters*, 226.
[302] Manovich, 267-327.

adaptations including remixing, transforming, and building upon the source materials beyond their physical and sociocultural boundaries that might otherwise be inhibiting. Today, many cultural institutions embrace such possibilities of remixing and other reuse of artworks by offering their digital surrogates and copies. For instance, Europeana, Digital Public Library of America, Digital NZ, and Trove (the National Library of Australia) annually hosts GIF-making competitions to incentivize creative reuse of their digital collections.[303] Of course, remixing culture is not homogenous and not every digital and digitized object needs to cater to the contemporary trend. However, just as Frost carved out a unique space for his poetry performance in relation to the tradition of humorous monologue and then popular vaudeville, it would be wise for the pilot edition to clarify its principles while anticipating and acknowledging certain expectations that is specific to our time. In order to initiate such a conversation within collaborators, I have devised ways to remain vigilant and mindful about access advocacy, especially when it is presented as a monolithic ideal or is based on the confrontational posturing that promotes abstract, liberatory talking points devoid of local contexts. In particular, I have reframed open access as a spectrum and reconstructed the assumed relationship between hacktivists and gatekeepers into the one where all participating partners need to discuss their varying and respective interests, in order to collectively determine where in the open access spectrum the pilot audio edition should fall. As a hermeneutic, this alternative framework not only serves as an antidote to unquestioned advocacy discourse but also offers a more generative peer evaluation practice than many of the current open access discourse enables.

[303] "GIF It Up."

First of all, understanding the access model as a spectrum invites assessment of every edition in its own terms and resists the imposition of a notion that the freer the better. For example, the first iteration of the *Dickinson Electronic Archives* (1994) adopted what we call today Gratis OA, an access model that is free of charge and encourages fair use.[304] Just as any scholarly editions of literary works in print, the *Dickinson Electronic Archives* operated—and still does—under the familiar assumptions that readers could use copyrighted resources for the purposes of "criticism, comment, news reporting, teaching (including multiple copies for classroom use), scholarship, or research" without permission from the editor or needing to pay for reproduction.[305] According to its founding editors, Martha Nell Smith and Lara Vetter, the *Dickinson Electronic Archives* was in part designed to shed light on the traditionally opaque editorial process. That is, by presenting digital surrogates of archival papers in concert with their interpretative argument, Smith and Vetter invited their readers to cross-examine their textual scholarship.[306] This was a groundbreaking approach as its preceding scholarly editions had mostly published—per print publication conventions—transcriptions of manuscripts alone and inadvertently obfuscated how transcribing Dickinson's idiosyncratic handwriting often necessitated highly subjective, if not entirely speculative, judgment calls.[307] By utilizing the affordances of an electronic edition to publish the images of Dickinson manuscripts, Smith and Vetter not only removed the financial barrier and the elitist

[304] Smith and Vetter, "Conditions of Use Statement."
[305] "The Copyright Law of the United States," Section 107; "Code of Best Practices in Fair Use for Academic and Research Libraries;" "Codes of Best Practices" (Center for Social Media and Social Impact); Aufderheide and Jaszi.
[306] Smith et al., "Detailed Description of the Archive" (1997).
[307] Smith (2007), 11.

understanding around access to archival research but also challenged a paternalistic editorial practice that had long obscured alternative literary interpretations of Dickinson papers.[308]

Since open access vocabularies entered the humanities discourse in the 2000s, interpreting the *Dickinson Electronic Archives* as Gratis OA might be considered ahistorical. Nevertheless, the *Dickinson Electronic Archives* serves as a reminder of the significance of free access to archival resources, especially when the current open access discourse tends to treat Gratis OA as something less desirable in comparison with another possible model, Libre OA. Such a subtle yet pervasive notion of hierarchy among access models is seen even in Suber's passing description of two access models: "Gratis OA is free of charge but not more free than that. Users must still seek permission to exceed fair use. Gratis OA removes price barriers but not permission barriers. Libre OA is free of charge and also free of some copyright and licensing restrictions."[309] As the example of the *Dickinson Electronic Archives* suggests, however, Gratis OA can be a most appropriate option especially when its affordance aligns with the rationale for the very edition's publication. That is, whether freer means better needs to be determined situationally.

Treating open access as a spectrum is also a way to question existing assertions about so-called best practices. Examining "where" in the spectrum of open access an edition might fall and "to what end" is especially useful when editors are less explicit about their access model compared to those of the *Dickinson Electronic Archives*. Regardless of intentions, the access model of an edition does signal—

[308] Smith (2004).
[309] Suber, (2012), 66.

however inadvertently—its underlying research interests as well as its anticipated readership. The current iteration of *The Rossetti Archive* (1993-2008) is one such example that adopted Libre OA, a model that is free of charge and some copyright restrictions.[310] Specifically, *The Rossetti Archive* defined its terms of use by using a Creative Commons license NC-SA 2.5, a license that supports transformative use and redistribution of works for non-commercial purposes.[311] The biggest difference between Gratis OA and Libre OA is that the latter proactively defines how readers may exceed fair use while the former encourages it. Today, computational processing for research purposes increasingly falls within fair use—thanks to a legal case spearheaded by Matthew Jockers, Matthew Sag, and Jason Schultz on behalf of other humanities scholars in 2012.[312] By joining in on the copyright infringement dispute between Google and the Authors' Guild over the Google Books project, Jockers et al. ensured that some digitally-enabled research methods such as text mining millions of digitized books "to extract information from and about them to sift out trends and patterns" are considered fair use.[313] However, anything beyond such "non-expressive" usage—as Jockers et al. strategically characterized—still falls into a fair use gray zone. As a result, if users wish to download files in their entirety and modify them for the purpose of self-expression, they still ought to navigate the intrinsic vagueness of statutory standards for fair use on their own.

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[310] McGann, ed. *The Rossetti Archive.*
[311] The versioning history of *The Rossetti Archive* suggests it has not always been licensed under the Creative Commons terms. Just as any other early electronic editions, *The Rossetti Archive* adopted the Libre OA model through its multiple iterations. See its original status captured by *Wayback Machine* screenshots. McGann, ed. "The Rossetti Archive Copyright Statement" (2000).
[312] Nowviskie; Jockers et al. "Don't Let Copyright Block Data Mining" (2012); Jockers et al. "Brief of Digital Humanities and Law Scholars as Amici Curiae in Authors Guild v. Google" (2012).
[313] Jockers et al. "Don't Let Copyright Block Data Mining" (2012), 30.

Libre OA, therefore, makes it an editorial responsibility to clarify fair use's legal ambiguity on behalf of the readers, so as to encourage expressive reuse and remix of the works. Incidentally, one of the experimental analyses conducted by Jerome McGann, the editor of *The Rossetti Archive,* is a research method called "deformation"—a hermeneutic to present a familiar text in a new light.[314] By distorting the digitized image of Rossetti's painting using Photoshop, for example, McGann investigated formal and compositional implications of the painting "The Blessed Damozel."[315] While McGann has not published the rationale for shifting the edition's original Gratis OA status to the current Libre OA model, the edition's ultimate access model nevertheless gestures towards facilitating digitally-enabled, exploratory research methods.

Another benefit of treating open access as a spectrum, and subsequently discussing an edition's access configurations among editors and with readers, is educational. Given an online scholarly edition is uniquely situated to serve both readers within and beyond academia, it is an opportunity to invite readers for critical textual inquiries. Or, as Julia Flanders put it, the editorial design question ought to shift from asking "what the user wants (which is essentially a marketing question)" to "what kind of relationship with the text we think we should encourage (which is a question about the social and institutional function of texts)."[316] The *Folger Digital Texts* (2012) edited by Barbara Mowat and Paul Werstine, for example, managed the precarious balance between addressing the norms of remix culture and championing editorial sensibility. Designed to encourage reuse of Shakespearean texts, the *Folger*

[314] McGann and Samuels, "Deformance and Interpretation."
[315] McGann, "Imagining What You Don't Know."
[316] Flanders (1997), 302.

Digital Texts adopts Libre OA and uses a Creative Commons license (CC BY-NC 3.0) that allows the transformative use and redistribution of works for non-commercial purposes.[317] Unlike other electronic editions that are largely designed to facilitate viewing, the *Folger Digital Texts* encourages downloads by offering texts in different formats: XML, HTML, PDF, DOC, TXT, and TEI.[318] Their treatment of the plain text, in particular, warrants careful reading, as it supports digitally-enabled research methods while bringing to attention the otherwise misleading connotations of the plain text.

Scholars who conduct a large-scale textual analysis such as distant reading have long relied on the plain text, aggregated from Project Gutenberg, Google Books project, HathiTrust, and other online resources.[319] Though these corpora are largely devoid of individual text's material histories—versioning records, typographical marks, and notes of editorial emendations—such granular details have long been considered a necessary trade-off for a larger statistical insight. Indeed, computational textual analyses often seek to examine non-canonical works that have long been neglected in order to study larger literary trends and patterns than the study of selective cannons has brought forward to date. For instance, in one of the most recent text analysis monographs, Andrew Piper showcases a historical shift in the use of punctuations, the constitution of plots, variants in characters, and genre-specific

[317] Unlike *The Rossetti Archive* that requires the derivatives to be shared under identical licensing terms, the *Folger Digital Text* enables derivatives to adopt their own licensing terms.
[318] Mowat and Werstine, "Timeless Texts, Cutting-Edge Code: Free downloads of Shakespeare from *Folger Digital Texts*."
[319] Moretti, "Conjectures on World Literature" (2000); Jockers, *Macroanalysis* (2013); English, "Now, Not Now: Counting Time in Contemporary Fiction" (2016); Underwood et al. "The Transformation of Gender in English-Language Fiction" (2018).

stylistics based on his computational study of 230,000 poems, 15,000 novels, and 12,000 works of nonfiction published over the span of past two centuries.[320]

While there is a gap in what text analysis scholars need and what editors of the *Folger Digital Texts* offer in terms of is corpora's canonicity and scope, the edition nevertheless cautions against the tendencies where the findings based on text analysis is presented as evidentiary rather than a moment of reflection on the hypotheses that were set to test in the first place.[321] When the *Folger Digital Texts* nudges users to think twice about the implications of the plain text, the edition makes it an editorial responsibility to inform its shortcomings. That is, despite its benign semblance, the plain text is but one way of representing the text of a particular literary work, and that its limitations must be taken into considerations:

> Folger Digital Texts provides .txt format files for projects and applications where simplicity and/or stability is the highest priority. These ASCII 7-encoded files are the most likely to render properly in the widest number of applications and the least likely to present conversion errors when being incorporated into text analysis tools. However, they also lack formatting, critical editing marks, and special characters. It is important to note that because special characters are not present, accents on words will be missing, which will change the meter of those lines. It is recommended that you use one of the other

[320] Piper, 3, 191, 203.
[321] For instance, Paul Fleming examines how Moretti fails to examine his own biases even when met with a seemingly conflicting computational result. See Fleming, "Tragedy, for Example: Distant Reading and Exemplary Reading (Moretti)."

> formats offered via Folger Digital Texts unless using a completely unadorned text is a priority.[322]

Here, Mowat and Werstine share their dilemma in wishing to accommodate creative usages of text while being wary of flattening its historical and material specificity. By informing the audience about their unease, the editors help their readers develop a critical perspective on the plain text, perhaps even for the first time.

As for the archival audio recordings, their copyright status differs from that of works fixed on papers. In general, concerning post-1972 recordings, the current US federal laws assume separate copyright for the work, the recording of the work, and of the publisher. The case for pre-1972 recordings—the category the most of audio recordings of Frost's talks and readings belong—is more complicated. That is, all recordings made before 1972 are protected by state common law copyright and antipiracy statutes rather than the US federal laws.[323] The lack of federal copyright protection for pre-1972 recordings means, according to intellectual property expert Brandon Butler, libraries are left without their explicit rights to circulate and produce preservation copies and that the public is without a legal ground to practice fair use.[324] Additionally, relevant state laws for the pre-1972 recordings include the ones where recordings currently exist as well as the ones where copyright holders reside. Unless copyright holders have otherwise registered pre-1972 recordings to the US Copyright Office, they will enter the public domain in 2067.[325]

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[322] Mowat and Werstine, "TXT."
[323] Besek (2005), 21-6.
[324] Butler, 160-2.
[325] "Federal Copyright Protection for Pre-1972 Sound Recordings."

Bearing in mind such complex legal conditions of pre-1972 audio recordings, the open access spectrum as a framework encourages transparency to shed light on the special collections librarians' managerial labor pertaining to a mix copyright status of their collections. The framework also offers the public that has long been exposed to the all-or-nothing access advocacy discourse some room for the benefit of the doubt especially when the libraries' action could easily appear gatekeeping. For example, the Woodberry Poetry Room, a special collections reading room for Harvard University's audiovisual archives, offers its online interface called "Listening Booth." Adopting the Gratis OA model, this public-facing interface enables online readers to consult 242 poets and their recordings from 1933 to the present without fees. The Listening Booth access design centers around close listening practices, just as how the Woodberry Poetry Room in Harvard's Lamont Library is equipped with circular tables with earphone jacks and a turning table in the middle. Beyond close listening, however, the Listening Booth adopts a restrictive language to regulate its usages, accompanied with a copyright symbol: "For playback on the Woodberry Poetry Room website only. All other use is strictly prohibited."[326] Indeed, to forestall any unsolicited downloading, locations of audio files are also concealed in the source code behind the graphic interface. Such precaution is a plausible practice especially if the library has legally binding agreements with individual copyright holders. However, coupled with the institution's records of controversial copyright policies concerning other historical collections in its custody (e.g., photographs of enslaved persons produced by biologist Louis Agassiz in 1850 and the Emily Dickinson Collection), it is a question of trust how readers wish to understand the implications

[326] "The Listening Booth," *Woodbury Poetry Room*.

of terms of use set by the Listening Booth. As of this writing, some of the digital files are only available to Harvard affiliates without apparent coherency in what is and is not available online due to "copyright restrictions."[327]

For example, out of six audio recordings of Robert Frost, two talks delivered at Harvard University in the 1960s are available online. The rest has none descriptive titles, making it hard to identify why some recordings are only available to Harvard's affiliates unless readers dig deeper into a separate library catalog system to investigate their publication history. With some recordings such as "Interview with Richard Poirier" (1959), it is relatively easy to speculate its mixed copyright status that might inhibit the library from enabling public online consultation. Poirier's interview with Frost, for instance, was published in the literary magazine *The Paris Review*'s in 1960. According to Poirier's published account, the interview took place in Frost's residence in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and Poirier and his colleague at Harvard University Robert O'Clair handled the tape recording.[328] I would imagine the interview was a work for hire for the magazine and that the Paris Review Foundation, as well as the Estate of Robert Frost own the right to publish the recording today. By the look of it, the Listening Booth keeps the recordings that involve additional permissions beyond that of Henry Holt and the Estate to internal circulation. Per the open access spectrum framework, the Woodberry Poetry Room could include the discussion of copyright conditions as a part of the evolving legal context of audio recordings and shed light on the socioeconomic networks that sustain and inform literary enterprise. It would also help online readers offer due credit to the labor of

[327] "Frost," *Woodbury Poetry Room*.
[328] Poirier (1960).

archivists whose professional responsibility includes retaining a cordial interpersonal relationship with donors, copyright holders, and other benefactors to sustain their institutional operation for the collections' longevity.

The open access spectrum also acknowledges the range within the Gratis OA model, i.e., how some online audio editions ensure fair use by analogically leveraging the federal copyright protections.[329] Take, for example, *Faulkner at Virginia* (circa 2010) exhibition written and directed by English Professor Stephen Railton in collaboration with the University of Virginia Library. Featuring audio recordings of William Faulkner's classes and lectures during his writer-in-residence appointment at the University during 1957 and 58, *Faulkner at Virginia* serves as an audio edition of Faulkner's talks, complete with transcriptions, timestamp index, and historical backgrounds for the U.S. racial discourse in the late 1950s. With regard to the access model, the site is open to public, that is, for those who have access to the Internet. *Faulkner at Virginia* also encourages fair use that includes downloading of audio files: "The site has been created to enable public access to these materials in support of teaching, research, and scholarship. Educational institutions or affiliated individuals, school teachers, news organizations, and members of the public are all welcome to link to individual images or other content posted on the site and to download content for the above-authorized purposes."[330]

The publicized editorial intent, moreover, often works in favor of unintended or even accidental access design in the face of constantly changing operating systems

[329] Besek (2009), 39-66.
[330] Railton, "Conditions of Use and Copyright Information."

and other software programs that generate the online edition.[331] *Faulkner at Virginia* relies on the browser's standard HTML audio feature to render the full recording of the event as well as its segmented versions. While the longer files are offered in both MP3 and OGG formats, the short clips are only available as OGG files. Given the limited cross-browser compatibility of OGG files compared to that of MP3, the edition's original technical design choice results in a situation, as of this writing, where the current version of the Google Chrome browser cannot let online readers download the short audio clips. However, when readers know that the most taxing editorial challenges for Railton were to transcribe Faulkner's particular pronunciation of the term "Negro" that sometimes bordered on the racial slur on certain occasions, it encourages generous speculation—if not over rationalization—of OGG files' inaccessibility as means to discourage out-of-context quotations of Faulkner's nuanced discussion of racism with predominantly white University of Virginia audience in the late 1950s. Better yet, such an accidental glitch might even nudge readers to take more time to contemplate on what Railton calls "the phonetic and the ideological complexity of [Faulkner's] racial vocabulary" and to carefully reflect on their desire to download the OGG clips in the first place.[332]

Finally, the spectrum within Gratis OA models adopted by existing literary audio collections has significance for the future definition of fair use pertaining to pre-1972 recordings. As large corporations continue to assume more power with a league of lawyers over individuals regarding use of artworks today, communication scholar Patricia Aufderheide and legal scholar Peter Jaszi have been advocating ways

[331] My thinking here is influenced by Trevor Owens' discussion of how to develop the most appropriate preservation intent for digital artifacts. Owens, 81-102.
[332] Railton, "Faulkner at Virginia: An Introduction."

to reclaim fair use among the current legal boundaries. In particular, Aufderheide and Jaszi's approach has been to work with journalists, documentary filmmakers, and other artists to define the code of best practices in each community. That way, when confronted by lawyers, insurers, publishers, and others who have the power to act as gatekeepers, practitioners have the language to claim their right to fair use backed by successful case studies from their immediate communities.[333] The code of best practices developed in 2011 by working poets in consultation with Aufderheide and Jaszi did not consider the usage of historical audio recordings.[334] However, as editors of archival audio collections start including access models as part of a critical discourse, it is a matter of time—if we so choose—to integrate archival audio recordings to contemporary poetry performances and to enrich our understanding of sampling and remixing culture as a means to pay homage to and to directly engage with other poets, living and dead.

PennSound's Gratis OA model has led such an effort to center communal practices since 2003. Written by Charles Bernstein, "PennSound Manifest" prescribed its approach to copyrights: "One of the advantages of working with poetry sound files is that we don't anticipate a problem with rights. At present and in the conceivable future, there is no profit to be gained by the sale of recorded poetry."[335] It is natural for Chris Mustazza then to identify *PennSound*'s predecessor in the Contemporary Poets Series spearheaded by a poet Vachell Lindsay who—having been rejected by Victor Records due to questionable profitability of his performance—sought out the

[333] Aufderheide and Jaszi, 127-147.
[334] Aufderheide et al.
[335] Bernstein, "PennSound Manifest."

recording equipment at Columbia University in 1931.[336] Additionally, *PennSound* anticipates downloading of audio files to be the major interests of its readers and supplies essential bibliographic information of each recording via MP3 file metadata descriptions. Independent from a library infrastructure, *PennSound* has become the largest audio collection of poets' audio recordings and its access model has facilitated emerging prosody analyses conducted by Marit MacArthur and Tanya Clement among others.[337]

Interdependent Open Access Model

The little known aspect of Frost's early career is how he routinely put in a good word for others who were themselves starting out their careers as writers, i.e., yet another kind of informal talk that shaped his literary enterprise. Chief among them was English poet Thomas Edward, whom Frost encouraged to write and offered his generous guidance. Their correspondence—before Edward enlisted himself to the British army and was eventually killed in France in 1917—suggests Frost's sending two manuscripts to his own editor on behalf of Edward. Referring to the other recommendation he had made for another English poet Walter de la Mare and his book *The Listeners and Other Poems*, Frost promised Edward that he would keep advocating. Let me quote Frost's letter in length to illuminate his citing practice, that is, how he endorsed his fellow writers and, in return, commended them for undertaking literary careers:

[336] Mustazza (2019), 1-5; 14.
[337] MacArthur, "Beyond Poet Voice: Sampling the (Non-)Performance Styles of 100 American Poets" (2018); Clement, "Measured Applause: Toward a Cultural Analysis of Audio Collections" (2016).

Meanwhile I wish you could let me have copies of just the poems you are putting into book form. I am not a person of half the influence I should have thought I would be by this time. Nevertheless I must see what I can do to find you a publisher here and save you your copyright. I failed in a way that was no discredit to you with the Four and Twenty Birds. "Too insular" was the praise our publishers damned it with for American purposes. I can see the way Henry Holt looked at it. And then it might have fared better if I could have thrust it upon him in book form—as I did The Listeners. That might have helped the matter. I am making a clean breast of all this to give you a chance to refuse to let me see what I can do with the poems. You needn't feel obliged to humour me (as I do you in that spelling.) I sha'n't go to Holt this time; but to someone else who dropped in on me lately for a talk on what was doing in English writing. Never mind who it was for the present. Get up no hopes—as I know you are incapable of getting up any. Only let me try. It's a shame you shouldn't have something on someone's list over here where I find so many who know and like you. One of my professors at the University of Pennsylvania was liking the "perfect texture" of your prose just the other day—thought he had read all you had written. Mosher of Portland seemed to have a large knowledge of you.[338]

[338] Frost, *Letters*, 494-5.

Such peer support was a mutual practice among Frost's English literary circle, and Frost too was a beneficiary such as when Lascelles Abercrombie volunteered to help sort out Frost's strayed relationship with a London publisher David Nutt.[339]

In such a spirit of reciprocal relationship, and with the understanding that open access is a spectrum, I have devised an interdependent open access model for the pilot audio edition of Robert Frost's public talks and readings. The interdependent open access model is based on the multifaceted copyright conditions with which special collections librarians, the Estate of Robert Frost, the poet's publisher Henry Holt and Company, and I work today. The model also represents theoretical and practical undertakings of the audio edition that are mutually inclusive.

Theoretically, the interdependent open access model complicates our contemporary success narrative the open access advocacy offers—i.e., free access to works would generate exposure and excitement, and it may help consequently promote the work.[340] To date, Frost's public talks, too, are said to have contributed to the "creation, cultivation, and expansion of his audience" and that the payment for his talks increased exponentially from his first performance in 1915 to the end of his life.[341] There is a seemingly convenient alignment between Frost's success narrative and that of open access advocacy's unfounded claim that public exposure will accumulate fame and fortune.[342] The idea, of course, is not new. Indeed, *Publishers Weekly* in 1950 observed that the sales of poetry books were affected by publicity,

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[339] Frost, *Letters*, 338.
[340] When a popular science fiction writer and anti-DRM advocate Cory Doctorow speaks about the benefits of open access, he notes how fame and fortune present a chicken-and-egg situation. That is, especially if one wishes to make financial gains from her artwork. "[B]eing famous won't—in itself—make you rich. But if nobody knows about your work, nobody's going to buy it." Doctorow, 39.
[341] Sheehy et al. (2014), 10; Seale (2014), 318.
[342] Doctorow, 39.

quoting Frost and his four Pulitzer Prizes as their prime example.[343] Following the *TIME* magazine coverage of Frost in 1959, moreover, Holt's sales manager sent out a memo to the company's stockholders, stating that *TIME*'s coverage would surely stimulate sales and that it was a good time to buy more stock.[344]

This narrative around exposure—or the idea that open access acts as an effective free advertisement—however, presents an uneasy tension for the pilot edition when set against a fuller account of Frost's success as an author. The sole emphasis on publicity flattens the managerial efforts that Frost and the people around him made for enabling him to be a vocational poet and also naturalizes a romanticized notion about the poet as a genius, who just needed enough exposure. In reality, Frost's becoming popular was supported by a network of people, including Alfred Harcourt at Holt, who arranged a monthly stipend to support the then poverty-stricken Frost family in 1915; Elinor Frost's foresight in ensuring copies of her husband's books at a local bookstore prior to his Colorado talk event in 1931; literary critic Richard Poirier, who shed light on the complexity of Frost's works in 1977; Charles Green, the head of Jones Library in Amherst, who was the first to invest in the development of a Frost collection in a public library; and so on.[345] So not only did the quality of Frost's work or the numbers of press coverage make him a household poet,

[343] "Modern Poetry Sells in Quantities Or Almost Not At All." *Publishers Weekly*, vol. 157, no. 12, 25 March 1950, 1487-1489.
[344] "Memo to the Trade," Princeton Box 153, Folder 2.
[345] For the financial arrangement made by Harcourt, see Alger. Elinor's letter to Holt on July 14th, 1931 is housed in Princeton. Poirier's *Robert Frost: The Work of Knowing* (1977) discussed how—contrary to the seemingly straightforward language of Frost's poetry—the poet exercised complex linguistic philosophy. As for the account of Green, whom Frost named as the first collector of Frostiana, see Jones Library's "Background Note" in the Robert Frost Collection finding aids as well as Alger, 303.

but also crucial was a network of people who supported and celebrated the poet every step of the way.

Adopting the interdependent open access model, therefore, is one way of acknowledging historical and contemporary stewards of Frost's legacy. As a matter of fact, the pilot audio edition has been informed by my collaborators' respective priorities and interests since the very beginning, expressed through different channels of talks and informal conversations. For example, Frost scholars Donald Sheehy and Mark Richardson first voiced their concerns for the lack of Frost's digital presence in a 2014 MLA panel, where I happened to be an audience member solely because I was there to greet Richardson who was my BA thesis advisor in 2011. Special collections librarians Mike Kelly and Jay Satterfield had also been discussing the need of reformatting Frost's audio collections at Amherst College and Dartmouth College when I proposed, in 2015, to coordinate the existing interests among the community of Frost scholars and archivists.[346]

In terms of practicality, the interdependent open access model also leverages different capacities of collaborating partners rather than treating the difference as inhibiting challenge to publish the audio recordings of Frost's talks. Initially, special collections librarians could not justify large-scale digitization to their institutions or to public funding agencies unless it was guaranteed that the digitized collection would be eventually open to the public. Frost's literary estate, on the other hand, could not waive some of their exclusive copyrights to grant open access without examining the talks' entire transcriptions—something that was only feasible after the digitization. Owing to their institutional and legal constraints, neither libraries nor the estate could

[346] Kelly.

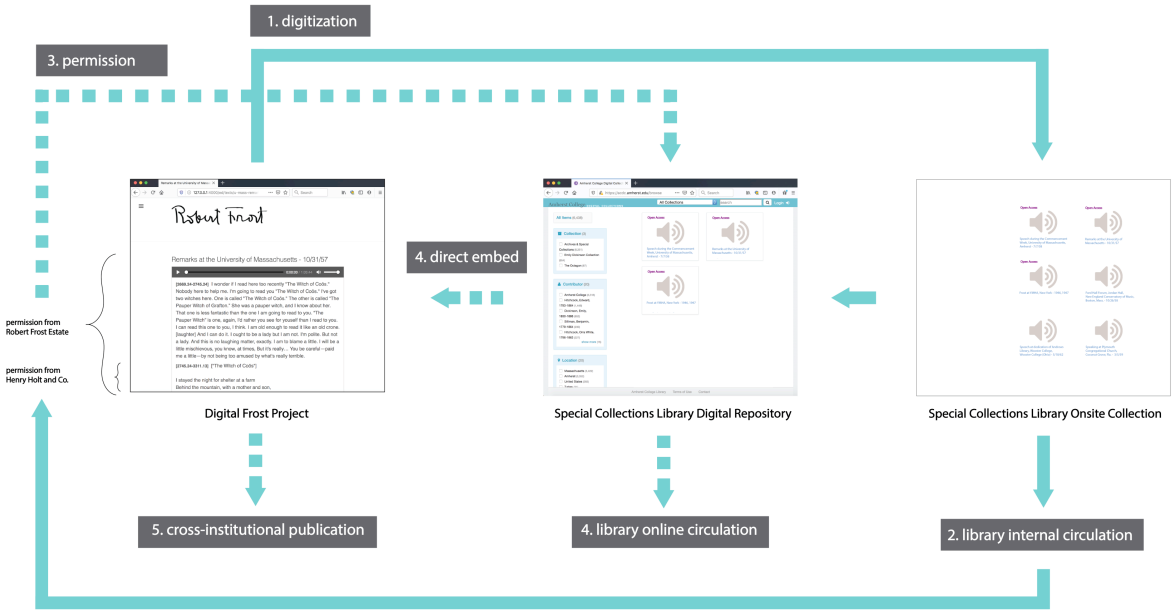
take action though they were aware that the reel-to-reel tapes were gradually deteriorating.

Having recognized this, I first worked with Carole Thompson, the then president of a non-profit organization the Friends of Robert Frost, who had offered to set up a fund to support the digitization and publication effort as her organization decided to retire from its decades-long duty to run the Robert Frost Stone House Museum in Shaftsbury, Vermont. With the external fund, the libraries gained more flexibility with regard to the timing of open-access publication. At the very least, they could produce preservation- and use-copies of audio recordings for internal circulation for the time being per the current US copyright law Section 108, which enables libraries to practice their duty by reproducing copies of their holdings regardless of their copyright status.

In the meanwhile, I asked *PennSound*'s associate director Chris Mustazza and prosodist and then President of Robert Frost Society Natalie Gerber to help me illustrate the implications of developing an open-access audio collection to Frost's twenty-first-century students, researchers, teachers, and fans during the 2017 Robert Frost Symposium. The presentation led to enthusiastic discussion of Frost's unusually dramatic performance of rural New England poems. Among the symposium attendees was Peter Gilbert, then the director of Vermont Humanities Council who also represents the Estate of Robert Frost. Considering the necessary authorization, the estate considered the external fund as well as the sanguine conversations at the symposium as a manifestation of communal interest in the audio edition and granted preliminary permission to proceed with my vision for the open-access publication. As

the official permission request process required information that was only available after the digitization, such consent—albeit informal—was a crucial step forward.

Additionally, I proposed to special collections librarians that we streamline the cataloging and rights management process through my editorial work. Based on my dual training in library science and textual scholarship, I demonstrated how transcriptions, annotations, and textual emendations necessary for the development of a cross-institutional platform could double as a basic cataloging practice. The current finding aids at the special collections libraries offer minimal information about the audio recordings such as the talk's date, venue, and the title. Regarding the talk's content, it had long been beyond the purview of archives' processing work to listen to audio recordings and find in-depth information about each talk. Additionally, since no literary editors had published a complete edition of Frost's talks before, any researchers who were interested in studying Frost's talks needed first to identify the talk event of their possible interests based on sporadic mentions and partial transcriptions incorporated in scholarly articles, monographs, biographies, and letters. To further streamline the effort to manage the copyright permission process, I designed my interface to render audio files through direct embedding so that the open-access permission that I receive from the estate and Holt for the cross-institutional interface would trickle down to the participating libraries [Image 1].



[Image 1: Digital Frost Interdependent Open Access Model]

For the mechanism of such direct embedding, the edition renders audio files and transcriptions by relying on the "webvtt-player" program originally developed by Ed Summers for the Maryland Institute for Technology in the Humanities (MITH) research project "Unlocking the Airwaves: Revitalizing an Early Public and Educational Radio Collection."[347] Additionally, Raffaele Viglianti made adjustments to the original "webvtt-player" with additional JavaScript files so that I—as well as others with similar projects—could use the program with basic web development skills.[348] The webvtt file format used in the program provides time-aligned transcriptions of audio and audiovisual content, relies on a standard HTML feature,

[347] *Unlocking the Airwaves*.
[348] "umd-mith/webvtt-player."

and is compatible with the international guidelines set by the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C).[349]

For the pilot audio edition of Frost's talks and readings, the interdependent open access model not only saved special collections libraries and the estate from dealing with separate permission requests for the external circulation of digitized recordings. It also proved to be an effective way for the estate to ensure the provenance of audio files on the Internet and for me to keep acknowledging the decades-long stewardship of librarians every time a reader visits the cross-institutional platform. Most importantly, the solution born out of the institutional obstacles helped further cement the mutually beneficial work relationship between librarians, copyright holders, and the project coordinator—all motivated by the collective desire to provide a well-curated public platform for Frost's twenty-first-century readers.

As scholarly editors have long examined the sociocultural formation of texts, a similar level of care should be applied to the editorial judgment regarding the configuration of access models. Reflecting on her conversations among the advisory board members of *Emily Dickinson Archive* spearheaded by the Harvard University Press, Martha Nell Smith makes a critical suggestion concerning collaborative editorial labor. She notes that editors working on a single edition need not agree on interpretations of literary works. Rather, argues Smith, editors should showcase the very disagreement and invite readers to see what kinds of editorial judgments are at play in the making of an edition.[350] In thinking about the adoption of open access, I

[349] "WebVTT: The Web Video Text Tracks Format."
[350] Smith (2014), 405-7.

add to Smith's process-oriented editorial approach a self-reflective analysis of the open access advocacy discourse. As I have demonstrated, idealistic access advocacy can highly influence the interpersonal relationship among collaborators. If the discourse should reduce collaborators to adversarial terms or efface the necessary process of listening to all involved parties, editors might wish to reframe the discourse to seek how best to utilize such differences as strengths.

Understanding open access as a spectrum is but one way to make room for dialogues among collaborators because every edition needs its own access model based on its unique conditions. The topic of access models should never be too trivial, too managerial, or too sensitive to warrant critical debates among scholarly editors. Rather, by treating open access as a spectrum, we can expand and transform the need of copyright permission to a process of collaborative, critical inquiry and invites our readers to recognize how different particulars of each edition inform different degrees of access. The rest, talk.

Talk Transcription #1: Remarks at the University of Massachusetts, 1957 October 31

[Introduction by MC]: It has been said that colleges have the indispensable function that they can only highly serve us when they aim not to drill but to create. When they gather from fall, every ray of various genius through their halls, and by the concentrated choirs, set the hearts of the youth on playing. For this, we look tonight to a living American scholar, a man thinking, a man doing, Mr. Robert Frost. [applause]

[0:01:09.9] You said I was a scholar? [MC: I did, Sir.] Said I am a scholar. [laughter] I don't know what's here with this. I hope the machine is working well. I don't know whether I would be a scholar or something worse. [laughter] But I don't care. I am always having adventures these days to set me off talking. I don't have to worry about subject. Somebody said to me the other night after I'd spoken somewhere else. He said, "According to your theory…" He began like that. I said, "Hold on. You mean according to my practice. I haven't had any theories." [laughter] And, well, he didn't regard that at all, that didn't mean anything to him. He just said, "According to your theory, animals can't think." Utter disgrace. Two things there already to talk about, you see. First, I haven't got any theory. Everything I do is according to my practice. (See if anybody's watching.) According to my practice. In poetry, you have no ear unless you are hearing both a rhythm and the meter at the same time. See? You have known. See? Call them my practice. Not theory. According to my practice, animals can think. I often watch them thinking. I don't know what he wanted to involve me in. As I watched him, I thought he came from Tibet or somewhere. [laughter] But he was an American farmer. He said, "But you never can tell these days." What I meant, according to my practice in teaching, nobody thinks. I treat nobody as if he thought who doesn't sometimes make a good metaphor. Bring two things together in the form of a metaphor. Make an association, a connection, you see. That's what I was really talking about. I didn't mean dogs can't talk. I mean, can't think. But I mean grown-up

human beings can't think, for me, unless they make metaphor, innuendo, intonation, hints, double meaning, double entendre, symbol—all of these things. That's just one thing I wanted to address. I don't tell, and I don't say anything like that to convert anybody or to teach anybody anything. I only tell it to people who already know it and want to hear me say it and confirm them in their method, in their beliefs. See? Something like that. I'm not teaching anybody anything.

[0:04:28.1] Then another thing I heard the other day that teased me good deal. I heard that… A friend of mine, a boy I taught—I thought I might have taught him a little—but colored. Gone a good way in the world. Quite well-known. And I heard that he was…that he whistled at being told that perhaps the colored people of the world, of our country, would bring something to us of music and imagination that we haven't ourselves. See, it's mental all right. I wasn't the one who said it. He whistled at that and said, "You want to make entertainers of us." Like Shakespeare—if I'd been there, I'd said. Entertainers like Shakespeare. I wouldn't let him get away with that. I'm surprised he should have said it. For I want to be in the—What do we write poetry for? What is Socrates? Euripides and so on—right place for it. Entertainment, isn't it? The height of it all was entertainment from my point of view. The plays of Shakespeare are called plays. P-L-A-Y-S. Each one of them is a play. A play, a play, you see. These are all the things you run into that help you do your thinking. Place you and all that. This saying, this introduction so pleasant and so complimentary, makes me a scholar. That gives me something to think about. It's another one. Another adventure. Never had it before. Nobody's called me a scholar. [laughter] It's all right. So I'm getting another degree. [laughter] I got a whole lot of them. And, so that's another degree.

[0:06:49.0] Just telling you a thing that happened to me a little bit before I read to you. Reason why? These are free verse poems I recite to you before I begin the regular verse. [laughter] On the train, somebody sat down beside me—a young lady. And the first thing she said to me was, "You look just like my grandfather." I said, "Yes?" That did nothing. [laughter] And then I looked out the window a minute or

two. And then she said, “You a farmer?” [laughter] And I said, “Well, I'm never more complimented than when I am called a farmer except when I'm called an athlete.” [laughter] Alright? I've been called an athlete. I've got called a pitcher. There was an article in *The New Yorker* some years ago about my pitching career.[351] That takes me there. [laughter] Hurler? Pitcher? You know, all these things. It all brings us to Mudville.[352] She was entertaining. I was disposed not to be entertained. I was tired. I had been at Yale. [laughter] I looked out the window then. And I thought that I hadn't been very gracious, you know, social. Then I said, “What do you do?” And what do you suppose she said? She said, “I am a bat/butt buster.” [laughter] She would get rewards all the time, wherever you go. [laughter] That was a new one to me. I said, “Give me a minute or two.” And this brings me to another thing in the matter. This person says a poem to me. Of course, it's a bid. A bid for my appreciation, isn't it? It’s a bid. It's a plea. I beseech you, understand? See? You get it? See? That's what the poem says. And the bat/butt buster. Did I get it? Yeah? I got it for myself. One little thing, I said the other day, there are only two things I cared for in my teaching. One was to make people buy books, get them to own books of their own. And the other was to get them into a state where they would rather see a thing for themselves than have it pointed out to them. So I'm that way. I'm very selfish. I didn't want her to tell me. I want to guess it. I want to get it. See? Bat/butt buster. And I did, pretty well. I want to give you a moment. You'd rather see it for yourself than have me point it out to you, wouldn't you now? [laughter] I said, “You are going to families to straighten out difficult children.” She said, “Yes. I bust them if I can.” Then I said, “But you'd have a hard time.” She said, “Yes.” “And in the end, I'll bet you they don't get really busted until they get out in the street with the other children, and the other little brats bust them.” [laughter] She said, “Yes.” And I said, “You work out of Boston?” And so on. You know, as they say. But never mind the rest of it. [laugher] It was very interesting. It almost cured me of shutting myself away in the trains. I tend to do that

[351] The article in question may be the one written by Raymond Holden, “North of Boston” (June 6, 1931). Also of interest is Robert Frost’s article “A Day of Prowess” published in the 1956 *Sport Illustrated*.

[352] A likely reference to Ernest Thayer’s baseball poem “Casey at the Bat.” The poem was originally written in 1888 and was later popularized by Russell Hunting and DeWolf Hopper as a part of their comic monologue performances.

when I am tired. I ought to always sit out where I'll have something to tell about. Something like that. Ought to. No matter how tired I am.

[0:11:01.3] Well, that brings you to these poems. And this matter of seeing it yourself rather than having it pointed out to you. See, there's so much distress I suffer from—of a good natured kind (I don't mind a little distress in these days)—having good friends of mine do the pointing out where I'd rather people would see for themselves. And I'd be sorry to have anybody with me… I took an attendant with me to a baseball game. I wanted a symbolist along and I took a symbolist with me.[353] Down to Washington. See, all-star game. I needed a symbolist, you know. But usually I don't run anyone along to, say, be mean when I say anything. When I crack a joke, a wise crack or anything, I don't want anybody to say, "He's mean." [laughter] Let me give you a couple of more hard ones. See, the poems, they are easier than this, than what I am going to give you. Two of them. One I've been telling quite a lot, leaving with people to see for themselves.

[0:12:44.8] In the United Nations building, they are setting up on the ground floor, in the room all by itself, all by itself—the ground floor, [they're] making a new floor to support it, clear from the bedrock of Manhattan Island (Has to have that to support it.)—a great chunk, a great lump of ore. Iron. 90% pure. It's ore. It's not refined. Just pure. Very nearly pure iron. It's a remarkable chunk of ore. About fifteen tons it weighs. And it stands there alone with a chair or two in the room. So you have to go in and sit with it. You and me, anybody. It's always unlocked. It's like a retreat room, a natural retreat. I have never been there but I am supposed to take an interest in this stone. Now I'm supposed to see for myself what it means. And I don't want it pointed it out to me any more than you want it pointed out to you. You're thinking—I can hear you. [laughter] Very sensitive I am. I feel the waves coming in and there. But, see, you could see some things that it isn't, probably. It's no light matter. Fifteen tons. [laughter] You got that all right, didn't you? I didn't know I was going to say that. [laughter] But the first thing you might think about. You might get a question about

[353] Most likely Howard Schmitt. See Frost, "A Day of Prowess." *Sports Illustrated* (1956).

it, you know. And say something that you know it. You can't before. They're going to make the whole down floor, you see? The whole down floor. The big room with that thing with two, three chairs. Retreat. Mediation. And that's the underground. People say to me, "Oh I suppose it's so that it kind of balances that building. It must waver in the wind, you know, that tall thing. And it must go like this." And then maybe somebody says it was put in there to give it weight so that if it did go clear over, it would bob up again. [laughter] Like one of these children's toys. That won't do, will it? It's a grave thing. A grave matter.

[0:15:47.6] Then I will say a poem to you to begin with. But I am going to say one or two old ones. Some new ones. One rather new. One will have in it, you know... Do we think, do we try to think that you can have anything any way you want it? See? You can have that piece of iron ore any way you want it. Another guess that it might be, you know… The man that came to me about it—involved me in it—was a Pakistani.[354] A very attractive man who lived in the realm of symbols. You could see that. And very grave about it. And he is a very fine person. It's a grave matter, if you care. And now, this one that I am going to say to you has given me some trouble that way. You know, people making guesses at it. I said to him one day. He's Mohammedan, of course. And a very fine, fine, a very fine man. I was greatly taken with him. Took a great notion to him. He was so good that when he came on an errand, in two minutes he said, "I have no evidence we have met." That's all. And that's the way to pull my leg. You know, very, very, very good. And then when he left me, he hadn't told me his errands, you know. I know what brought it alright—by intonations and symbols. But he didn't tell it. He said "and I had no errand, no errand" when he did this. And as he ran out the door he said, "The rest of my life to you." Just like that. "The rest of my life to you." Well, that makes you want to think right about the great boulder, the great lump. The King of Sweden sending it over. I should say that. That might help you. It's a gift from the King of Sweden, coming in the ship all by itself. [laughter] Now you are right in the middle of all that and all

[354] Ahmed S. Bokhari (1898-1958). See Seale, Lisa. "War and Peace: Robert Frost and the United Nations Meditation Room." *The New England Quarterly*, vol. 77, no.1 (March, 2004).

your English work, fooling around with Melville and Moby Dick and all that sort of thing. And being troubled, you know? Thinking, wondering, what's the matter with you that you don't get things and waiting for teachers to tell you what they are. Now it's never entirely factual. The thing is very... it's supple, you know. You can have it this way and that way. But there is a sort of certainty somewhere in it. In all the uncertainty of it. The pretty play of uncertainty. There is a certainty. And you see I said to him, the Mohammedan, “It might suggest to anyone the Kaaba, the black stone at Mecca.” “Oh,” he said, “No, no, no, no, no, no. That'd be terrible. That came from Heaven. That didn't come from the King of Sweden.” [laughter] “In other words, it's a meteorite?,” the other one asked. See? Came from the heaven. I have never seen it. Very few Christians have. Or, they can see that. That's the Mohammedan.

[0:19:47.0] But now the one that I'm going to say it to you, it’s the kind of thing where you just obviously got this sort of intonation, double ulteriority in it that I call it. That's my own word. You kind of… I've been accused. I got that up. Nobody accused me of it. But I got it out for myself one day when I was bothering people about these things. And I say I got an ulteriority complex. [laughter] You know, but it doesn't mean that I am any worse than anybody. [laughter] We all are living in the world of hints, intonations, you know. Taking hints when there are hints and taking them sometimes when there aren't any. And then get in, making trouble. Busting up families and all that sort of thing. Get in the habit of taking hints when none are intended. Very serious.

[0:20:43.6] This one is called "Mending Wall." And it's out of my farming days that I still project. I still go on with some farming. All you should know. I wouldn't think I was alive unless I had something going on on the land. But I don't do this anymore. Restore the stone wall around things.

[0:21:05:09 Reads "Mending Wall"]

Something there is that doesn't love a wall,
That sends the frozen-ground-swell under it,
And spills the upper boulders in the sun;
And makes gaps even two can pass abreast.
The work of hunters is another thing:
I have come after them and made repair
Where they have left not one stone on a stone,
But they would have the rabbit out of hiding,
To please the yelping dogs. The gaps I mean,
No one has seen them made or heard them made,
But at spring mending-time we find them there.
I let my neighbor know beyond the hill;
And on a day we meet to walk the line
And set the wall between us once again.
We keep the wall between us as we go.
To each the boulders that have fallen to each.
And some are loaves and some so nearly balls
We have to use a spell to make them balance:
'Stay where you are until our backs are turned!'
We wear our fingers rough with handling them.
Oh, just another kind of outdoor game,
One on a side. It comes to little more:
There where it is we do not need the wall:
He is all pine and I am apple orchard.
My apple trees will never get across
And eat the cones under his pines, I tell him.
He only says, 'Good fences make good neighbors.'
Spring is the mischief in me, and I wonder
If I could put a notion in his head:

'*Why* do they make good neighbors? Isn't it
Where there are cows? But here there are no cows.
Before I built a wall I'd ask to know
What I was walling in or walling out,
And to whom I was like to give offense.
Something there is that doesn't love a wall,
That wants it down.' I could say 'Elves' to him,
But it's not elves exactly, and I'd rather
He said it for himself. I see him there
Bringing a stone grasped firmly by the top
In each hand, like an old-stone savage armed.
He moves in darkness as it seems to me,
Not of words only and the shade of trees.
He will not go behind his father's saying,
And he likes having thought of it so well
He says again, 'Good fences make good neighbors.'

[0:23:15.4] See, now you can do a lot of things with that. Of course, you don't need to. But the thing that I'd like to teach you with is not about that. It's easy, that is. As somebody said to me once, that wanted to be too cruel, said "The only thing that you ever wrote that will be remembered is something you didn't get up. 'Good fences make good neighbors,'" he said. "Oh," I said, "I quoted it anyway." [laughter] And he said, "Well, that's, you get that much credit." This happened to me in New York. A friend of mine, Irwin Edman, came up to me in company and he said, "I tell you, Robert, good fences make good burglars."[355] Well, I thought he was talking poetry. He's poet too. As well as a New York wit. He was. He's not living. A great friend of mine. And I thought he was saying something, you know, half philosophy, too. And I thought he meant by that "good fences make good burglars" he meant "if you make a good fence, if you make a good law, a strong law, it makes good criminal." That he was talking like an anarchist from Spain. [laughter] Pick out my countries carefully

[355] Irwin Edman (1896-1954) is Professor of Philosophy at Columbia University.

today. Good symbols. See these countries. Barcelona, I was thinking of. And Barcelona is a symbol, you know. Another symbol. So I gave a kick to it and get away with his philosophy, you know, that law makes crime. I thought that's a myth. But he wasn't satisfied and came back in a little while when I was with somebody else. And he said, "I tell Robert good fences make good burglars."[356] And still there, to see if I get it. It took me some time. I didn't get it till midnight. But some people get it. I tell it wrong to see how fast people get it. See? [laughter] Good fences. I'm not going to solve it for you. But then, there you are, this is this great problem in poetry. Has anybody a right to go around making poems that nobody can get? See? [laughter]

[0:25:53.0] And how deep is deep? See? It's the great problem. How deep is deep enough? To be a fair play with the reader and the listener, you see? It's the problem of all our schooling. It seems to me there is a danger in the classes taking too much pleasure in something that has to be pointed out to you. That's my complaint. I don't mean that I expect anything to be done about it. If I did, I wouldn't sleep. [laughter] Well then, let's go away from that. You see that's in the poems all the time. Some of them very simple like this, I say. I'll just go on now. I won't talk about this. This gives me this chance to say a little about what's bothering people. Young people ask me about it, you know, "What is all this double meaning, this ulteriority?" I suppose there's almost nothing else, is there? There's almost no talk that isn't like that.

[0:27:05.3] This is called "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening." This is an old one of mine.

[356] According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, the term "fence" means "a receiver of stolen goods" or "a place where stolen goods are bought." During the talk delivered at the Bread Loaf School of English on August 2, 1954, Frost offered more explanation about the joke. He said "wasn't I sick of myself when I saw how slow I was to get that? And yet, the words are perfectly good words. I had all the material. I knew what a fence is and how he handles stolen goods for robbers, and I didn't catch it" (Cook, 67).

[0:27:12.6 Reads "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening"]

Whose woods these are I think I know.
His house is in the village though;
He will not see me stopping here
To watch his woods fill up with snow.

My little horse must think it queer
To stop without a farmhouse near
Between the woods and frozen lake
The darkest evening of the year.

He gives his harness bells a shake
To ask if there is some mistake.
The only other sound's the sweep
Of easy wind and downy flake.

The woods are lovely, dark and deep,
But I have promises to keep,
And miles to go before I sleep,
And miles to go before I sleep.

[0:27:52.6] No more insistence on anything about it, you just read through. Then, one called…let's see, "Desert Places." Much later. That's an early one of mine.

[0:28:09.3] "Desert Places"

Snow falling and night falling fast, oh, fast
In a field I looked into going past,
And the ground almost covered smooth in snow,
But a few weeds and stubble showing last.

The woods around it have it—it is theirs.
All animals are smothered in their lairs.
I am too absent-spirited to count;
The loneliness includes me unawares.

And lonely as it is that loneliness
Will be more lonely ere it will be less—
A blanker whiteness of benighted snow
With no expression, nothing to express.

They cannot scare me with their desert places
Between stars—on stars where no human race is.
I have it in me so much nearer home
To scare myself with my own desert places.

[0:29:11.6] Then, let's see. “Two Roads…” This time of year, a little later.

[0:29:19.3 Reads "The Road Not Taken"]

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,
And sorry I could not travel both
And be one traveler, long I stood
And looked down one as far as I could
To where it bent in the undergrowth;

Then took the other, as just as fair,
And having perhaps the better claim,
Because it was grassy and wanted wear;
Though as for that the passing there
Had worn them really about the same,

And both that morning equally lay
In leaves no step had trodden black.
Oh, I kept the first for another day!
Yet knowing how way leads on to way,
I doubted if I should ever come back.

I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence:
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.

[0:30:13.4] You notice I didn't say it. I said there is very little difference between them, almost imperceptible. But it made a lot of difference in the end. That's fine. You might overlook that.

[0:30:27.9] And then, now, one of a little length. A very recent one of mine. I have to remember it. I didn't bring a copy of it with me. I think I can say it. This one's about a dog. And it's really about the shortness of dogs' lives, you see. It's called "One More Brevity." “One More Brevity.” We've all been through that experience with this.

[0:31:15.6 Recites "One More Brevity"]

I opened the door so my last look
Should be taken outside a house or book.
Before I gave up seeing and slept
I said I would see how Sirius kept
His watch-dog eye on what remained
To be gone into if not explained.
But scarcely was my door ajar,

When past the leg I thrust for bar
Pushed in to be my problem guest,
Not a heavenly dog made manifest,
But an earthly dog of the carriage breed;
Who, having failed of the modern speed,
Now asked asylum—and I was stirred
To be the one so dog-preferred. [laughter]
He dumped himself like a bag of bones,
He sighed himself a couple of groans,
And head to tail then firmly curled
Like swearing off on the traffic world. [laughter]
I gave him water, I gave him food.
He rolled an eye with gratitude
(Or merely manners it may have been),
But never so much as lifted chin.
His hard tail loudly smacked the floor
As if beseeching me, “Please, no more,
I can’t explain—tonight at least.”
His brow was perceptibly trouble-creased.
So I spoke in terms of adoption thus:
“Gustie, old boy, Dalmatian Gus,
You’re right, there’s nothing to discuss.
Don’t try to tell me what’s on your mind,
The sorrow of having been left behind, [warped tape]
Or the sorrow of having run away.
All that can wait for the light of day.
Meanwhile feel obligation-free.
Nobody has to confide in me.”
’Twas too one-sided a dialogue,
And I wasn't sure I was talking dog. [laughter]

It brings up that subject, doesn't it? Can dogs talk?

I gave up baffled. But all the same
In fancy, I ratified his name,
Gustie, Dalmatian Gus, that is,
And started shaping my life to his,
Sharing his miles of exercise
And finding him in his right supplies.

Next morning the minute I was about
He was at the door to be let out
As much as to say, “I have paid my call.
You mustn’t feel hurt if now I’m all
For getting back somewhere or further on.”
I opened the door and he was gone.
I was to taste in little the grief
That comes of dogs’ lives being so brief,
Only a fraction of ours at most.
He might have been the dream of a ghost
In spite of the way his tail had smacked
My floor so hard and matter-of-fact.
And things have been going so strangely since
I wouldn’t be too hard to convince,
I might even claim, he was Sirius
(Think of presuming to call him Gus)
The star itself, Heaven’s brightest star,
Not a meteorite, but an avatar,
Who had made this overnight descent
To show by deeds he didn’t resent
My having depended on him so long,
And yet done nothing about it in song.

A symbol was all he could hope to convey,
An intimation, a shot of ray,
A meaning I was supposed to seek,
And finding, wasn't disposed to speak.

That's a new one. [applause]

[0:35:04.8] Glad you liked it. Don't you think it's nice left just that way? That's… You see, I don't know how I happened to make that poem come up to that end. Just that way. Such as we've been talking about. You know, come up, "finding, wasn't disposed to speak." It isn't because I am cussed. [laughter] I am very selfish myself. See? I call it very selfish not to let people point things out to you. I'm very selfish. But sometimes I let people point out something to me. Sometimes I remember I must try to be unselfish. It's one of those niceties of life, you know. How selfish you want to be. That's very hard. Now let's see what else I'll give you.

[0:36:02.9] I suppose… I may say some of the… Now there are degrees, aren't there, in these things. And this one I want is much harder in a way. I am aware of that. But there are sometimes ones that you aren't sure you ought to say in public. The person ought to have the book. You know I can see in faces—you are going to shoot me? [laughter] Shoot if you must. [laughter & applause] You know, it's another puzzling presidency. I've been thinking about this lately. Another puzzle I thought of. I was with somebody who wanted to find out how I was going to vote. [laughter] Because I was with three in Washington. They wanted to find out how I was going to vote. Newspapers. Three interviewers and three cameramen with them, so I was going to be shot. You see? Anyway. And I said that I took refuge in the fifth amendment. [laughter] And didn't tell. So they didn't get out. And I said in fact I take refuge in the fourth amendment. See this is some more of my tricks. And now I don't know what the fourth amendment was. [laughter & applause] They said, "What is it?" I said, "You want me to point it out to you?" You see I've been playing with it inside here. "Want me to point it out to you, you poor fish?" [laughter] Poor fish, that's another

symbol isn't it? [laughter] And you know what day it is? You do, of course, or you wouldn't have applauded it. [laughter] As a matter of fact, it gives every man the right to shoot his enemy by accident. [laughter] Not with a camera. With a real gun. [laughter] Shoot him by accident. It's got to be by accident. So, you got to establish it, you see, that there is no real motive, you see. [laughter] Then you shoot him in the deer season. [laughter] If there's a motive it's very dangerous, they might get you on that.

[0:38:48.5] Well, here we are. Another one. And, you know, what I am saying to you is to release this thing, the constraint there is about it all. I can tell by certain people's faces that they are trying too hard to know what I am talking about. [laughter] I don't want to be that way. That's not the way I've lived. When I want to be really puzzling, I can be really puzzling. But now there is a degree to the poems. Some are very straightforward, simple, you know. And some of them are not hinting much of any. And it would be bad to take a hint from them whey they aren't hinting. So you are in trouble there. That's part of it. But don't strain. Easy does it. [laughter]

[0:39:45.1] This one is called "Directive." "Directive." I've been almost tempted to read this twice to you because it's a bit different. A little different.

[0:39:50:7 Reads "Directive"]

Back out of all this now too much for us,
Back in a time made simple by the loss
Of detail, burned, dissolved, and broken off
Like graveyard marble sculpture in the weather,
There is a house that is no more a house
Upon a farm that is no more a farm
And in a town that is no more a town.
The road there, if you'll let a guide direct you
Who only has at heart your getting lost,

May seem as if it should have been a quarry—
Great monolithic knees the former town
Long since gave up pretense of keeping covered.
And there's a story in a book about it:
Besides the wear of iron wagon wheels
The ledges show lines ruled southeast northwest,
The chisel work of an enormous Glacier
That braced his feet against the Arctic Pole.
You must not mind a certain coolness from him
Still said to haunt this side of Panther Mountain.
Nor need you mind the serial ordeal
Of being watched from forty cellar holes
As if by eye pairs out of forty firkins.
As for the woods' excitement over you
That sends light rustle rushes to their leaves,
Charge that to upstart inexperience.
Where were they all not twenty years ago?
They think too much of having shaded out
A few old pecker-fretted apple trees.
Make yourself up a cheering song of how
Someone's road home from work this once was,
Who may be just ahead of you on foot
Or creaking with a buggy load of grain.
The height of the adventure is the height
Of country where two village cultures faded
Into each other. Both of them are lost.
And if you're lost enough to find yourself

See? "if you're lost enough to find yourself"

By now, pull in your ladder road behind you

And put a sign up CLOSED to all but me.
Then make yourself at home. The only field
Now left's no bigger than a harness gall.
First there's the children's house of make believe,
Some shattered dishes underneath a pine,
The playthings in the playhouse of the children.
Weep for what little things could make them glad.
Then for the house that is no more a house,
But only a belilaced cellar hole,
Now slowly closing like a dent in dough.
This was no playhouse but a house in earnest.
Your destination and your destiny's
A brook that was the water of the house,
Cold as a spring as yet so near the source,
Too lofty and original to rage.
(We know the valley streams that when aroused
Will leave their tatters hung on barb and thorn.)
I have kept hidden in the instep arch
Of an old cedar at the waterside
A broken drinking goblet like the Grail
Under a spell so the wrong ones can't find it,
So can't get saved, as Saint Mark says they mustn't.
(I stole the goblet from the children's playhouse.)
Here are your waters and your watering place. [lapse in tape]
Drink and be whole again beyond confusion.

[0:43:58.6] See, that's a little harder to read aloud. Perhaps I ought not to read it. Now I will read something else that ought to be read aloud. That's one of the questions with me always. Just that difference. Some of those that I care for most. I try them once in a while but I have feelings that they are just not meant for the platform.

[0:44:34.7] I wonder if I have read here too recently "The Witch of Coös." Nobody here to help me. I'm going to read you "The Witch of Coös." I got two witches here. One is called "The Witch of Coös." The other is called “The Pauper Witch of Grafton.” She was a pauper witch, and I know about her. That one is less fantastic than the one I am going to read to you. “The Pauper Witch” is one, again, that I'd rather you saw for yourself than I read to you. I can read this one to you, I think. I am old enough to read it like an old crone. She's an old lady. [laughter] And I can do it. I ought to be a lady but I am not. [laughter] I'm polite. But not a lady. [laughter] And this is no laughing matter, exactly. I am to blame in it a little. I will be a little mischievous, you know, at times. But it's really… You be careful—favor me a little—by not being too amused by what's really terrible. [laughter]

[0:45:48:7 Reads "The Witch of Coös"]

I stayed the night for shelter at a farm
Behind the mountain, with a mother and son,
Two old-believers.

That's old fashion trance-medium, she was. Old fashion trance-medium. You know them. I suppose you consult them. [laughter] About the stock market. I never did. Some do.

Two old-believers. They did all the talking.

The old lady says:

Folks think a witch who has familiar spirits
She could call up to pass a winter evening,
But won’t, should be burned at the stake or something.
Summoning spirits isn’t ‘Button, button,
Who’s got the button,’ I would have them know.

And the son, he is about forty years old. He says:

> Mother can make a common table rear
> And kick with two legs like an army mule.

And she says:

> And when I've done it, what good have I done?
> Rather than tip a table for you, let me
> Tell you what Ralle the Sioux Control once told me.
> He said the dead had souls, but when I asked [him]
> How could that be—I thought the dead were souls,
> He broke my trance. Don't that make you suspicious
> That there's something the dead are keeping back?
> Yes, there's something the dead are keeping back.

And the son says:

> You wouldn't want to tell him what we have
> Up attic, mother?

She says:

> Bones—a skeleton.

And he says:

> But the headboard of mother's bed is pushed
> Against the attic door: the door is nailed.
> It's harmless. Mother hears it in the night

Halting perplexed behind the barrier
Of door and headboard. Where it wants to get
Is back into the cellar where it came from.

And she says:

We'll never let them, will we, son! [laughter] We'll never!

And he says:

It left the cellar forty years ago
And carried itself like a pile of dishes
Up one flight from the cellar to the kitchen,
Another from the kitchen to the bedroom,
Another from the bedroom to the attic,
Right past both father and mother, and neither stopped it.
Father had gone upstairs; mother was downstairs.
I was a baby: I don't know where I was. [laughter]

And she says:

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

When I heard Toffile upstairs in the bedroom
And thought I heard him downstairs in the cellar.
The board we had laid down to walk dry-shod on
When there was water in the cellar in spring
Struck the hard cellar bottom. And then someone
Began the stairs, two footsteps for each step,
The way a man with one leg and a crutch,
Or a little child, comes up. It wasn't Toffile:
It wasn't anyone who could be there.
The bulkhead double-doors were double-locked
And swollen tight and buried under snow.
The cellar windows were banked up with sawdust
And swollen tight and buried under snow.
It was the bones. I knew them—and good reason.
My first impulse was to get to the knob
And hold the door. But the bones didn't try
The door; they halted helpless on the landing,
Waiting for things to happen in their favor.
The faintest restless rustling ran all through them.
I never could have done the thing I did
If the wish hadn't been too strong in me
To see how they were mounted for this walk.
I had a vision of them put together
Not like a man, but like a chandelier. [laughter]
So suddenly I flung the door wide on him.
A moment he stood balancing with emotion,
And all but lost himself. (A tongue of fire
Flashed out and licked along his upper teeth.
Smoke rolled inside the sockets of his eyes.)
Then he came at me with one hand outstretched,
The way he did in life once; but this time

I struck the hand off brittle on the floor,
And fell back from him on the floor myself.
The finger-pieces slid in all directions.
(Where did I see one of those pieces lately?
Hand me my button-box—it must be there.)
I sat up on the floor and shouted, 'Toffile,
It's coming up to you.' [laughter] It had its choice
Of the door to the cellar or the hall.
It took the hall door for the novelty,
And set off briskly for so slow a thing,
Still going every which way in the joints, though,
So that it looked like lightning or a scribble,
From the slap I had just now given its hand.
I listened till it almost climbed the stairs
From the hall to the only finished bedroom,
Before I got up to do anything;
Then ran and shouted, 'Shut the bedroom door,
Toffile, for my sake!' 'Company?' he said, [laughter]
'Don't make me get up; I'm too warm in bed.'
So lying forward weakly on the handrail
I pushed myself upstairs, and in the light
(The kitchen had been dark) I had to own
I could see nothing. 'Toffile, I don't see it.
It's with us in the room though. It's the bones.'
'What bones?' 'The cellar bones—out of the grave.'
That made him throw his bare legs out of bed
And sit up by me and take hold of me.
I wanted to put out the light and see
If I could see it, or else mow the room,
With our arms at the level of our knees,
And bring the chalk-pile down. 'I'll tell you what—

It's looking for another door to try.
The uncommonly deep snow has made him think
Of his old song, *The Wild Colonial Boy*,
He always used to sing along the tote road.
He's after an open door to get outdoors.
Let's trap him with an open door up attic.'
Toffile agreed to that, and sure enough,
Almost the moment he was given an opening,
The steps began to climb the attic stairs.
I heard them. Toffile didn't seem to hear them.
'Quick!' I slammed to the door and held the knob.
'Toffile, get nails.' I made him nail the door shut
And push the headboard of the bed against it.
Then we asked was there anything
Up attic that we'd ever want again. [laughter]
The attic was less to us than the cellar.
If the bones liked the attic, let them have it.
Let them stay in the attic. When they sometimes
Come down the stairs at night and stand perplexed
Behind the door and headboard of the bed,
Brushing their chalky skull with chalky fingers,
And sounds like the dry rattling of a shutter,
That's what I sit up in the dark to say—
To no one any more since Toffile died.
Let them stay in the attic since they went there.
I promised Toffile to be cruel to them
For helping them be cruel once to him.

And the son says:

We think they have a grave down in the cellar.

And she says:

We know they have a grave down in the cellar.

And the son says:

We never could find out whose bones they were.

And she says:

Yes, we could too, son. Tell the truth for once.
They were a man's his father killed for me.
I mean a man he killed instead of me.
The least I could do was to help dig their grave.
We were about it one night in the cellar.
Son knows the story: but 'twas not for him
To tell the truth, suppose the time had come.
Son looks surprised to see me end a lie
We'd kept all these years between ourselves
So as to have it ready for outsiders.
But tonight I don't care enough to lie—
I don't remember why I ever cared.
Toffile, if he were here, I don't believe
Could tell you why he ever cared himself….

[She hand't found the finger-bone she wanted
Among the buttons poured out in her lap.
I verified the name next morning: Toffile.
The rural letter box said Toffie Lajway.]

Then something else. [applause]

[0:55:12.0] Now some of the little ones. Some more little ones again. Here, this, not a very long ago one. But it's in my book. It's called "The Most of it." And it could be called better, I think. "Making the Most of It." I think it would improve the title to call it "Making the Most of It." That's what it's meant to be. And I thought that would suggest that to people, but it doesn't. "The Most of It" is incomplete. This is about a lonely person.

[0:55:53:5 Reads "The Most of It"]

He thought he kept the universe alone;

See, he's that kind of a man. See, I say it like that, "kinda man."

He thought he kept the universe alone;
For all the voice in answer he could wake
Was but the mocking echo of his own
From some tree-hidden cliff across the lake.
Some morning from the boulder-broken beach
He would cry out on life, that what it wants
Is not its own love back in copy speech,
But counter-love, original response.
And nothing ever came of what he cried
Unless it was the embodiment that crashed
In the cliff's talus on the other side,
And then in the far distant water splashed,
But after a time allowed for it to swim,
Instead of proving human when it neared
And someone else additional to him,
As a great buck it powerfully appeared,

Pushing the crumpled water up ahead,
And landed pouring like a water fall,
And stumbled through the rocks with horny tread,
And forced the underbrush—and that was all.

I am going to read that twice to you.

[0:57:09.0 Re-reads "The Most of It"]

He thought he kept the universe alone;
For all the voice in answer he could wake
Was but the mocking echo of his own
From some tree-hidden cliff across the lake.
Some morning from the boulder-broken beach
He would cry out on life, that what it wants
Is not its own love back in copy speech,
But counter-love, original response.
And nothing ever came of what he cried
Unless it was the embodiment that crashed
In the cliff's talus on the other side,
And then in the far distant water splashed,
But after a time allowed for it to swim,
Instead of proving human when it neared
And someone else additional to him,
As a great buck it powerfully appeared,
Pushing the crumpled water up ahead,
And landed pouring like a water fall,
And stumbled through the rocks with horny tread,
And forced the underbrush—and that was all.

[0:58:07.5] That's got the new, see, a different kind of thing, that is. And the thing, you know, that you wonder about. What you write. Especially for—you know what I write—especially poets to promise saying, "Pushing the crumpled water up ahead." You may have seen a dog or a man or a deer do it. I don't know if you've ever seen a deer coming across a pond, a lake, "Pushing the crumpled water up ahead." That's the fun of that.

[0:58:38.7] This is another kind. This is a love poem. Short one. And it's called "Never Again Would Birds' Song Be the Same."

[0:58:45:7] "Never Again Would Birds' Song Be the Same”

He would declare and could himself believe
That the birds there in all the garden round
From having heard the daylong voice of Eve
Had added to their own an oversound,
Her tone of meaning though without the words.
Admittedly an eloquence so soft
Could only have had an influence on birds
When call or laughter carried it aloft.
Be that as may be, she was in their song.
Moreover her voice upon their voices crossed
Had now persisted in the woods so long
That probably it never would be lost.
Never again would birds’ song be the same.
And to do that to birds was why she came.

I'm going to say that twice to you.

[0:59:42.4 Re-reads "Never Again Would Birds' Song Be the Same"]

He would declare and could himself believe
That the birds there in all the garden round
From having heard the daylong voice of Eve
Had added to their own an oversound,
Her tone of meaning but without the words.
Admittedly an eloquence so soft
Could only have had an influence on birds
When call or laughter carried it aloft.
Be that as may be, she was in their song.
Moreover her voice upon their voices crossed
Had now persisted in the woods so long
That probably it never would be lost.
Never again would birds' song be the same.
And to do that to birds was why she came.

See?

[1:00:24.1] Then, let's see. Well, another kind of thing. Another kind of voice entirely. This is called "Provide, Provide." See, you wouldn't know how to say that. I've read the poem so I know how to say it. "Provide, Provide," like that, you see? Like your grandmother. [laughter] This one is in triple rhyme, and it goes like this:

[1:00:53.6 Reads "Provide, Provide"]

The witch that came

It begins in the night. An episode. One of those episodes such as I've been telling you. Something I knew about. I had a friend who led the scrubwomen's strike at Harvard. [laughter] He achieved his purpose, too. I wasn't there. But I know. He's a great friend

of mine. You probably know who he was. You may have read about that at the time. And that was one of the young radical acts. He's quite radical. But this, I just took off from there. I didn't stay there.

The witch that came (the withered hag)
To wash the steps with pail and rag,
Was once the beauty Abishag,

The picture pride of Hollywood.
Too many fall from great and good
For you to doubt the likelihood.

Die early and avoid the fate.
Or if predestined to die late,
Make up your mind to die in state.

Make the whole stock exchange your own!
If need be occupy a throne,
Where nobody can call *you* crone.

Some have relied on what they knew;
Others on being simply true.
What worked for them might work for you.

No memory of having starred
Makes up for later disregard,
Or keeps the end from being hard.

Better to go down dignified
With boughten friendship at your side
Than none at all. Provide, provide!

[laughter & applause]

[1:02:36.9] And you can see how that is meant for public reading. And then I had a fun with it. The first time I read it was in Washington. Right in the height of everything. Right in the height of everything. [laughter] And right in front of me was very prominent person. Almost as prominent as you could have, but not quite. And…how delicately I say these things. [laughter] And he was right down in front of me. So when I got to the end of it like that, I came down. I like to tell this, how you project it, this tone is so much of a poem, you see? It's the whole of it. The whole thing. The tone that's in it, the context. I came down on it, you know, "No memory of having starred // Makes up for later disregard, / Or keeps the end from being hard. // Better to go down dignified / With boughten friendship at your side / Than none at all. Provide, provide!" And then I said, “Or somebody else will provide for ya.” [laughter]

[abrupt cut in tape]

Talk Transcription #2: Speech during Commencement Week, University of Massachusetts, Amherst, 1958 July 7

Hello. I've never been in this hall before, this beautiful hall. But I've been here, as you know, over and over and over again. And I thought I'd be a little reminiscent about it. I came to this town in the winter of 1915 to give one talk at the little college down the street. [laughter] And I was entertained by the first college president I ever met, and his name was Alexander Meiklejohn.[357] And part of the entertainment that evening was a visit from the dean of this then agricultural college. And his name—he was a Welshman, a very famous baseball pitcher, one of the world's greats—Ed Lewis, whose father was a Welsh bard and who had a double interest from that.[358] From the contest that he'd heard in poetry, at Utica, New York, where they had a nice eisteddfod just as in Wales.[359] He had a double interest in poetry as a competition and baseball as a competition. He never got over that. [laughter] And he was invited down to read me one of my poems at the president's house at the other college. He was then Dean here, and he became President of this, and worked hard all his life to turn it into a university, a state university. I know a good deal about it. We got to be great friends. And then he went from being President here to be President of the New Hampshire state, where I followed him to his dying day. And he's one of my great friends. It amuses me to think that I have never had my poems read to me but that once. [laughter] He was a good reader and the poem he read me that night was one I ought to read to you today. It's called "The Death of the Hired Man." It was a new book then in America, in a new book of mine called *North of Boston*.

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[357] Alexander Meiklejohn (1872-1964) served as President of Amherst College between 1912 and 1924.

[358] Edward M. Lewis (1872-1936), an academic administrator at the Massachusetts Agricultural College. He served as Dean for thirteen years, as Acting President several times during and after Kenyon L. Butterfield's presidency, and as President for one year.

[359] Eisteddfod is a competitive festival of music and poetry in Wales.

[0:02:41.1] And since then, many years I've been here and down there, at the other place. [laughter] And I've always had a lingering sentiment about this as an agricultural college. I often meet people who, like me, in their youth, dreamed a dream of being the right kind of a farmer, a romantic farmer, that is, who could at once make a living and have a bookcase in his house. And I saw a farm like that last year. I was asked by the Governor of Vermont to take part in the thing called "Wide Wide World" that brought Vermont in a Vermont sugaring time.[360] And they chose for it, whoever chose it (the Governor of the State or whoever did), one of the most beautiful farms that New England could have to show on television. It's in Shrewsbury, Vermont, and it was this kind of farm. There were a thousand buckets hung, when I was there, on the trees, on the maple trees. A thousand buckets. That's considerable, I may tell you. And they had something like a herd of seventy-five or a hundred cows. And I stayed in their house for a day or two, and I was in various rooms in the house. And there was such a pleasant distribution of books all down the years. Not bought sets or anything like that. But as if that family had always been reading along somewhere. Some books good and some not so good, you know, as they have to be when you aren't instructed by the Book-of-the-Month Club or something like that, you know.[361] [laughter] That way you choose your own and take your own chances and all that. A very, very fascinating place to me.

[0:05:05.0] I meet, constantly, young people like that who are in danger of going farming because they got that sort of sentiment about it. And though they don't know much about it. And some of them get to an agricultural school. And I remember once here, while walking, I saw a man with a beard in a tree with a saw. And he looked like somebody I'd seen before. He resembled a very noted American poet. And it turned out he was the son of the very noted poet. And he had taken the notion a little too late in life to learn how to trim apple trees. And he was in a tree. And he afterward founded a school. Or he was then in process of founding a school for young

[360] "Wide Wide World" is NBC's 90-min documentary series, which aired on Sunday afternoons. The episode in question "It's Sugarin' Time in Vermont!" aired on March, 31, 1957.
[361] Founded in 1926, the Book-of-the-Month Club provided subscribers selective, recently published books.

people who he thought could be saved from the confusion of this world by learning how to trim trees and hoe the ground. And I spoke to him in the tree. It was a romantic moment. Well, that goes on all the time.

[0:06:18.8] I constantly meet people and I fear a little for them that they don't know enough what they are doing because it's rather a hard life. And it's a very practical life. It has many sides to it. Too many sides for most of us. I went through a lot of it. When you write poetry, when you write anything, what do you rely on in the public nature or the public mind? I still find I am relying a good deal on their fondness for the country, and for farming, and their knowledge of tools a little. It's extraordinary. Somebody pointed that out to me and I have to admit this impeachment that I am all full of tools. That I've always been thinking about hoes and rakes and things like that. And scythes, particularly. My favorite weapon is a scythe. [laughter]

[0:07:26.5] I was saying the other day that, you know, here we are again, as so often in the world's history, at a point where a new terrible weapon has been invented. Science has turned up a new terrible weapon. And what do we start doing? We start praying on Sunday and weekdays too, I guess, that it can be turned into a tool. And that's the old biblical story that the weapons should be turned into tools. But vice versa is true, too. When I was very young, the world was still echoing with the great war in Hungary. An outbreak in Hungary like the one you read about, the recent one. And it was an outbreak of farmers, rustics, and peasants against the Austrian Empire. Not against the Russian. And what do you suppose they were armed with mostly? Scythes and pitchforks. They hadn't anything else. They turned tools into weapons. And all the time, where I go now, I am faced with this question of tools and weapons, weapons and tools. And down at the UN, where I visited the other day, they have a lump of iron for you to contemplate in the meditation room on the ground floor. Everybody's welcome. One or two at a time. (I don't know how many—there's only a chair or two there.) But you go in there and contemplate a lump of iron. And I suppose you're to contemplate that lump of iron as tools. But oh dear. See, the trouble

is, it is two things at once it’s not one thing. It's pure iron now. But it's both tools and weapons, isn't it? And it bothers me. There it is.

[0:09:44.7] This poem that I am going to say to you first—a little thing, offhand thing—doesn't come of that visit there but it might have come from that. As I say, it's going to be lost on people who don't know a hoe from a rake. Some people don't know a cow from a horse, you know. [laughter] That's an old joke between the city and the country. The city is contempt for the country and the country is contempt for the city just based on those things, you know. But this is for people who know something about the behavior of hoes.

[00.10.34.3 “The Objection to Being Stepped On”]

At the end of the row
I stepped on the toe
Of an unemployed hoe.

[laughter] See?

It rose in offence
And struck me a blow
In the seat of my sense.

[laughter]

It wasn’t to blame
But I called it a name.
And I must say it dealt
Me a blow that I felt
Like malice prepense.
You may call me a fool,

But *was* there a rule
The weapon should be
Turned into a tool?
But what do we see?
The first tool I step on
Turned into a weapon.

[laughter & applause]

[0:11:22.0] So it's to people versed in country things, a little versed in country things, that I must be addressing myself wherever I am. I never was a good farmer. I was this kind of romantic person that was willing to die to farm, you know. And put in there dead. [laughter] I had a very, very, very severe time for ten years. But I did it. And I still am something—always have one toe in it anyway. Never without some farming going on. And I like to be thought of that way. Nothing of [the kind] that my publishers have a right to advertise, you know. I'm not a genuine farmer. But I live with farmers and I am a Vermonter and all that.

[0:12:21.3] Sometimes they remember. Once I was down in New York on my way to speak at where they don't know anything about farming. Downtown and at the New School of Social Research and my friends down there. On my way down, I had a little extra time. I stopped in to watch some Newsreel or something like that. [362] And somebody was telling the difference between an introvert and an extrovert, wagging his finger. I often think of Ed Lewis. When he taught here—and he was a good teacher, you know—he didn't use one finger. He used two like a baseball pitcher. [laughter] He always applied two fingers. He never got out of that habit. Two fingers always came on. [laughter] But this fellow was talking about introverts and extroverts. Well, it was just what I wanted to hear for my purposes down when I got to my lecture place. I just began by saying that I'd just been hearing about extroverts and introverts. And I wanted them to know I was neither an extrovert nor an introvert.

[362] A Newsreel is a documentary film concerning the current affairs. It was typically shown in cinemas.

I was just a plain vert from Vermont. [laughter] And I hope they know enough heraldry to know what vert means.[363] You have to know heraldry to know that. You see, all this depends on people knowing something that they perhaps don't know. But then you do this on a percentage basis. [laughter] You lose some.

[0:14:00.2] But now, suppose I read. I often am distressed that people come into the country life of America with so little to go on. So little understanding of my attractions, my affections, towards a person like Ed Lewis, who was known for this university, taught a person like Bernard DeVoto, a person I got to know very well just because he wrote one pretty article, years ago, in one of the magazines, on how many—how very few hundred dollars a year—cash a person could have a good life on in New Hampshire and Vermont.[364] And you wouldn't believe what I am going to say. The cash was three hundred dollars. To understand what the good life was out of that moved me. So that we grew to be great friends. I know all about that, part of it, still do. And my anger was for people that thought everybody ought to be moved off farms like that, and moved out to Iowa where there's some soil to work, you know. We have a story. I never told any anecdotes much. I never told an anecdote till I was over fifty. I wasn't the anecdotal kind. I admired people who did. Envied them. But the one little anecdote I may be permitted here.

[0:15:44.2] A farmer from Iowa stopped beside one of our farms up there, looked out his car window, over the stone wall at a man hoeing, a Vermonter hoeing. And said to him, "You haven't got much soil there, have you?" And he says, "Not much." And he says "You haven't got inches while we got feet out in Iowa, I think, likely." He says "So I don't see how you earn a living." He says, "We earn a living. We earn a little more than living. What we make more, we invest in Western farm mortgages." [laughter] That's a good idea.

[363] In heraldry, vert refers to the color green.
[364] DeVoto, Bernard. "New England: There She Stands." *Harper's*, March 1932.

[0:16:33.4] You see, just the point of that is the simplicity of it that I've lived in and still live with. I live in the little town of Ripton, Vermont. And I suppose there are two, three hundred people left in the whole township. Ten square miles. There used to be six sawmills there, and there used to be six schoolhouses. There's one schoolhouse left and no sawmill. And things have declined, but they are quiet. Rather nice, you know. A lot of nice abandoned roads to go walking in. No cars to bother you—that sort of thing. Nice people too. But the understanding of them is just something that I want to say here. (I didn't mark that poem. I can't find it. I thought I knew it. I got a book here that doesn't got any directory in it.) [laughter] Well it ends up like this. Just I won't read that whole poem. It's about a burned out place. The house is gone. The barn is left. And the only life left in the place is the swallows that go in and out of the broken windows in the barn. And you might be riding by and think that even the swallows were sad. But you have "to be versed in country things / Not to believe the phoebes wept." [365] You can get a good in the sadness out of it that isn't in it. Things go, things come. Even you know, you have to know, you have to live with it long time to know that some of the thing that looks like—slum? We got a one-house slum, maybe, you say. If you looked all over you might find something you call a slum. One house. I won't tell you where it is. Ten miles square, we are, you see. Maybe you couldn't find it. But if we have a one-house slum, the people in it are jaunty about it. You wouldn't want to interfere with them. Social workers better let them alone. [laughter] The funny part of it is how much company they have. So many cars parked by the house every night till two o'clock in the morning. I don't know about it. I heard somebody say about another town where there is a house like that. We were comparing towns. He said, "Oh yeah," he knew somebody over another place, over in New Hampshire. When he got tired of the crowd that stay up, you know, very late, have a good time—I don't know what they talk about, what they do, but—the man (the head of the family), he said, "You folks can stay here all night if you want. I am going to bed." And he took the tablecloth off the table, wrapped himself in it, and laid down the corner. [laughter] That's, you know, "One has to be versed in country things." [laughter] To know how to take them.

[365] Last two lines from "The Need of Being Versed in Country Things" with variation.

[0:20:05.4] I am going to read you this poem that I heard read to me here called "The Death of the Hired Man." I've found, many times, the poem like this is a test with people. My friends, they don't get it, you know. They don't know the spirit of it. Here is a man, his wife, and a hired man at the point of death. But their attitude is—you have to be versed in country things to get it right. Some get somewhere near it. You can get too much sociological significance out of it, you know. For me, it isn't meant like that at all. It's about human things. And it isn't just New England. I think when I was young, I thought this kind of hired man was peculiar to New England. But many times since I've been told stories very like this in other parts of the country. Just saying. This sort of thing. It's in blank verse.

[0:21:21.1 "The Death of the Hired Man"]

Mary sat musing at the lamp-flame at the table
Waiting for Warren. When she heard his step,
She ran on tip-toe down the darkened passage
To meet him in the doorway with the news
And put him on his guard. 'Silas is back.'
She pushed Warren outward with her through the door
And shut it after her. 'Be kind,' she said.
She took the market things from Warren's arms
And set them on the porch, then drew him down
To sit beside her on the wooden steps.

'When was I ever anything but kind to him?
But I'll not have the fellow back,' he said.
'I told him so last haying, didn't I?
If he left then, I said, that ended it.
What good is he? Who else will harbor him
At his age for the little he can do?

What help he is there's no depending on.
Off he goes always when I need him most.
He thinks he ought to earn a little pay,
Enough at least to buy tobacco with,
So he won't have to beg or be beholden.
"All right," I say, "I can't afford to pay
Any fixed wages, though I wish I could."
"Someone else can." "Then someone else will have to."
I shouldn't mind his bettering himself
If that was what it was. You can be certain,
When he begins like that, there's someone at him
Trying to coax him off with pocket-money,—
In haying time, when any help is scarce.
In winter he comes back to us. I'm done.'

'Sh! not so loud: he'll hear you,' Mary said.

'I want him to: he'll have to sooner or later.'

'He's worn out. He's asleep beside the stove.
When I came up from Rowe's I found him here,
Huddled against the barn-door fast asleep,
A miserable sight, and frightening, too—
You needn't smile—I didn't recognize him—
I wasn't looking for him—and he's changed.
Wait till you see.'

'Where did you say he'd been?'

'He didn't say. I dragged him to the house,
And gave him tea and tried to make him talk.

I tried to make him talk about his travels.
Nothing would do: he just kept nodding off.'

'What did he say? Did he say anything?'

'But little.'

'Anything? Mary, confess
He said he'd come to ditch the meadow for me.'

'Warren!'

'But did he? I just want to know.'

'Of course he did. What would you have him say?
Surely you wouldn't grudge the poor old man
Some humble way to save his self-respect.
He added, if you really care to know,
He meant to clear the upper pasture, too.
That sounds like something you have heard before?
Warren, I wish you could have heard the way
He jumbled everything. I stopped to look
Two or three times—he made me feel so queer—
To see if he was talking in his sleep.
He ran on Harold Wilson—you remember—
The boy you had in haying four years since.
He's finished school, and teaching in his college.
Silas declares you'll have to get him back.
He says they two will make a team for work:
Between them they will lay this farm as smooth!
The way he mixed that in with other things.

He thinks young Wilson a likely lad, though daft
On education—you know how they fought
All through July under the blazing sun,
Silas up on the cart to build the load,
Harold along beside to pitch it on.'

'Yes, I took care to keep well out of earshot.'

'Well, those days trouble Silas like a dream.
You wouldn't think they would. How some things linger!
Harold's young college boy's assurance piqued him.
After so many years he still keeps finding
Good arguments he sees he might have used.
I sympathize. I know just how it feels
To think of the right thing to say too late.
Harold's associated in his mind with Latin.
He asked me what I thought of Harold's saying
He studied Latin like the violin
Because he liked it—that an argument!
He said he couldn't make the boy believe
He could find water with a hazel prong—
Which showed how much good school had ever done him.
He wanted to go over that. But most of all
He thinks if he could have another chance
To teach him how to build a load of hay—'

'I know, that's Silas' one accomplishment.
He bundles every forkful in its place,
And tags and numbers it for future reference,
So he can find and easily dislodge it
In the unloading. Silas does that well.

He takes it out in bunches like big birds' nests.
You never see him standing on the hay
He's trying to lift, straining to lift himself.'

'He thinks if he could teach him that, he'd be
Some good perhaps to someone in the world.
He hates to see a boy the fool of books.
Poor Silas, so concerned for other folk,
And nothing to look backward to with pride,
And nothing to look forward to with hope,
So now and never any different.'

Part of a moon was falling down the west,
Dragging the whole sky with it to the hills.
Its light poured softly in her lap. She saw it
And spread her apron to it. She put out her hand
Among the harp-like morning-glory strings,
Taut with the dew from garden bed to eaves,
As if she played unheard some tenderness
That wrought on him beside her in the night.
'Warren,' she said, 'he has come home to die:
You needn't be afraid he'll leave you this time.'

'Home,' he mocked gently.

'Yes, what else but home?
It all depends on what you mean by home.
Of course he's nothing to us, any more
Than was the hound that came a stranger to us
Out of the woods, worn out upon the trail.'

Then he says:

'Home is the place where, when you have to go there,
They have to take you in.'

And she says:

'I should have called it
Something you somehow haven't to deserve.'

Warren leaned out and took a step or two,
Picked up a little stick, and brought it back
And broke it in his hand and tossed it by.
'Silas has better claim on us you think
Than on his brother? Thirteen little miles
As the road winds would bring him to his door.
Silas has walked that far no doubt today.
Why doesn't he go there? His brother's rich,
A somebody—director in the bank.'

'He never told us that.'

'We know it though.'

'I think his brother ought to help, of course.
I'll see to that if there is need. He ought of right
To take him in, and might be willing to—
He may be better than appearances.
But have some pity on Silas. Do you think
If he had any pride in claiming kin
Or anything he looked for from his brother,

He'd keep so still about him all this time?'

'I wonder what's between them.'

'I can tell you.
Silas is what he is—we wouldn't mind him—
But just the kind that kinsfolk can't abide.
He never did a thing so very bad.
He don't know why he isn't quite as good
As anybody. Worthless though he is,
He won't be made ashamed to please his brother.'

'*I* can't think Si ever hurt anyone.'

'No, but he hurt my heart the way he lay
And rolled his old head on that sharp-edged chair-back.
He wouldn't let me put him on the lounge.
You must go in and see what you can do.
I made the bed up for him there tonight.
You'll be surprised at him—how much he's broken.
His working days are done; I'm sure of it.'

'I'd not be in a hurry to say that.'

'I haven't been. Go, look, see for yourself.
But, Warren, please remember how it is:
He's come to help you ditch the meadow.
He has a plan. You mustn't laugh at him.
He may not speak of it, and then he may.
I'll sit and see if that small sailing cloud
Will hit or miss the moon.'

It hit the moon.
Then there were three there, making a dim row,
The moon, the little silver cloud, and she.

Warren returned—too soon, it seemed to her,
Slipped to her side, caught up her hand and waited.

'Warren?' she questioned.

'Dead,' was all he answered.

Then different sorts of things. Some short ones. [applause]

[0:30:13.9] Then one that everybody's handled and made all sorts of things out of in school and out of school. It's going on *Saturday Review* by a friend of mine right now.[366] One little innocent poem like this takes two, or three, or four pages, I believe, in the *Saturday Review*. He says—it amuses me to tell at the expense of critics in general that—he assumes, he says, he ventures to say, he's willing to bet (or something like that) that before I wrote this simple little poem, I wrestled with something approaching it all night long, and then came clear in a moment, you know. And that's happened to me with Algebra and Geometry. Geometry particularly. I 've wrestled all night with something, and kept right on wrestling with it in my sleep and got right up and did it in the morning. See? But, he thinks that's the way that poem must have been written. Well it's quite an adventure to say when what I did all night… My friends have long known, everybody's known that I wondered if he hadn't heard it. That what I did all that night was write a long, long poem without turning back and printed as a poem "New Hampshire." And it's right where he could see whether I wrestled with it or not. But it's alright. It's his guess. He's right to guess. He could say that that was wrestling, too. As bad as wrestling if he wanted, you know.

[366] Ciardi, John. "Robert Frost: The Way to the Poem." *Saturday Review,* 12 April 1958.

He's got a way out of it. He said wrestled with that all night and then rather a nice little clear poem in the morning. You know, psychologists have all sorts of ingenuity, he can probably prove that the little poem is derived from this great big thing about "New Hampshire." Though it brings in all sorts of things, I don't know. It's alright. I will have a good time with him this summer. I will be seeing him pretty soon. I hope he doesn't misunderstand my speaking of it in public. Both he and I live a very public life. So all our intimacies are all in the open, you know. The little poem is like this. And you wouldn't know what's all this fuss about it, those of you who have never heard it before. It's called "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening."

[0:32:41.2] "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening"

Whose woods these are I think I know.
His house is in the village though;
He will not see me stopping here
To watch his woods fill up with snow.

My little horse must think it queer
To stop without a farmhouse near
Between the woods and frozen lake
The darkest evening of the year.

He gives his harness bells a shake
To ask if there is some mistake.
The only other sound's the sweep
Of easy wind and downy flake.

The woods are lovely, dark and deep,
But I have promises to keep,
And miles to go before I sleep,
And miles to go before I sleep.

[applause]

[0:33:41.7] He praises the poem. He admires it, he cares for it, he loves it. Just that, you know, I couldn't ask anything of him. But it’s amusing that he thinks—he's got twisted—the night I spent and struggled, you know. The struggle is all right in print, in the same book. He just didn't happen to hear it. He doesn't listen to gossip. Lots of gossip going around—that I start. Emanates from me.

[0:34:11.3] Well, now some other little poems like that. This one is called "The Road Not Taken."

[0:34:16:5] "The Road Not Taken"

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,
And sorry I could not travel both
And be one traveler, long I stood
And looked down one as far as I could
To where it bent in the undergrowth;

Then took the other, as just as fair,
And having perhaps the better claim,
Because it was grassy and wanted wear;
Though as for that the passing there
Had worn them really about the same,

And both that morning equally lay
In leaves no step had trodden black.
Oh, I kept the first for another day!
Yet knowing how way leads on to way,
I doubted if I should ever come back.

I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence:
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.

[0:35:21.7] A little more water. [applause] I had nobody to introduce me to tell you all that I have been having a very bad cold. And I am a little down in the voice right now. You can hear it. I do my own apologies. But the water will help a lot.

[0:35:51.3] And then many a poem like that. Of that kind. Then suppose I do another one not so long as "The Death of the Hired Man." This is another kind of adventure in the country. When I lived in a farm, when I was farming, we really had mud time. See, the world hadn't all been concreted down. Now the grass can't get through even, you know. But in those days, there was a month there when you couldn't go abroad. We didn't leave our farm. Just a month. If you did, you dragged your wheels up to the hub, right by my house. Nobody went by. It was lovely. [laughter] More isolated we were than any snow time. Stricter snow years. But the mud time was all. And this is the memory of mud time, and the first people that came by were on foot.

[0:37:10.6 Reads "Two Tramps in Mud Time"]

Out of the mud two strangers came
And caught me splitting wood in the yard.
And one of them put me off my aim
By hailing cheerily 'Hit them hard!'
I knew pretty well why he dropped behind
And let the other go on a way.
I knew pretty well what he had in mind:
He wanted to take my job for pay.

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

The sun was warm but the wind was chill.
You know how it is with an April day
When the sun is out and the wind is still,
You're one month on in the middle of May.
But if you so much as dare to speak,
A cloud comes over the sunlit arch,
A wind comes off a frozen peak,
And you're two months back in the middle of March. [laughter]

That does, you know, just as well for country things as it does for sitting on the bleachers in baseball.[367] [laughter] Their early ball game.

A bluebird comes tenderly up to alight
And turns to the wind to unruffled a plume
His song so pitched as not to excite
A single flower as yet to bloom.
It is snowing a flake: and he half knew
Winter was only playing possum.
Except in color he isn't blue.

[367] Seats that are constantly exposed to the sun.

But he wouldn't advise a thing to blossom.

[The water for which we may have to look
In summertime with a witching-wand,
In every wheelrut's now a brook,
In every print of a hoof a pond.
Be glad of water, but don't forget
The lurking frost in the earth beneath
That will steal forth after the sun is set
And show on the water its crystal teeth.]

The time when most I loved my task
These two must make me love it more
By coming with what they came to ask.
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.

Out of the woods two hulking tramps
(From sleeping God knows where last night,
But not long since in the lumber camps).
They thought all chopping was theirs of right.
Men of the woods and lumberjacks,
They judged me by their appropriate tool.
Except as a fellow handled an ax,
They had no way of knowing a fool.

Nothing on either side was said.
They knew they had but to stay their stay

And all their logic would fill my head:
As that I had no right to play
With what was another man’s work for gain.
My right might be love but theirs was need.
And where the two exist in twain
Theirs was the better right—agreed.

But yield who will to their separation,
My object in living is to unite
My avocation and my vocation
As my two eyes make one in sight.
Only where love and need are one,
And the work is play for mortal stakes,
Is the deed ever really done
For Heaven and the future’s sakes.

That’s out of my thinking. [applause]

[0:40:32.9] And I am always thinking, in the next edition I print, that I'm going to make a hyphenated work out of it. "Only where love and need are one / And the work …”—and then I ought to have this all hyphenated—“And the work is play-for-mortal-stakes." Play-for-mortal-stakes, that is not just play but play-for-mortal-stakes. The big gamble. The real big gamble of life. I mean to make that very serious.

[0:41:00.8] Then, suppose, here’s another very countrified one. A lot of my politics hidden in the woodchuck's talk. This is the little rhymed piece. Couplets, quatrains, and the woodchuck speaking. And it's very smug. I'd like to say it's a most Vermontly poem. It rings with Vermont. Smugness. It's smug and love poem—both. I didn't say snug. I said a smug love poem. [laughter] You have to be careful in this world. The woodchuck says:

[0:41:51.7 Starts from the second stanza of "A Drumlin Woodchuck"]

My own strategic retreat
Is where two rocks almost meet,
And still more secure and snug,
A two-door burrow I dug.

With those in mind at my back
I can sit forth exposed to attack
As one who shrewdly pretends
That he and the world are friends.

All we who prefer to live
Have a little whistle we give,
And flash, at the least alarm
We dive down under the farm.

We allow some time for guile
And don’t come out for a while
Either to eat or drink.
We take occasion to think.

And if after the hunt goes past
And the double-barreled blast
(Like war and pestilence
And the loss of common sense),

If I can with confidence say
That still for another day,
And even another year,
I will be there for you, my dear,

It will be because, though small
As measured against the All,
I have been so instinctively thorough
About my crevice and burrow.

[laughter & applause]

[0:42:57.9] You know, an addition to that I wrote right at the same time. But I thought it was too outspoken so I moved it a way off from that. See, it's printed in another part of the book. Let's see if I can say that one.

[0:34:20.0 Reads "Triple Bronze"]

The Infinite's being so wide
Is the reason the Powers provide
For inner defense my hide.
For next defense outside

I build myself this time
Of wood or granite or lime
A wall too hard for crime
Either to breach or climb.

Then a number of us agree
On a national boundary.
And that defense makes three
Between too much and me.

[laughter & applause]

[0:43:54.9] This comes as saying: question that's brought altogether now, you know, the world is one world and no boundaries and everything. And people have made… I'm not going to keep on with that theme. I thought maybe I'd read you "Mending Wall." But I guess I'll say "Birches." That's more innocent. [laughter]

[0:44:19.8] You know, I have come to know a lot more about birches than I knew when I wrote this poem. The different kinds of birches. But I began with this interest, the observation, there. I lived further North than I did when I had written this. Up further North. Where there are fewer of the smaller birch that I was really writing about in this. The so-called gray birch. I live now where the White Mountain birches that are not at all playful. You can't play with them the way you do these. They are brittle. They break your neck if you try this sort of thing on them. But I lived with these. These were around the schoolhouse where I went school and they were on my farm. The smaller birch. I don't like to call them gray. They are white. "Gray" belittles them. That's the name for them, I believe. The common name.

[0:45:22.2] When I came here today, I bade farewell to my friends, you see. I didn't know whether I'd live through this or not. [laughter] A bad cold. I was saying today, I said to a doctor, "Is there nothing you can do about this cold? I have so much ahead of me." He said, "If there is anything ever can be done about the common cold, it'll cover the front page of all newspapers in the country." You see, be front-page news. "Not a thing can be done," he said. So you just have to take it. You have suffered with me. Another thing he said was, "We are advised now in the medical schools when we can't do anything about a cold, just help it go into pneumonia and we can do something about that." [laughter]

[0:46:23.2 Reads "Birches"]

When I see birches bend to left and right
Across the lines of straighter darker trees,

You know, as I watch them as I go down, wherever I go, I am inclined to see whether I get my poems right. See, "When I see birches bend to left and right / Across the lines of straighter darker trees." I am always looking to see if they are behaving right, you know. [laughter] Behaving as my saying in the poem. I watch it as I go down the coast, the shoreline, you know. There are lots of them there. And they are still going.

When I see birches bend to left and right
Across the lines of straighter darker trees,
I like to think some boy's been swinging them.
But swinging doesn't bend them down to stay
As ice-storms do. Often you must have seen them
Loaded with ice a sunny winter morning
After a rain. They click upon themselves
As the breeze rises, and turn many-colored
As the stir cracks and crazes their enamel.
Soon the sun's warmth makes them shed crystal shells
Shattering and avalanching on the snow-crust—
Such heaps of broken glass to sweep away
You'd think the inner dome of heaven had fallen.
They are dragged to the withered bracken by the load,
And they seem not to break; though once they are bowed
So low for long, they never right themselves:
You may see their trunks arching in the woods
Years afterwards, trailing their leaves on the ground
Like girls on hands and knees that throw their hair
Before them over their heads to dry in the sun.
But I was going to say when Truth broke in
With all her matter-of-fact about the ice-storm
I should prefer to have had 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 alone.
One by one he subdued his father's trees
By riding them down over and over again
Until he took the stiffness out of them,
And not one but hung limp, not one was left
For him to conquer. He learned all there was
To learn about not launching out too soon
And so not carrying the tree away
Clear to the ground. He always kept his poise
To the top branches, climbing carefully
With the same pains you use to fill a cup
Up to the brim, and even above the brim.
Then he flung outward, feet first, with a swish,
Kicking his way down through the air to the ground.
So was I once myself a swinger of birches.
And so I dream of going back to be.
It's when I'm weary of considerations,
And life is too much like a pathless wood
Where your face burns and tickles with the cobwebs
Broken across it, and one eye is weeping
From a twig's having lashed across it open.
I'd like to get away from earth awhile
And then come back to it and begin over.
May no fate willfully misunderstand me
[And half grant what I wish] and snatch me away
Not to return. Earth's the right place for love:

There isn't any place… "Earth's the right place for love: / I know no place where it's likely to go better." I said something wrong there.

[I don’t know where it’s likely to go better.]
I’d like to go by climbing a birch tree,
And climb black branches up a snow-white trunk
Toward heaven, till the tree could bear no more,
But dipped its top and set me down again.
That would be good both going and coming back.
One could do worse than be a swinger of birches.

[0:49:52.7] You see, I slipped on some line there. [applause] It's funny I did that. I thought I knew that better than I knew anything in the world. Something on that one line. Let's see. "Earth's the right place for love: / I don't know where it's likely to go better," I said. That’s it. I thought so. “I don't know where it's likely to go better." That’s it. Important to get that right.

[0:50:35.6] That's the kind of thing that places you in a way, you know, about how much you live here and how much you are waiting to live somewhere else. You know, it makes one of the divisions between the Old Testament and the New Testament. Isn't that a strange thing? Just that's what I am saying there. Between the Old Testament and the New Testament. I was in a little store not so very long ago with three Jewish friends running it. They are very faithful Jews. One of them said to me, "Answer one question, will you?" I said, "Two, three, any number. Come ahead." He said, "I just want to ask you one. Do you believe in the immortality of the soul?" I said, "You don't, do you?" He said, "We are not interested in that." That's what he said. It's kind of interesting. I'm not settling that question. But it's interesting to see somebody—the Old Testament is his. He's not interested in that. It's all about differences. When you hold the Bible in your hand, you are holding both those together, you know. Two things. The one where the concern is all, most entirely, and the other one.

[0:52:21.5] Now I mustn't keep you too long, must I? This funny time of day. Must be getting hungry. [laughter] What time did we begin? Did you notice? Five? Alright.

Then I've done about enough. Shall I do a gay one or two before I leave you? [applause] Let me do one other, then one gay one. Two little ones here. This is about tree at my window.

[0:52:55.5 Reads "Tree at My Window"]

Tree at my window, window tree,
My sash is lowered when night comes on;
But let there never be curtain drawn
Between you and me.

Vague dream-head lifting out of the ground,
And thing next most diffuse to cloud,
Not all your light tongues talking aloud
Could be profound.

That's the leaf talking.

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.

That day she put our heads together,
Fate had her imagination about her,
Your head so much concerned with outer,
Mine with inner, weather.

[applause]

[0:53:54.7] And then, this one about an ant. An A-N-T. [laughter] And this ought to amuse you by the rhymes in it. That's part of the fun. Most of the fun. And I always think the fun of rhymes is just this. You watch the poet to see whether he is writing the poem or the rhymes are leading him around by the nose. [laughter] And he's losing his meaning somewhere before he gets through with his difficulty of rhymes. That's the way I look at poems. And it's a kind of a game, you see. You went to write into it. And you can tell. How can you tell? You can tell what he is trying to do and you can tell he isn't doing it. [laughter] See, that's nine times out of ten. But you have to watch my poem, this one. The rhymes are close together, and the lines are short. So you can watch this thing running away from me, if you want. See if it does. See whether I control it. Whether my strong will prevails. We used to have a poetess down here by the name of Emily Dickinson, you know. When rhymes got in her way, she just trampled them. [laughter] She just came tearing through. Willful lady. And that's alright, too. It gives you great strength. Not necessarily strength but a willful lady, you know, a willful woman, having her own way. Darn the rhymes, you know. [laughter] Now this goes like this.

[0:55:35.0 Reads "Departmental"]

An ant on the tablecloth
Ran into a dormant moth

Did I tell you the circumstances? I was sitting and there was a moth that had fallen under the lamp. And an ant crossed the tablecloth and invited me along there with those two things.

An ant on the tablecloth
Ran into a dormant moth
Of many times his size.
He showed not the least surprise.

See? Watch the rhymes.

His business wasn't with such.
He gave it scarcely a touch,
And was off on his duty run.
But if he encountered one
Of the hive's enquiry squad
Whose work is to find out God
And the nature of time and space,
He would put him onto the case.
Ants are a curious race;
One crossing with hurried tread
The body of one of their dead
Isn't given a moment's arrest—
Seems not even impressed.
But he no doubt reports to any
With whom he crosses antennae, [laughter]
And they no doubt report
To the higher up at court.
Then word goes forth in Formic:

That's that acid language [laughter] that the critics use. The poets don't use that.

Then word goes forth in Formic:
'Death's come to Jerry McCormic,
Our selfless forager Jerry.

See, that's all socialism in one line. [laughter]

Our selfless forager Jerry.
Will the special Janizary

Whose office it is to bury
The dead of the commissary
Go bring him home to his people.
Lay him in state on a sepal.
Wrap him for shroud in a petal.
Embalm him with ichor of nettle.
This is the word of your Queen.'
And presently on the scene
Appears a solemn mortician;
And taking formal position
With feelers calmly atwiddle,
Seizes the dead by the middle,
And heaving him high in air,
Carries him out of there.
No one stands round to stare.
It is nobody else's affair.

It couldn't be called ungentle.
But how thoroughly departmental.

[laughter & applause]

All right, thank you. Closing hour, closing hour. All very nice. Lovely.

[applause]

Talk Transcription #3: Frost at YMHA, New York, Circa 1946

I suppose I never have a book come out. I never come to a place like this without asking myself a certain question that I've been taught to ask. I went years and years and years of my life without asking it. But I have been asked so many times by young people, college people, friends, that now I get to saying to myself, “Whom am I addressing? To whom do I speak? To whom do I write? Have I any consciousness of choosing my readers?” In this pulpit I can cross my heart and say that honestly, I never did ask that question in the old days. Never thought of it. I suppose if I had been asked, still I'd say I was writing not out of my head but out of my bones for a kind of people, nice people, that I've been thrown with ever since I was born. I haven't divided them into brainy and brainless or anything like that. But they are just nice people. I've heard some strange answers to that question in later years.

[0:01:59.2] Tell you a story. Uncle Sam—you know him?—he has lately been taking one poet at a time and sentencing him to a year's novitiate, in a high place of contemplation, before he gets really famous. Takes one a year. Succession. And the high place is a top room in the Library of Congress. [laughter] And the contemplation is rather too close up for perspective. Very much too close up. It's so close up that when anybody's face is that near mine, I close my eyes. It’s so close up that way it looks like a bald head full of all the middle class brains of the United States of America. And it's called the Capitol dome. [laughter] And the young poets up there have to ask themselves if they are writing to those middle class brains. For a year. And I hear them discussing. Most of them decide against it. They resolve never to write anything that has any chance of being read or recited in Congress. [laughter] Well the only trouble with that is that it seems a little too self-conscious, you know—that you are not to be bothered with such thoughts—that it might have a wrong effect on you. You be writing away from something instead of writing to something. And I feel that in some of their work that they are writing away from something instead of to something. I sat with some very nice people here, abroad, who considered their

vocabulary and their kind of thinking so as to eliminate bad readers. Get the vocabulary like… Someone asked me today, what hypergraphic meant. And I said, “Where'd that occur in a poem?” And I said, "Were all the words like that?" [laughter] If so, I knew who got up the vocabulary. [laughter] And, again, it seems rather self-conscious. Seems as if, when you got to the age of poetry and voting and things like that, you could trust yourself to say anything that came into your head, you know. Or anything that came, any motion—we won't say of the heart but any motion of the mind. I won't call it ideas but motion of the mind. Gesture of the mind. Say to people, you know, “You are proud.” The people in front of you, whoever they happen to be. You can do a little. You can't do this. And the waves, the filaments of the minds, you know. See if they can wave it too. That's what you are asking when you read a poem. Now there is this to be said about the people who deliberately go away from one kind of audience. After thinking of them a long, long time, I decided to make one line of poetry to set them right with me. You see, they are my friends, too. So I put it this way to myself. "Some mystery becomes the proud.”[368] Let them their pride, their loftiness, their haughtiness, and some mystery becomes them. And again, you wouldn’t want my formula. I know that some child said that he'd hate to be the result of planned parentage. [laughter] Is that in *The New Yorker*? Somewhere? Sounds like *The New Yorker*? And the same, you know, with the poems. I'd hate to plan a poem to any particular audience. And still again is that notion, you know, this coyness, this allusiveness, this little pride when somebody asks you a flat question and wants to flatten the whole thing out. You make what's almost a tricky answer. And this innuendo, this intonation, there's this all-this-sort-of-thing you play with. Poetry is what you might call a delicate excess of that kind. It's an excess. Like some of the other excesses. [laughter] But it's a sublimation, you know. Use the word. A sublimation of excesses.

[0:07:40.0] Now I am going to tell you, read you a poem in which I said something about that without knowing what I was getting into. [laughter] A very serious man, a committee, in fact, came to me about it. When it gets to be committees, [laughter] you

[368] A line from “Choose Something Like a Star”

got to be serious. Maybe I won't read the poem yet but I will tell you the part of it, what the inquiry was about. Why did I say, toward the end of a poem, these words? "I hear the glass, a drinking goblet, under a spell so the wrong ones can't find it and so get saved. As Saint Mark says they mustn't."[369] And he said, "What kind of aristocratic thing is that to say?" [laughter] Well I said, "I got it out of the New Testament." And he said, "Yes, we verified that." [laughter] Then he said, "What's more, it's said twice in the New Testament. These things are said in poetry. So the wrong people can't understand them, and so gets saved." And he says, "It says that twice!" I said "That's news. I'm glad." [laughter] And he said, "And it says once in the Old Testament." I said, "That settles it." [laughter] Then he said, "Why did you bring that up?" He said, "That's an unpleasant thing to bring up." "Well," I said, "I brought it up just as The Whale brought up Jonah." [laughter] And left him on the beach. I brought it up, that is, I take pleasure I must say and that's a wicked thing, isn't it? That is not very democratic, is it? To bring up things that nothing can be done about and just leave them. [laughter] So I can't say too much against these people who just sit down and get up a language that nobody can understand but their gang. You know, if they feel that way, I guess that's one way to feel. [laugher] It's a matter of feeling. I'll save that poem, read it a little later. [laughter]

[0:10:14.4] Read some others first. I answered that question myself, you see: "To whom do you address your writing?" I am told that sometimes the audience here likes to ask questions. But you won't need to ask that. I've answered that very thoroughly. [laughter] There are other questions like… for instance, you might ask me this one. [laughter] "Have professors the right to get meaning out of things that you didn't put into them?" [laughter] I will answer that if you want. That's not that.

[0:10:58.7] Now, a place to begin. It's almost anywhere. This one is called "The Gift Outright," "The Gift Outright." It's a little piece of blank verse. And it's a history of the United States in about the length of a sonnet.

[369] A variation of lines from "Directive"

[0:11:24.1 "The Gift Outright"]

> The land was ours before we were the land's.
> She was our land more than a hundred years
> Before we were her people. She was ours
> In Massachusetts, in Virginia,
> But we were England's, still colonials,
> Possessing what we still were unpossessed by,
> Possessed by what we now no more possessed.
> Something we were withholding made us weak
> Until we found out that it was ourselves
> We were withholding from our land of living,
> And forthwith found salvation in surrender.
> Such as we were we gave ourselves outright
> (The deed of gift was many deeds of war)
> To the land vaguely realizing westward,
> But still unstoried, artless, unenhanced,
> Such as she was, such as she would become.

[0:12:18.1] Now in another vein, somebody said to me the other day—a friend and another poet—"You aren't on the record about the bomb, are you?" [laughter] I said, "You know what I am going to say about the bomb and the blank verse someday? That I think it's another block buster with a pinch of radium or something thrown in so as to leave something going on after it's over." Yeah I don't think so.

[0:12:44.4] But here is one that is called "Why Wait for Science." This is a sonnet. I heard about the history of sonnets. A friend of mine has just finished his one hundred thousandth sonnet. [laughter] His name is Merrill Moore.[370] Dr. Merrill Moore. Psychiatrist. [laughter] He looks into the history of everything after he's done it. And

[370] Merrill Moore (1903-1957) is a psychologist and poet, the author of *Clinical Sonnets* (1949) and *Case Record from a Sonnetorium* (1951).

he finds that the sonnet began in Italy, say, in the 12th-13th century. There was a proper sonnet. Italian sonnet. And then there was the Shakespearean sonnet. And then, he says, he writes what's called the illegitimate sonnet. [laughter] And that's a good name for it. If you'd look the book up, it's called *Clinical Sonnets*. [laughter] Anything clinical is illegitimate in a sonnet. But here is one that is sort of a sonnet. It's called "Why Wait for Science."

[0:13:43.6 "Why Wait for Science"]

> Sarcastic Science she would like to know,
> In her complacent ministry of fear,
> How we propose to get away from here
> When she has made things so we have to go
> Or be wiped out. Will she be asked to show
> Us how by rocket we may hope to steer
> To some star off there say a half light-year
> Through temperature of absolute zeró?
> Why wait for Science to supply the how
> When any amateur can tell it now?
> The way to go away should be the same
> As fifty million years ago we came—
> If anyone remembers how that was.
> I have a theory, but it hardly does.

[laughter]

[0:14:23.9] And then here's another one of that scientific kind. [applause] This one is called "Etherealizing." "Etherealizing." There is no play on the word "theory" either. I noticed that the first word suggests that. That's wrong. I never do that.

[0:14:39.2 “Etherealizing”]

A theory if you hold it hard enough
And long enough gets rated as a creed:
Such as that flesh is something we can slough
So that the mind can be entirely freed.
Then when the arms and legs have atrophied,
And brain is all that’s left of mortal stuff,
We can lie on the beach with the seaweed
And take our daily tide baths smooth and rough.
There once we lay as blobs of jellyfish
At evolution’s opposite extreme.
But now as blobs of brain we’ll lie and dream,
With only one vestigial creature wish:
Oh, may the tide be soon enough at high
To keep our abstract verse from getting dry.

[laughter & applause]

[0:15:37.8] Then, some of these are by request. There's a little group of them now that's someone, one person, others, asked me to say. This one is called "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening."

[0:16:04.4 “Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening”]

Whose woods these are I think I know.
His house is in the village though;
He will not see me stopping here
To watch his woods fill up with snow.

My little horse must think it queer

To stop without a farmhouse near

I'll start that again.

Whose woods these are I think I know.
His house is in the village though;
He will not see me stopping here
To watch his woods fill up with snow.

My little horse must think it queer
To stop without a farmhouse near
Between the woods and frozen lake
The darkest evening of the year.

He gives his harness bells a shake
To ask if there is some mistake.
The only other sound's the sweep
Of easy wind and downy flake.

The woods are lovely, dark and deep,
But I have promises to keep,
And miles to go before I sleep,
And miles to go before I sleep.

[0:16:57.7] Someone asked me if that was metaphysical. [laughter] And I said yes. [laughter] I say yes fifty percent of the time. [laughter] A boy on the street up in Cambridge the other day—I was out late, rather late in the evening—and the boy on the street spoke to my dog. He said, "That's his dog." He said, "That's your dog?" I wanted to say somebody else's but I said, "My dog." He said, "Is that your dog?" I said, "Yes." He said, "Aren't you a poet?" And I said, "No." [laughter] That's fifty-

fifty. [laughter] You got to be careful about this reputation business, you know. You can't have two reputations on the street. [laughter] I'm getting scared.

[0:17:54.6] Then another little one, a very new one, relatively new. It raises this question of, both question's about "Who you write your poems to?" This is really addressed particularly to an archaeologist. I've been waiting to see if he knew it. But you'll see. Perhaps I don't know that kind too well, I better have that open. It's called "Closed for Good."

[0:18:30.7 "Closed for Good"]

Much as I own I owe
The passers of the past
Because their to and fro
Has cut this road to last,
I owe them more today
Because they've gone away

And come not back with steed
And chariot to chide
My slowness with their speed
And scare me to one side.
They have found other scenes
For haste and other means.

They leave the road to me
To walk in saying naught
Perhaps but to some tree
Inaudibly in thought,
'From you the road receives
A priming coat of leaves.

‘And soon for lack of sun,
The prospects are in white
It will be further done,
But with a coat so light
The shape of leaves will show
Beneath the brush of snow.’

And so on into winter
Till even I have ceased
To come as a foot printer,
And only some slight beast
So mousy or so foxy
Will print there as my proxy.

How often is the case
I thus pay men a debt
For having left a place
And still do not forget
To pay them some sweet share
For having once been there.

[0:19:52.1] See why I wrote that to an archaeologist? He lives on people that have once been there. [laughter] He's not cynical either. And then, let's see…[flips pages] I really have paid my respects to the bomb in a little mean poem like this. Called alliance. It's called "King's X." You know how we used to say King's X? Somebody? You know? No players? When you’re playing a tag or something, you cross out things and you say, "King's X no fairs."

[0:20:36.5 "U.S. 1946 King's X"]

Having invented a new Holocaust,
And been the first with it to win a war,
How they make haste to cry with fingers crossed,
King’s X—no fairs to use it any more!

[applause]

[0:20:52.6] That's the only one I ever wrote that was meant to be mean. [laughter] Oh, wait a minute… Just a minute [flipping pages] They are all marked. Lost the paper… What’s the matter with me? Not this…

[0:21:36.9] I learned a new word the last year. One new word. I don't know whether that's been your growth or not. With me, my growth has been sort of by one word at a time. And one a year. Not much faster. I learned the word "urban" as distinguished from "urbane." And if you don't use “urban/urbane” right, you are out. [laughter] You're not in the right political party. [laughter] You'll look into that. But I am making my adjustment to that as I stand here. This is called "Two Tramps in Mud Time." "Two Tramps in Mud Time." And the way this word is getting used. I'm wondering if any of us should admit not being urban/urbane. My daughter at home from South America finds that most of the people in South America are not urban. But from the political point of view, they are being treated as urbane minded. They are not urban. They are farmers. But they are urbane minded from the point of view of the political leaders. Oh they are going to know the reason why. That's all. Well, this is not a very urban/urbane poem I'm going to read you. I've been wondering how urban/urbane mine are. See, it makes a lot, gives you a lot, to think. [laughter]

[0:23:17.5 “Two Tramps in Mud Time”]

Out of the mud two strangers came
And caught me splitting wood in the yard.
And one of them put me off my aim
By hailing cheerily ‘Hit them hard!’
I knew pretty well why he dropped behind
And let the other go on a way.
I knew pretty well what he had in mind:
He wanted to take my job for pay.

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

The sun was warm but the wind was chill.
You know how it is on an April day
When the sun is out and the wind is still,
You’re one month on in the middle of May.
But if you so much as dare to speak,
A cloud comes over the sunlit arch,
A wind comes off a frozen peak,
And you’re two months back in the middle of March. [laughter]

A bluebird comes tenderly up to alight
And turns to the wind to unruffle a plume

His song so pitched as not to excite
A single flower as yet to bloom.
It is snowing a flake: and he half knew
Winter was only playing possum.
Except in color he isn't blue.
But he wouldn't advise a thing to blossom.

[The water for which we may have to look
In summertime with a witching-wand,
In every wheelrut's now a brook,
In every print of a hoof a pond.
Be glad of water, but don't forget
The lurking frost in the earth beneath
That will steal forth after the sun is set
And show on the water its crystal teeth.]

The time when most I loved my task
These two must make me love it more
By coming with what they came to ask.
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.

Out of the woods two hulking tramps
(From sleeping God knows where last night,
But not long since in the lumber camps).
They thought all chopping was theirs of right.
Men of the woods and lumberjacks,
They judged me by their appropriate tool.

Except as a fellow handled an ax,
They had no way of knowing a fool.

Nothing on either side was said.
They knew they had but to stay their stay
And all their logic would fill my head:
As that I had no right to play
With what was another man’s work for gain.
My right might be love but theirs was need.
And where the two exist in twain
Theirs was the better right—agreed.

But yield who will to their separation,
My object in living is to unite
My avocation and my vocation
As my two eyes make one in sight.
Only where love and need are one,
And the work is play for mortal stakes,
Is the deed ever really done
For Heaven and the future’s sakes.

[0:26:10.6] There's a trap in there. In the line there I didn't set on purpose, I guess. “The work is play.” People all say that. His work is his play. That isn't what it says there. "The work is play for mortal stakes." His work is a gamble, you see. For life or death. That's what I am saying there. And people miss that. "The work is play for mortal stakes, / Is the deed ever really done." You know you can bet your bottom dollar on saving Europe. And you don't know if somebody else that'll do another, you know. We have two slangs, haven't we? Bet your bottom dollar. And the other is: you bet your life. See? Somebody that'll bet his life will always beat the fellow that'll bet his bottom dollar. Ain't that right? I think so. That's what I'm talking about there. Betting. You betcha life. Said that way. You betcha life. [applause]

[0:27:11.3] If I have time, I'd like to read you one longish one. I like to read you one called "The Witch of Coös." And that's about a witch. [chuckles] Or, a trance-medium. Another name for it. I always call those. Those words are interchangeable with me. I used to think witches are different but I now see that these things run together. Philosophy runs them together, you know. You know how things go. To me, it runs together, philosophy. Poetry separates things and philosophy runs things together. [laughter] And this witch was no lady and I don't pretend to talk her dialect. I don't write her dialect. But I talk her way a little bit. Give it her tone. It's a veritable tale. Veritable.

[0:28:14.05 "The Witch of Coös"]

I stayed the night for shelter at a farm
Behind the mountain, with a mother and son,
Two old-believers. They did all the talking.

And by old-believers—and this is the only note I will say—by old-believers, I ought to explain that I meant she was of the vintage that followed what we called the Civil War between the states. [laughter] We have to call it that to be liberal. But after any war, you get a lot of witches and things that want to see where people have gone that have been killed in the war. It's natural, you know. “They did all the talking,” I say, and the mother says:

Folks think a witch who has familiar spirits
She could call up to pass a winter evening,
But won’t, should be burned at the stake or something.
Summoning spirits isn’t ‘Button, button,
Who’s got the button,’ I would have them know.

And her son who’s with us says:

Mother can make a common table rear
And kick with two legs like an army mule.

And she says:

And when I've done it, what good have I done?
Rather than tip a table for you, let me
Tell you what Ralle the Sioux Control once told me.
He said the dead had souls, but when I asked [him]
How could that be—I thought the dead were souls,
He broke my trance. Don't that make you suspicious
That there's something the dead are keeping back? [laughter]
Yes, there's something the dead are keeping back.

You wouldn't want to tell him what we have
Up attic, mother?

And she says:

Bones—a skeleton.

[SON.] But the headboard of mother's bed is pushed
Against the attic door: the door is nailed.
It's harmless. Mother hears it in the night
Halting perplexed behind the barrier
Of door and headboard. Where it wants to get
Is back into the cellar where it came from.

And she says:

We'll never let them, will we, son! We'll never!

And he says:

It left the cellar forty years ago
And carried itself like a pile of dishes
Up one flight from the cellar to the kitchen,
Another from the kitchen to the bedroom,
Another from the bedroom to the attic,
Right past both father and mother, and neither stopped it. [laughter]
Father had gone upstairs; mother was downstairs.
[I was a baby: I don't know where I was.] [cut in tape]

[MOTHER.] The only fault my husband found with me—
I went to sleep before I went to bed,
Especially in winter when the bed
Might just as well be ice and the clothes snow.
The night the bones came up the cellar-stairs
Toffile had gone to bed alone and left me,
But left an open door to cool the room off
So as to sort of turn me out of it.
I was just coming to myself enough
To wonder where the cold was coming from,
When I heard Toffile upstairs in the bedroom
And thought I heard him downstairs in the cellar.
The board we had laid down to walk dry-shod on
When there was water in the cellar in spring
Struck the hard cellar bottom. And then someone
Began the stairs, two footsteps for each step,
The way a man with one leg and a crutch,
Or a little child, comes up. It wasn't Toffile:

It wasn't anyone who could be there.
The bulkhead double-doors were double-locked
And swollen tight and buried under snow.
The cellar windows were banked up with sawdust
And swollen tight and buried under snow.
It was the bones. I knew them—and good reason.
My first impulse was to get to the knob
And hold the door. But the bones didn't try
The door; they halted helpless on the landing,
Waiting for things to happen in their favor.
The faintest restless rustling ran all through them.
I never could have done the thing I did
If the wish hadn't been too strong in me
To see how they were mounted for this walk.
I had a vision of them put together
Not like a man, but like a chandelier. [laughter]
So suddenly I flung the door wide on him.
A moment he stood balancing with emotion,
And all but lost himself. (A tongue of fire
Flashed out and licked along his upper teeth.
Smoke rolled inside the sockets of his eyes.)
Then he came at me with one hand outstretched,
The way he did in life once; but this time
I struck the hand off brittle on the floor,
And fell back from him on the floor myself.
The finger-pieces slid in all directions.
(Where did I see one of those pieces lately? [laughter]
Hand me my button-box—it must be there.)
I sat up on the floor and shouted, 'Toffile,
It's coming up to you.' It had its choice
Of the door to the cellar or the hall.

It took the hall door for the novelty,
And set off briskly for so slow a thing,
Still going every which way in the joints, though,
So that it looked like lightning or a scribble,
From the slap I had just now given its hand.
I listened till it almost climbed the stairs
From the hall to the only finished bedroom,
Before I got up to do anything;
Then ran and shouted, 'Shut the bedroom door,
Toffile, for my sake!' 'Company?' he said, [laughter]
'Don't make me get up; I'm too warm in bed.'
So lying forward weakly on the handrail
I pushed myself upstairs, and in the light
(The kitchen had been dark) I had to own
I could see nothing. 'Toffile, I don't see it.
It's with us in the room though. It's the bones.'
'What bones?' 'The cellar bones—out of the grave.'
That made him throw his bare legs out of bed
And sit up by me and take hold of me.
I wanted to put out the light and see
If I could see it, or else mow the room,
With our arms at the level of our knees,
And bring the chalk-pile down. 'I'll tell you what—
It's looking for another door to try.
The uncommonly deep snow has made him think
Of his old song, *The Wild Colonial Boy*,
He always used to sing along the tote road.
He's after an open door to get outdoors.
Let's trap him with an open door up attic.'
Toffile agreed to that, and sure enough,
Almost the moment he was given an opening,

The steps began to climb the attic stairs.
I heard them. Toffile didn't seem to hear them.
'Quick!' I slammed to the door and held the knob.
'Toffile, get nails.' I made him nail the door shut
And push the headboard of the bed against it.
Then we asked was there anything
Up attic that we'd ever want again. [laughter]
The attic was less to us than the cellar.
If the bones liked the attic, let them have it.
Let them stay in the attic. When they sometimes
Come down the stairs at night and stand perplexed
Behind the door and headboard of the bed,
Brushing their chalky skull with chalky fingers,
And sounds like the dry rattling of a shutter,
That's what I sit up in the dark to say—
To no one any more since Toffile died.
Let them stay in the attic since they went there.
I promised Toffile to be cruel to them
For helping them be cruel once to him.

And the son says:

We think they have a grave down in the cellar.

And she says:

We know they have a grave down in the cellar.

And he says:

We never could find out whose bones they were.

And she says:

> Yes, we could too, son. Tell the truth for once.
> They were a man's his father killed for me.
> I mean a man he killed instead of me.
> The least I could do was to help dig their grave.
> We were about it one night in the cellar.
> Son knows the story: but 'twas not for him
> To tell the truth, suppose the time had come.
> Son looks surprised to see me end a lie
> We'd kept all these years between ourselves
> So as to have it ready for outsiders.
> But tonight I don't care enough to lie—
> I don't remember why I ever cared.
> Toffile, if he were here, I don't believe
> Could tell you why he ever cared himself….
>
> [She hand't found the finger-bone she wanted
> Among the buttons poured out in her lap.
> I verified the name next morning: Toffile.
> The rural letter box said Toffie Lajway.]

[applause]

[0:36:46.0] And a little one quite different from all that. See the time. This one is called "Come In." "Come In." It's about a thrush.

[0:37:04.9 "Come In"]

> As I came to the edge of the woods,

Thrush music—hark!
Now if it was dusk outside,
Inside it was dark.

Too dark in the woods for a bird
By sleight of wing
To better his perch for the night,
Though he still could sing.

The last of the light of the sun
That had died in the west
Still lived for one song more
In a thrush's breast.

Far in the pillared dark
Thrush music went—
Almost like a call to come in
To the dark and lament.

But no, I was out for stars:
I would not come in.
I meant not even if asked,
And I hadn't been.

Want me to say that twice? [applause]

[0:37:44.4 Re-read "Come in"]

As I came to the edge of the woods,
Thrush music—hark!
Now if it was dusk outside,

Inside it was dark.

Too dark in the woods for a bird
By sleight of wing
To better his perch for the night,
Though he still could sing.

The last of the light of the sun
That had died in the west
Still lived for one song more
In a thrush’s breast.

Far in the pillared dark
Thrush music went—
Almost like a call to come in
To the dark and lament.

But no, I was out for stars:
I would not come in.
I meant not even if asked,
And I hadn’t been.

[applause]

[0:38:28.4] Then, let's see now, I want to do that one with that quotation from the New Testament in it. That's a little harder, the poem. I had that marked. This is called "Directive." And speaking of who you are talking to—kindergarteners or grown-up people and all that—I suppose you got some awareness of where you are and all that. For instance, whether you're with Democrats or Republicans, you know. And all that sort of thing. You got something in you. That's called tact. [laughter] And some people haven't got it. And get along just as well, maybe. [laughter] But I am aware of

this that there are poems that I'd rather you'd read to yourself than me read them to you. I don't know what the... there is no rules about it. I just notice that I steer off quite many of this. There's some I can't put this much. I've never read aloud. Let other people read them. I let, and I get asked what's the matter with them. Nothing's matter with them. I don't know what's the matter with them. I just keep them. Now this one I wouldn't naturally read aloud, I think. But I'm going to read it. I've read it two or three times just against the grain.

[0:40.02.2] "Directive"

Back out of all this now too much for us,
Back in a time made simple by the loss
Of detail, burned, dissolved, and broken off
Like graveyard marble sculpture in the weather,
There is a house that is no more a house
Upon a farm that is no more a farm
And in a town that is no more a town.
The road there, if you'll let a guide direct you
Who only has at heart your getting lost,
May seem as if it should have been a quarry—
Great monolithic knees the former town
Long since gave up pretense of keeping covered.
And there's a story in a book about it:
Besides the wear of iron wagon wheels
The ledges show lines ruled southeast northwest,
The chisel work of an enormous Glacier
That braced his feet against the Arctic Pole.
You must not mind a certain coolness from him
Still said to haunt this side of Panther Mountain.
Nor need you mind the serial ordeal
Of being watched from forty cellar holes

As if by eye pairs out of forty firkins.
As for the woods' excitement over you
That sends light rustle rushes to their leaves,
Charge that to upstart inexperience.
Where were they all not twenty years ago?
They think too much of having shaded out
A few old pecker-fretted apple trees.
Make yourself up a cheering song of how
Someone's road home from work this once was,
Who may be just ahead of you on foot
Or creaking with a buggy load of grain.
The height of the adventure is the height
Of country where two village cultures faded
Into each other. Both of them are lost.
And if you're lost enough to find yourself
By now, pull in your ladder road behind you
And put a sign up CLOSED to all but me.
Then make yourself at home. The only field
Now left's no bigger than a harness gall.
First there's the children's house of make believe,
Some shattered dishes underneath a pine,
The playthings in the playhouse of the children.
Weep for what little things could make them glad.
Then for the house that is no more a house,
But only a belilaced cellar hole,
Now slowly closing like a dent in dough.
This was no playhouse but a house in earnest.
Your destination and your destiny's
A brook that was the water of the house,
Cold as a spring as yet so near its source,
Too lofty and original to rage.

(We know the valley streams that when aroused
Will leave their tatters hung on barb and thorn.)
I have kept hidden in the instep arch
Of an old cedar at the waterside
A broken drinking goblet like the Grail
Under a spell so the wrong ones can't find it,
So can't get saved, as Saint Mark says they mustn't.
(I stole the goblet from the children's playhouse.)
Here are your waters and your watering place.
Drink and be whole again without confusion.

[0:43:43.5] See that's hard a little. With some, you'd rather see than hear. [applause] And I'd rather have you see it. But it's a matter of between the eye and the ear, you know. It's both in poetry. There's nothing that isn't to the ear. And some things are to the ear and eye. So you can divide them that way. They've got to be all to the ear. And some are to the eye, too. Then here is a little one, you know, on this question I must give you a little chance to answer. Ask me questions if you want to. Eventually I say this one just to show you how people have done taking things to mean different things. All I say is there's got to be a first meaning that is very hard and definite. Not hard but firm. You see? Firm without hardness. Soft without flabbiness. That's what you are after in these things. Men, women, poems. And the first meaning got to be hard and plain enough. Now you take a poem like that one I've just read you. I'm aware when I say now. I wouldn't have been aware years ago. I was too innocent to be aware. But I am aware that some people never made a loaf of bread. And so they never saw a dent in dough. I got to do it on a percentage basis again. [laughter] There are several things in that one, aren't there? You see that I might worry about, when I want to lay awake nights and write footnotes. [laughter] You better get up and write them instead of lying and thinking about them. That's right, I think of them. Remember that. For instance, "belilaced cellar holes," "belilaced cellar hole." Some of you all know. Well this isn't about country. Some of them country things. But some people have never read *The Arabian Nights*. So they wouldn't know what I

meant by “forty firkins.” That's where I got that. Some of these are out of books. You wouldn't know it to look at me. [laughter] They aren’t all country things. But to take that "Someone's road home from work this once was, / Who may be just ahead of you on foot / Or creaking with a buggy load of grain." That's asking quite a lot of people. They aren’t chanting Sanskrit either. Just in plain English.

[0:46:36.2] Well here's this one I am going to say and show you how people have taken it. It amuses me. Just take it as an example that way. It's called, to begin with, "One Step Backward Taken." And it asks you to know a little about a flood. A freshet. When everything gets swept along, you know. When the water gets going, carrying big rocks and everything.

[0:47:01.9 “One Step Backward Taken”]

Not only sands and gravels
Were once more on their travels,
But gulping muddy gallons
Great boulders off their balance
Bumped heads together dully
And started down the gully.
Whole capes caked off in slices.
I felt my standpoint shaken
In the universal crisis.
But with one step backward taken
I saved myself from going.
A world torn loose went by me.
Then the rain stopped and the blowing
And the sun came out to dry me.

[0:47:33.5] On the surface, some people are better, would be more content, if that were left there. Let alone. Just as it is. And I might be. I wouldn't care if you never

went any further with it. But somebody comes up to me after I've said it, and notices what I called it "One Step Backward Taken." See? That's the name I gave it. "But with one step backward taken / I saved myself from going." And somebody says, "You mean we ought to recede about the bomb?" So I changed the name to "I felt my standpoint shaken." [laughter] I took that line for my title once and recited it. And then somebody comes up to me and said, "You've been reading Karl Marx, too!" [laughter] And then I tell this to some boys at college and the boys say to me, "Why don't you call it 'Bumped Heads Together Dully.'" [laughter] You see how it goes. That answers that question—sort of. I don't mind that. Because I do that with other people's poems. That is, I steal a meaning. Steal the show. And I think that's what they are written for, really. To run off. To run off on tangents from them. The first meaning, the place of departure, the point, you know, is—that's important. To get that definite enough. Pinned there in some way.

[0:49:08.0] Well, I was going to give you a chance to ask questions. You want to? I've got a minute or two more. Shall I say one thing about poetry? I see a lot of poets here, friends of mine and all, and any lesson I might try to teach them would be gratuitous. But I just show you what I have done once teaching with one poem. One of my own, you see. I just was giving evidence today. I'm not as good as Padraic Colum about all that.[371] He can quote. I never said a line of poetry to him but that he added to it. It went right on from there. Not anybody, you see? Not anybody. Didn't matter. Even prose. I said something out of the decline—the fall of Roman Empire—once. And he went right ahead, reciting the decline of the Roman Empire. [laughter] That's right. In Chicago. I remember the day very well. But I know a lot of poetry beside my own. But I am here tonight just to use my own as much as I can.

[0:50:13.6] This question of rhyming and meter, and why I get into it. That I won't go into. But it's one of my tests. It's one of my approaches to all poetry. It's through the rhyme and the meter. And if anyone brings me a pretty good poem, and it's in rhyme and meter… If it's in free verse, I send it to Carl Sandburg anyway. [laughter] But if

[371] Padraic Colum (1881–1972) is an Irish poet, editor, children's writer, folklorist, and playwright

it's in my kind of thing, first thing I do is to look at the rhymes. The rhyme pairs. Because I better run my eyes over to get the idea, the main thing, then the rhyme pairs. That's what interests me. And there will be one good line, carrying the burden of the meaning. And then a makeshift line. And then another good line when the trouble's over (of rhyming) then a makeshift line again. And when the trouble's over, another good line. See, so much of poetry just breaks up into that. And that's out. You have to ask yourself. But that's best with test. Is there equal goodness? Is there equality between the rhyme pairs so that you can't tell which carries most of the burden of the poem? I'm sure that settles it more than anything else. The weaknesses is in that second one of the pair. And it doesn't add to the strength at all to be foxy about it and put the weak one first. [laughter] That's too easy to see through. And that equality is a thing. So just for the fun of it, and farewell, let me say one of mine. The lines are so short, that even in hearing it…. I use this in teaching this way, approaching poetry. Well, I've just been out to two to three colleges. I used this, one of them. The rhymes are so close together, the pair, that you can examine them. Pair by pair as I go if I do it deliberately enough. And you can see how good a poet I am. [laughter] And this is called "Departmental." And I wouldn't use a poem I was in love with, you know, this way. But I am not in love with this one. This is just a good poem. This is a heavy duty one. It's about an ant. A-N-T.

[0:52:49.3 "Departmental"]

An ant on the tablecloth
Ran into a dormant moth

See? That's what's caused the poem. If that ant hadn't done that, there'd never been a poem. [laughter] Did you see that ant started to rhyme right away? That's a rhyming ant.

An ant on the tablecloth
Ran into a dormant moth

Of many times his size.
He showed not the least surprise.
His business wasn't with such.
He gave it scarcely a touch,
And was off on his duty run.
But if he encountered one
Of the hive's enquiry squad
Whose work is to find out God
And the nature of time and space,
He would put him onto the case.

You can see the way to do is to try to anticipate the rhymes. See what I'm going to do next. See if I'm just doing it weakly or whether I am resisting in my meaning, you know? [laughter] There's deep meaning. That's metaphysical. This poem is. [laughter]

He would put him onto the case.
Ants are a curious race;
One crossing with hurried tread
The body of one of their dead
Isn't given a moment's arrest—
Seems not even impressed.
But he no doubt reports to any
With whom he crosses antennae, [laughter]
And they no doubt report
To the higher up at court.
Then word goes forth in Formic:

F-O-R-M-I-C

'Death's come to Jerry McCormic, [laughter]
Our selfless forager Jerry.

See that's socialism.

Our selfless forager Jerry.

That's what we are about to become: selfless foragers. [laughter]

Our selfless forager Jerry.
Will the special Janizary
Whose office it is to bury
The dead of the commissary [laughter]
Go bring him home to his people.
Lay him in state on a sepal.
Wrap him for shroud in a petal.
Embalm him with ichor of nettle.
This is the word of your Queen.'
And presently on the scene
Appears a solemn mortician;
And taking formal position
With feelers calmly atwiddle,
Seizes the dead by the middle, [laughter]
And heaving him high in air,
Carries him out of there.
No one stands round to stare.
It is nobody else's affair.

It couldn't be called ungentle.
But how thoroughly departmental.

[laughter & applause]

[0:55:42.4] Now if anybody wants to ask any questions, ask it so I can hear it. I have the loud speaker in my favor and you got nothing down there. We could have one if somebody can carry it round the way they do. But if something you'd like to ask me particularly, and you'd make me hear it, I'd like to answer it if it isn't one of, about, for information, please. [laughter] I have no information. Can I hear it? I doubt if I can. [Audience: Read "The Road Not Taken."] Read "The Road Not Taken." [applause] That's better than answering questions. [laughter] You can see these ulterior meanings that people get out of things. Somebody, my publisher, gets a book of mine out—a smaller book than my *Collected Poems*—and calls it from one of the poems, *Come In*. See? That's just stealing the meaning out of the poem to make it come into the book. And then I've understood that there is a possibility of a textbook—a sort of a book to go, a smaller book to go around—and they're going to take the name of this poem, "The Road Not Taken." You see, for the book. See, again? That's enlarging the meanings. That's alright. How can you stop it? [laughter] It's alright. That's what I do myself, I say, to everything. "The truth is great and shall prevail. / But none cares whether it prevail or not."[372] And how I've stolen meaning from that, from Coventry Patmore, for instance. Always stealing meanings. So with the Bible. Lines in the Bible, you know.

[0:57:31.2] "The Road Not Taken"

> Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,
> And sorry I could not travel both
> And be one traveler, long I stood
> And looked down one as far as I could
> To where it bent in the undergrowth;
>
> Then took the other, as just as fair,
> And having perhaps the better claim,
> Because it was grassy and wanted wear;

[372] Lines from Coventry Patmore's "Magna Est Veritas" with variants.

Though as for that the passing there
Had worn them really about the same,

And both that morning equally lay
In leaves no step had trodden black.
Oh, I kept the first for another day!
Yet knowing how way leads on to way,
I doubted if I should ever come back.

I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence:
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.

[applause]

[0:58:29.9] Now look, if you want me to say another poem? "Two Look at Two?" That's a little hard. That's the one that I've never read. Just because, I don't know, I feel a little diffident about it, I think. And diffidence is one of the elements in it, isn't it? Expressiveness and diffidence. What are they? How can you have expressiveness if you have diffidence? But you do. Say another one? "Birches?" Alright, I'll say "Birches," I hear that. [Audience: Faster!] Frost: Yeah, wait a second. [laughter] Will I remember it? I have to remember it. I have to start it right. Not loud enough? Did you say faster? I see.

[0:59:30.0 "Birches"]

When I see birches bend to left and right
Across the lines of straighter darker trees,
I like to think some boy’s been swinging them.

But swinging doesn't bend them down to stay
As ice-storms do. Often you must have seen them
Loaded with ice a sunny winter morning
After a rain. They click upon themselves
As the breeze rises, and turn many-colored
As the stir cracks and crazes their enamel.
Soon the sun's warmth makes them shed crystal shells
Shattering and avalanching on the snow-crust—
Such heaps of broken glass to sweep away
You'd think the inner dome of heaven had fallen.
They are dragged to the withered bracken by the load,
And they seem not to break; though once they are bowed
So low for long, they never right themselves:
You may see their trunks arching in the woods
Years afterwards, trailing their leaves on the ground
Like girls on hands and knees that throw their hair
Before them over their heads to dry in the sun.
But I was going to say when 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 or in to fetch the cows—
Some boy too far from town to learn baseball,
Whose only play was what he found himself,
Summer and winter, and could play alone.
One by one he subdued his father's trees
By riding them down over and over again
Until he took the stiffness out of them,
And not one but hung limp, not one was left
For him to conquer. He learned all there was
To learn about not launching out too soon
And so not carrying the tree away

Clear to the ground. He always kept his poise
To the top branches, climbing carefully
With the same pains you use to fill a cup
Up to the brim, and even above the brim.
Then he flung outward, feet first, with a swish,
Kicking his way down through the air to the ground.
So was I once myself a swinger of birches.
And so I dream of going back to be.
It's when I'm weary of considerations,
And life is too much like a pathless wood
Where your face burns and tickles with the cobwebs
Broken across it, and one eye is weeping
From a twig's having lashed across it open.
I'd like to get away from earth awhile
And then come back to it and begin over.
May no fate willfully misunderstand me
And half grant what I wish and snatch me away
Not to return. Earth's the right place for love:
I don't know where it's likely to go better.
I'd like to go by climbing a birch tree,
And climb black branches up a snow-white trunk
Toward heaven, till the tree could bear no more,
But dipped its top and set me down again.
That would be good both going and coming back.
One could do worse than be a swinger of birches.

Is that enough? [applause]

[1:02:25.9] You aren't going to ask any questions, are you? I guess you ask for more poems. And that's a kind of rebuke to me for having answered the question early on before I began to read. [laughter] But I can take it like a gentleman. You want me to

say one more poem? Call it good night? You want me to say one, wicked one? Or a sweet one? Wicked one. [laughter] I say one to go with this, the one about the ant. It's called "A Considerable Speck." [Audience: “Oh.”] Somebody knows it. [laughter] "A Considerable Speck." I said I only wrote one malicious poem. A very malicious one about the bomb. And this is a little malicious. Not about abstract verse. That's affectionate. See? Because I write that myself. Teasing some of my closest friends. But this is meant to be mean.

[1:03:26.4 "A Considerable Speck"]

A speck that would have been beneath my sight
On any but a paper sheet so white
Set off across what I had written there.
And I had idly poised my pen in air
To stop it with a period of ink
When something strange about it made me think.
This was no dust speck by my breathing blown,
But unmistakably a living mite
With inclinations it could call its own.
It paused as with suspicion of my pen,
And then came racing wildly on again
To where my manuscript was not yet dry;
Then paused again and either drank or smelt—
With loathing, for again it turned to fly.
Plainly with an intelligence I dealt.
It seemed too tiny to have room for feet,
Yet must have had a set of them complete
To express how much it didn’t want to die.
It paused with terror and with cunning crept.
It faltered: I could see it hesitate;
Then in the middle of the open sheet [a tape cuts abruptly]

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