The Making of Books and the Making of Robert Frost

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Contents

Introduction

In one of his poems, Robert Frost draws attention to books as physical objects, turning books into a sort of character. In the poem entitled "A Fountain, a Bottle, a Donkey's Ears and Some Books," the speaker and his companion are exploring a desolate and abandoned house that, some decades ago, was home to a would-be poet. The following excerpt begins with the speaker's companion remembering a few curiosities about the poet's life, and then the speaker describes what is left behind by this long-departed writer.

> 'She was "shut in" for life. She lived her whole
> Life long in bed, and wrote her things in bed.
> I'll show you how she had her sills extended
> To entertain the birds and hold the flowers.
> Our business first's up attic with her books.'
>
> We trod uncomfortably on crunching glass
> Through a house stripped of everything
> Except, it seems, the poetess's poems.
> Books, I should say!—if books are what is needed.
> A whole edition in a packing-case,
> That, overflowing like a horn of plenty,
> Or like the poetess's heart of love,
> Had spilled them near the window toward the light
> Where driven rain had wet and swollen them.
> Enough to stock a village library—
> Unfortunately all of one kind, though.
> They had been brought home from some publisher
> And taken thus into the family.[1]

[1] Page 196. In general, I cite the *Collected Poems, Prose, and Plays (CPPP)* for Frost's writings, including poetry and prose. For Frost's letters, see note below. Given the interests of this dissertation, I will refer to other editions as well as historical printings available during Frost's lifetime when appropriate, and I will note these cases as we get to them.

We are introduced to this writer in the normal way. There is a preliminary biographical sketch of dubious value; then our main "business" is with her books. But we get an unusual perspective that emphasizes these books as physical objects. The speaker waxes poetic in describing the books themselves, not the poetess and not her work. In fact, the books have taken over the identity of the human being. The poetess was a shut-in who never left the house, and her books continue to occupy the house after all the people and other household items are long gone. When we segue, as is our habit, from the poetess's life to her literary career, we find that the books are as telling as any form of biography. These books are inaccessible, forgotten, and decaying, just as this writer's work is obscure and neglected. The fate of these books tells us what we need to know about the fate of a writer, the literary sort of afterlife, the poetess's importance as a literary-historical figure. In this case, we are talking about a lack of importance, a failure to be much of a figure at all, but without these books as the artifacts of her work, even the failed figure would not be so tangibly present. A writer is someone whose persona is translated into book form, and readers know writers as these objects bearing their names, not in person. This type of existence entails its own sort of growth and lifecycle. In Frost's poem we learn from the fact that the books were conceived and born but only to waste away. This poem also demonstrates that books have a range of telling qualities. Frost does not tell us any of the words that are in the books, but the books have meaning in their physical description and the conditions of their existence.

In this dissertation, I wish to explore the multiple senses in which a writer makes and is made by books. Frost can use books to represent a poet who didn't "make it." Someone put up the money to have the books printed, but what about publicity, distribution, and retailing, the investment in marketing needed by books, movies, music, and so on, in order to turn creative effort into practical success. (We now have self publishing and online publishing, but these are still no guarantee of fame or paying customers, even for fifteen minutes.) We will see that in Frost's own career as a poet, it was only with purposeful efforts to help the sales and reviews of Frost's books

that Frost eventually became a "made man." Literary ambition has many sides, however, and books are the poet's means not only to reach paying customers but also to share with and to influence fellow members of the poetic guild. Just like any reader, a writer generally meets other writers in book form. A poet learns about the art and about the life of the poet from what other practitioners have done, and so this is another sense in which a poet is made by books. As Frost said about the relationship between his life and his writing: "It would be hard to gather biography from poems of mine except as they were all written by the same person, out of the same general region north of Boston, and out of the same books, a few Greek and Latin, practically no others in any other tongue than our own" (783). In books, a poet finds the poets who have endured and finds the form in which they endure. From the books that exemplify writerly success, we learn what works effectively as a book and how the best books work. This includes the selection and arrangement of writings of course but also some awareness of the unique condition that is the print medium. Frost said, "the first book I remembered the looks of was a book of verse by Robert Herrick," and he was impressed when decades later a friend tracked down a copy for him: "It gives me a feeling. It is the very book. Damn you for a detective. The last possible look I could have had at the book was in 1883 or 4—sixty years ago."[2] When it came to making his own books, Frost felt that being "the best-printed American writer" was very much a reason to brag (Blumenthal, *Robert Frost and His Printers* 1). Frost worked with several of the leading figures in the American fine-press movement, which is reflected in the typography and design of many Frost books. The book designs are also known for including the work of J. J. Lankes, the woodcut illustrator closely associated with Frost. Frost was happy to have not just beautiful, quality books but also printed objects that he felt effectively represented his sensibility. Again, what is at stake in getting the books right is relevant to everything from immediate commercial viability to sustaining the literary figure that will hopefully find fame with future generations of readers. Frost does not want to be a mere dabbler in poetry

[2] Frost to Thompson, 1942, in *Selected Letters of Robert Frost,* ed. Lawrance Thompson, #388. Hereafter cited in text. I will cite the numbering system of this edition for all Frost letters unless otherwise noted.

but rather to take up a line of work whose job description is both to write poems and to make books, the medium in which the art of poetry is shared.

I wish to point out one more type of making, that most Classic sense of poetic maker, the Greek ποιητής. This elemental view of a poem as "a thing made" is also seen via the book medium. Here is just one example of how our picture of the words, punctuation, and whitespaces that Frost made depends upon which specific books we look at. In one of Frost's best dramatic poems, "The Death of the Hired Man," the conversation revolves around the pitiable yet prideful person that is the hired man:

> He don't know why he isn't quite as good
> As anyone. He won't be made ashamed
> To please his brother, worthless though he is.

But depending on which book one is reading, one might find the lines written this way:

> 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.

Both versions are written in accordance with the blank verse form; so no doubt both come from the poet's deliberate crafting. The first version is printed in Frost's landmark book *North of Boston,* the book that made Frost famous, and in that volume this poem works in concert with the book's many dialogue-driven poems of related theme and tone. The second version is found in volumes of Frost's collected poetry, books that are also important to his career, albeit in a different way. We may simply want to know what Frost wrote, but the poetic making is mediated through the extant books, which bring their own material conditions. This is the nub of one of the oldest types of literary scholarship, for Classical and Biblical texts are inseparable from the tablets, parchments, and papyri that have physically preserved their existence. The scholars in this area are well-practiced in sounding out the things often taken for granted about books, and my study owes much to the foundational work in the fields of bibliography and textual criticism, such as Bruce Metzger's study of the New Testament. This scholarship demonstrates the wide-ranging relevance of even

basic tasks such as describing physical copies, because for any description to be coherent and useful, the observer must know how to sort out the features and details of the document, which demands a historical understanding of its production and purposes. Bibliography and textual criticism can never be reduced to merely securing the chain of custody for a literary work or establishing a strong, clear signal for its transmission, to use modern analogies. The author's writings become one of the range of choices that go into making a book. For literature from ancient to modern, the designs of the author are bound up with the designs of the book as a physical object.

We can begin to study the complex relationships among authors, literature, and books simply by seeing the book as a designated and delimited set of writings. In the introduction to the Oxford World's Classics edition of the Bible, Stephen Prickett emphasizes the impact of the adoption of the bound codex:

> Before the invention of the codex, or bound manuscript volume, the biblical texts were held as individual scrolls stored together in a wooden chest or cupboard. Under such conditions the question of the precise canon of which works did, or did not constitute the scriptures, or the exact order in which the constituent works should occur, though it might have been a matter of doctrinal debate, was not an immediately practical question. ...the process of creating a canon for the Hebrew Bible and for the New Testament coincides historically with the widespread introduction of the codex form. (xi)

By forcing certain choices, the book presents its own artistic questions: "this loose collection of very different kinds of material composed over a period of almost 500 years... all had to be placed in a specific order. Juxtaposition always suggests meaning" (xii). Noticing that this is more broadly an opportunity for creativity, authors have looked for the chance not just to write some words but also to have a say in how a book is made. For their part, scholars have drawn attention to the choices involved in placing poems into books, and the range of interpretive possibilities may be sampled in the collection of essays edited by Neil Fraistat, *Poems in their Place.* It is natural that literary scholars have discovered the book to be of interest as a distinct presentation of literary work(s), but this can be informed by and integral with the other kinds of art essential to making a book, all of which make it an object of study. To get started with the book arts, the craft of bookmaking, and the

significance of the creative choices involved, a good perspective is that of the trade itself. This can take the form of practical manuals like Robert Bringhurst's *The Elements of Typographic Style* or grand cultural commentaries like the wonderfully titled *Politics and Script: Aspects of Authority and Freedom in the Development of Graeco-Latin Script From the Sixth Century B.C. to the Twentieth Century A.D.* by Stanley Morison, famed designer of the typeface Times New Roman. Either way, many of these practitioners are sensitive to both traditional craft and its fraught position with respect to contemporary business and society. For this, much credit can be given to the fine press movement, a branch of William Morris's arts and crafts movement, which has direct bearing on this study. Frost was in the right time and place to work with the leading Americans in the fine press movement, and Frost's main collaborator, Joseph Blumenthal of the Spiral Press, left us a rich commentary, from scholarly book histories to personal memoirs, which are themselves learned discussions of practicing the craft.

My work here also develops out of the academic efforts to bring together the many dimensions of studying books. David Foxon's *Alexander Pope and the Early Eighteenth-Century Book Trade* is a case study that looks at the book business along with typographic design and their combined significance for scholarly editing. In a more theoretical vein, I have benefitted from concepts like Jerome McGann's bibliographical codes and especially Gerard Genette's paratexts. Although Genette theorizes the paratext in terms of social function and does not comment specifically on editorial issues, he like McGann reveals distinctions that are very useful for apprehending the diversity of features in a printed document. Moreover, I have taken cues from the capaciousness of Genette's explorations, a virtue he shares with G. T. Tanselle, who in *Bibliographical Analysis* suggests the amazing diversity of perspectives on the book and its significance. Last but not least, my work here is inspired by the Frost scholars who have pointed out the significance of the many different features found in Frost's books, promising that the books will reward sustained study. In his monograph, William Pritchard ventures that one of the prime

approaches to Frost's poetry is "to concentrate on the individual volumes.... It has long seemed to me that the ideal way to read Frost is to encounter his poems in their original, first habitats; especially such wonderful collections as *North of Boston, New Hampshire* and *A Witness Tree,* which are much more than receptacles containing discrete, individual efforts" (xviii). Starting from this declaration of the books' inherent value, we are ready to discover the many ways Robert Frost the poet has made and is made by them.

Chapter 1

The Making of Books and the Making of Robert Frost

Robert Frost's first two published books, *A Boy's Will* (1913) and *North of Boston* (1914), have become the natural starting point for general discussions of Frost's literary corpus, and in this chapter, I will focus more specifically on the way these books can act as key players in the oft-told story of Frost's debut as a poet. Frost was nearly forty years old by the time these two books were published, and it certainly marked a change from the two decades of adult life that he had lived up to that point. In those years, Frost had made a home off the beaten path in northern New England and lived as a poultry farmer and as a teacher at provincial prep schools and normal schools. As a freelance writer, he had sold some work to a variety of publications, from stories in poultry trade papers[1] to poems in better literary magazines, but this was sporadic work with little promise as a regular profession. Frost was always writing poetry, his identity was in being a poet, but his status as a poet was limited to someone who had an avocation, perhaps a quixotic vocation. But then Frost made the midlife decision to pull up stakes and move his family to England, pinning his hopes on English literary society and its lively culture of periodicals and reviews. He got a break with a publishing deal for the first two books, and in a stunning turn of fortune, Frost had "made it" as a poet, getting extensive and favorable reviews and becoming a known entity to the big names in Modernist poetry, including Ezra Pound and Amy Lowell. Though not quite a "made man" in the financial sense, Frost was well-established, publishing another book every few years and having a

[1] Reprinted in the charming *Robert Frost: Farm Poultryman,* ed. Lathem and Thompson (Hanover, NH: Dartmouth Publications, 1963).

regular stipend from his publisher as well as real income from teaching appointments at universities and invited lectures. Along with all this, there is another crucial sense in which the books made Frost the poet. As they always do, critics and the reading public fixated on the question: who is this new poet? And for them, the answer had to have everything to do with his books.

A Boy's Will and *North of Boston* defined the life of the poet in the consciousness of these readers, and for his part, Frost would play along with the idea that the books are equivalent to biography:

> The book [*A Boy's Will*] is an expression of my life for the ten years from eighteen on when I thought I greatly preferred stocks and stones to people. The poems were written as I lived the life quite at the mercy of myself and not always happy. The arrangement in a book came much later when I could look back on the past with something like understanding. ...
> I say all this biographically to lead up to Book II (North of Boston). There came a day about ten years ago when I made the discovery that though sequestered I wasn't living without reference to other people.[2]

We are told that the book encodes who the poet was and is, how he has lived, what he has done. The first book is the earlier period of his life, and "Book II" is the later period. So, the two books present us with quite a clear-cut and straightforward plot and moreover lead us to the straightforward moral of the story. The first book will be colored by some youthful melodramatics, but these growing pains will eventually lead the artist to a greater awareness. Frost, however, is teasing us. First, he identifies the convenient age of eighteen as the start of his immature period, and the playfulness continues when the major turning point comes on a single day that happens to divide his career into two equal ten-year periods. Again, the fact is that both books were produced within a year of each other and when Frost was nearly forty years old. Frost took some liberties in making a "youthful" book well after the fact. Jeffrey Cramer has researched the biographical context for

[2] Frost to Braithwaite, 1915, in *Selected Letters of Robert Frost,* ed. Lawrance Thompson (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1964), #105. Hereafter cited in text. I will cite the numbering system of this edition for all Frost letters unless otherwise noted.

each individual poem and shows that these two books give us a blurry chronology at best.[3] Furthermore, these books leave out many of the poems written at the time; Frost would publish dozens of other poems from this so-called early period but years or even decades later.

In playing the role of explainer, Frost readily humors the premise that his life makes the books and his books are a life, but the execution makes us seriously question that equivalence. For Frost, this is not just mockery but rather an understanding that even a very loose biographical sketch will trigger a deep complex of beliefs. What is compelling is the want and need to read the book as a proxy for the human being. In many cases a reader never meets an author in person; yet readers feel that they "know" their favorite writers. What they get introduced to and acquainted with are the books. If an author's books are not available to us, that author will not become a familiar figure. When Chaucer says, "go, little book," he is speaking to the vehicle that carries his words and his reputation out into the wider world. There are of course distinct advantages gained by having books act as the proxy for a person. In book form, an author can go anywhere there is a reading public, and the books can continue to exist and circulate after the author's death. The book allows mere mortals to project themselves across time and space, and compared to real human beings, books are better adapted to the literary condition. Within the ecosystem represented by the publishing industry and the reading marketplace, the book medium survives by how well it serves the needs of reproduction and distribution. So Frost, like every author, would like to have his identity stolen by his own books, but Frost also takes interest in the paradox thus created. If a book can convey a human presence, it does so by investment in whatever kind of life a book can embody.

Making this distinction is not just a witty observation, it is crucial to the book's existence. If books take on a life of their own, it is a life that requires its own sort of conception or cultivation and a life that faces its own sorts of hazards to survival. As evident from Frost's career, a poetic

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[3] *Robert Frost Among His Poems* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 1996). And any chronological interpretation must grant that *A Boy's Will* is not from Frost's boyhood. Nothing in it was written before the age of eighteen. See also Frost's letter to Ward (1913, #49), where he emphasizes that he has outgrown all habits of student work.

temperament is not enough to bring a book to fruition; there is also the business of publishing, which must be nourished appropriately. Printing, marketing, distribution, and retailing require money of course but also labor, physical assets, and management. The book can be quite an agent but at considerable cost, committing resources to a fruit that may wither on the vine depending on business savvy or lack thereof as well as the whims of reviewers and the buying public. A writer committing to the capitalist means of being reproduced, circulated, and preserved has no guarantees. We all know the mantra "high risk, high reward," but just as interesting is choosing how to balance risks, sometimes deciding on a modest outlay when returns are uncertain. The capitalist game certainly precipitates in things like slick marketing strategies, but for Frost, risk is also a key metaphor that taps into a formative mode of experience, as seen for example his epigraph to *In the Clearing*, which speaks of "risking spirit / In substantiation,"[4] and in the way he could come up with the parallel phrases "trial by existence" (28) and "trial by market" (104), making commercial success an echo of larger concerns. Again from the epigraph to *In the Clearing*:

> ...derring-do
> Thought of in the large
> Is one mighty charge
> On our human part
> Of the soul's ethereal
> Into the material. (447)

Lest this sound too philosophical, we can also find that artists explore risk through the artistic materials, process the challenge in terms of the medium. Frost, for example, expresses his struggle in blank verse:

> Do you know,
> Considering the market, there are more
> Poems produced than any other thing?
> No wonder poets sometimes have to seem

[4] The epigraph is a lightly adapted excerpt from the poem "Kitty Hawk." Robert Frost, *Collected Poems, Prose, and Plays,* ed. Richard Poirier and Mark Richardson (New York: Library of America, 1995), 423. Abbreviated *CPPP* and hereafter cited in text. In general, I cite this edition for Frost's writings, including poetry and prose. In this chapter, references to *A Boy's Will* and *North of Boston* shall be to the original English (London: David Nutt) and American (New York: Henry Holt) editions. For Frost's letters, see note above.

> So much more businesslike than businessmen.
> Their wares are so much harder to get rid of. (155)

Note that the poet does not want to be an actual businessman but rather to offer a much more magnified and distilled experience by comparison. The symbolic trial has literary value, figuring a classic story, plot, dramatic shape, one that is useful for allegorizing the life of a poet and his work. The allegory here can claim the status of parable, passed down from a tradition as old as Pindar, whose poetry is inseparable from his artful praise of his patrons. Compared to the examples I've noted, various artists and artworks may be less direct an expression of this parable, but they will be no less concrete in expressing it, for every surviving artwork tells a story of being tested by particular economic conditions and being tested by the concrete difficulties of a particular medium. These are not just personal complaints but common experiences that help establish the family bonds among artists. Whatever one's individual aesthetic ideal, an artist looks to a shared kinship and heritage to make intelligible the artist's practical job and tangible results. A poet is someone who willingly inherits the problems of poets and poetry and finds lessons therein, and I hope to explore how the modern version of the parable is told in the making of books and specifically poetry books. A writer is someone who has gleaned his lot in life from books, and this suggests a quite different approach to interpreting the claim that Frost's books are made out of his biography.

Just like other readers, Frost would have encountered important writers primarily in book form, but for the poet, these encounters with books are life-changing, for in them he finds the tribe he wishes to join and its difficult initiation process. The books attest to poets who "made it," in the sense of making a career of writing, of becoming recognized cultural figures, and of surviving as historical figures, and consciously or not, a poet like Frost sees how all this is gambled on the making of the book. The life of the book is tested first by a pressing need for sales and good publicity from reviewers, which can deepen into concerns of how a book can continue to hold value, to have a more lasting chance of survival. As time goes on, not all books will be thought of as worth

taking up space in a warehouse, an institutional library, or a personal collection.[5] The trial by market and trial by existence suggest the complexity of accounting for how artworks survive the ebb and flow of cultures, are able to answer the successive challenges of historical movements.[6] Though it sounds tautological, I would say that extant books provide an object lesson in what a book ought to do to continue existing. The lessons are condensed in the physical artifact, and Frost's own efforts to make a viable book are engendered by the concrete examples that imparted to him a book's potential for vitality. Of course, to perceive a book's strengths is to be responsive to another crucial sense in which a book is "a thing made": as a creative medium that displays a range of crafted features from the selection and arrangement of poets to presswork and binding. For his first two books, Frost did not have much say in the physical design, but as his career grew, he collaborated with typographers, illustrators, and book designers, another interesting way in which Frost's status as a poet corresponds with the level of involvement in bookmaking. This chapter, however, focuses on the designs of *A Boy's Will* and *North of Boston,* in which the written content is the main sense in which Frost makes his books, but a concern for the poetry is no less indicative of the condition of the medium. What we know of poets' writing is whatever is chosen for and perhaps specifically written for the book format, and so a poet learns the art of poetry from how it looks recorded in a successful book.

A poet's book will be based on other poets' books, but this does not invalidate the prevailing idea that poets' books give us a personal connection to the writer and his life. No doubt Frost wrote from experience and in that sense his books are made out of the life of the poet. But whatever a poet's personal vision, he deals in the artistic medium's resources for rendering it, and similarly

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[5] The story of Cotton Vitellius A.xv shows that sometimes a constitutional affection for antiquities passed from father to son can be what allows a work to survive.

[6] The complexity and importance of such accounting are reflected in the use of certain archetypal myths, all potentially misleading. Milton's "fit audience find though few" should be interpreted carefully in that his epic poem quickly found a large and enthusiastic audience. We might also give allowance for the superficial cachet of being the "discoverer" of valuable artifacts. Repeated claims that Codex Sinaiticus was rescued from a rubbish heap are disputed by the monastery.

whatever the details of Frost' biography, his concern is how a complex self and life ought to be translated into book form, of what sort of story can actually succeed as a book of poetry.

I

Near the beginning of this chapter, I pointed out the problems in Frost's suggestion that *A Boy's Will* and *North of Boston* emerge from a basic contrast between youth and maturity. There is cause to declare this invalid as a real story, but all stories are too-tidy forms that cannot exactly fit the messiness of reality. Being a poet and writer, Frost's job description includes dealing in the artfulness of all storytelling including biography and finding significance in the tensions between reality and the possible stories to be made. In Frost's explanation of his two books as biography, which I quoted at length in the introduction to this chapter, Frost is clear that "The arrangement in a book came much later when I could look back on the past with something like understanding." After all, in his well-known poem "The Road Not Taken," Frost has his speaker point out, "I shall be telling this with a sigh / Somewhere ages and ages hence" (103), recognizing the difference between his present situation and the rhetoric he will someday use to look back on it, and remarkably, the poem's speaker is already preparing to use the facts selectively. The oft-recited conclusion that he took the road "less traveled by" contradicts his own observation that the two roads were used "really about the same." One should expect changes when it is only "much later" that one looks back with "something like understanding," for the retelling comes out of a different perspective and purpose. Such shifts are explored in other Frost poems that look back on youth from a distance, but in examples like "To Earthward" and "The Oven Bird," the mature perspective emphasizes the loss of freshness, with mixed implications for the notion of development. Even within *A Boy's Will,* Frost creates multiple versions of the story, for example with the first and last poems, which make a sort of frame for the book. "Into My Own" declares that the youth's path is cyclic, that time will bring him back to the same place, and "Reluctance" resists as platitudinous

notions of moving on and letting go. This of course complicates the basic youth-to-maturity trajectory plotted for *A Boy's Will* as paired with *North of Boston* and also adds to the various biographical archetypes found throughout Frost's work. The clashing artistic shapes help us to appreciate that the choice of any one meaning to be crafted from real life is inseparable from a particular want, need, and effort.

There is much in the specific occasion for remembering, and so I refer one last time to the long quote in which Frost says *A Boy's Will* and *North of Boston* are made from his life story. It is from a letter addressed to W. S. Braithwaite, a critic who would give Frost good coverage, and Frost openly notes the newly invented illocutionary act that he performs for the critic: "I say all this biographically." In his headnote to the letter, Thompson opines that Frost's "tactic" is insincere, supplying "tendentious" remarks that "had the makings of good 'copy'" for reviewers, but can we not see Frost's spinning of stories as appropriate for his fraught position? Again, for a heretofore unknown poet starting to make his name, the poet's biography is a loaded question. The problematic answer that Frost suggests can be understood in terms of the very different types of life story that Frost is weaving at the same time. It unfolds in parallel with the story of survival of Frost's fledgling books, which can be retold as the equally meaningful story of Frost undertaking the test of a literary career. These parables of creative trial clash productively with the maturation topos, for Frost chooses what kind of story can be effectively conveyed by poetry books and what the auditors of that story, i.e. reviewers and literary society, are prepared to listen to.

When *A Boy's Will* was published in 1913, a needed victory came in receiving notice from prominent periodicals, though the reviewers' actual responses were somewhat measured.[7] The *Times Literary Supplement* is a good example: "Sometimes too, in a vein of reflection, he [Frost] makes one stop and think, though the thought may be feebly or obscurely expressed" (1).

[7] An excellent compilation of reviews is *Robert Frost: The Critical Reception,* ed. Linda W. Wagner (Burt Franklin, 1977). Hereafter cited in text. For all reviews, I will cite author of review if known as well as page number from this anthology, unless otherwise noted.

Fortunately, the reviewers also latched onto the youthful character of *A Boy's Will* (the *TLS* says, "naively engaging"), and this magically turned the ambivalence into a kind of praise, for the inexperienced poet will learn from his weaknesses, while his positive qualities will keep growing as he matures:

> it is that youthful sombreness which is little more than a play of hide-and-seek with cheerfulness. The definition of the feeling is not always sharp, but, even in its vagueness, it exhibits a savor, a saltiness, a reaching and penetrating quality which augurs well for this young writer's future. (O. W. Firkins, 8)

The Academy latched onto the sentiment wholeheartedly, offering this encouragement to the wunderkind:

> We do not need to be told that the poet is a young man: the dew and the ecstasy—the audacity, too—of pristine vision are here. ... if this is a true sample of his parts he should presently give us work far worthier of honour. (5)

These reviews proved to be remarkably useful. Business and marketing professionals know that it is often the second product to market that succeeds. The second product takes advantage of the consumer awareness created by the first, and the second also irons out the problems that are always discovered with a hitherto unknown kind of product. Turning back to Frost's reviewers, what they found in the first book is what they might have expected from a first book: not quite ready for prime time, but worth seeing what he gives us next. Frost did indeed deliver the goods with his second book, *North of Boston*. The appropriately-titled *American Review of Reviews* confidently summed up the book's importance: "Here the author came fully to his own. The book brought instant acclaim, and without reserve Frost was honored as a poet of high distinction" (Sylvester Baxter, 22). Of course, Frost knew that when he "came fully to his own," it had little to do with natural growth but rather marked the crucial transition from an amateur poet to a poet who is viable in the market.

For Frost, there was no question that he would be known by his books and that this unique type of life had to be nurtured in its own way: "[a contract] is just the beginning of a book's career. I am in mortal fear now lest the reviewers should fail to take any notice of it. Such a work isn't sold in

the bookstores but through the notices in the papers entirely" (Frost to Bartlett, 1913, #46). As we've seen, Frost did get the reviews, and we can begin to wonder if Frost played the marketing competition with the strategy of a chess master. As noted above, Frost's first book is the product of some peculiar self-anthologizing. Richard Poirier was one of the first to point out that Frost had the poems on hand to assemble a book of greater range and richness than he did.[8] In fact, Frost gave the following instructions to a friend who was compiling excerpts from the reviews: "Leave in any derogatory remarks. We like those" (Frost to Bartlett, 1913, #52). The ground was being prepared for the release of the next book, and Frost had reason to worry when his publisher was slow about it: "I shall have another book done ... before she gets Book II out. This is rough on me because I feel that now is the time to strike while there is a certain interest in me for what I have done" (Frost to Bartlett, 1914, #73). No doubt Frost was ahead of the game, a game involving a range of players from poets and publishers to reviewers and the reading public. Frost played to win and played for keeps. A decade later, when he had established himself as a dominant player, he told this story:

> Three months ago John Gould Fletcher wrote me saying, "I learn you have a book out. I wish you would use your influence with Henry Holt & Co to help me get a book out. I am sending them a manuscript." I spoke to Lincoln MacVeagh in the matter. He said he wouldn't publish John Gould Fletcher's book for two simple reasons: first because it wouldnt sell and second because he hated the kind of thing Fletcher wrote. I said I wouldnt ask him to publish it to get me a good review or save me from a bad one. Obviously he might have published Fletcher's book and charged it up to advertising mine. ... But I can't excuse Fletcher his bad taste—worthy of Washington politics or New York business. (Frost to Untermeyer, 1924, #244)

Frost's account is perfectly rational until we get to his concluding remark, which sounds hypocritical. If anyone has joined in on the business and politics of poetry, it's Frost. How can he censure a fellow poet for "bad taste" for trying to get a book deal? Frost must have some concern for the spirit of the game, which interestingly becomes clearer when he is more candid about competing:

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[8] *The Work of Knowing* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), 54-56.

> All we know is that the crowning mercy for an author is publication in some form or other. Undeniably the best form is a book with a reputable house at the expense of the house. The next best is a book with a reputable house at the expense of the author. (781)

This wonderfully unapologetic capitalist is able, with wit, to indicate some subtle distinctions to how well a poet passes the test, that winning may happen by degrees, and even clarifies why victory must be handled with taste. Frost says, "the crowning mercy for an author," not crowning glory. A book deal is not a coronation; it is more like winning a stay of execution.

Viewed after the fact, it can look like the only "real" life story told by the books is the story of how Frost manipulated the market with cold calculation to assure his success in the business. Yet at the time, Frost would have had no way of knowing whether his efforts would help at all, nor could he have foreseen the series of fortunate results that ensued in spite of serious difficulties.[9] Frost's precarious finances during these years have been well documented. He sold his farm to raise cash, "going all in" so to speak, but for Frost this was the latest out of a long line of maneuvers that had so far failed to push his career over the top. One cannot bet the farm, as Frost actually did, with any rational expectation. Even when his career began to find momentum, Frost lived in fear that any financial gains would go first to the lawyers and businessmen. Again, Frost was looking not at guarantees but at probation. If he was coldly practical, it was in recognizing the limited options open to poets:

> The poets here are of three kinds—the poor rats in one room and a suit of clothes with no family to take care of and much too cunning to be caught in that trap, the gentlemanly minors with a graceful weakness for verse and by common consent quite rich enough to indulge it and the few like Masefield who arrive at one jump. I am like none of these. I must make my way very slowly: such is my doom I am afraid. There will be little money return directly from my poetry—at least for the present. (Frost to Bartlett, 1913, #67)

Frost counsels himself on prudence, patience, and all that, but crucially he locates his standing relative to the society of poets. Frost looks at other poets for how the handle the practical question of living on poetry, and though he declares that he is like none of his contemporaries, he finds in the

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[9] William Pritchard made this important point in the larger context of Frost's biography. See *A Literary Life Reconsidered* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), 4.

comparison the type of trial by which he will be made a poet, ultimately tying him into a greater tradition.

Chaucer, in his "Complaint" to his purse, also declares himself a poet who must court money (the purse is his "lady dere"), and by addressing the poem to King Henry IV, Chaucer is able to class himself as a writer who appeals to (in both senses) the highest of patrons. With his wordsmithing, the poet did win a reward from the king, and for its skill the poem also survives as literature. The literary business leaves an inheritance for succeeding generations, a legacy of artworks that preserve and record the complex type of success that will keep the family line going. A prototypical example of a pedigree shaped for and through literary competition (ἀγών) is the ancient Greek theater. In *The Clouds,* the playwright Aristophanes has a speaking role in his own play, plainly stating his ambition not only to win first prize in the theatrical festival but also to cement his overall reputation. He addresses directly the critics who have been satisfied or dissatisfied by his efforts, comparing his methods to those of his competitors and retracing his career achievements as certified by judges of "extraordinary taste and discrimination" (achievements naturally culminating in the present work).[10] In this and less direct ways, the Greek plays speak to and about the culture of Greek theater, with its system of festivals, audiences, established genres, citizen juries, and prizes. Similarly, I look for how books speak to and about the system of publishers, reviewers, and readers. A Greek tragedy (or comedy) cannot succeed if it does not offer a creative response to the solutions achieved by competing tragedies, and a book of poetry must be able to take inspiration from the same pressures that all books of poetry work under.

As we've seen, Frost faced a culture of readers and reviewers that pressured and judged poetry books for an admissible persona and life story. Aristophanes wrote himself into his play as a character, and no less a creative solution to expectations is the character of Frost depicted by his books. In this chapter, we are seeing how that character's opening turn towards majority is mapped

[10] *Four Plays by Aristophanes,* tr. William Arrowsmith (New York: Meridian, 1994), 62.

onto the first two books, and knowing how way leads on to way, Frost could also anticipate the tropes that would shadow the subsequent books, as seen in the following excerpts from a letter to Louis Untermeyer, in which Frost speaks in terms of life phases but is in reality plotting a course of books:

> I am become my own salesman. Two of my phases you have seen so what shall I say... Take care you don't get your mouth set to declare the other two [books] (as I release them) a falling off of power, for that is what they can't be whatever else they may be, since they were almost inextricably mixed with the first two in the writing and only my sagacity has separated or sorted them in the afterthought for putting on the market. Did you ever hear of quite such a case of Scotch-Yankee calculation? You should have seen the look on the face of the Englishman I first confessed this to!
> ...
> I can unfold as a personality at discretion.
> ...
> Great effect of strength and mastery! (1916, #146)

Frost reiterates the language of sales and markets here, but just as significant are the designs implied in words like "power," "sagacity," "unfold... at discretion," "strength and mastery," and even "calculation." We have a laugh at the expense of the Englishman who (with apologies to Keats) believes that if poetry comes as naturally as leaves to a tree, then so should books, but this reflects the pressure that is placed on books. The skill is in discerning what in the design of a book can make it the supposed natural fruit of a poet's life.

If there is a way to connect Frost's books to the poet's real life, it is first that a poet studies the vocation as it has been passed down in books. The poet's challenge then is discerning how this inheritance takes hold in the here and now and which of the book's possible offerings the present is ready to believe in (or "buy"). None of the foregoing is meant to suggest that Frost does not write from experience, but his creative energy is channeled by the problem of how to retell and revitalize the life of the book, a problem that manifested in Frost's literary moment as modernism. In its way, modernism was simply the latest attempt to retell the story of how art is made. As the name implies, the modernists were vexed by their relationship to the time-tested prescriptions for art and artists and, haunted by a sense of a failed culture, felt that art must confront the test of

modernity. Modernist artists were concerned, as they should be, with their own survival, feeling blighted by an unhealthy growth, no longer viable. As always, however, solutions were to be found by getting back down to roots and soil, tapping into a more primal vitality.

Modernism also found its preferred way to cast the relationship between the life of the person and the life of the artworks, turning people into personas that write manifestos. In declaring their "revolutionary" principles for what makes art, what makes poems, these manifestos end up sounding similar to each other, fitting the need to be understood in terms of the story told by the other modernist personas.[11] Which brings us to Ezra Pound. Every modernist poet had to be aware of Ezra Pound's call to "make it new," and it seems that no modernist poet could avoid Ezra Pound the man. Frost met Pound early on, and when Pound published a review of *A Boy's Will,* he certainly identified what would become the other critical watchword for Frost's first book when he concluded with praise of Frost's simplicity (2). The *Times Literary Supplement* would say, "the writer is not afraid to avoid the simplest of his thoughts and fancies" (1). *The Dial* enjoys Frost's "simple phrasing" (Payne, 5). F. S. Flint goes the whole nine yards in advocating Frost's "simplicity of utterance. It is this simplicity which is the great charm of his book; and it is a simplicity that proceeds from a candid heart" (3). Despite the whiff of condescension, this is genuine praise for the modernists, who wanted first to shed the baggage of fancy poeticisms, the mannered style that trumpeted the presence of poetry. Of course, the reversion to childlike innocence must then lead to new growth, flowering in revolutionary methods that would topple the crusty old academic prescriptions. In essence, maturity is signaled by polemics and manifestos. Frost didn't mind stirring up trouble here, saying things like this in anticipation of his second book:

> 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 (principle I had better say) of versification. (Frost to Bartlett, 1913, #53)

[11] A few prominent examples include Whitman's preface to *Leaves of Grass* and its verse manifestation "Starting from Paumanok," Moréas's "Symbolist Manifesto," Ezra Pound's "Prolegomena," T. S. Eliot's "The Metaphysical Poets," and Amy Lowell's preface to *Some Imagist Poets.*

Along with the mock pretense, there is a complex game behind this grandstanding, and, indeed, much would need to "transpire presently" for Frost.

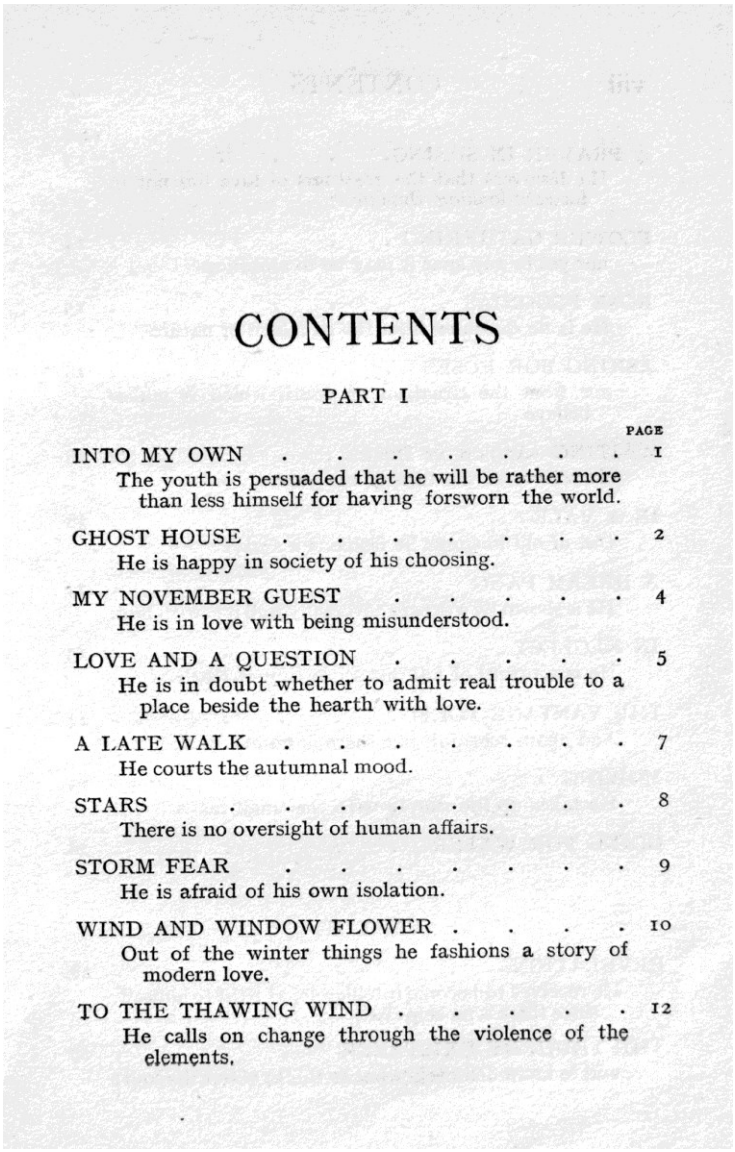
Frost's problem was that the critics had been just too impressed with his simplicity. *A Boy's Will* was apparently so very free of the taint of education, it wasn't clear if Frost could fill the other half of the modernist prescription, that is, re-intellectualize his subsequent product with aesthetic and theoretical pronouncements. As Frost wrote to a literary ally: "At least I am sure I can count on you to give me credit for knowing what I am about. You are not going to make the mistake that Pound makes of assuming that my simplicity is that of the untutored child. I am not undesigning" (Frost to Mosher, 1913, #55). In fact, Frost would never be fully accepted as an intellectual poet with the likes of Pound, T. S. Eliot, Amy Lowell, or any other of the overtly experimental high modernists, because his poems simply did not look like theirs, but Frost was able to clinch things for *North of Boston* by getting at the game behind the modernist game. As a good modernist should, Frost expatiated his poetic principles, now familiar to all Frostians as "the sound of sense" and justly admired for their vigor and insight. But given Frost's true skill with complex literary theory,[12] the sound of sense is an elementary idea (in a positive sense), bringing out continuities with Chaucer, Shakespeare, and writers of drama and dialogue across all periods. Yet it gave the critics and reviewers the poetic manifesto they needed, for a manifesto should come off as both self-evident and sanctioned by history, as the avant garde know perfectly well.[13] There is a fine sense of irony in modernism and Pound's formulation "make it new," which is where Frost found room to play and what makes it hazardous to be reductive about Frost's designs. The best modernists are well-aware that their movement springs from the burden imposed by artistic history and tradition, that "original" has two contradictory meanings pointing to both the inheritance and the here and now, and that both aspects of originality speak to the question of what can survive, what remains

[12] For comparison, see Frost's deft critique of Robert Bridges's quantity theory, in his letter to Cox, 1914, #70.
[13] I will say more on the sound of sense throughout this essay. An interesting thing to keep in mind is that Frost sketched his ideas in various places but never formally wrote them up, and so his manifesto really exists as patchwork.

vital, where to grow. Frost captures the paradox in his quip "the old way to be new" (741), and so he knows the book of poetry as a time-tested form proven upon the extensive history of books of poetry. What is new in Frost's books comes out of his effort to master the art of the book.

II

That being said, let's now look more closely at specific features of the books, starting again with *A Boy's Will.* One of the most obvious features that a book adds to the individual poems is the book's title, and the title *A Boy's Will* is the single biggest clue to the book's design. The design is made obvious again, but in a quite different way, when we turn to the table of contents (fig. 1.1). Frost inserts these short phrases alongside the titles of almost every poem, a kind of gloss that connects each poem to a vague narrative focused on a single character, "the youth." We also see "Part I" indicated. The contents and thus the glosses are divided into three large parts, further organizing the story that the book is supposed to tell. We can't help but notice the odd feel of the glosses; should we laugh with Frost or at him? Readers who can remember their Longfellow are rewarded with an additional perspective on the glosses. The phrase "a boy's will" is taken from the Longfellow poem "My Lost Youth": "A boy's will is the wind's will, / And the thoughts of youth are long, long thoughts." So it is with Frost's melodramatic youth who goes hither and thither but never experiences a shortage of brooding along the way. To be frank, this is not the most difficult allusion in the history of literature. Most Americans of Frost's generation could remember Longfellow as the most popular poet of the 19th century. Frost, it seems, is making sure his designs will be easy to notice and decode. With a largely accessible allusion, placed conspicuously in the title, no one will have trouble "getting" the meaning or noticing that it also points at the meaning of the (also-hard-to-overlook) glosses. Frost, however, is up to his usual fooling. Though it's perfectly obvious that the book has a meaningful design, upon closer inspection, the meaning of the book remains perfectly vague.



CONTENTS

PART I

Figure 1.1: Table of contents for *A Boy's Will* (London: David Nutt, 1913).

The big question is how does the story indicated by the table of contents manifest itself in the actual content; in other words, how can we read the many individual poems so that they string together to materialize the story? The answer, in this case, is we can't. Most critics have agreed that these poems, being mostly brief, self-contained, and highly subjective, do not add any narrative or characterization beyond what the glosses claim. Upon examination, the book's title and table of contents are a deliberate artifice that draws attention to the book's construction. They are about themselves as much as the book's content. As such, readers should feel free to interpret the content on its own terms, for the string of poems suggests a variety of groupings and patterns. Frost's arrangement is more subtle and dynamic than both the system imposed on the table of contents and the rubric of "immaturity" imposed by the title.[14] We are also free to analyze the book's artifacts on their own terms, not just as headings dictated by the book's content. The glosses in particular seem to be playing their own game, working out their own conflicts. They are written in the third person by someone older than the youth, ostensibly with a better perspective on the youth's mindset than the youth himself. There is some gentle mocking of the youth's egotism (the youth, he says, resolves "to know definitely what he thinks about the soul"), but the analyses also come off as too pat and rather belated. Whoever this explicator is, he keeps distancing himself from the poetry with explanations that feel ever more abstract. In fact, the glosses' style and narrative have been imported from an external supplier. As noted by both Poirier and Pritchard, if we look at W. B. Yeats's early book *The Wind among the Reeds,* we find little sequences throughout the table of contents, such as:

> Michael Robartes Asks Forgiveness Because of His Many Moods
> Aedh Tells of a Valley Full of Lovers
> Aedh Tells of the Perfect Beauty
> Aedh Hears the Cry of the Sedge
> Aedh Things of Those Who Have Spoken Evil of His Beloved

[14] Poirier's analysis in *The Work of Knowing* is just one example of the possible ways that critics have found to read the arrangement of *A Boy's Will.*

When Yeats was planning this book, he tried out different selections and arrangements of poems and in the process wrote out several possible tables of contents. Later on, he replaced the proper names with abstractions (He, Poet, Lover), a move whose effects would be most concentrated in a list of titles.[15] Yeats was turning an artifact of the book format into a design, and Frost simply took the next step. Frost is able to allude to his predecessor's book not only with content but also with form, one table of contents imitating another. In a way, this allusion complements the reference to Longfellow. Yeats and Longfellow are both older poets whose lifespans overlap with Frost's. Yet Yeats and Longfellow are an unusual literary pairing,[16] and the book design invokes them in very different ways, from the straightforward quotation in the title to the metalepsis of the table of contents. Once again, Frost would have us labor at least a bit to make a solid meaning out of the combination. As a book, *A Boy's Will* repeatedly reminds us that no part of it is simply a natural outgrowth. The items used to construct the book remain distinct constructions themselves, the table of contents made like a table of contents, the poems arranged to suggest various arrangements, and so on.

With *North of Boston,* Frost was just as determined to construct a book that would make an impression as a book, and there's no question that it was a coup. Frost would go on to produce other books with conspicuous and even award-winning designs; yet readers down to the present day tend to remember *North of Boston* before all other books in the Frost canon. The book's distinctiveness, however, leads to an attitude very different from *A Boy's Will*. Strangely, Frost would sometimes try to disavow his own designs for *North of Boston:*

> I got a dozen poems together—a dozen or fifteen, I think it was—that hadn't been written toward that name [*North of Boston*] and hadn't been written toward any particular ideas. They had been scattered among lyrics. They were blank-verse things scattered through twenty years. Then, all of a sudden, I put them together with some little dim notion of their belonging together—swept them together. They're not organic. (828)

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[15] See The Wind Among the Reeds: *Manuscript Materials,* ed. Carolyn Holdsworth (Ithaca: Cornell U. P., 1993), xxvii.

[16] Yeats offers a brief and dismissive judgment of Longfellow in "What Is 'Popular Poetry'?".

He reminds readers that the poems did not grow together organically but also claims that he never intended for them to work together as a book, so what does that leave us? The poems are there only because Frost placed them there, and we are left with the tricky notion that Frost did manufacture the book but was barely conscious of it. In reality, of course, the book emerged from repeated cycles of selection, writing, and rewriting that progressively refined its character. We will try to make sense of Frost's cagey attitude as we look over what exactly he "swept" up.

As expected, the poems in *North of Boston* portray rural New England, and what sets the book apart are the extended narratives based on Frost's real-life observations of people and happenings from the period he lived on his New England farm. It might be tempting to say, therefore, that the book's content is a direct product of Frost's life, but it is not in any autobiographical sense. Rather, it is a sensibility that Frost found in the locals and their ways, "liking their gossip for its own sake" as he puts it (Frost to Braithwaite, 1915, #105). On the book's dedication page, Frost labels it "this book of people," suggesting that the book is made from them. Yet the book's fabric has other crucial threads. With the sound of sense, Frost declares that the book is "made" just as much by its technique, an amalgam of blank verse and modern vernacular. The book requires not only New England subjects but also the language that can properly portray them and render their dialect. So far, I have freely used the categories of form and content, but this ready-made distinction always reveals more subtleties. The poems' combination of form and content is itself a distinctive type of content, and this content is what gives shape to the whole book. Given this groundwork, readers have gone on to explore all sorts of additional ways in which the content organizes the book, but for now, let me describe only the most obvious of the additional structures.

Twelve of the fifteen poems listed in the table of contents are extended narratives. These poems of dialogue and action are anchored at the beginning, middle, and end with three of Frost's most significant poems of meditation: a blank verse soliloquy on social boundaries ("Mending Wall"), a spiritual meditation in irregular form ("After Apple Picking"), and an *ars poetica* written

inside of a heroic couplet[17] ("The Wood-Pile"). Finally, Frost framed the entire design with two short lyrics that take a familiar, almost beguiling, tone towards the reader. The first poem, "The Pasture," appears on a preliminary leaf, coming before the table of contents. The final poem, "Good Hours," serves as a kind of postlude.[18] Both of these poems are printed in italics, and neither appears in the table of contents. Thus, Frost places these highly-personal lyrics on a meta-level that is separate from a body of poetry that may or may not be personal. It is hard to miss this structure, and there's no doubt of its deliberate design. We might even say it is more definite than the designs we observed with *A Boy's Will.* Yet it doesn't feel like artifice just for the sake of showing off the artifice. As suggested earlier, readers have found much in *North of Boston* by following their intuition that the book's content and structure are innately fitted to each other.[19] Also mentioned earlier was the one other artificial structure that patterns the entire book, its blank verse. The blank verse asks to be appreciated on the micro-scale in the same way as the macro-scale structures, unmistakably artificial, yet almost indistinguishably woven with the subject matter. Much as Milton did with the blank verse of *Paradise Lost*, Frost brings a type of control that makes the juggling of exposition, dialogue, and great soliloquies look fluid and easy. Artificial forms, when handled with mastery and a skilled touch, become natural.

Needless to say, entire schools of literary theory are being suggested here, especially the New Criticism and its roots in Coleridge's organic form. The comparison to Milton, however, also reminds us of something that has almost gotten left behind as this discussion unfolds: the historical dimension. Frost's formal designs are, on the one hand, a pure aesthetic accomplishment, an artist working out the challenges of the art itself. On the other hand, the challenge of blank verse is also presented by its imposing cultural significance and an imposing canon of poets who set the

[17] The first and last lines rhyme, but all the other lines are unrhymed.
[18] Several sources incorrectly report that "Good Hours" was added in the second edition, an error that may go back to Crane's 1974 catalogue. See David Sanders, "Correcting the Record: 'Good Hours' and *North of Boston,*" *Robert Frost Review* 23/24 (2014), 70-79.
[19] As with *A Boy's Will,* I will not try to list the many interpretations of *North of Boston's* overall organization offered by a variety of excellent critics. My point is simply that it has been a very fruitful effort.

expectations for it. A work's content can refer to history and society, but so can its form as well as particular associations of content, form, and genre.[20] By choosing to write long-form poetry in blank verse, Frost invokes the English tradition of Shakespeare and Milton. Because of this context, blank verse is the appropriate form for drama and epic, which means that blank verse is fitting for both a certain weight of utterance and a work whose large size approaches book-like proportions. Blank verse is a kind of content that can be identified with books: the title of the poem is also the title of the book, or, in the case of epic, the poem also comprises books.[21] However subtle these associations of form and content, they are made by tradition, not by nature. But just as one can practice a skill until it becomes second nature, we can also learn cultural practices until they become ingrained, and therefore Frost's particular unification of content, verse form, genre, and book design can feel natural.

III

As a great lover of the Classics, Frost was all too aware that by bringing together an exercise in genre and form and subject matter with a concern for tradition and education and mastery, he was evoking the idea of the Virgilian Progress. According to this idea, Virgil's poetic career began with pastoral, proceeded to georgic, and concluded with epic. More specifically, he mastered certain models from the Greek tradition. First he wrote the *Eclogues* in the style of Theocritus, then the *Georgics* based on Hesiod, culminating with the *Aeneid* in imitation of Homer. Virgil's tomb says, "I sang of pastures, cultivated fields, leaders,"[22] and ever since, poets and critics have pointed to this

[20] Here, I am indebted to the writings of John Hollander. See *Vision and Resonance* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975), especially ch. 9.
[21] We saw before how Frost liked referring to his books by number. He even had "BOOK SIX" printed on the title page of *A Further Range.*
[22] "Cecini pascua, rura, duces." 'Rus' generally means countryside or rural areas, but it is specifically associated with the growing of crops, a complex social arrangement that allows cities to exist.

as a training program, the path to follow if you want to grow into a great poet.[23] Returning to the comparison between *A Boy's Will* and *North of Boston*, is this Virgilian discipline the "real" story of education, maturity, and progress told by the two books? Certainly, the parallel should be investigated. *A Boy's Will* is a book of short poems in various song forms while *North of Boston* takes on the weightier blank verse along with bigger themes. After that, however, it becomes tricky to pin down a more precise parallel. If Frost's goal is epic, it is reflected only in *North of Boston's* blank verse style that should, but ultimately does not, fill up the whole book. In terms of subject and genre, it seems that *North of Boston* is more in line with step two of the three step progression. In his review, Pound astutely attached the label "Modern Georgics" to *North of Boston* (15), and Frost used the working title "Farm Servants and Other People." Yet we can also find both Frost (849) and Pound claiming that *North of Boston* is modeled on the *Eclogues,* and Abercrombie's review detects "almost the identical desires and impulses" as Theocritus (13).

It's easy to see that Frost is working with recognizable elements of the Virgilian progress, but they seem put together almost by free association. *North of Boston* meanders among all three steps of Virgil's career, and to boot, *A Boy's Will* has its share of georgic moments. But if Frost is turning the Virgilian progress into a jumble, it was a problematic combination of things in the first place. It's well and good that genres and forms have a history of cultural roles and use by past writers, but what does it really mean that a poet in the here and now is supposed to "master" all of that? Must an artist recapitulate the putative historical sequences in his own work? On some level, we must think that the answer is yes, or we would not notice Frost's wayward performance. Virgil's history seems entangled with some extra premise or belief, perhaps ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny or the legal concept of precedent (teleology is a given, of course). Either way, the Virgilian progress conflates not only facts and beliefs but also all parts of the timeline. It is about

[23] For helpful background on this topic, I have consulted *European Literary Careers,* ed. Patrick Cheney and Frederick A. de Armas (Toronto: U. of Toronto Press, 2002).

constructing the future as much as reconstructing the past, and it is for the benefit of the present that history is taken as prescriptive or even prophetic.

Historical events may be fixed in the past, but historical knowledge is the always current process of reconstruction. Frost recognizes that he himself is not locked into the Virgilian sequence, but it is available in the present as material for building anything from a norm to an allusion. As such, its usefulness is not so different from the other items associated with Virgil's past, including the actual works as well as the diverse other ways the works have been construed, and we'll find that Frost's books turn out to be as good a take on the history as any. Virgil's progress actually moves backwards through the Greek tradition, as Theocritus came after Hesiod, who possibly came after Homer. What is sometimes forgotten is that along with the Virgilian progress, there was also Virgil's wheel, which implies no beginning or end point. For Frost, the present is the time when all the works of the past can be observed together, and much like flattening a three-dimensional image onto a plane, history becomes a way to see many overlapping relationships among works. The layers of association grow even deeper when people treat history as a normative, prescriptive force. When poets try to imitate Virgil or have critics try to force them into that mold, the works of Frost, Shakespeare, Virgil, et al., become metaphors for each other. Frost and other poets can use English blank verse as both tenor and vehicle for the prestige of Classical epic. Virgil was a model for Frost's more immediate forerunners, too, and Frost's reviewers often recognized Romantic and Victorian influences in the poetry more quickly than the Classical. By metalepsis, however, their interpretation of recent literary history was just another version of the Classical history.

When it comes to 19th-century influences, Frost's first two books can once again be mapped onto earlier and later stages. *A Boy's Will* is Romantic, and *North of Boston* is Victorian. *A Boy's Will*, with its short lyrics and ballad-like tales, is Frost reworking the *Lyrical Ballads* of Wordsworth and

Coleridge,[24] while *North of Boston* develops out of Robert Browning, especially a volume like *Men and Women*, with celebrated depictions of character and speech, not to mention the male-female relationships.[25] But as Frost says, all the fun is in suggesting "formulae that won't formulate—that almost but don't quite formulate."[26] Despite its obvious debt to the dramatic monologue, *North of Boston* seemed to induce the reviewers to spill more ink on Wordsworth than on Browning, and Frost only egged them on. In a letter to Thomas Mosher, he plugged *North of Boston* by saying, "I dropped to an everyday level of diction that even Wordsworth kept above. I trust I don't terrify you" (1913, #55). Notice, however, that Frost is positioning himself not as Wordsworthian but as post-Wordsworthian. He has surpassed Wordsworth by, interestingly enough, managing to go lower. With a touch of humor, Frost talks as if he is crossing into terra incognita, conveniently ignoring the fact that Robert Browning, and the strong, earthy speech of "Fra Lippo Lippi," have already happened.[27] We might ask if Frost is placing himself, in a roundabout way, into Browning's generation, or if he is really post-Browning and therefore post-post-Wordsworth, but the habit of tying everything back to Wordsworth is not just about getting tangled in unnecessarily complex genealogies. In Frost's time, Wordsworth was present to all literati specifically in the form of his preface to the second edition of *Lyrical Ballads*. In fact, this Wordsworth essay was too present. Though many thousands of words long, it could, by this point, be tossed around in a kind of shorthand. This made possible Frost's own apologia, the sound of sense, which was curt and fragmented compared to Wordsworth. With only a nod, however, Frost could appropriate a host of Wordsworthian concerns: experimentation, technique, the vernacular, breaking free of mannered style, going back to the true roots of poetry, and, overall, being baffling to conventional taste. As

[24] And the English Romantics as a whole are remembered for elevating the short lyric, despite the major poets' aspiring to the bigger genres and the "minor" poets' success with long narrative (i.e. Walter Scott). More on this below.
[25] Though I will not go in depth here, there is much on the significance of Wordsworth and Browning as a literary-historical progression. The classic study is Robert Langbaum, *The Poetry of Experience* (New York: Random House, 1957).
[26] Frost to Untermeyer, 1917, in *CPPP,* 692.
[27] As well as *The New-England Tragedies* of Longfellow. And there are always the unassailable, "timeless" examples of Shakespeare and Chaucer.

suggested earlier, the critics could now feel that they had permission to treat *North of Boston* as a serious and sophisticated development. Wordsworth's preface was an artistic manifesto that had become an easily-recognized symbol of manifestos, and so it was as much a feature of the modernist zeitgeist and lingua franca as it was a particular point on the historical timeline.

Yet once more, it seems like the diachronic histories will all end up folded into the synchronic fabric, but there is a rather different way in which poets do experience literary history in time. We can take another cue from Wordsworth, who in the poem now known as *The Prelude, or Growth of a Poet's Mind; An Autobiographical Poem* takes nearly eight thousand lines to recount this "growth" over the course of his whole life. One book of this personal epic is called simply "Books," in which along with a wonderfully mysterious dream about books, Wordsworth remembers important moments in his life created by books and reading. A poet's biography includes his reading, and although the available books promise access to all literary history at once, one person can only get to a certain number of books over a certain amount of time. That is, each person will have a personal history of reading. To some extent, the order of reading is set by forces in one's culture (school curricula, for example), but your reading will also be idiosyncratic, giving you your personal version of historical knowledge.

Let's revisit, one last time, the youth-to-maturity trope in Frost's first two books, with the idea that the life of a poet is a life of books and reading. I was first pointed in this direction by Richard Poirier's suggestion that if *A Boy's Will* really is looking back on early life, it is by looking back on early reading (ch. 2). In fact, Frost's poetic youth can be identified with one book in particular, Palgrave's *Golden Treasury*, the well-loved anthology of English lyric.[28] *The Golden Treasury* was a cultural institution, but it also happens that Frost was personally quite taken with the book. He recalled coming across it in a local bookstore while at Dartmouth, "neglecting my

[28] Ed. Francis Turner Palgrave (Cambridge: MacMillan, 1861). Text references are to this edition, though Frost probably had a later, American edition. For a survey of the book's history, see Martin Spevak, "*The Golden Treasury:* 150 Years On," *Electronic British Library Journal* 2012, article 2.

studies for Palgrave, which I had just got hold of. (Halcyon Days!)" (Frost to Ward #22). When Frost became a teacher at Pinkerton Academy, his students in "English I" were to memorize "twenty poems from the Golden Treasury; basis of subsequent study of the history of English literature" (662). Frost is locating this book specifically in adolescence and later education, not early childhood. As discussed near the start of this essay, *A Boy's Will* is not really the poetry of a boy; it is the first poetry that matures out of an apprenticeship with *The Golden Treasury*.

Palgrave's collection is subtitled "the best songs and lyrical poems in the English language," and in his preface, Palgrave explains some interesting things that this means in practice. "Narrative, descriptive, and didactic poems... have been excluded," he says, and "Humorous poetry... has been considered foreign to the idea of the book." Even more pointedly, "Blank verse and the ten-syllable couplet, with all pieces markedly dramatic, have been rejected as alien from what is commonly understood by song." We can see the pattern for *A Boy's Will* here, but even more, all that has been excluded, a vast territory for future exploration and a rather good look at what will happen next in *North of Boston.* It could even be a map for the rest of Frost's life, where he did explore more of the humorous and especially the didactic. But lest we believe we've found the literary-biographical key to Frost, remember that this is another metaphor for the same progress discussed with the 19th century and with Virgil. Frost's youthful reading also included Romantic and Victorian and Greek and Latin, much of it before he discovered *The Golden Treasury,* and all these texts are able to inform one another. *North of Boston* crosses the frontiers of the book as laid down by *The Golden Treasury*, but its originality comes from embodying multiple other books—*Lyrical Ballads*, *Men and Women*, the *Eclogues*, the *Georgics*, a blank verse epic or drama—some of which are part of *The Golden Treasury*, too,[29] and all of which manage to be synthesized into a distinctive brand of book in its own right, what Frost called a "book of people" and critics often simply dubbed a "local" or New England book. While books develop out of historical contexts and biography, they develop most of

[29] Continuing a thought from above, Palgrave helped reinforce the cultural notion that lyric was the 19th century ideal.

all out of other books. As an artistic form, books all bear a family resemblance to one another, and thus, it is as books that they take part in the richest networks of metaphor.

Chapter 2

New Hampshire and the Generic Function of Books

Don Quixote, the remarkable satire on reading and books by Miguel de Cervantes, is framed with a preface in which a fictionalized author explains that he did not want to write a preface. About his writing, he says:

> But I would have preferred to give it to the world just as it is, plain and simple, not decorating it with a prologue or an endless list of all the sonnets, epigrams, and elegies we put in the front of books. Because, let me tell you, though writing the book was hard work, nothing was harder than this preface you're reading right now. I kept picking up my pen and putting it down, over and over, not knowing what I was supposed to write...[1]

This is just one symptom of the speaker's anxiety that the book is unfinished, as he continues that it is "...without a single annotation in the margins and absolutely no footnotes at the back, the way I see other books," and so on, and so on (8). Fortunately, a friend arrives and offers this counsel to the writer:

> First of all, the problem of all the sonnets and epigrams and elegies you haven't got at the beginning of your book, which are supposed to be written by important, titled people, simply disappears if you take the trouble to write them yourself. (9)

The writer's friend has similar advice for generating marginal annotations, citations, and footnotes but then remarkably shifts the grounds of the argument, questioning the premise behind the writer's idea of what a book should look like: "...this book of yours simply doesn't need any of the things you say it lacks, because the whole thing is an attack on romantic tales of chivalry..." (11).

Through satire, Cervantes brings to the surface certain large assumptions made in thinking about books. First, the fictional author struggles because the work of writing the story is not the

[1] tr. Burton Raffel, ed. Diana de Armas Wilson (New York: Norton, 1999), 7. Hereafter cited in text.

same as the work of making it a book. Second, the distinction between a book and its contents implies that there is a creative medium available in the book that can be differentiated from the literary arts. Third, therefore, an author can and should exercise control over the book as well as the literary work. Fourth, if the book is its own medium, a book's design refers to other books, and the most basic design decision is: what other book should your book look like. Much in this chain of assumptions fits naturally with what was said in the first chapter, where we explored the diverse dimensions to the question of how a book is made. In this chapter, however, I focus the question of bookmaking on the artistic medium, with potential for creative work in its tangible, visual, and printed features, and looking along this dimension, I string together the assumptions above, for it points onward to another key factor in the making of books. A book refers not only to certain other individual books but also to broader types and even stereotypes. However important the idiosyncrasies and particular imitations, designs are also compelling for their relationship to preexisting patterns. As *Don Quixote's* preface suggests, books communicate much by both fulfilling and thwarting expectations, which is another way of saying that books, like all art, deal in genre.

I would like to address up-front the theoretical question of what is genre. I make no attempt at novelty; I agree with Alastair Fowler's groundwork on the subject, most importantly his argument that genre is best understood as "a family whose septs and individual members are related in various ways, without necessarily having any single feature shared in common by all..."[2] By looking for Wittgensteinian family relationships rather than "correct" formulas that set absolute boundaries, Fowler offers an antidote to the angst surrounding questions like "what is tragedy." Much ink has been spilled over the supposedly inconsistent tragic recipe, trying to conform Aristotle's prescriptions to the Elizabethan theater as well as the actual Greek examples, not to mention newer formulations from Nietzsche's to George Meredith's. Comprehending tragedy is not about the essential feature or features but a range of family traits and resemblances, which allow us

[2] *Kinds of Literature* (Harvard University Press, 1982), 41.

to recognize works as related along multiple dimensions.[3] Genre resemblances should in fact prove more evocative than actual genealogy, for they are something the artist can shape to communicate with the audience.[4]

Given these rather sweeping claims, my argument will take the form of a case study of Robert Frost's 1923 volume of poetry, *New Hampshire.*[5] A richly-designed book that won Frost a Pulitzer, *New Hampshire* should certainly be seen as unique, but I hope to show that both writer and reader make sense of it as part of a book family with relatives ranging from *Don Quixote* to the Bible. First, however, my discussion of *New Hampshire* will address a prerequisite matter. Though we have already declared interest in the concrete medium, such study will still be afflicted by the often confusing overlap between the words "book" and "content." In ordinary usage, to read a book means simply to read a text; we are not saying to look at a particular physical book and indeed do not mean to invoke the concrete medium at all. Generally when we "talk about a book," the referent is more or less a book-length piece of writing. No doubt one key to a book's identity is in being the vehicle for a novel, or romance, or epic, or a compilation or collection, but for the present question, trying to discern the genres of books, the temptation would be simply to fall back on the genres of extended or massed written works.

If the book is habitually identified "with" or "as" its content, what is a meaningful basis on which to carve out the book's own identity? This question can be answered in several legitimate ways. *New Hampshire* seems to show off what the concrete medium has to offer with woodcut illustrations and hand lettering, as well as care for basic materials in its typography, printing, and binding, all of which create the feeling of a well-made book. I will, however, take a contrarian approach to these qualities of the book. If the idea of a book is sometimes completely abstracted

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[3] The Neoclassical efforts to regulate the genres simply created more family relationships.
[4] See Fowler, 44: the "very possibility of return to earlier paradigms constitutes a difference that makes literary genres more coherent than some other families."
[5] In this chapter, references to *New Hampshire* shall be to the original 1923 edition (New York: Henry Holt). Hereafter cited in text.

from the physical object, then it can be just as one-sided to notice the medium for obvious displays of the beautiful and decorative. High craftsmanship and visual artistry certainly say something about a book, but they should not make or break the analysis of book vs. book-length work. There is more to the book's design and function, as seen in the worries of *Don Quixote's* fictional author. For him, the book medium involves framing a bare text with a scaffolding of rather heterogeneous written pieces: prefaces, epigrams, marginal notes, footnotes. To describe this perspective on the book, I will adopt Gerard Genette's term "paratext" and his distinction between text and paratext.[6] This might appear to incur another rift between book and content, but it can also suggest a joint nature. The voices of *Don Quixote's* preface treat the paratext as a meaningless convention, a perfunctory duty in wrapping up the book and not germane to the work itself, but this critique of stereotypical paratextual patterns develops into the actual preface for the text, a text based on lampooning an absurdly popular literary genre. The creative play between text and paratext forms Cervantes's satirical book and suggests that there are ways to balance the literary content with the book's other qualities.

This is not to imply that paratext provides the definitive picture of the book as a medium. The practice of ordinary editions vs. illustrated editions (or any "nice" edition) does of course help differentiate genres of book, but the book arts should be seen as working in conjunction with the other designs and types of content that form the book as a concrete, made object. We can begin to outline the book's larger architecture in the interplay between paratext and literary work(s), and any perspective on the book's composite material, for example McGann's distinction between bibliographical codes and linguistic codes, will help us study the formation of book genre.[7] Coming full circle, I argue that the medium's complexity of features, and the complexity of perspectives on

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[6] *Paratexts* (Cambridge University Press, 1997). Genette locates the basis of paratext in social practice rather than physical medium, but his recognition of the paratext is such a fundamentally sound observation that it needn't be confined to any one theory. For further discussion, see ch. 3.

[7] With a "composite" perspective, the study of book genre can and must build on the full range of compelling work positing the book as an art in itself. See introduction for examples.

them, point to the need for genre, which represents a flexible, inclusive, and productive perception of the relationships among book designs. So, I turn to Frost's *New Hampshire,* which has long attracted interest for being a book, whether that means an illustrated book, a Pulitzer-winning book,[8] or a printed arrangement of writing and poetry.

I

The book's title is a good place to start. If the book exists as a range of heterogeneous and competing materials, the title is an unusually clear focal point. Whatever the book is supposed to be, the title claims to give it an identity, and Frost does something with his title that forces us to ponder what exactly is being identified. Although the book is known largely by its short title, there is also a subtitle, so that the book's full title is *New Hampshire: a poem with notes and grace notes*. What does this mean? It's not a book, it's a poem? Or it's a poem and a book? Frost's title shows, right from the start, the natural ambiguity between identifying a book and identifying its content. We don't have to tackle the ontological questions quite yet, though, because on a more immediate level, all we need is our sense of humor to see what is meant by "a poem with notes and grace notes." The book does indeed feature a long poem called "New Hampshire." There are, however, many other poems in the book, more than forty of short-to-medium length, and it is all these "extra" poems that will help explain the odd subtitle. After the title poem, the book is divided into two large sections, called "Notes" and "Grace Notes," comprising the remaining poems, implying that all these poems are just the remarks and annotations, the scholia and glosses, even the citations and references, supplementing the one main work. The poem "New Hampshire" actually bears superscript numbers and footnotes, which contain citations that refer to the notes (the other poems). Frost risks getting too clever by half as he also uses the word "notes" in the musical sense, made obvious by the

[8] "...a book most carefully arranged, as if he had a notion it might in fact win him the Pulitzer," says William Pritchard, *Frost: A Literary Life Reconsidered* (Oxford University Press, 1984), 145.

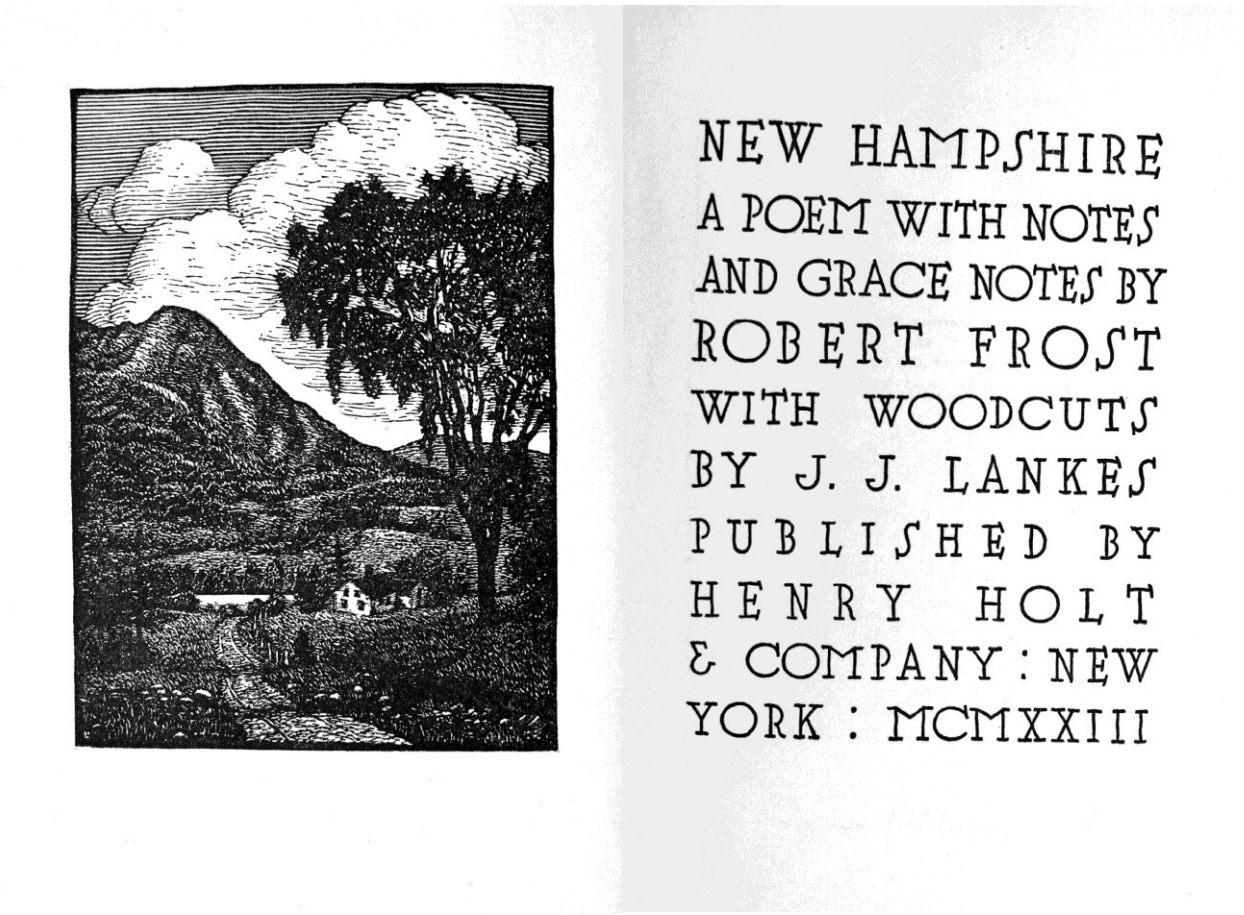

Figure 2.1: Title page and woodcut for *New Hampshire.*

mention of "grace notes." It's common to speak of poetry as music, the songs of rhapsodes and muses, but to be more specific, the poems found under the heading "grace notes" are short and delicate, in keeping with the meaning of grace notes in music, which are brief, light, and ornamental.

This is all quite whimsical, but Frost's little game also plays on a surprisingly basic dualism in the thing known as a "book of poetry." Is a book of poetry made by collecting and binding together at least several and often many individual poems? Or does a book of poetry mean just one poem (though it needs to be a poem of appropriate size, like Dante's *Divine Comedy*)? The answer, of course, is that it can do either. Although these are two very different ways of building up a book-sized body of poetry, both feel perfectly familiar and traditional for a poetry book. What is being described here is a genre family. The book of poetry is a genre with a number of family branches, whose members are not uniform in appearance but can nonetheless be recognized as relatives of types and sub-types. These relationships are something Frost can reference in making his own book. A certain pedigree is invoked by the claim that the poem called "New Hampshire" is the book's one work and its whole *raison d'être.* Yet we also have no trouble comprehending that *New Hampshire* is a type of collection, and within this sub-family of poetry books, we can even trace a specific branch, the lyric collection, "notes and grace notes" marking out a lineage that stretches back to Tottel's *Songes and Sonettes*.[9] It should be mentioned that the "headline" poem followed by shorter ones represents yet another typical book plan.[10] What matters here, however, is how Frost is able to assert two complete book patterns in one book, and, moreover, the claimed book structures are apparently mutually exclusive. We can see how genre is more malleable than actual genealogy. Frost's hybrid experiment is literary rather than scientific. For artistic purposes, *New Hampshire* needs only evoke the patterns of whole books. In this case, it is the pattern of content

[9] There are further traces of this family line within the tradition of English lyric anthologies, examples including Donne's *Songs and Sonnets* and Palgrave's *Songs and Lyrics.* Sonetto is the diminutive of the root word of song, and so "notes and grace notes" parodies the formula "songs and little songs." Frost takes the diminishment a step further by atomizing songs into mere notes.

[10] A plan that is certainly popular with recent Anglo-American poets, e.g. Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* (1st ed.) and T. S. Eliot's *Prufrock and other Observations.*

that possesses recognizability. A poetry book is one whose content is poetry, but the type and arrangement of poems suggest book forms. On the surface, this observation would seem to further the notion of identifying a book by its contents, but on closer examination, the poetry alone will not lead us to what is distinctive about *New Hampshire*. The arrangement of poems, while clearly significant, is used as a subordinate technique in the book's larger schemes for holding its content together.

As I said in the introduction to this chapter, whenever we look at "the book" from a new angle, we are also taking another look at the vexing distinction between book and content. Frost exploits the fact that certain patterns of content, such as the one epic poem or several shorter ones, are indeed commonly understood to be books; yet this sort of book must mean something different from the actual book *New Hampshire* and its realized form. Pushed to the forefront by *New Hampshire's* title and subtitle, the long poem is the natural way to introduce the problem. Long poems are, with complete casualness, called books, illustrating how the word book is metonymic with a written work of appropriate magnitude and dimensions. The long poem is to verse what the novel is to prose, and in some discourses (e.g. many undergraduate essays), the term novel has become a synonym for any book-like work, whether poetry or prose. The long poem exemplifies the general confusion that comes with a one-to-one relationship between book and content, i.e. one book identified with one literary work. Given this, Frost's book also invites us to consider the other basic model, a one-to-many relationship. The one-to-many perspective on *New Hampshire* is not simply about dividing a book into smaller pieces (chapters, cantos, parts, etc. can already be found in large literary works) but depends on the fact that in Frost's book, each poem, though hardly epic, is able to stand as a work in its own right. This model of the book presents at least an opening for the book to carve out its own role; it seems that the book must have some function in taking constituents that are somewhat disparate and composing them into a whole. The appeal of this idea can be confirmed by the way many readers have analyzed books of collected poems, but oddly

enough, these analyses have not put us much closer to discovering that the book has abilities distinct from or beyond what the content already does. As noted already, scholars and critics have shown how subtly the book works to place poems into groups and sequences. They tend to take for granted, however, that the several poems ought to be read together as a sort of super-poem.[11] Edgar Allan Poe said that a long poem is only a concatenation of short poems, and we seem to accept this as a symmetric relation, that a series of poems becomes one work without undue hardship. The one-to-many model ends up leaving as little space for the book as the one-to-one model because it seems sufficient to see the contents as one large literary work; moreover, it seems sufficient to use literary terms to say how the constituent poems cohere. This roundabout way of arriving at the same confusion simply shows that we cannot sidestep the basic problem of book vs. content. Again and again, we will run into the habit of the abstract unit of book-sized/shaped writing to absorb or displace the concrete book.

To be clear, the literary content ought to attract attention and hold interest, but the issue is the blind spot it creates with respect to the book. This problem will not be solved by speaking of the book as a combination of long and short poems nor other specific arrangements of poetry. Patterns of content are inherently about content; though they may resemble books, the poems may just as well be had as a scroll, a manuscript, a web site, or a recitation by a rhapsode. A seemingly obvious way to resist abstraction is to emphasize the book as a visual and physical object, especially since *New Hampshire* is known for its woodcut illustrations and hand lettering, but again, this is not the best initial approach to the problem, for it is too easy to pigeonhole interest in the book as interest in the book arts. The key to getting a handle on the book as "material" (in all senses of the word: physical object; what matters, is relevant; creative grist) is through its most paradoxical material:

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[11] The norm is duly noted by the *New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* (Princeton University Press, 1993), 728-29: although the modern poetic sequence "may well include narrative, dramatic, and ratiocinative elements, its structure is finally lyrical." Lest we were in any doubt about the normative quality: the lyric sequence "was developed all but unconsciously by poets in search of longer structures..." and "frees us to look at poems of all periods, long and short, in a new way, for its dynamics are those of lyrical structure itself, defined as the overall directive energy of movement..."

the writing. Language is rightly admired for its ability to convert between tangible and intangible forms. With remarkable ease, words may be reproduced on paper, in speech, and in the memory. Yet, as the myth says, it is possible to get a grip on the protean creature. While the book is very broadly a verbal work, it is more specifically a written work, and we can narrow down further from writing to print and finally to the book as a distinct type of print object. This is not to suggest that we need to distill a book into basic elements, for in an actual book, these states do their work as a complex amalgam. Rather, by simply keeping in mind that there exists a path from verbal to written to print to book, we can become sensitive to the signs of different levels at work.

Of course, this is still a rather abstract explanation of the book as an object. *New Hampshire* can give us a concrete example of how the book is a distinct manifestation of the poetic content, and we begin to see that the shifts from words to book-shaped text to book take on a variety of forms in practice.[12] Frost first problematizes the process by drawing attention to what seems like a superfluity of book contents. The long poem claims to be a book's worth of writing; another book's worth is offered in the collection of poems. Yet all this is not enough to make his book. *New Hampshire* has even more written content: the title page (which spells out the subtitle), the table of contents, the section titles, the superscript numerals, and the footnotes. Without all of this "stuff" fitting together as it does, *New Hampshire* would not have the shape that it does. Thus, these writings should be seen as book-forming content as much as the poems are. However sophisticated our theory of book vs. content, we will get a good start by simply expanding our view of what counts as book content. In the shift to a printed form and finally to the book medium, more written "stuff" gets rounded up, and we must consider materials that range more widely in form and function as they interact with the verbal, written, and printed patterns of the book. By noticing what pieces come in, and where, when, and why, we will be able to say that this collocation of

[12] Just to be clear, I use the word "text" to mean the arrangement of words and (when appropriate) other written symbols that constitute the literary work(s), consistent with Genette's distinction between text and paratext.

heterogeneous writings is what makes the book distinctive, and conversely, the book, through its ability to place and hold these pieces into these interrelationships, enriches the meaning of each piece. For example, the words "grace notes" are interesting enough as a title for a set of short poems, but then they are placed at specific points in the codex, on the title page, within the table of contents, and at a section-title, with typography and page formats that complement the function of those locations, so that throughout *New Hampshire*, part and whole will mutually reinforce each other's significance. In Genette's terms, it is not simply the existence of paratextual components but also their complex interdependence with textual components and the book as an object.

This comprehensive notion of book content may seem straightforward, but the crux is how we now rethink the more usual idea of content. The book-shaped literary work must also assume its proper role among the other elements comprised by the book. This perspective helps us discern that the book has substance beyond just "the content," but at the same time, we should not lose sight of the fact that the literary work and its identity are the core. Whatever additional materials are set in place by the book, they are not construed as an expansion of the literary work, nor is it a radical transformation to format the text for the print codex. The book does, however, allow for a logic that literary content alone cannot convey, a logic specific to the book medium that can noticeably and purposively modulate the work it carries. With terms like "modulate," I am speaking with studied vagueness, but once again, *New Hampshire* is ready with samples of the possibilities. Returning to one of the book's main parts, the set of short poems, I said that these writings are able to invoke the well-recognized pattern of the lyric sequence. On the strength of this tradition, literary logic, whether narrative, ratiocinative, or super-lyric,[13] is sufficient to attach the poems to one another. Frost's book, however, does show another way of tying together short poems, presenting them as notes and appendices, a structure that is non-narrative and non-literary. In fact, the logic of textual notes is figured quite well by the notion of "grace notes." In musical theory and

[13] See note 11.

practice, grace notes are not integral to the main flow; they are extrametrical flourishes. As mere offshoots from the main body, such elements should hardly be expected to yield a linear plot. This alternative ordering is a good example of why I use the word modulation. The book medium is what holds together the footnotes, citations, headings, and page numbers, and a cross reference to a poem is really a matter of locations in the codex, without any direct effect on the poems or their sequencing. The worst intrusion on the poems is the sprinkling of superscript numerals, which are indeed a good symbol of the book's presence. The reader knows that these are not part of the text proper, that they are mere suggestions, that by habit a reader can disregard these marks and continue uninterrupted; yet they slip in a temptation to flip back and forth and see why such-and-such footnote to "New Hampshire" cites such-and-such poem in the "Notes" section. Always pushing the game a step farther, Frost also sticks a superscript number and footnote on a poem besides "New Hampshire"; that is, even the notes have notes. "The Star-Splitter," a poem cited in multiple footnotes (8, 12, 13) has its own footnote (29) citing another poem, "A Star in a Stone-Boat," already seen in two footnotes (6, 8). A Derridean might say that this web of movement is in fact the real way to read the book, but my point here is that the book can depict an idea about the text even as it faithfully reproduces it.

Because the book can operate along its own dimension, the self-sufficient literary logic of a text does not preclude the modulating effect of the book, something to keep in mind as we turn to the other major part of *New Hampshire,* the long poem. Here, we have not only the monolith that can stand alone but also the work that claims to be the book itself, a claim made up front by taking over the book's title. Yet a book title is expressed through title pages, covers, and spines, so that even the putative book-launching poem gets modulated through the actual book. Frost certainly makes the point that the book's presentation of the work can be figurative, even ironic. It is only figuratively that the forty-four poems not called "New Hampshire" are mere annotations. In fact, the "other" poems are not subsidiary to the main poem at all. They represent much of the book's

strongest work, so much so that we could completely invert the book's hierarchy--these poems make up the payload, while the poem "New Hampshire" is only an artifice of the book. From this perspective, the role that the long poem does have is to serve as the body for the notes scheme, and the notes scheme, as we've seen, gives us another way of thinking about how the book makes its many individual poems relate to each other. Moreover, if "New Hampshire" is a figurehead, we can also say it serves as a reification of the super-poem that supposedly frames the many short poems. Thus, the long poem provides a perspective on the shifty assumptions made about wholeness and unity when dealing with a one-to-many form. "New Hampshire" is not at all a book; yet the book itself suggests that idea, for it can be a symbolic work about the complexities in making a book called *New Hampshire.*

At this point, one might understandably object that these reinterpretations of the book are too figurative, too symbolic. From what we've seen, one might grant that the book medium can express its own designs but conclude that Frost's symbolic, metaphorical book content is too esoteric for the reader for whom the relevant content is simply the poems. Admittedly, Frost's book gives a somewhat fictional account of its poems, but the book is not there to force a contrived meaning onto the literary contents nor to negate other, more straightforward ways of reading the poems. Rather, just as assembling poems into a larger body opens them to another layer of interpretation, in turn, by conveying that verbal object through print and the book, the words will be read in a concrete condition not found elsewhere. Other books may not frame their text as creatively as Frost's, but all books are a figurative representation of their literary contents because every book is another parable about working with the text. This active relationship between book and literary content takes us back to *New Hampshire's* starting point. The book's title and subtitle would seem to tempt us to short-circuit the path from literary work(s) to book, simply identifying a book with or as "the content." This, however, is only a gambit for drawing us into the layers of artifice, into the work of knowing the poetry by means of a book. The irony is found right in the

subtitle. It poses as a literal description of content, but "a poem with notes and grace notes" can only be understood figuratively. We can't figure out what the subtitle is saying, and indeed these words just wouldn't make sense, without seeing the whole design of this particular printed object. In turn, *New Hampshire's* multi-layered designs wouldn't make sense unless set up at the start by the title and subtitle. The phrase *New Hampshire: A Poem with Notes and Grace Notes* is materially integral to the book and an essential part of its complex form. It is, indeed, the proper identifier for the whole object. It describes the printed form only figuratively yet clearly, and thus it describes the poems only figuratively yet accurately enough, because the book and "the content" figure one another.

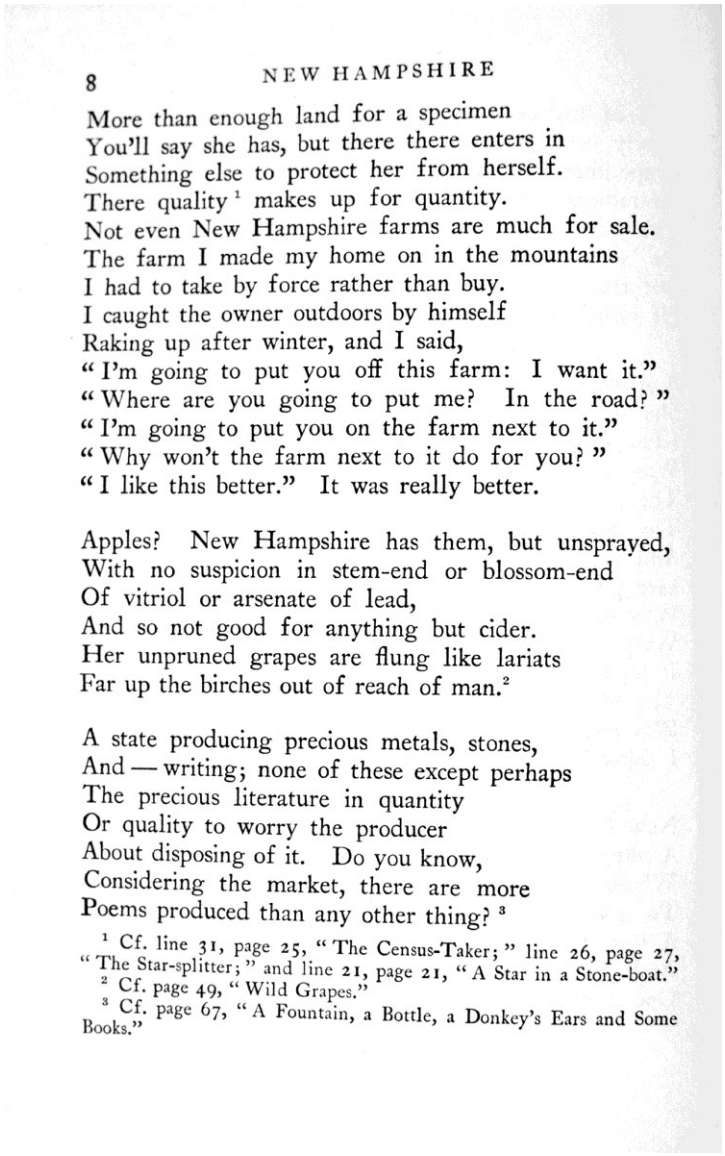
All this being said, we still have not turned our full attention to genre, but genre issues are latent in the conclusions reached thus far. Though we have simply been trying to see the book from different angles, it has been additional confirmation that the book can be an artistic medium, that its elements and operations can be precisely ordered for creative purposes. Genre is implicit, because designs are made comprehensible by expectations and assumptions, because designs find their own direction by building on a foundation of shared conventions. The marks of creativity will be harder to discern and appreciate if we believe each book design must be completely idiosyncratic, and we ignore our capacity to recognize patterns if we limit comparisons to only isolated, stand-alone examples. At this point, we have certainly noticed one of the keys to the book's shared patterns and conventions: the assumption that "the content" is the book's identity. This indeed serves as a stable frame of reference in the midst of the book's myriad possible designs. Moreover, given a foundation, the design possibilities can become organized on additional levels. As noted all along, a set of poems, or any other literary work(s), is very much capable of expressing schemes and shapes of its own, and so there is much to be negotiated with the book's paratexts and other components, which themselves represent a variety of instruments to help betoken the mainness of the main work. All this cannot be arranged ad hoc for every book. It would be daunting to conceive how a book should

figure, represent, or "re-present" the work, to produce an object of appropriate bookishness, if there were not recourse to layers of more specific patterns, and these interrelated layers generate genre relationships. We have already seen the appeal of these more specific patterns in the notes scheme of *New Hampshire,* and this is where I will begin my discussion of genre functions, for again, the perspective afforded by these components lets us better see the central component and thus the genre choices that make the book work as a whole.

II

As much as *New Hampshire's* notes are Frost's eccentric invention, they also take advantage of familiar conventions. They set up shop exactly where they ought to, at the foot of the page and also stashed away in the back of the book. Moreover, the mere mention of footnotes evokes a certain look on the page (fig. 2.2). The characteristic appearance is easy to see: a zone of finely-textured small type, which takes over the bottom part of the page when there are many notes, as well as the typical recurring abbreviations and constellation of numerals which add to the visual pattern. The notes need only look enough like notes to be recognized as such.[14] This is not a matter of laxness; these patterns have artistic value for being easy to evoke and ready at hand. Genericizing makes forms and practices abstractable, so to speak, but it is equally important to remember that the generalized form is set up by specific books. The patterns, syntactic, typographical, and more, become familiar through their concrete appearance in books and then, because familiar, continue to be used in similar contexts. We know about notes, for example, by the way they are cultivated in books of the bureaucratic and academic strain, and this context extends to things like scholarly articles and government reports, which are not exactly books but can carry on the relevant concrete patterns. Notes demonstrate the two-way communication made available by generic devices: the

[14] The "appendix" of *New Hampshire* also presents the appropriate pattern, an extended list of short items, though the visual impression is not as strong as that of the footnotes.



8 NEW HAMPSHIRE

More than enough land for a specimen
You'll say she has, but there there enters in
Something else to protect her from herself.
There quality [1] makes up for quantity.
Not even New Hampshire farms are much for sale.
The farm I made my home on in the mountains
I had to take by force rather than buy.
I caught the owner outdoors by himself
Raking up after winter, and I said,
"I'm going to put you off this farm: I want it."
"Where are you going to put me? In the road?"
"I'm going to put you on the farm next to it."
"Why won't the farm next to it do for you?"
"I like this better." It was really better.

Apples? New Hampshire has them, but unsprayed,
With no suspicion in stem-end or blossom-end
Of vitriol or arsenate of lead,
And so not good for anything but cider.
Her unpruned grapes are flung like lariats
Far up the birches out of reach of man.[2]

A state producing precious metals, stones,
And — writing; none of these except perhaps
The precious literature in quantity
Or quality to worry the producer
About disposing of it. Do you know,
Considering the market, there are more
Poems produced than any other thing? [3]

[1] Cf. line 31, page 25, "The Census-Taker;" line 26, page 27, "The Star-splitter;" and line 21, page 21, "A Star in a Stone-boat."
[2] Cf. page 49, "Wild Grapes."
[3] Cf. page 67, "A Fountain, a Bottle, a Donkey's Ears and Some Books."

Figure 2.2: Footnotes citing the "notes" in *New Hampshire* (1923).

device itself has been made recognizable as its own form, apart from its specific sources, but it is also a palpable reminder of its native environment.

In *New Hampshire,* we can begin to see the complex behavior that emerges from this simple function. The notes bring with them their powerful association with administration and academia, which feels rather foreign to Frost's finely-wrought artistic object. Piles of footnotes might appear on a poem, but it ought to be one of those old warhorses encrusted with stuffy scholarship, not a new work fresh from the poet's pen. We are conscious of some sort of allograft or adaptive reuse of material taking place. I will suggest that this effect is made discernible and also made comprehensible by genre's family-like functions. The family traits not only mark out the tight-knit circles; families also have far-flung branches that, however distant, are marked by telling resemblances.[15] The expected and unexpected family relationships give artists a highly nuanced system to work with. To restate the basics we can build on: a generic signal exists on a more abstract level than specific works, which makes it portable, able to be grafted into another species, and its old familiar context clings to it even when recombined with its new context. This not just adds but multiplies meanings. When notes are imported into a seemingly foreign type of book, it of course works as an allusion to notes' contrasting background, but the allusive effect resonates further through genre. The new juxtaposition can feed back into the background supplied by genre, which in fact has already happened in the case of *New Hampshire.* The idea of poets themselves assembling notes to flank their creative works has spawned its own family line.[16] Alexander Pope's *Dunciad Variorum,* Samuel Taylor Coleridge's *Rime of the Ancient Mariner,* and T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* are some of the better-known family members.[17] These hybrids, though limited in number, show that Frost's book can be understood as representing another branch of the family, which in turn shifts our perspective on what we initially presumed about the genre. To borrow

[15] See Fowler, 41.
[16] As Fowler observes in discussing the origins of genres, a new line hardly requires a mass movement; it can be launched by a single work, though its prototype status will be clear only in retrospect.
[17] For continued development of this sub-genre after Frost, consider Auden's *The Double Man* (1941).

mathematical terms, every additional family node compounds, geometrically multiplies the interrelationships.[18]

Books with notes will always have a certain family reputation, and finding a new or surprising side to the family does not displace or make us forget that ingrained impression, nor should it. Rather it lets us deepen the associations of the books we already know, primes us to be able to recognize even more relatives, and perhaps see that this potential was latent in the family nature all along. Notes are, naturally, "marginal," perhaps even mere padding, banished to the edge of the page or the hinterland at the back of the book. We generally accept that notes may change, be added, and/or disappear whenever a new edition comes out or the text is reprinted somewhere else. If the main text showed the same susceptibility, it would automatically raise questions, but notes are the wild frontier. In the marginal zone, other writers and commentators can roam about and launch incursions on the text, in citation form as well as butting in with their own voices, jostling and talking over each other. In mapping its settled areas, the book sets up by contradistinction its famous outback where an otherwise fixed and established text remains open to creative thinking, even redefinition by other writers. Notes, by not being "the" text, can foster deliberation and growth, and they have been in this position ever since their origins as scholia on ancient texts.

In the 10th century Venetus A manuscript, *The Iliad* is framed by multiple sets of notes, which seem to be the product of several stages of compilation and copying, ultimately merging the work of multiple scholars over multiple generations. For a somewhat later example, there is the 1560 Geneva Bible, which, as the Bible of Shakespeare and the Pilgrims, shaped Anglo-American culture and language. "It was, however, the marginal notes, those famous 'spectacles for weak eyes,'

[18] For a classic literary example, consider the Petrarchan volta, which is useful not only to an Italian sonnet but has been grafted into related species such as English sonnets, longer poems, and even prose forms that change course just past the halfway mark. Shakespeare sonnets 18, 29, and others hybridize the volta with the snappy English-style concluding couplet. George Herbert's "The Flower" uses the exact 4:3 ratio of pre- to post-turn.

which, along with the sacred text itself, exercised a most profound influence on the theological and ecclesiastical history of England and Scotland...," as Biblical scholar Bruce Metzger explains.[19] The Geneva Bible was succeeded by none other than the one commissioned by King James, who, besides some concern for the translation, saw a chance to fight Geneva's marginalia, which he famously called "seditious and savouring too much of dangerous and traitorous conceits." Perhaps it is only natural, then, that notes are the canvas for so much of *New Hampshire's* creativity. Notes open up contradictory possibilities, from academic punctiliousness to sedition and subversion. More broadly, notes are an artifact of the book medium that function not only as abstract structure but also embody memory. The history of the art suggests ever more threads to a family trait and, as we shall discuss next, ever more traits that thread together families, and so past use generates ever more significance for future use.

I have been focusing on notes as just one trait weaving through the labyrinthine book family. Earlier, however, I said that the distinctive character of the book medium would be revealed through its ability to coordinate elements of several types (several dissimilar written pieces). Though notes have fixed our perspective so far, it is also a perspective on the main work and book as a whole. Marginal annotation and appendices may be, by definition, adjuncts, but this already suggests that it is just the sort of main work and sort of book that could use, or ought to have, some ancillaries firmly bound to it. This leads me to a question raised by Fowler, who asks if genres are fundamentally "organizations, or only assemblages of features." Reckoning that genres do not turn on a single feature but on sets of traits, often diverse in quality, "The question naturally arises whether we have to think of such a generic repertoire as listing only 'field marks' or special genre-linked features.... Or are the kinds complete organizations?"[20] I will not pretend to offer a definitive answer; Fowler himself leaves it as an open question. Rather, it is a way to explore what of the book's ordering and organizing function is reflected on or derives from the realm of genre, and it is

[19] "The Geneva Bible of 1560," *Theology Today* (Oct 1960): 351.
[20] Fowler, 74, 59.

a way to see what difference is made if book genealogies are traced not just through individual traits but also through complexes of texts, paratexts, and overall book designs. We can also address a more specific concern of ours, what we might call the immediate family of *New Hampshire,* that distinctive sept of books in which poets have framed their own works with pedantry. The question will be if *New Hampshire's* family branch is discerned merely as a change in the lineup of genre markers or is also a more specific way of associating the traits with one another.

All examples of this rare hybrid strain are of interest, but as already stated, I have picked out Pope's *Dunciad Variorum*, Coleridge's *Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, and Eliot's *The Waste Land*. *The Waste Land* first appeared without notes in literary magazines. Notes were added specifically for the first book publication (New York: Boni and Liveright, 1922), and interestingly, they make it look like the content should have been annotated all along. Eliot's Modernism reckoned a culture collapsed under its own weight, leaving only fragments, and Eliot's poem itself is in fragments, juxtaposing pieces of high and low culture from a wide range of languages and eras. The notes identify a number of works, literatures, and historical styles that are being consciously rehashed, and thus the notes help the reader see the work as a pastiche of the various sources. They also, however, make it clear that Eliot's range of reference is so eclectic and obscure that everyone will still struggle to comprehend the poem. Eliot cannot cite and comment without a sense of irony, and Eliot's own explanation is worth quoting at length:

> I had at first intended only to put down all the references for my quotations, with a view to spiking the guns of critics of my earlier poems who had accused me of plagiarism. Then, when it came time to print *The Waste Land* as a little book, ...it was discovered that the poem was inconveniently short, so I set to work to expand the notes, in order to provide a few more pages of printed matter, with the result that they became the remarkable exposition of bogus scholarship that is still on view to-day. I have sometimes thought of getting rid of these notes; but now they can never be unstuck. They have had almost greater popularity than the poem itself—anyone who bought my book of poems, and found that the notes to *The Waste Land* were not in it, would demand his money back....[21]

[21] *On Poetry and Poets* (London: Faber and Faber, 1957), 109.

Eliot uses some artistic license here, yet the fiction is perfect for relating how the notes play in the larger picture. The book ought to have some bulk, perhaps even inert bulk, which notes conveniently furnish. Eliot suggests that the notes are illegitimate but points out that nonetheless they have assumed great importance and cannot be "unstuck." Becoming an accessory demanded by consumers of the poem is another way to become a requirement of the book, whereas before Eliot said that the book requires merely some sort of padding out. Along with all this, the notes may still have an artistic role in limning Eliot's pastiche of erudition.

Looking three centuries earlier, we find the same themes in Pope. *The Dunciad Variorum* (1729) is a mock epic but more specifically satirizes the attitude surrounding "great epic" in Pope's time. It expresses Pope's observation that though the Augustan age valued classic works, it was more about pedantic philologists, the 18th-century hangers on of "The Classics." Pope also observed that the scholarly edition, as a book type, embodies the way the pedants crowd the main work, and so in a satiric imitation, his *Variorum* edition has the poem virtually buried in an inimitable massing of notes and appendices. So, the book can parody the situation of the epic, but the poem also has its part in the mocking. "The Dunciad" imitates the plan of an epic but never goes much further than a few, rather short "books." Like Eliot, Pope uses notes to supply much-needed bulk to fill out the volume. The notes are what turn "The Dunciad" the poem into *The Dunciad Variorum* the book. The answer to why book padding is required depends upon whether one sides with Pope or the dunces.

The burden that traditional forms become in modern hands also informs the history of *Rime of the Ancient Mariner*. It was first published in *Lyrical Ballads,*[22] the book on which Wordsworth and Coleridge collaborated, and in that book, it is perhaps the poem that tries the hardest to follow the ballad form. Later, Coleridge reprinted the poem in his own book,[23] where he added its other famous feature, the glosses that form a running commentary alongside the poem's verses. Both of these publications represent a conspicuous relationship between poem and book, and with both,

[22] Notable editions include the first of 1798 and second of 1800.
[23] *Sibylline Leaves* (London, 1817).

the book reflects a feeling that the reader needs to be groomed, properly prepared for the poem. *Lyrical Ballads'* authors supposed that its poems would not fit contemporary expectations for poetry, perhaps would not look like poems at all to the reader. Thus came the prefaces, expanded and supplemented in successive editions, which again are more favored by academics than much of the poetry, giving the reader a solemn directive that the poems "are to be considered as experiments," and with all this and the unusual title *Lyrical Ballads*, the book itself could mediate the poems to the public. Or so it was hoped. The paradox is that the experimental was also about recovering traditions, not least of which were the ballads of the title, and so readers were indeed unsure how to take *Rime of the Ancient Mariner.* The reframing of the poem, however, is only another source of puzzlement. Today, most classroom anthologies reproduce the glosses, implying that they are more than an ordinary set of annotations. The glosses are written in a learned and rather sententious language, sometimes distracting with their arcane references and excessively wordy explanations that spill into the poem's space on the page, a caricature of book learning that lends the poem a bookish air. Perhaps this primes the reader to view the poem as something traditional, even ancient, but a ballad is not where we would expect help from moralizing glosses. Though ballads were an old folk tradition, published books of ballads were a more recent, and popular, trend. Coleridge's poem is still an experiment, the poet's attempt to imitate a ballad, an older art that was not yet assimilated into modern literature.

III

Now we must address what this family lineage means to Frost's book. In other words, we must move from the concreteness of these examples to somewhat less satisfying general patterns, but we are also studying how to specify this cultivar in the midst of the larger book species. First, the members of this family branch give us a more concrete picture of what we have already identified as the genre's signature feature. In all the aforementioned books, the notes evoke the

stereotype of pedantry, a tangled mass of minutiae crowding the work, and in all these examples, with a highly characteristic irony, for it is the poets invoking that stereotype for their own ends. Frost's book pushes the envelope by making the notes a vehicle for more poems; yet this adaptation is still based on the family irony, showing the learned style of fussy abbreviations and citations and retelling the joke of notes being more involved than the main work. Continuing in this vein, these examples show how the notes take on a more particularized significance in relation to the ostensible main body, a.k.a. the literary work(s) or the text, and to the book as a whole. The overall form can support more differentiated versions that bring out certain aspects of the general pattern.

In general, notes bring mixed connotations to a book's main body. Notes show that writer, editor, and/or reader would like an added layer of detail to supplement the text. On the one hand, this perhaps validates the work as being worthy of an annotated book. On the other hand, it could imply that the main work is somehow lacking, that writer, editor, and reader would prefer not to deal with just the bare work, that a book must frame it to make it more acceptable. Either way, notes seem to address the question of whether the work passes muster to be a book. Whether or not the work is good enough on its own, the notes somehow furnish a level of commitment to its bookishness. When poets themselves furnish notes, the question is sharpened. Did the author fear that no matter what he accomplished in the work itself, its worthiness would be lost on others? Did the author intend to offer deficient writing that notes could buttress? In these books, the poets' creative product so incorporates ostensibly auxiliary materials that the main work is to some degree a notional main work, but this makes the main work all the more interesting. The author coopts the chorus of critic-researcher-academic, and the space they requisition, to coopt their supposed necessity to the book, which must be deeply symbolic of the author's approach to his own text and what it is supposed to be doing in a book.

This book family is distinctive for its concrete application of farcical notes to raise serious questions about the main work. In our exemplars, it seems that, not unlike the notes, the literary

piece is not supposed to "play the material straight," to use the acting expression. *The Dunciad Variorum* is a mock epic, and *The Waste Land* is what we might call an epic failure, the product of a culture that searches for the epics it once had. *Rime of the Ancient Mariner* says that Coleridge cannot write a ballad except as a literary imitation, painfully conscious about the use of models. Parody, pastiche, and studied imitation are techniques that depend on conventions, assumptions, expectations, in that they realize convention itself is a creative subject. These literary texts critique the value of their own genres and what makes them literature, echoing the questions raised by the books that frame them.[24] The works' awareness of fulfilling and not fulfilling expectations feeds back into the overall book. It should come as no surprise that the books' self-consciousness brings us back to the basic assumption that links book with work, namely, that a book is defined by its content. The literary piece, with its presumption of centrality, can play on the expectations of the book medium as a whole. If the notes are valued for their bulk and their dubious commentary, there is at the core a text that is capable of asking for those answers or that "added value." It is not only ironic notes but also ironic main text that makes for this genre of ironic book, a genre that suggests a certain way of asking what makes a book, what merits a book. Should we question the worth of "The Dunciad" or *The Dunciad Variorum?* Is *New Hampshire* based on "New Hampshire" or vice-versa?

So, we cannot end without revisiting the troublesome poem called "New Hampshire." As hinted at earlier, its claim to be a title poem is meant to be debatable. Granted, it is the longest poem in the book, but at just over four hundred lines, it is a long poem relative only to Frost's standards. We should note that *The Waste Land* also tips the scale at a little over four hundred lines, but Eliot's poem punches above its weight with its knotty, oracular strategy. "New Hampshire" spars with an attitude but certainly not the weightiness of a title poem. Eliot was worried he didn't have enough "when it came time to print [the poem] as a little book," but the problem of "is this adequate for a

[24] Remembering that these books have a cousin in *Don Quixote* suggests a pattern in which satire reaches outward to the extra-diagetic and paratextual.

book" is even more blatant for Frost. Like Eliot, however, Frost examines this as not only a question of size and weight but also a question of how is this literature. In literary terms, there is a distinct lack of expectations when it comes to poems named after U.S. states. A state might be the topic of a few songs in the folk or popular vein, but this poem is not for humming and strumming. Even if Frost's poem draws on a bit of that lyrical style, that does not let us assume much about the kind of poem "New Hampshire" is supposed to be. Frost knows that the question of what is expected for book content is tied to the question of what is expected for literary kinds, literary genres. For comparison, think of verse epic, drama, or romance, sonnet sequence, verse narrative (e.g. *The Canterbury Tales*), or even miscellany, all of which are automatically understood to be books.

This is not to say that Frost's poem is a complete enigma. Broadly speaking, it must have a basis in the loco-descriptive or topographical poem, a genre that includes John Denham's "Cooper's Hill" and Wordsworth's "Lines Written a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey." Of course, these poems are no more book-like than most others, but the development of the topographical genre from the Classicism of Denham to the egotistical sublime of Wordsworth reflects crucial transitions in English poetry and poetics. The topographical poem can be a bellwether of literature, especially for Frost's era, providing a key model by which he can confront and play off literary expectations. The topographical Classic-to-Romantic evolution needs a dissertation of its own, but in the space I have here, I will compare "New Hampshire" to just one of its predecessors and a rather remote one, Ausonius's *Mosella,*[25] a poem about the Moselle river valley. Though Ausonius is a lesser-known Latin poet, Frost, always a Classicist, may have been aware of him, and he may have been reminded of *Mosella* in particular by the 1915 translation of F. S. Flint, imagist poet who was one of Frost's earliest colleagues from English literary society.

Just like Frost's poem, *Mosella* is centered in description of the landscape and its regional environs. Ausonius describes a place of natural abundance, with verses devoted to praising the

[25] I have consulted the translation of E. H. Blakeney (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1933).

viticulture and cataloging the fish species. He also approvingly surveys the noble estates and stalwart peasants that people the landscape. It is the poet's ode to his native land, a celebration of the good life in the provinces rather than the imperial capital. Thus, *Mosella* anticipates poems like Frost's quite nicely, except that Frost's descriptions of New Hampshire are spiked with a self-deprecating persona. Compared to Ausonius, Frost almost belittles his subject. The State of New Hampshire is not just provincial, it is characterized by "absurdly small towns" (9). Frost does survey the territory, cataloging its mineral resources and agricultural products, arable land and settled places, institutions of learning, history and heritage, and notable personages, but he does so not to show the land's abundance but rather its sparseness, saying "Just specimens is all New Hampshire has" (5). Frost even deflates the "there's no place like home" topos, confessing that "Anything I can say about New Hampshire / Will serve almost as well about Vermont" (10) and ending the poem with "At present I am living in Vermont" (16).

I am not trying to prove that Frost intended to parody Ausonius specifically; I simply assert that *Mosella* represents the preexisting models and patterns for this kind of poem, so that Frost's poetry is not simply ribbing the State of New Hampshire, it can also embody skepticism towards a tradition. Thus, "New Hampshire" as a lead poem does adopt and adapt the traits shared by its genre of book, which for lack of a convenient label I will call the book-like poem with ironic (by definition?) author-produced notes. *New Hampshire* starts as a joke about a bantamweight poem that can't make for much of a book, but the question "is it book-worthy" always sounds like a question about literary value. Crucially, the topographical genre of poetry often addresses in addition to its stated subject knowledge of poetic material, the resources of literature, and writerly practices. *Mosella* is liberally seasoned with references to mythology and canonical Classical works. Ausonius says that these figures are apt for describing his subject, that the Moselle as a place seems a realization of mythological wonders and in fact exceeds them. *Mosella* becomes a way of validating and justifying the poetic tradition and of asserting Ausonius's own purpose as a poet.

Frost also wants to reconcile the world of literature with the real place, but as we would expect, he is not quite as earnest as Ausonius. Frost notes that his fellow poets find New Hampshire uninteresting, and when he presses one for more explanation, she tells him, "Go read your own books and find out" (10). In response, part of what Frost does is to mention, with studied casualness, Christopher Marlowe, Tennyson, Matthew Arnold, Shakespeare, to show how such references do belong in New Hampshire, and snidely hinting that he, Frost, makes more vital use of this tradition than others.

My own discussion of "New Hampshire" and *New Hampshire* has tended toward learned literary investigation, but I do not mean to lose sight of the popular and accessible understanding of the work. It does matter to Frost that it can be too easy to assume what kind of book his should be. A book of lyric poems about getting back to nature in New England sounds like an obvious and predictable genre. Frost has played with the conventions of book organization and ironized the literary tradition of topographical poetry in order to question what makes his book, but on a more accessible level, he reevaluates the picturesque brand of poetry book. "New Hampshire" is a folksy tour of the countryside but, as noted above, nearly creates the impression that there's not much to write about and even acknowledges the genericization of New England states: "Anything I can say about New Hampshire / Will serve almost as well about Vermont" (10). This conscious exercise in popular expectations allows us to discern what, to Frost, is actually worth writing about and his sense of how New Hampshire can make for poetry and make a book.

Looking back over my rather lengthy discussion of *New Hampshire,* it may seem that I have thrown together a mixed bag of family traits picked up wherever they could be had. This, however, is the way genre behaves no matter what the artistic medium. The "content" that constitutes genre can be plucked from any feature, quality, or property of the art from general to specific. The only real requirement for being a genre marker is that it can be recognizable and identifiable as a

marker.[26] There is almost a resistance to logic in genre's choices of where and on what to operate. Yet, at the risk of petitio principii, the fact that we can discern pattern is what makes genre exist. Genre represents the capacity of artists and their audiences to give method to the madness. Genre's power is that it can indeed offer comprehensibility from a hodgepodge of artistic properties, that it provides another level on which to select, order, and emphasize features of the artwork. For example, hymns, ballads, and fourteeners make us care about 6- and 8-syllable patterns, which are hardly worth noting in, say, novels and are not relevant in the same way for much other poetry, even hudibrastic verse.

In exploring both books and works, we've seen that descriptions as vague as "short" or "long" or "about a landscape" can speak to genre; yet genre signals can be as specific as particular words, phrase structure, or format (a section titled "notes"; a title using the formula: figurative description + whitespace + "a poem"). To return one last time to Fowler, who is not shy about his belief in genre's capacity: "Of all the codes of our literary *langue,* I have no hesitation in proposing genre as the most important, not least because it incorporates and organizes many others..." (22). When it comes to the book, what genre "incorporates and organizes" includes the work/content/text, which gets framed with various other materials and the book's overall design. Before concluding, I would like to return briefly to the book's visual and material qualities, which I tabled near the beginning of this chapter, not to offer a full argument on this topic but simply to suggest how it can test and extend the idea of genre. How does genre work with the fact that the book can involve several different arts and crafts: the verbal and literary, illustration and graphic design (including typography), presswork (paper and ink), and the craft of binding and covers. In theory, genre can incorporate any of these in the same way it can use and emphasize any feature of an art, but it is interesting to see concretely how genre answers certain challenges posed by the book medium.

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[26] See Fowler, 58.

The heterogeneity of the medium informs the concern I raised as a preliminary to my argument, the idea that the text is easily abstracted from any particular physical book and that this idea can paradoxically be reinforced by the book arts, which are often seen simply as the option to decorate a certain vehicle for the text. (In other words, merely noticing that verbal and non-verbal arts can be collocated in a particular physical book can make them seem as if they must be separate concerns to start with). No doubt the visual and material qualities draw attention to the book as its own medium, yet if this is treated as a completely open set of choices that may or may not be exercised in a particular book, one tends not to be predisposed to recognize much pattern beyond just a standard vs. a deluxe edition. This rubric does differentiate *New Hampshire* from other books. But does that taxis do much work as far as the design and meaning that genre is supposed to support? Surely there are meaningful patterns to how verbal and non-verbal arts are collocated, with subtle variations, which genre codifies in a comprehensible way. The Biblical Codex Petropolitanus Pupureus, of gold and silver ink in two-column uncials on purple parchment, is related to yet should be distinguished from a gold-plated edition of the phone book (yet to be discovered). An interest in *New Hampshire's* visual design should of course look at Lankes's woodcuts for their individual merits but can also involve larger relationships to books like illuminated Bible codices, *Through the Looking Glass* (a kind of symbiosis between the text of Carroll and the illustrations of Tenneil), or the books that pair the work of Charles Dickens and Hablot Knight Browne (creating a strong association yet still separable). Again, I will not go further here; I merely offer a head start for another study that can explore the significance of types like an illustrated edition of a work vs. an illustrated work.

Chapter 3

The Author's Corpus and the Book of Collected Works

So far we have focused on three of Frost's books of poetry, and this study could continue on to what is in total a series of nine books over the course of Frost's career. In addition to *A Boy's Will* (1913), *North of Boston* (1914), and *New Hampshire* (1923), which we have looked at, there is *Mountain Interval* (1916), *West-Running Brook* (1928), *A Further Range* (1936), *A Witness Tree* (1942), *Steeple Bush* (1947), and *In the Clearing* (1962).[1] There is, however, a contrasting set of books which may also be said to define Frost's career: *The Collected Poems*, of which there are two different versions from 1930 and 1939, and *The Complete Poems* from 1949.[2] The titles of these volumes speak of collecting poems, but I shall argue that they are just as much about collecting books. Looking at their tables of contents, we find not only a long list of poems traversing Frost's career but also these headings: "A Boy's Will," "North of Boston," "Mountain Interval," "New Hampshire," and so on. In a Frost collected works, the primary sections are formed from Frost's individual or constituent books, and each collected works, from 1930, 1939, and 1949, presents in chronological order the individual books published up to that date.[3] (I will use the wording "individual book" and "constituent book" throughout this essay, and when needed for clarity, I will specify the original publication as a single volume or the use as a constituent in a collected works. The three iterations of Frost's collected works are often consistent with each other in their salient

[1] After *A Boy's Will* and *North of Boston* (first published in England), the first trade editions of Frost were published by Henry Holt, New York, though *In the Clearing* was published by the post-merger Holt, Rinehart and Winston, New York.
[2] All published by Henry Holt, New York.
[3] This means that Frost's last individual book, *In the Clearing,* never made it into one of his collected works.

features, so I will make observations about "collected works" that apply to all three and distinguish among 1930, 1939, and 1949 as needed.)

In short, a Frost collected works is a book of books. This is an exploitable creative choice, for one could instead take the approach of W. H. Auden. As described by Auden editor Edward Mendelson:

> In [the 1945 collection] and [the 1950 collection], Auden arranged his poems in alphabetical order of first lines, although he divided the shorter poems between a larger group titled "Poems" and a smaller group titled "Songs and other Musical Pieces." In [the 1966 collection] he arranged his poems in roughly chronological sequence, divided into four dated sections. ... His foreword implied that each section represented "a new chapter in my life," and all but one of the chapter divisions mark changes of residence....[4]

These synoptic groupings and the so-called life chapters can be made only by breaking apart Auden's individual books. In fairness, we might say that Auden's individual books are not very tidy as a set. Some, like *Letters from Iceland* (1937), are collaborations with co-authors. Some, like *The Age of Anxiety* (1947), contain one large multi-part work. Some were reissued in one or more revised editions. Whatever the potential difficulties and rewards of representing these books as a set, Auden's books of collected works create a picture alternative to that of Auden's individual books rather than descended from the individual books. On the one hand, it may seem that Auden has given his body of poems a more valuable reinterpretation compared to Frost's more boring choice to concatenate constituent books, but on the other hand, Frost gives us compounded layers of artforms to interpret. In a collected works, the "works" that are collected can be poems, but in Frost's collected works, the constituent books, so dutifully represented, are also Frostian works that lend themselves to being collected.

Throughout this dissertation, I have tried to suggest the variety of implications to the basic question: what makes a book. The Frost-type collected works invites us to confront, in a uniquely stark form, that question and its many different aspects. What happens to a book when it becomes a constituent of another book? How can a book be made of books? These assimilations and

[4] W. H. Auden, *Collected Poems* (New York: The Modern Library, 2007), xxiii.

translations depend upon basic assumptions about how books work. In Frost's case, the assumption that we can lay out first is the presumption of sameness, that is, that the collected works offers the same content as the original single-volume publications, in contrast to the many, many poets who treat any new edition as a mandate to revise the work. It is important, however, to understand from the start that the sameness of the Frost books is indeed an assumption, notional, even a sales pitch, for there are revisions to be found.[5] Towards the end of this chapter, I will discuss the poems' editing and variants and argue that a different type of interest in variants is created by their being unavowed and unnoticed. Before getting to that, though, we must see that the designs for these books mean that any such editing has been done silently. The Frost collected works are not being sold as the revised (or improved!) edition of the poems. Nor are they being sold as deluxe or limited editions, which have been offered by Frost on other occasions. In the *Collected Poems* and the *Complete Poems*, the product being sold is the content, and the main value proposition is one of preservation, reproduction, the same poems gathered into the same constituent books, even though that proposition sweeps a bit under the rug.

Recognizing the value attributed to sameness, we can then bring to bear the wider question of what makes a book and begin to discern that the sameness is defined in contradistinction to several differences. The books are not of course the same physical object. The individual books exist first as single volumes, and the collected works is a new creation in the book medium. Its *raison d'être* is to perpetuate the existence of the individual books but in a way does so by superseding the extant examples. To see it from a different angle, the individual books change by renewing and modulating in time. In their original publications as single books, there is a timeline of events,

[5] In addition to variant readings in the texts of the poems, which I discuss later in this chapter, three of the individual books have been "edited" with a limited number of changes in the sequence of poems. In *A Boy's Will,* three poems are dropped and one added. In *Mountain Interval,* one poem is moved within the book and two added. In *West-Running Brook,* three poems are added. While these changes are certainly of interest, a proper reading of their impact would entail studying the full sequence of poems in each respective individual book, so for the purposes of the present argument, differences in the text will be addressed by looking at revisions within poems.

which leads to remembrance in a new physical form and event, that is, the publication of the collected works. Continuing in this vein, we can see the metaphorical changes represented by a collected works. Abstractly, we might say that just as the individual book can be credited as an artwork formed from the poems, on the next level up, the collection does the same with the constituent books. In practice, however, the symbolism changes when stacking the two levels. While both are collections of works, one takes the title collected poems while the individual books never do. The individual books receive creative titles, which can make them sound more artistic. A Frost collected works keeps its title within highly standardized limits, but a shift can be highly symbolic, such as the shift from *Collected Poems* to *Complete Poems*. So, while we have the same content, the same poems in the same individual books, it has all been brought into a new complex of hypo-book and epi-book, and the differing vehicle and conditions must be just as important to the value and success of the collected works and, to come full circle, define the nature of the sameness.

I will say more about the all-too-tempting symbolic, social, and philosophical interpretations of the book of books, but first I will touch on how the book's multidimensional being is recorded in tangible traces in the medium, namely, in the paratext.

I

Although the essential need for sameness and difference may seem abstract, that need is in many ways rendered by the paratext as a concrete artifice of the book object. For example, the 1939 and 1949 collections took on a preface, the short essay written by Frost called "The Figure a Poem Makes," demonstrating one way in which the collected works is a chance to add content that does not interfere with the content of the individual books. On the surface, this sounds like basic logic, since "para" means "alongside" and so the paratext is by definition outside of the text proper. If the effort is to keep the text the same, to preserve the text, supposedly the paratext need not be included in that concern. On closer examination, however, we will find that particular paratextual

components can be made more variable or indeed more constant relative to the main text, and the manifold relationships between a particular paratext and its text will define the character of any changes and their potential impact. For example, in all iterations of the collected works, *New Hampshire* is stripped of the whole set of paratexts that made it a distinctive use of the medium. The woodcut illustrations and hand lettering are not reproduced, but along another dimension, all the footnotes are dropped, as well as the section titles ("Notes" and "Grace Notes") and the subtitle ("a poem with notes and grace notes"), which of course means that *New Hampshire* as a book has been divorced from the entire notes idea and the allusion to scholarly volumes. In contrast, for the book *A Witness Tree,* a more substantial portion of the paratexts is transferred to the collected works, including section titles and footnotes.

The paratextual changes of *A Witness Tree* are difficult to compare to the paratextual changes of *New Hampshire* because so much depends on the individuality of the text-paratext relationship in the respective books. In the context of the present study, we are certainly not ready to compare the two books because we have considered *New Hampshire's* distinctive paratext but not *A Witness Tree's*. Needless to say, we would progress a great deal with detailed book-by-book discussions, but in this chapter I would like to start from the opposite angle, studying the books synoptically to discern broader patterns, types, and classes in the paratext. This is not to isolate the paratext but rather to draw some theoretical outline of how the paratext can interact with the text at hand. As discussed in the last chapter, the paratext is its own creative ground, maintaining its codes and its ways of helping to make the book. Though the paratext is not self-contained, it can communicate through pattern on its own terms. I will suggest how paratextual types and orders can communicate the idea of a book of books, where books are conserved yet remade, where the end result presents the constituent books both as individuals and as a compounded whole.

Let's consider the dedication page, whose use shows some regularity and shared practices, such that any change to the pattern affects what the book communicates in terms of the dedication

page and, as a ripple effect, shifts the overall system of codes linking text with paratext. In their original publications as single volumes, Frost's individual books all have a typical dedication page where, in addition to naming the dedicatee, the address is often supplemented with a brief remark or message. The collected works, however, have no dedications at all, neither the dedications for the constituent books nor a master dedication page in the front matter of the collection.[6] This could well be a purposeful choice in light of what dedication pages can mean to Frost when he does use them. In their original publications as single volumes, Frost's books were dedicated to family and close friends (*New Hampshire*, being the oddball, was dedicated to Vermont and Michigan). Just as characteristic is how the very personal (yet very formulaic) "To so-and-so" is extended into a somewhat freer dedicatory remark. The original dedication page to *A Further Range* appears as follows:

> To E. F.
> for what it may mean to her that beyond the White
> Mountains were the Green; beyond both were the
> Rockies, the Sierras, and, in thought, the Andes and
> the Himalayas—range beyond range even into the
> realm of government and religion.

E. F. stands for Frost's wife Elinor Miriam Frost (initialed E. M. F. in some other books). Frost then branches off of the address to his wife to speak to her about their history as a couple. The White Mountains are in New Hampshire where they lived during their early married years, and later, as Frost's career gained momentum, they moved to the Green Mountains in Vermont. There is, however, more to this message. As Frost becomes metaphorical about ranging into government and religion, it is clear that he is explaining the course of the present book of poetry, and we can reinterpret the White and Green Mountains as places that also play a role in Frost's writing.[7] The

[6] The only dedications to be found in the collected works are those attached to individual poems such as "A Star in a Stone-Boat" and "A Passing Glimpse." I will table discussion of these since they are plausibly the province of the poems rather than the books.
[7] Frost will sometimes speak of his Derry (New Hampshire) poems, his Ripton (Vermont) poems, etc.

dedicatory remark is partly a personal message and partly a public advertisement that nudges readers into a certain orientation toward the present book.

This dual discourse can work even in a very terse form, for example the dedication page from the original single-volume publication of *North of Boston:*

> TO
> E. M. F.
> THIS BOOK OF PEOPLE

Frost tags *North of Boston* as a book of people, and this has become like a mantra to critics and scholars, who appreciate the book as an assortment of sensitive portraits of people that Frost encountered over years of living and working in rural New England. Yet this can simultaneously be the intimate personal message to Elinor Frost, for Frost is telling her that the book is a memoir of the everyday friends and neighbors with whom they shared their life. As noted from the beginning, Frost blurs the line between art and biography, and so the doubleness of a dedicatory remark can become intrinsic, even when in some cases the remark has a purely personal tone. The original dedication page from *Mountain Interval* appears as follows:

> TO YOU
> WHO LEAST NEED REMINDING
> that before this interval of the South Branch under black mountains, there was another interval, the Upper at Plymouth, where we walked in spring beyond the covered bridge; but that the first interval of all was the old farm, our brook interval, so called by the man we had it from in sale.

Though nothing but intimate details, again addressed to his wife, we realize that this is being put forth in an obviously public vehicle, and we cannot help but read it into our own approach to the book.

There would be nothing inherently problematic with reproducing these dedication pages in the collected works. Their omission could be attributed to unthinking standard practices, but even so, letting the dedication pages be overlooked by default can say something about the attitude towards them. We are on even better footing when noting that all iterations of the collected works decline to place a dedication page in the front matter of the volume as a whole. A dedication would

be not only accepted but also expected at the head of a collected works. Seeing how Frost uses dedications to connect individual books to his personal life and at the same time draw in his readers, he could use them in a *Collected* or *Complete Poems* to make the logical connection between life and lifework and to frame the constituent books as a set. So, it seems odd that a Frost collected works neglects dedications, but we can also remember that this is just one of the several kinds of choices to be exercised in remaking the books. Looking back to the original single-volume publications, there are a few other stray bits of interesting content in the preliminary pages. *A Further Range* marks itself as "Book Six" on its title page (it is indeed the sixth of the individual books). In *North of Boston,* immediately before the first poem there is a preliminary leaf that is blank except for this statement:

> *Mending Wall* takes up the theme where
> *A Tuft of Flowers* in *A Boy's Will*
> laid it down.

In the former case, an individual book codes itself with reference to the long-term course of milestones, and in the latter case, the interest is in drawing continuities between books. These are not represented in the collected works either, but they show that there are other instruments for framing the book that are different from yet subtly related to what is communicated from the dedication page. Significances can shift and communications can become expressed in another form as the constituent books are remade into hypo-books and a new epi-book takes shape. At the very least, we can say that the complete absence of dedications becomes one way for the collection to make a consistent presentation and to mark itself as a different class of book, and we will find other forms of paratext that more subtly register the tension between continuity and reconstituting, where concrete features will both help to maintain the individual books and also be subject to assimilation into the larger whole.

To reveal a more mixed process of conserving yet remaking books playing out, we can look at what for lack of a better term may be called book-framing poems. A book, so often treated as a

linear form, must have a first and last poem, but along with this natural emphasis Frost often uses the medium to add emphasis to the thresholds, making simple beginnings and ends into preludes and postludes. The first poem found in the collected works is "The Pasture." Though it is printed on page one of the book, it is not listed in the table of contents, and as the very next page is a section title announcing the first constituent book (*A Boy's Will*), page one and its poem are apart from and prelude to the regular body of poems. In their original single-volume publications, many of the individual books had similarly marked poems, and we could say that the collected works got its preludial poem by "promoting" it from one of the constituent books. In the original *North of Boston*, "The Pasture" is printed on a preliminary leaf, but in the collected works, because it has been made the prelude to the entire collection, "The Pasture" no longer appears at the head of *North of Boston*. The "promotion" ends up robbing a constituent book of its own prelude. Every book has an internal hierarchy, and when hooked into the hierarchy of a collected works, a constituent book's hierarchy must to a certain extent adapt to the larger compound of hypo- and epi-levels.

In addition to a book-framing poem being reassigned, there are more subtle ways in which the individual books subdue their preludes and postludes. In *North of Boston*, the closing poem was set apart by being printed in italics,[8] a typographical marking also given to *Mountain Interval's* opening and closing poems and *New Hampshire's* closing poem. In the collected works, all of these poems are printed in standard roman, bringing them into typographical conformity with the rest of the text. This even happens to the two pseudo-epigraphs at the head of *A Witness Tree*. I call these short poems pseudo-epigraphs because in addition to being printed in italics, they are attributed to outside sources, though one of the attributions is made-up.[9] In the collected works, the pseudo-epigraphs are still found at the head of *A Witness Tree* but are set in roman, again making them more consistent with the rest of the poems. It is the original single-volume publications that attest

[8] This postlude, "Good Hours," was not in the original book's table of contents but became listed in the collected works' tables of contents.
[9] Thus one epigraph is an actual quote and the other is really a Frost poem.

to Frost's habit of emphasizing poems to make a distinct frame for the book, but in the collected works, a consolidation of typography turns these poems from prelude and postlude into the first and last poems of a section.[10] With these subtle traces, the compounded book adapts and tempers without completely flattening the hierarchies that give shape to the constituent books.

To review briefly, we looked first at the dedication page, whose regularity of use shows how the author can encode paratextual elements with his own meaning, and Frost's decision to give up this part of his code shifts the priorities within the text-paratext complex. Then we looked at the preludial and postludial poems as a frame, showing how books form overall structures and how the epi-book may need to supplant some of the form of its constituent books and at the very least relegate them to their subordinate place. To continue, I will consider Frost's use of footnotes (the main type of notes found in his books). As notes can only be adjunct to a text, we have another type of subordination and one that seems less open to interpretation, yet there are still choices in how this book feature shall be remade with the collected works**.** Again, *New Hampshire* loses its entire system of notes, showing that the book can be abstracted from one of its overarching imaginative frameworks. After *New Hampshire's* original publication as a single volume, Frost took a liking to the use of notes and included sets of notes in the original *West-Running Brook*, *A Witness Tree, Steeple Bush,* and *In the Clearing.* These four sets of notes, however, seem ordinary in character compared to *New Hampshire*. In the two earlier books, a note will simply put a date on a poem, though in the two later books, Frost uses notes for additional comment or even additional lines of poetry. The collected works chooses to reprint notes for only one of the constituent books, *A Witness Tree.* From this single set of notes, we cannot deduce an overall policy toward them. As the

[10] There is one more relevant feature that I do not include in the main discussion because of its possibly accidental significance. *A Further Range* is divided into six sections, with the final section being titled "Afterthought" and containing just one poem. All sections, including "Afterthought," are retained in the collected works, but the earliest that *A Further Range* could be collected was 1939, in which it was the final constituent book, meaning "Afterthought" was also the final subheading in the 1939 collection (perhaps only a side-effect of how 1939 was assembled). In the 1949 *Complete Poems*, another constituent book has been appended, but after that there is a final section titled "An Afterword" containing three poems.

notes for *A Witness Tree* look very much like those for *West-Running Brook,* the kind of content presented through notes is not the deciding factor. We have come to another point where it is apropos to look into the books' individual character, but for the purposes of this chapter I will continue with my synoptic discussion, which at least allows us to observe that whatever the particulars, they can be perceived and compared to each other within the form of the collected works. This is perhaps the most basic way in which the paratextual field supports both individuality and integration. There is space for a constituent book to assert its own reasons for its paratext, but though the individual can in a sense own the paratextual feature, it will also belong to the collected works and take its place among the paratexts that are oriented toward the overarching book.

So, paratexts can embody an array of interactions, but I would also stress the ambiguities and problems of intent because of the variety of influences involved. For instance, I will point out one case of a paratextual feature that on the surface registers all too clearly the kinds of change that we are exploring. I am speaking of tables of contents, which seem like a blueprint for the book but in Frost's case can invite specious interpretations. In the collected works, the table of contents is the first sign of what the book means to be. The constituent books are shown as sections, and of course the book titles are the section headings. The merging of hierarchies is clearly evident, for if the constituent books have become sections, then subsections represent what were sections in the original single-volume publications. In this respect, though, the books have not all been treated the same, and with all the books listed in one table, we can readily compare how the individuals have been remade. The first five constituent books have lost whatever internal divisions they had originally, including the ironic appendices of *New Hampshire* and the poetically meaningful section titles in *West-Running Brook.*[11] For the three subsequent individual books, however, all internal sections have been reproduced as subsections of the collected works. To all appearances, this is a symptom of a more general program in the collected works to normalize the earlier books while

[11] In the main body of the original *West-Running Brook*, epigraphs were printed on some of the section titles.

conserving the quirks of the later books. The earlier *A Boy's Will* loses the parts and glosses found in its original table of contents, while the later *A Further Range* keeps the alternate titles listed in its table of contents. The earlier *West-Running Brook* loses the notes that accompanied a few of the poem titles in its original table of contents, while the later *A Witness Tree* keeps the notes in its table of contents. As I said, however, there is a risk of attaching specious significance to all this.

We need to be aware that the patterns could be attributed to the three iterations that Frost's collected works went through and the history of the three successive typesettings. When the first collected works was assembled in 1930, it meant that the first five individual books were going to be typeset as a group, and the policy was to give all of that book content a uniform treatment. Perhaps because those five books, in their original single-volume publications, present quite a heterogeneity of styles, the typographical presentation of the *Collected Poems* would have no subsections, no footnotes, no text in contrasting typefaces, certainly no glosses nor other oddities, only the poems (also no illustrations). The resulting 1930 volume is a clean and consistent piece of book design, but it seems that priorities were not the same in 1939 and 1949. At these two later dates, the need was to append the individual books that had appeared during the intervening years, *A Further Range* by 1939 and *A Witness Tree* and *Steeple Bush* by 1949. With these books was reproduced more of their paratextual details, yet without revisiting the first five books to reintroduce similar details. In other words, the 1930 typesetting of the *Collected Poems* rather than the original publications as single volumes became the model for subsequent iterations of the collected works. In fact, the 1939 *Collected Poems* reused the plates of 1930 with new plates for *A Further Range* added on, and so in bibliographers' terminology they are issues of the same edition. As the first extant production of the collected works, the 1930 version carried a certain inertia that continued to matter as much as any aesthetic or editorial concern.

Having given this cautionary example, I would not want to restrict unduly the interpretation of paratexts except to say that solid inferences depend on understanding the book's complex

existence. Though it may be difficult to infer exact meanings for each of the paratextual phenomena, that difficulty can always be taken as evidence that the making of books is not one-dimensional, and in our case, the changes and adaptations presented by the book of books reflect many direct and indirect causes, from aesthetic to personal to industrial. To wrap up my overview of the Frostian paratexts, I will focus on two other features that I deliberately neglected to point out before now. I wanted to wait until after adequately sampling the difficulty of interpreting paratexts, because these two types of paratext suggest a very clear-cut and consistent pattern of adaptation in the collected works and, moreover, play roles that very much invite sweeping philosophical interpretations. I am speaking of the original books' titles and typography. Without question the constituent books' titles must be conserved in the collected works while, conversely, it is just as much taken for granted that the collected works will not perpetuate the typographical details of the original single-volume publications. When the original books are remade in a different physical realization, typography is dispensable along with other choices made in crafting the printed medium, but a change or loss of title would instantly raise questions about what is being done to an individual book, for to give a name to something is to give it a symbolic existence. The dichotomy of titles and typography seems to reflect how the collected works can symbolize all the individual books while also remaking them, but this pattern implies its own limits and through contradistinction can point to other ways of interpreting paratext and book.

At this point, I would like to make a brief digression on the theory of paratext as first laid out by Genette in his landmark book. With the highly suggestive patterning of titles and typography, we can become trapped by certain premises that even Genette will assume are fundamental and absolute with regard to the nature of books. For my purposes, I value the term "paratext" as making a sound distinction within the varied kinds of printed and other features maintained by the book medium; however, my idea of basing paratext in the physical artifact is not always supported by Genette. In his introduction, Genette says the study of paratexts:

> bears on the most socialized side of the practice of literature (the way its relations with the public are organized), and at times it will inevitably seem something like an essay on the customs and institutions of the Republic of Letters. (14)

We can see the implications of this social emphasis in how Genette judges the physical makeup of the codex: "if the typesetting is only a materialization of the text, the paper is only an underpinning for that materialization, even further removed from the constitutive ideality of the work" (35). Genette's analysis of book titles is even more telling, for he is mindful of how titles are maintained within the forms and practices of the physical medium, pointing out the print codex's structure of half title and full title pages and the obligatory locations for the title on the spine and front cover. Yet for Genette, the title's privileged placement in the codex must be an aftereffect of social privilege: "bit by bit our ideal notion of the title had worked its way free of the initial textual and later paratextual jumble in which it had been buried without a really specific status" (64). Working from the foundations of "modern titology," Genette sees the title as: "an artificial object, an artifact of reception or of commentary, that readers, the public, critics, booksellers, bibliographers, ... and titologists (which all of us are, at least sometimes) have arbitrarily separated out..." (55). Genette suggests a credible story for what we observe in Frost's collected works. Typography can be representative of visual design, illustration, paper and presswork, all the features that highlight the book as a physical and visual medium and thus are not conveyed with the original books when they are transferred to a newly designed, typeset, and printed book. What must be conveyed are the titles, which Genette casts in a public role, as a book's identity in society, a name used for communication among diverse parties from buyers and sellers to "titologists." The caveat I wish to make is that I do not think this is about finding the book's "essence" but rather a selected approach to the book's complex being.

Genette himself is too clear-sighted to be hamstrung by his own theoretical assertions. He sees that features of the medium like format, paper, typeface, and typography can be not only a

partner to the text in forming the book but a partner whose loss would deprive both book and text of character and artistic intent.[12] We can also look to one of Genette's concluding remarks:

> Inasmuch as the paratext is a transitional zone between text and beyond-text, one must resist the temptation to enlarge this zone by whittling away in both directions. However interminable its boundaries, the paratext retains at its center a distinctive and undisputed territory where its 'properties' are clearly manifest and which is constituted jointly by the types of elements I have explored in this book (407).

With this judicious guidance on the basis for paratext, it seems counterproductive to preconceive of the physical medium as merely secondary. Just as social practices associate text with paratext, so does the print codex to form a book. There can be no doubt that a social demand for names gives life to book titles, but titles are also given status by the medium's way of presenting them. If the title is supposedly essential to a Frost book (even more essential than the text?), it is one aspect of a name that is shared across several uses and, like all names, can shift in what it refers to. Conversely, if the physical and visual medium is supposedly dispensable, that means disclaiming some of the physical object's many features and functions but still implicitly depending on others (which I will discuss further in the next section). The Frost collected works is not formed by universals or essentials but rather a chosen concept, and its paratextual patterns are best interpreted in light of the array of perspectives that could inform the book of books. In the next section, I will point out the effect of a rather strongly shared perspective on the book reflected in reviewers of Frost's individual and collected volumes.

II

A book review implies much about its declared object of interest. Exactly what sort of thing is it reviewing? Looking at the long series of reviews of Frost's work over his lifetime, we see what

[12] See ch. 2, especially page 34. In addition, Genette's discussion of material and substance is careful to start with a distinction between the verbal and "other types of manifestation," by which he means typography, illustration, and the like (7). The way Genette isolates the verbal condition seems in line with G. T. Tanselle's emphasis on the distinction between tangible and intangible works. Remembering Genette's other remarks, we can also see why Tanselle has been mistaken for "idealist."

they owe to the book for its roles as a printed package, commercial package, artistic and physical medium, and most broadly, an index of Frost's art and all ideas and meanings that people would like to attach to art and the artist.[13] As soon as Frost has built up an appreciable number of books, thus forming a collective body worth considering and referring back to, reviewers begin to fall into habits of conscious and unconscious reliance on the book object. Just as much as individual poems, the books become coinage of Frost's work, of Frost's career activity. For example, here is how Louis Untermeyer contextualizes his review of *West-Running Brook,* Frost's fifth individual book: "Forget for the moment Frost's most famous 'North of Boston' and its successor 'Mountain Interval'; examine his earliest volume 'A Boy's Will,' published in 1913, and 'New Hampshire,' published in 1923" (72). When dealing with an accumulation of pieces, i.e. numerous individual poems, we can appreciate the simple ability to combine a number of them into a unit. A book creates a unit by physically binding the folded paper with its printed matter, but it also represents the need for a saleable entity, in that a book gets made because it is a commercially viable unit. When it comes to moving the work from poet and publisher to reviewer and reader, this unitizing into a labeled package is of course considered an advantage by all involved. The set of texts, the set of poems, becomes more usable for a range of purposes; in today's technological language, the package and its identifier are an interface with high compatibility. More symbolically, names are valuable when the use of those names is shared among diverse parties, confirming an agreed-upon system for delimiting and organizing entities, and so book titles are the default and best-understood way for Untermeyer to survey the lay of the land. In saying that books can supply the coinage of Frost's work, I call on the idea of coining in multiple senses: units accepted in exchange and circulation, a family of things stamped with identifying patterns, and to conjure up a label or name.

Having had a chance to focus on some individual books earlier in this dissertation, we have already seen the symbolic value that gets invested in the named entities. The books' recipients,

[13] As in previous chapters: unless otherwise specified, citations for reviews refer to Wagner's convenient anthology. Page numbers from Wagner cited in text, along with author of review if known.

critic, buyer, and reader, take for granted the books as practical physical packages and then assume they must be discussed as creative works, as artistic units, presuming also that the names symbolize their character. It may be no surprise, then, that without any hesitation or question of presumptuousness, all these qualities are conferred on the collected works. Logically, collected works package and unitize mainly in the physical and commercial sense, and even though reviewers do see that these books are a concatenation of already-published individual books, they prefer a rather different way to feel the relationship. A review of the 1930 *Collected Poems* in *Christian Century:*

> Five previously published volumes of Robert Frost's poems are assembled between one pair of covers. It is wonderful how a man can hold one mood through all the seasons for twenty years or more, and how everything he has written reflects a single emotional state and seems part of a single picture. (100)

The review in *New York Herald Tribune Books* is sure that the perceived unity is not just a sense of record-keeping, not just the fact of compiling the primary published units of one writer, but aesthetic, growing from symbolic kernels:

> In this collected edition of his poems we may study, with especial profit, the prevailing meditation which runs, from the first poem written thirty years ago... down to the last poems written yesterday.... 'Into My Own,' which opens this collection, gives the key to the entire book. (Taggard, 87)

Such determination to find the figurative unity of the book can even overwrite its prosaic title, which within its prosaic limits reached its greatest expression in the 1949 version: *Complete Poems of Robert Frost.* The *Chicago Sun-Times* proffers an obligatory key to the book: its preface. "It is the best possible kind of preface to the body of Frost's lifework because it is a kind of credo" (Kennedy, 227). Just as telling as the desire for a key is the requirement that the key must fit the belief in "the body of Frost's lifework." The title *The Complete Poems of Robert Frost* simply names an entity that was already very real to the reviewers, and ex post facto, the title coins an artwork out of what is in the book. The book is named for its character, the human character and his characteristic personal creed.

Again, if we were dealing with Frost's individual books, we would be all too happy to say that the book titles can be read symbolically, just as we believe a priori that the book coheres as a work of art, but such interpretations should seem more of a stretch for the collected works, which specifically lack the intentional and manifest artistic making of the individual books. The collected works unitizes in a more mundane way the pieces that map out an author, his career, his publications. Yet this is enough if the making of books is a metaphor. The mundanities that go into a book, from the physical media to the worldly human author, are readily taken up as characters in the mythology of where art comes from. To the advantage of readers and reviewers, there is not only a supply of oft-told allegories about artistic origins, the stories prove adaptable, tending to correlate and blend with one another and with an acceptable story for the actual case. Let's return for a moment to the individual books and consider how the final one put together by Frost, *In the Clearing,* is reviewed in *Christian Science Monitor:*

> A first impression of the whole book might, in fact, be of miscellany. But the more one reads, and relates groupings of ideas, theme, and their cross allusions, the more powerfully one is impressed that "In the Clearing" contains essences of most of the thoughts and convictions Frost ever had.... Never underestimate Frost the book planner (Holmes, 252)

Because this book came so late in Frost's life, it is no surprise to find the mythic seed planted in the lifetime expression of Frost. The additional terms and conditions spelled out here do nothing to discourage, indeed they encourage, treating the mythology as transferable to the volume of collected works. Even if the work under consideration presents as discrete pieces, you are counseled that you better keep looking for the implicit unity if you know what's good for you. If one is assured that every book coheres by force of metaphor, symbolism, then the counsel "Never underestimate Frost the book planner" is not meant to be restricted to certain cases, is not merely for those books with an overtly customized architecture. Even with the collected works, the reviewers can take for granted the book's artistic plan and creative coherence. The reviews will say that, in essence, a collected works is inevitably an organic form grown from the latent potential of

its seed, because, as we shall see, it proves an irresistible opportunity to retell the favored and oft-told myth of the growth of the artist.

To further clarify the mythos that weaves together the book reviews and the books as defined by reviewers, we can trace a particularly strong and versatile thread running through the weave, a thread that strings together sequences, linear plot. We have seen the regularity with which a book's sequence of poems is treated as meaningful, and we can't help but look for plot in stories including biography. This universalizing makes fungible the hypo- and epi-book as well as all tropes about life and art. This easily becomes an unconscious habit of interpretation, as seen in this review of *A Further Range:*

> A chart of the present book would show a horizontal line of moderate elevation running from the first to the central pages; there it would rise perpendicularly to the position of Frost at his uppermost; it would culminate in "Iris by Night"; near the close it would drop to its first level and run thus to the end, except for a sharp rally at the longish "Build Soil—a Political Pastoral".... (Doughty, 140)

As we can see, there are no holds barred in reading the individual book as linear, and the influence on a book of books will be as pervasive. Interestingly, poems may be difficult to see as falling into a meaningful sequence except that provided by the book, but there is a preexisting justification for linearity in considering a sequence constituted of books. The individual books are on a historical timeline as publishing events and milestones in Frost's work as a writer. But built to a towering height upon this real-world sequence is the mythic plot, the life of the artist, artistic growth. With the publication of *A Further Range,* Frost had his sixth individual book, which one reviewer took as ample basis for a rhapsodic narrative:

> This, his finest book, indicates no end, but magnificent growth toward a final word that he may take two books to reach. But to appraise this book, I must retrace the foot-hills and mountains he has already climbed before, on this further range, he salutes the sun.
> Frost began with the grace of "A Boy's Will"—like a day in March, with chime of melting snow, old-porcelain skies.... It was no mountain, but a birch-embroidered hill. Then upon a world surprised into acclaim of poetry far too good for it, came "North of Boston".... It was a mountain on whose shoulders people dwelt; whose summit was dark with pines and white with clouds. "Mountain Interval" was... a high peak of backward vision. (Root, 141)

It seems Auden was wasting his time in organizing his collected poems into "life chapters," for readers are all too ready to do that work themselves.

In a way, the actual compilation and printing of Frost's several collected works is redundant, merely affirmation of the linear narrative already celebrated in the book reviews. How interesting, then, that the reviewers who re-read the story in a Frost collected works feel a bit let down, as if finally having it all unified as a printed artifact is disillusioning. These reviewers never question their assumption that they are reading a life-of-art story but instead blame the book for being an unsatisfactory allegory. Reviewing for *The New Yorker,* Louise Bogan judges the 1939 *Collected Poems:*

> one reads... waiting for a crack of upheaval, with some roughness of unforeseen growth thereafter. The tone is curiously static throughout. The emotion in the best lyrics... does not "Broaden down" from youth to maturity; it sounds intermittently. (152)

The tension seriously strains the *Times Literary Supplement* review of the 1930 *Collected Poems.* The reviewer correctly describes the factual history, the real-life chronology, "Considering the length of time Mr. Frost must have had in which to shape his talent and select from his output, it is not surprising that his early work shows little of the hesitancies of immaturity," but in the very same paragraph falls back on the myth of the growing artist, "the youthful affirmations of 'A Boy's Will,' achieving with maturity a more perfect expression..." (98). Seeing such belief in the allegory, we can understand how its web of metaphor has entangled so many different points. There is Frost the poet, and there is the poet's biography. There is the poet's writing, his career, and a timeline of publishing events. There are the books, artifacts privileged for the traces tangibly preserved in them. There are the poems placed into those books, which can be taken as a trace of the man, his publishing effort, his career, his art. These are all distinct objects of interest, but that does not stop them from merging in a way that appears to reveal the essence from whence it all came. Frost's books are the proxy for the man. His collected works is just a set of books, but life is art and art is

life. A book of books will tell the story of artistic development, and if books yield artistic unity and a plot, then so does Frost's poetic life.

While taken as natural by these reviewers, this is a specific perspective on the material guided by a specific configuration of assumptions about the material. It is reflected in the tangible treatment of the paratext, which cannot be well-accounted for by more abstract interests such as authorship or biography. For example, the dedication page may be as direct a personal utterance as can be found in a Frost book, put forth as part of a real relationship, reflecting key influences at different points in the writer's life. Thus, their omission is not a serious fault for a collected works in which the interest is not general biography, not life per se, but in pursuing certain premises about the lifework. Furthermore, the book is tailored to the concept of lifework rather than a more comprehensive researcher's interest in authorship. Frost is not directly responsible for illustrations, typography, and the like, so it is not seen as inappropriate to exclude them when collecting the Frost "works." Frost did, however, write the dedications, section titles, footnotes, and various other comments placed in tables of contents and elsewhere in the books. This is all part of the work attributable to the author but appreciated inconsistently if at all in his collected works.

III

The *Collected/Complete Poems of Robert Frost* are about Frost inasmuch as the author is needed as a premise underlying the lifework, and circularly the author is valued according to how his works are presented, how the features of the original books are prioritized by the collected works. If one were given a chance to edit a new version of Frost's collected works, it would certainly be promising to commit from the outset to a view of the book more comprehensive than the basic "title + poems." Just to be clear, nothing in my discussion has been meant to deprecate the *Collected* and *Complete Poems* as we have them but rather to show that their approach to the book as an object must be understood as both a particular concept and tangible form. The editor of a new Frost

"works" should not merely try to reproduce a higher percentage of the material in the paratext; the paratextual choices should be part and parcel of a coherent alternative idea.

Certain choices may promise an immediate payoff in drawing attention to the book as a medium, for instance choices like reintegrating woodcut illustrations or those elements that work as a system to create allusions to whole books (e.g. allusion to Yeats's book in the glosses of *A Boy's Will* or the elements that make *New Hampshire* a scholarly tome). An edition that brings out such features would doubtless change the perception of Frost's books, but I call attention to G. T. Tanselle's measured response to:

> a general tendency to focus on book illustration, layout, and typographical displays and to pay insufficient attention to the quieter (but no less expressive) background made up of specific typeface designs, type sizes, letter-spacing, type-page dimensions and the like...[14]

Tanselle is not far from Frost's thinking on the subtle aspects of design and their pervasive power. Here is what Frost wrote to Joseph Blumenthal, designer for many of Frost's books, founder of the Spiral Press, and prominent player in the fine press movement: "To Joseph Blumenthal, who thus in pure bookmaking (nothing added) found things to say that were never said before to my poetry."[15] Working with a fine press was a painstaking process, which Frost sometimes found daunting, but he was always taken with the tangible quality of the creation: "I like this type so well and also the idea of the hand-setting so well that it would go against the latent craftsman in me to give them up."[16]

All this being said, we might be tempted to believe that the editorial solution is facsimile reproduction of the original book designs. With ever-improving digital tools, it is possible to reproduce all relevant parameters of typography, not just the font including specific cut and weight but also tracking, kerning, and leading. The vector models now the standard will produce a cleaner realization of the typographical design than bitmap images of the original physical document (still

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[14] *Bibliographical Analysis* (Cambridge University Press, 2009), 87.
[15] Inscribed in Blumenthal's copy of 1930 *Collected Poems,* qtd. in Joseph Blumenthal, *Robert Frost and His Printers* (Austin, Texas: W. Thomas Taylor, 1985), 16.
[16] Frost to Blumenthal, 1930, qtd. in Blumenthal, 14.

the preferred technique for digitizing illustrations). Yet the digitally printed book will not be quite the same as the product of metal letterpress, and we should not allow ourselves to think there is such a thing as a perfect facsimile. If we take Frost's observations seriously, we must decide on the potential significance of paper and ink, bindings and covers, not to mention choices imposed by practical limits on the amount of labor that can be spent on digital typography. The better our sense of the book medium, the more we confront critical editorial questions as to how to represent its design.

For now, I will note just one very promising avenue to further understanding of Frost and the book medium. Whatever feature or quality of the medium we care to discuss, they all in some way make the books that represent Frost, but this does not mean the books are the vehicle of Frost's work only. As brought up a moment ago, the making of books benefits from the talents of others as well, and Frost himself can speak as if a partner in a jointly-authored artistic product: "That's a fine idea having all our names in the book together, the illustrator's, the maker's, and the author's. It has always been of the greatest importance to me who designed the books I wrote."[17] Here, Frost is referring to a limited edition with woodcut illustrations by Thomas Nason and typographic design by Bruce Rogers.[18] Rogers was another of the principal figures in the fine press movement and creator of the landmark Centaur typeface. As Frost says later in the same letter: "I saw something in the form of the Centaurs that I had never seen before. I meant to tell you about that earlier and make the shy suggestion that Mr. Rogers use his Centaur font on me. But that would have been going too far." Frost proves not only his interest in these elements of the book arts, he shows respect for the judgment of his partner in the collaboration. As Frost told Blumenthal: "Again your art and my art go hand in hand to market without rivalry."[19] A new edition guided by this perspective would illuminate a historical moment in which Frost and the American fine press

[17] Frost to Macy, 30 June 1950, qtd. in Blumenthal, 41.
[18] The limited edition of the 1949 *Complete Poems,* which of course suggests further distinctions to be made with respect to that class of books.
[19] Frost to Blumenthal, 28 April 1942, qtd. in Blumenthal, 33.

movement were both flourishing and found advantageous ways to work jointly.[20] Frost worked with D. B. Updike at the Merrymount Press to produce a limited edition of *West-Running Brook*, in addition to the aforementioned collaboration with Rogers and of course the long partnership and friendship with Blumenthal, which included work on *A Further Range, A Witness Tree, Steeple Bush, In the Clearing, You Come Too* (New York: Henry Holt, 1959), a reissue of *A Boy's Will* (New York: Henry Holt, 1934), the 1930 *Collected Poems,* and *The Poems of Robert Frost* (New York: The Modern Library, 1946). In this context I should not neglect to mention also the illustrator J. J. Lankes, whose woodcuts remain closely associated with Frost's books.

The concept of a collaborative artwork with collective "authorship" can help us think through the possibilities for a new edition, but we must still confront the difficult editorial questions. As before, there is no such thing as a perfect reproduction, and an editor cannot evade the responsibility of choosing how to represent (re-present) the joint efforts recorded in the book medium. Jack Stillinger did much to stir scholarly discussion of "multiple authorship" with his book of that title, and I would like to point to a thoughtful response by Peter Schillingsburg:

> When Stillinger speaks of interpretive acts, he seems to want critics to know the origin of each variant, but when he speaks of editorial presentation of works, he seems to require that all participants in multiple authorings have equal status. It is an enormous problem to ascertain what contextual or extratextual elements have interpretive implications for a given text. What exactly does the author's name imply? What do the binding, dust jacket, publisher's imprint, printer's imprint, and bookseller's sticker mean?[21]

It is bracing to stretch one's mind and notice that multiple parties are behind multiple classes of aesthetic detail introduced at multiple stages into the work, but one must then commit to refining and communicating those perceptions in the editorial presentation, exploring the possible

[20] This seems to me a more fruitful approach to history than the imperative to show that an author "is very much a product of his time," as if "the times" did not offer an array of potentialities that ranged from more to less apparent.
[21] Review of Stillinger, *Modern Philology* 91.3 (1994): 389.

complexities of multiple authors but also the individual author, the part of Frost that liked being "the best-printed American writer."[22]

On that note, I would like to conclude with the unquestioned and taken-for-granted aspect of a new edition, the textual variants. I save this most traditional area of literary editing for the end, for it is interesting to see the subtlety and restraint with which Frost revised his published poetry in light of the wholesale but oft ignored changes to book design.

IV

In this section, I will try to give a relevant sampling of variants found between the books' original single-volume publications and the 1949 *Complete Poems*.[23] First, this generally covers the extent of Frost's revisions to his published poems.[24] Second, the 1949 version of the poetry has had a long afterlife. Since Frost's death, his poetry has been republished in two major editions, editions with different goals, different results, and different pictures of Frost; yet both default to the 1949 version of the poems, as if we take "Complete Poems" to mean completed poems.[25] Given our discussion of the original single-volume publications and the collected works, it seems like a new edition ought to pair the text version with the paratext of its source book, but it is always good to test assumptions. Fortunately, compared to other cases, Frost's textual variants are not overwhelming. They do not involve reconciling many relevant yet highly inconsistent witnesses as with Shakespeare or the Bible, nor are we faced with the compulsive revising of Marianne Moore.

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[22] Conversation between Frost and Elizabeth Shepley Sergeant, qtd. in Blumenthal, 1.

[23] I have chosen to survey Frost's most-anthologized poems as having the most widespread interest. I will refer to the texts of 1949 as the revised version, but in many cases the revisions were first seen in previous iterations of collected works. Along with referring to the collations of Lathem, *The Poetry of Robert Frost* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1969), I have verified with physical copies unless unusual circumstances make it impossible.

[24] I do not sample variant readings from appearances in periodicals. My primary interest here is how Frost revisits poems that, by making it into a book, are more or less finished by his standards. Versions in periodicals tend to show less finish, and the number and character of minor revisions are evidence of a polishing process that is comparatively less revelatory.

[25] The same is true of the sequence of poems for each individual book (see note 5). See appendix for overview of Frost critical editions currently available.

The New Bibliography can and should be admired for tackling staggering numbers of variant readings. Editors developed ingenious heuristics to make educated guesses about intentional revision, editing done for the sake of norms, and random typos. Frost's case, however, does not call for a triage system to assign where and what efforts are worthwhile. In fact, Frost's texts present such a relatively modest set of variant readings that his case might be easily dismissed as not much of a problem. Interest in editorial matters is always tenuous, but it should not be lowered simply because of the proportion of variants. Indeed, it should be heartening that it does not require heroic effort to give due consideration to each and every variant. We will not need to assume beforehand what might be a typo, and some of the examples to follow may indeed be typos. We can see what might be gained by trying to read all of them as potentially meaningful.

Revisions could suggest the dreaded idea of the growth of the artist. For a poet of Frost's bent, we may more safely think of a poet working on his technique, honing his craft. In his revisions, we can find a sense of the poet growing in confidence, an ever-developing sureness in his own touch. I will start with one of Frost's earliest poems, "A Tuft of Flowers" from *A Boy's Will,* where it originally contained the lines below. As the poem's speaker sympathizes with a butterfly searching a freshly mowed field, he notices the tuft of flowers that the mower left standing. The butterfly:

> ...led my eye to look
> At a tall tuft of flowers beside a brook,
> A leaping tongue of bloom the scythe had spared
> Beside a reedy brook the scythe had bared.
> I left my place to know them by their name,
> Finding them butterfly weed when I came.
> The mower in the dew had loved them thus,
> By leaving them to flourish, not for us,
> Nor yet to draw one thought of ours to him,
> But from sheer morning gladness at the brim.

This is one of the earliest poems that hints at the true potential of Frost's sensibility, and Frost himself liked to look back on the poem as an early touchstone in his career. We remember the prefatory remark printed on a preliminary page in *North of Boston*: "*Mending Wall* takes up the theme where *A Tuft of Flowers* in *A Boy's Will* laid it down." The lines above are the heart of the

poem, but in the 1949 version a couplet is excised, and we can probably guess which lines are no longer needed: "I left my place to know them by their name, / Finding them butterfly weed when I came." On the one hand, the lines may be valid as concrete detail, since Frost has enough botanical interest to want to identify the flower species. On the other hand, they are flawed as poetry, saying that the butterfly lead him to butterfly weed, and not worth a couplet. For a similar example, here are some lines from the original version of "Birches:"

> But I was going to say when Truth broke in
> With all her matter-of-fact about the ice-storm
> (Now am I free to be poetical?)
> I should prefer to have some boy bend them

Again, we can guess which line gets dropped in the 1949 revision: the parenthetical "Now am I free to be poetical?" Certainly the poem makes a creative turn based on the speaker's poetic fancy vs. sober understanding of reality. This is such a characteristic theme of Frost's poetry that Frost shouldn't worry that we will miss it, but even if it were not, the parenthetical aside would still belabor the point.

To make these changes, Frost needed only to be confident that he could say things his way without having to overstate it. For poets, though, the other side of having a sure touch is prosody. Especially telling for Frost are a number of corrections he makes to the poems of *North of Boston*. Remembering that this is a book of dramatic verse, some as monologue and some in dialogue-driven narrative, the poems are mainly in blank verse (unrhymed iambic pentameter). Thanks to English poetry's generic and historical background, blank verse is a trope of verse drama, and on top of this base, Frost adds his personal poetic mission, to use the form to measure out the rhythms of regional American speech. The first poem in the book is "Mending Wall," which has this line in the original version:

> Where they have left not one stone on stone,

The 1949 revision adds the missing half-iamb towards the end of the line: "...one stone on a stone." In the dramatic "Home Burial," one of the wife's coldest responses comes when the husband wonders why he can't talk about their baby who has died. In the original version:

You can't because you don't know how.

The 1949 revision adds the missing fifth foot with "...you don't know how to speak." A common colloquial phrase becomes more specific, more deliberate, and more pointedly Frostian, as the idea of how to speak drives all of Frost's dramatic poetry. Blank verse is a form that Frost never stopped practicing, so looking beyond *North of Boston*, we can find that a couple of metrical fixes were in order for "Not to Keep," which originally had the line:

Under the formal writing, he was in her sight,

This six-foot line was corrected in the 1949 version:

Under the formal writing, he was there,

The original poem also had a line with the opposite problem:

His hands? She had to look, to ask,

This four-foot line was deftly filled out:

His hands? She had to look, to look and ask,

A uniquely prominent example is the poem "The Gift Outright," which originally had the line:

Until we found it was ourselves

As the poem Frost recited at the Kennedy inauguration, it has a conspicuous place in the Frost canon, and so the revised line is:

Until we found out that it was ourselves

There can be no doubt that Frost is the kind of poet who would correct apparent lapses in prosody, but I will admit that the examples above illustrate rather easy corrections, simple addition or deletion of words rather than significant rewriting of the lines. There are more difficult or more

ambiguous problems, which Frost might choose to leave as is. “The Gift Outright” has another metrically problematic line:

> In Massachusetts, in Virginia.

Though the other line from this poem was corrected, this one was allowed to stand. This can’t be dismissed as laziness, for whatever the irregularity, Frost may keep it for its expressive function. Thus, the real cases of interest are not straightforward questions of too many or not enough feet but when we must ask how rhythmic variations, whether regular or irregular, should be interpreted in light of Frost’s poetics.

Back to the seminal poems of *North of Boston*, “The Death of the Hired Man” had these lines originally:

> Its light poured softly in her lap. She saw
> And spread her apron to it. She put out her hand

The first line is perfectly regular iambic pentameter; yet the 1949 revision added a word to the end: “She saw it.” The new version of the line has an extra, eleventh syllable. The next line, which remains the same in both versions, has twelve syllables. Returning also to the popular “Birches,” its famous opening lines originally read:

> 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.
> Ice-storms do that.

These pentameter lines are a unique example of Frost’s project to capture vernacular voice tones. Those familiar with rural New England accents will recognize exactly how the terse delivery of “Ice-storms do that” should sound. From its opening, the poem narrows down its thoughts: a long sentence, a medium sentence, and finally the short separate sentence that, set off with a pause and breath, delivers the laconic epanorthosis. The 1949 revision shows a small yet significant rewording of the ending:

> But swinging doesn't bend them down to stay
> As ice-storms do.

The terse third sentence has been joined to the second sentence. It is a faster, more continuous, more regular movement, as the string of iambs flows unbroken across the line break. This raises the question of why and when Frost would trade a rough, colloquial rhythm for iambic fluidity. In this light, we can revisit earlier examples such as "Mending Wall." In this poem, the revised line rocks along evenly, but the original slows down towards the end and gives more weight to the monosyllabic words, all containing 'n' consonants: "not one stone on stone."

Another example of how prosodic change is tied to expressive tone is "An Old Man's Winter Night." This poem follows the titular old man with his lamp and stove in his farmhouse in snowy New England, but this is not a sentimental Norman Rockwell painting. Rather, Frost shows an enfeebled human in a harsh and isolated landscape, and the nub of the pathos is how the old man is lost even inside his own home. In the original version:

> What kept him from remembering what it was
> That brought him to that creaking room was age.

In a revised version, the first line became:

> What kept him from remembering the need

Swapping two syllables for three syllables will obviously affect the scansion, but interestingly, both versions can pass for regular pentameter lines because the word "remembering" can be pronounced with either three or four syllables depending on the rhythmic patterns around it. The revised version gives it the standard four syllables, but it can take a bit of extra care to enunciate every single syllable, making the movement slower, more deliberate. In contrast, the original version will scan easily if we say "rememb'ring," eliding the four syllables into three, which in this case is not a poeticism but rather sounds more informal and colloquial than the meticulous four-syllable pronunciation. This colloquialism seems compatible with the phrase "what it was," in contrast to the more proper-sounding revision, "remembering the need," which also sounds a little

more cognizant than not remembering what it was. This example also shows another way in which editors should not rely on a consistent story of revisions, for while the revision here was made after the publication of the poem in the original single-volume *Mountain Interval,* the 1949 text reverts back to the original reading.

Frost did not write exclusively in iambic pentameter, and the editorial choices can become even more difficult when we look at the alternative meters Frost liked to employ. One of Frost's favorite styles is freely alternating duple and triple feet, which may be described as iambic-anapestic, a nursery rhyme type of rhythm. Here are a couple of examples of the impossible choice it can present between more rough-hewn and more fluid, regular rhythm. "Two Tramps in Mud Time" is in iambic-anapestic tetrameter. Lines from the original version:

> A bluebird comes tenderly up to alight
> And fronts the wind to unruffle a plume

The 1949 revision reads "And turns to the wind...," replacing an iamb with an anapest. Another poem, "The Bearer of Evil Tidings," is in iambic-anapestic trimeter. Line from the original version:

> He ran through rhododendrons

The 1949 revision reads "...through the rhododendrons," again replacing an iamb with an anapest, and as the line has only three beats, the change has a strong effect in making the rhythm less angular and more lilting. Such problems have wider relevance, because similar lines can show up in poems that are otherwise in iambic pentameter. In the poem "Design," we find a line that is easier to scan as a Germanic four-stress line. In the original version:

> A snow-drop spider, a flower like froth,

In the 1949 revision, the end of the line says "...like a froth."

Throughout the foregoing discussion, I have assumed that the changes are based in metrical considerations, but I gladly allow that it is not easy to prove the significance of such minor changes, that it may seem safer to assume they are typos or perhaps a fastidious concern for inconspicuous words such as "a," "the," and "it." Aficionados of poetry never need a reason to explore the possible

effects of a minute change, but these cases are also good for testing the limits of one's approach to editing. Typos are not always immediately apparent, and the interest is in cases where the difference between random mistakes and valid readings is not clear. Taking another look at a couple of the poems we have brought up, in "An Old Man's Winter Night," our protagonist wanders around his own house, and in the original:

> And having scared the cellar under him
> In clomping there, he scared it once again
> In clomping off;

In the 1949 revision, however, "there" changes to "here." This could be one of those subtle typos, losing only one letter in a way that creates no obvious problem. Mistake or not, it is poetically interesting, forcing us to consider the difference between an enfeebled man being "here" or "there." Also revisiting the poem "Two Tramps in Mud Time," in the original version the poem's speaker tells us:

> Good blocks of beech it was I split,

In the 1949 revision, it changes from beech to oak. Both create a consonant pattern, the repeated 'k' sounds in "blocks of oak" or 'b' sounds in "blocks of beech," which might matter more to Frost than the actual properties of the trees. This is plausibly an intentional revision, but it presents the possibility of an unconscious substitution stemming from a partially remembered sound pattern. There are many other cases worth considering, but I will bring up just one more example in "'Out, Out—'," the gut-wrenching story of a boy who dies when his hand is mangled by a saw. In the original version:

> His sister stood beside them in her apron
> To tell them 'Supper.' At that word, the saw,
> As if to prove saws knew what supper meant,
> Leaped out at the boy's hand, or seemed to leap—

In the 1949 revision, "that word" becomes "the word." This is the climactic moment in the poem, but more than that, Frost compares the saw to a living being that understands words. Does the saw need to hear "that word" or "the word," or is this a typo disguised as a fine distinction?

This list is not meant to be exhaustive. As with the rest of my discussion of variants, these "typos" are a sampling from the better known and anthologized poems, simply to suggest that each deserves consideration on its own merits. The quantity of variants is already manageable and can be further pared down in not unreasonable ways. If a new edition annotated each poem with all its variant readings, essentially passing the choice of "best" reading on to the reader, we would not necessarily need to call it a dereliction of editorial duty; the variants are perhaps most valuable as interesting options presented to the reader.

Appendix

Editing and Remaking Frost's Books after 1963

Though Frost died just over a half-century ago in 1963, we have transitioned to quite a different picture of the books that continue to make Robert Frost the poet. All the books described in the preceding chapters have gone out of print, entering the realm of libraries and the used book market. The books that are now in print include new volumes of collected works produced after Frost's death, various new selected volumes, and, perhaps the most widespread and typical way to encounter Frost in book form today, classroom anthologies and the whole genus of related compilations. Of course, there is now also the incredibly complex proliferation of digital texts,[1] but the aforementioned set of new books is still an important link in the chain of transmission. Since his passing, the business of Frost has kept enough vitality to support the expense of putting new books into circulation, and as remade books with remade designs, they have shifted the way Frost is sold to the public. The books' effects on Frost's reputation are often subtle, but in this space I will work from an effect directly printed onto the texts of the poems. In producing a new edition of a writer's works, the editors will inevitably do something, for an editor who leaves a text untouched is a yet-to-be-discovered species. The new editions of Frost's collected works have become the reference point for subsequent copies of Frost, whether print or digital, and an interest in the specific editorial changes turns out to be a concrete way to bring out assumptions about books, for such

[1] Here, I would like to point out a connection to the Frost books that precede the 1923 United States copyright threshold. Now that digital print-on-demand has become highly economical, such that amateurs may add unlimited numbers of books to their "catalogs" with almost no effort by copy-and-paste, the market has been flooded by offerings of pre-1923 books. Combine these with some reprint editions that were already being sold by traditional publishers, and the bibliographical situation of these books has become very complex.

editing starts with a perspective on the existing texts preserved in the existing books and then asks why and how they should be represented in a new book.

Since 1963, two new versions of Frost's collected works have been produced, and in these two publications we find already a short but eventful history of "remaking" Frost's oeuvre. In 1969, *The Poetry of Robert Frost* (New York: Henry Holt, 1969) was published, and with this new book made just a few years after Frost's passing, the texts printed during his life began to be displaced by an edited version. The editor, E. C. Lathem, made widespread changes to the poems' punctuation. According to one count, the book introduces 1,117 changes to Frost's original punctuation, on the editor's own initiative rather than being based in Frost's records or instructions. Lathem and his edition provoked outright indignation from numerous critics, most prominently in the *Atlantic Monthly* article "Robert Frost Corrupted" by poet and critic Donald Hall, who supplies the count of the changes.[2] Nonetheless, this edition stood unchanged as the only collected works in print for nearly thirty years, and it remains in print today. An alternative to the Lathem edition was finally offered in 1995, with the *Collected Poems, Prose, and Plays,* prepared for the Library of America series (New York, ed. Poirier and Richardson). On the surface, it would seem that the significance of the Library of America edition could not be more different from that of the Lathem edition. The Library of America editors rejected the Lathem punctuation and instead reverted to the text of the 1949 *Complete Poems*, and as such the Library of America edition puts back into print the version of punctuation that was in print at the end of Frost's life. Compared to the Lathem edition, the Library of America edition drew limited comment from critics, at least on textual matters, and in a way this speaks to the merits that are generally ascribed to the newer edition. Most tellingly, the newer edition seemed to placate Donald Hall, who noted simply that it restores "Frost's poems as he wrote them" (81n). Echoing Hall, a few other critics and reviewers have remarked approvingly that the Library of America edition offers correct texts in contrast to Lathem's emendations: "if [the Library

[2] March 1982, 60-64. Reprinted in *Breakfast Served Anytime All Day* (Ann Arbor: U. of Michigan Press, 2003), 81-99. Reprint version cited herein.

of America edition] had done nothing more than return Frost's original texts to print, it would have been a huge contribution to American literature. It does even more...."[3] Hopefully, from all that has been discussed in my study, it is clear that whatever the merits of the Library of America edition, it is impossible for this newest book to offer a Frost identical to that of the approved older book(s). I emphasize only that the Library of America edition, in the eyes of key parties, has sufficiently performed or represented or embodied the quality of fidelity, of dependability, and calmed the public conversation so much that it leaves the impression that the editorial situation for in-print Frost editions has been resolved to general satisfaction. I of course wish to argue that both editions must be reexamined on an ongoing basis.

At the very least, one should be ready to revisit at any time the Lathem and Library of America editions because as a pair they constitute the basis for the text of Frost now in circulation. Books continue to make Robert Frost the poet and always will. We cannot lose awareness of Lathem's book having this role, for on *Amazon.com* it still outsells the Library of America edition by a wide margin.[4] Moreover, despite the critical community that *de jure* rules Lathem to be superseded by the Library of America book, Lathem still represents Frost *de facto* in highly conspicuous forums. For example, the *Norton Anthology of Modern and Contemporary Poetry* in its latest edition (New York: Norton, 2003), widely used in American classrooms to teach Frost, continues to reproduce the Lathem punctuation. The aforementioned critics make the crucial argument that the Frost offered by this supply chain has been spiked by a substantial dose of Lathem, such that it should be properly considered a Frost-Lathem mixed product. I would like to build on their understanding of the Lathem edition by bringing a more technical knowledge of

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[3] Richard Wakefield, "The Lives of an American Poet," *Sewanee Review* 106.1 (1998): 30. Wakefield adds: "Given the restored integrity of the original texts and the wealth of new material, *Frost: Collected Poems, Prose, and Plays* will long stand as the definitive volume of Robert Frost's work." See also Helen Vendler, "Dark and Deep," *London Review of Books,* 4 July 1996, 3-6: "A new edition of the poems had long been needed, if only because the most recent, the 1969 *Poetry of Robert Frost,* was mispunctuated. ... The Library of America has now established correct texts for all the poems (though a few errors remain)."

[4] In early 2018, Lathem ranks around #41,000 among all books sold, while Library of America ranks around #94,000.

editing, its theory and methodology, to the discussion of Lathem's purposes and choices. This is not to suggest an abstract solution to the Lathem text, for it is all part of the significance of this specific book, the 1969 *Poetry of Robert Frost,* which embodies Lathem the editor and a version of Frost along with prevailing editorial practices and assumptions about the nature of books, all in one concrete artifact. To take in more angles of this book's existence will give us a better understanding of the problems it represents and continues to propagate, and to speak idealistically, will help improve future attempts to make such books. To speak more cynically, we must trace the mistakes and misunderstandings that managed to make it into an influential book as indications of what we must live with given fallible human editors, and ultimately, I think the factors behind the making of his edition show why Lathem's punctuation, once it was introduced, continues to circulate and is unlikely ever to be eliminated, that the Lathem book will always have a part in Frost's oeuvre.

I start from what has already been a vigorous debate over Lathem's punctuation, which despite having eventually lost steam, is still a solid groundwork for investigating the edition and also has proven to have lasting value as a discussion of punctuation in poetic texts. It almost goes without saying that the critics vehemently defended Frost's original punctuation over Lathem's editorial changes. The more sustained arguments include the aforementioned essay by Donald Hall, which is the most comprehensive, and earlier reviews by William Pritchard and by Frank Bidart,[5] who expertly shows how punctuation is interwoven with the art of versification:

> Punctuation is often less abundant, and less necessarily flamboyant, when a traditional metric controls emphases and pauses. In Wordsworth's blank verse, for example, punctuation is at times quite spare. It becomes more dense the closer he comes to the twists and thrusts of ordinary common speech—when, that is, the poem seems less straightforwardly metrical....
>
> Frost's punctuation, like Wordsworth's, is often spare, but when he approaches common speech, is at times surprisingly intricate.

[5] Pritchard, "Frost Revised," review of *The Poetry of Robert Frost,* ed. Lathem, *The Atlantic,* October 1970, 130-33. Bidart, "Robert's Rules," review of *The Poetry of Robert Frost,* ed. Lathem, *Partisan Review* 38.3 (1971): 350-53.

Collectively, these critics have written a sensitive and multidimensional analysis of the poetics of punctuation, which in itself leaves Lathem in an awkward position, but another reason that they end up particularly harsh towards Lathem is that Lathem himself suggested the standard by which he should be judged, saying that he departed from Frost's original texts "for the correction of errors and for achieving greater textual clarity" (526). For this claim, Lathem has been taken to task, for if his emendations provide "correction and clarification" at all, it is not in any sense appropriate to the needs of the poetry. There is no need to redo the thorough investigation of this question conducted in the aforementioned articles, but I would like to add a few of the examples that I have found where Lathem's idea of clarification introduces problems into a prominent poem.

Here is an example from what is perhaps Frost's most tragic poem, "Home Burial." In these lines, the wife is so stricken that she cannot even stomach her husband's efforts to reach out to her, and so:

> She withdrew, shrinking from beneath his arm
> That rested on the banister, and slid downstairs;

The comma after the word "withdrew" has been inserted by Lathem. The sentence is clear enough without the editorial comma, for it's easy to see that "shrinking" can modify and color the overall attitude being depicted. Rather than clarifying, the comma introduces a grammatical oddity, for why should the prepositional phrase "from beneath his arm" seem to be attached to "shrinking" instead of "withdrew"? The "correct correction," if it's even needed, would be "she withdrew, shrinking, from beneath his arm."

For another example, I turn to one of Frost's famous sonnets, "Hyla Brook":

> By June our brook's run out of song and speed.
> Sought for much after that, it will be found
> Either to have gone groping underground
> (And taken with it all the Hyla breed
> That shouted in the mist a month ago,
> Like ghost of sleigh bells in a ghost of snow)--
> Or flourished and come up in jewelweed,
> Weak foliage that is blown upon and bent,
> Even against the way its waters went.

The comma at the end of the penultimate line, after "bent," is inserted by Lathem. If Lathem was worried that the reader might take "even" to mean "evenly," i.e. bent without variation, that would be a wayward interpretation, so wayward that it would not be stopped by the comma alone. The needed clarity is already available in the meaning of the poem and in the line break. Frost is saying that the weak foliage is remarkable for bending against the normal flow, not across or with it. The added comma makes the grammatical structure less obvious, perhaps suggesting that the penultimate line is a parenthetical aside, i.e. the final line would attach to the antepenultimate line. Frost knows he has written a long complex sentence, and as we can see from the punctuation already there, he has worked to make it clear enough.

For an example where Lathem seriously damages both sense and prosody with a single comma, I offer "Range Finding." The following lines describe an unusual scene in which a passing bullet has cut down a single flower:

> A butterfly its [the flower's] fall had dispossessed,
> A moment sought in air his flower of rest,
> Then lightly stooped to it and fluttering clung.

Lathem adds a comma at the end of the first line, after "dispossessed," creating a pause that absolutely should not be there. We must read this event in words streaming unimpeded across the line break. The falling flower, the butterfly losing its perch, searching the empty air, these should all run together with the "moment," in which we, too, are suspended momentarily by the slight grammatical ambiguity as we cross the line break.

My final example is Frost's idiosyncratic poem, "For Once, Then, Something," the only poem he wrote as a purposive demonstration of classical meter and a highly unusual one for an English poet: phalaecean hendecasyllabics.

> Others taunt me with having knelt at well-curbs
> Always wrong to the light, so never seeing
> Deeper down in the well than where the water
> Gives me back in a shining surface picture

> Me myself in the summer heaven, godlike,
> Looking out of a wreath of fern and cloud puffs.

Lathem has added a comma in the penultimate line, after the word "heaven." Frost was well-versed in the difficulties of rendering a classical meter in English, knowing that it would force him to pay attention to every syllable, for each would need to work artfully and artificially to represent a contrasting language with contrasting prosody.[6] In the excerpt here, Frost has written quite a long sentence with almost no commas but with a rhythm measured by the phalaecean structure. Considering as well how carefully Frost structures the commas in the poem's punchline, "For once, then, something," Lathem's added comma neither clarifies nor corrects.

For many more examples and explanations in this vein, I heartily recommend the articles listed above. These articles have also been very astute, and I think also correct, in trying to infer the root method and motivation behind Lathem's changes, given that his rubric of clarification and correction must mean something very different to him than it does to students of poetry. Lathem seems to have felt the need to regularize the punctuation, to enforce a house style; yet the style manual leaves much to the editor's personal discretion, as if Lathem tailors the style guide to his own notion of appropriate rules for a Frost poem to follow. Again, I recommend the articles for a fuller elaboration; for my purposes here, I will review the salient points that I would like to build upon. For Lathem, a necessary part of the house style is to conform to contemporary usage. For example, single and double quotes are made consistent with modern American usage, a task that can be carried out with simple guidelines with little ambiguity. This contrasts with most of Lathem's other decisions, for example the restyling of hyphenated compounds. Lathem adds or deletes one hundred eighty-two hyphens, according to Hall's count (and I rely on Hall's counts throughout this discussion). No doubt there has been a general trend towards less hyphenation in

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[6] For Frost's ability to theorize about classical meter, see again his letter to Cox, 1914, #70. For more insight into this poem's classical allusions, see John Talbot, "Robert Frost's Hendecasyllabics and Roman Rebuttals," *International Journal of the Classical Tradition* 10.1 (2003): 73-84. For more on classical meters in English, see Hollander ch. 3.

English, and certainly some hyphens have become a clear mark of the archaic, e.g. "to-day." Yet distinctions are anything but clear cut, and hyphenation practices in English are varied and irregular. It seems tolerable that Lathem has dropped the hyphens he found in tip-toe, in-door, and pocket-money. Each of these, however, implies slightly different reasoning and differences in whether the result should be an open or closed compound, and it is generally hard to tell what the guidelines should be for any given compound, hard to tell if a case is being treated individually or by rote. Lathem chooses to remove the hyphens in snow-crust and matter-of-fact but not make-believe or mother-bird or frozen-ground-swell. In removing the hyphen from harp-like, he is forced to close up the two halves and create the rather unfamiliar word "harplike."[7] Much of this does not point to problems with archaisms or common usage but simply Lathem's sense of what can be allowed.

Lathem's program spills over into dashes, of which he adds one hundred fifty-six, with similarly ambiguous results. Lathem is bothered by Frost's collocation of a dash with another punctuation mark such as (,—) or (;—), which he changes to a dash only, but on the other hand, he is willing to insert punctuation to create collocation like (?—) or (!—) or (.—).[8] The most anarchic set of editorial choices is seen in the commas, with Hall counting 443 added commas. As already discussed, Lathem will add commas, often unhelpful and sometimes incorrect, to set off clauses and parenthetical expressions. In a completely different vein, his attempt to standardize the text on the serial (or Oxford) comma may seem straightforward enough, but even this is hardly a neutral decision, for as the *Chicago Manual of Style* wryly notes, "feelings run high" on the Oxford comma. Even attempts to style consistently tend to be ad hoc, quirky, factional, and involve disparate ideas, making the results difficult to sort out regardless of the intent.

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[7] These examples are found in the following poems: tip-toe and pocket-money in "Death of the Hired Man," in-door in "House Fear," snow-crust and matter-of-fact in "Birches," make-believe and mother-bird in "The Exposed Nest," frozen-ground-swell in "Mending Wall," harp-like in "Death of the Hired Man."

[8] I enclose these in parentheses merely for clarity. These examples are found in the following poems: (,—) in "Storm Fear," "The Tuft of Flowers," and "The Death of the Hired Man"; (;—) in "An Old Man's Winter Night"; and (?—), (!—), and (.—) in "Home Burial."

The evidence I have gone over so far simply reinforces the solid case already built by the aforementioned critics. These critics have also proposed a sensible verdict, but now I will offer also my amicus brief, for I would like to bring under consideration the role of editorial theory and methodology. While it is broadly correct that Lathem does not know how to value Frost's original punctuation and thus his program of remediation is unsuitable and results in incoherent effects, this judgment may not be as useful as it seems, especially in pursuing solutions and alternatives. We would do well to take into account that, for starters, there is clear evidence that a meaningful portion of Lathem's work was performed in deference to editorial standards. In fact, Lathem studied a reputable, proven method and accepted at least some of its painstaking demands. His work and therefore his edition show the influence of what is generally known as copy-text editing, closely associated with W. W. Greg, Fredson Bowers, and Thomas Tanselle, the theory being first outlined in Greg's landmark essay "The Rationale of Copy-Text" and then widely adopted in American editing through the "working manual" issued by the Center for Editions of American Authors (CEAA).[9] One of the things emphasized in this school of editing is a certain standard of documentation to be provided by the edition, which makes it easier for us to look at the book itself for a record of the editorial decisions.

Lathem's book is such an artifact, a concrete document that follows the model and helps us retrace the copy-text editing process. One of the book's key features is an editor's statement, which though brief, documents many of the salient points of Lathem's work. Even more telling is the extensive section of textual notes totaling fifty-three pages, containing data from historical collation and a record of all emendations. We can see from the structure of this information that it has been generated by applying the process laid out in the CEAA "working manual." Lathem has been consistent with these guidelines in beginning with study of the texts as found in print sources published during Frost's lifetime. For a given poem, this starts with initial publication in a

[9] Greg, *Studies in Bibliography 3* (1950): 19-36. CEAA, "Statement of Editorial Principles: A Working Manual for Editing Nineteenth Century American Texts," (New York: Modern Language Association, 1967).

periodical (if any), then publication in an individual book, followed by inclusion in a long series of collected and selected works. Lathem leaves a valuable record of his research in a consistent format established by copy-text editors, listing for each individual poem the books and periodicals that are witness to the text, followed by a historical collation of the variants found among those witnesses. In addition to the collected evidence, we can also notice certain interpretive priorities that shape the record, for copy-text editing's foundational insight is in proposing a credible heuristic, rules of thumb, that can make inconclusive textual data more tractable, in particular by differentiating the handling of words and punctuation. The documentation in Lathem's edition clearly reflects these interpretive guidelines. The historical collation documents all findings of variant words, but for punctuation there is no data provided by Lathem's record, except in cases where Lathem has emended punctuation based on a historical variant, in which case he lists the witnesses that support his emendation. The way variant readings are prioritized and chosen for inclusion in the edited text is part and parcel of understanding copy-text editing, and it is highly significant that Lathem will select earlier variants for punctuation while for words, he prefers later variants, almost always defaulting to the readings of the 1949 *Complete Poems*, the most recent witness available to him.

Of course we must now discuss what is going on with these rules of thumb that treat words and punctuation differently, because so far I have pointed out the surface features of copy-text editing but not addressed the underlying intent, and so we are not yet able to evaluate Lathem's use of it. What I will argue here is that although Lathem's practices can undoubtedly be traced to those of copy-text editing, his application of those practices not only ignores the limits of their applicability but is fundamentally opposite to the premises of copy-text editing. What Lathem's problems help us to understand is that offering rules of thumb for punctuation turns out to be amazingly susceptible to misinterpretation. Greg's original recommendations do emerge directly from the premise that, for editors, punctuation presents a problem distinct from that of the words.

In relative terms, he casts punctuation as an uncertain, even intractable matter, but we must understand how and why he thus recommends a conservative heuristic for punctuation, not wholesale editorial intervention and certainly not restyling. Greg wants to draw a distinction between the "substantives" and the "accidentals" of text, which has proven an unfortunate choice of vocabulary but cannot be undone now. By accidentals, he means those features of the text that historically were particularly vulnerable to restyling by editors, compositors, etc., including punctuation, capitalization, and spelling, and as such difficult for the author to control. By contrast, the substantives are whatever the author had better control over, which generally means the words. Greg does actually say that substantives are more significant, affecting "the author's meaning or the essence of his expression," but in doing so he does not intend to make a judgment about the universal nature of punctuation but rather to observe the pragmatic effect on punctuation of the printing house practices that are concretely recorded in the historical documents. Thus, editors who are considering witnesses printed under such circumstances can understand that the accidentals rendered in those witnesses are of varying significance, possibly recording the whims, or the neglect, of house editors and compositors, and as an empirical matter not as likely to be authorial compared with substantives. On the surface, this analysis of accidentals may seem to justify things like modernized editions or editorial regularizing of the style, but Greg is actually concerned with the editor's options for recovering the punctuation that originates with the author.

Greg's question is simply how can editors pursue the author's original punctuation given the uneven record of that punctuation? Greg finds the question in a particularly acute form in the time period he is studying, for while we have a general awareness that accidentals might be restyled and/or handled somewhat casually, the empirical evidence of accidentals seems fraught with ambiguity. When looking at given witnesses, it can be near impossible to say which accidentals appear to be authorial or not. The editor must admit that the documented accidentals represent quite an enigma, in which a witness might or might not record a layer of restyled accidentals that to

an unknown extent obscures an earlier set of accidentals. With an abundance of caution, Greg does not make major claims about the meaning of accidentals in their earlier state, simply that they represent a starting point for discerning the practices of the author or at least his time and place (21). Again, Greg does not work from an idea of the universal nature of punctuation but rather the practical problem of witnesses that may preserve various mixtures of punctuation. Greg is recognized for his insightful response to the problem, which is really a stopgap measure but which demanded of him a compelling argument for eclectic editing, that is, being willing to take readings from various witnesses and combine them into a conflated text.

Again, this eclecticism is not conceived in the abstract but rather is guided by the concrete way accidentals and substantives were handled in historical situations. Greg starts with the simple observation that in some cases, the record shows that authors wanted and got to direct the production of revised editions. Greg further narrows the cases to those in which authors were likely to spend their finite time and energy on the words, conceding that punctuation, being more error prone, was more laborious to correct, and corrections might not survive the printing process anyway. Greg proposes an editorial heuristic that makes sense specifically when a first edition and one or more revised editions provide a series of witnesses to a work, with each revision taking its copy from the preceding edition while also including author-directed corrections. For this type of case, Greg suggests that variant words found in later witnesses should be given due consideration as authorial revisions, but for changes in punctuation, the earlier or earliest witness should be given more weight since the susceptibility of punctuation to non-authorial change may be compounded with each successive recopying and overwhelm the author's available attention. That, in a nutshell, is Greg's rationale for eclectic editing. This is an editorial theory based in book-making, reading source texts in light of how the witnesses were formed, which guides the use of that material to build the edited book. With this in mind, we can get back to Lathem and his adoption of copy-text practices.

As noted already, Lathem does research a series of witnesses, documenting the variant readings introduced at each point along the line, and when it comes to selecting the variants to be included in the edited version, we see that the Lathem text defaults to the latest major witness, the 1949 *Complete Poems,* for substantive readings while for accidentals, Lathem not only favors earlier variants when he find them but also demonstrates with his many emendations that he gives relatively less weight to the 1949 punctuation. So, superficially, Lathem adopts copy-text editing's eclecticism along with Greg's heuristic for accidentals and substantives, but we are hard pressed to find in Lathem Greg's sound reasoning from the concrete conditions that shape the historical record of the text and thus the pragmatic problems presented by the witnesses. In the previous chapter, I considered some of the substantive variants recorded across the successive incarnations of Frost's books, and I posited that we find a spectrum of changes ranging from clearly authorial revisions to difficult-to-interpret, possibly unintentional "typos." I believe that the variant readings in punctuation found in the Frost witnesses could be sorted out even more clearly. What is curious about Lathem's approach is that he is able, without falling back on a rule of thumb, to correct a number of punctuation marks lost initially through type damage with the error then propagated in succeeding witnesses,[10] and in a later explanation, Lathem takes pains to defend the fact that he introduced these corrections against a background of very reliably reproduced punctuation, saying that Frost's printers were so careful with successive editions that Lathem describes it as "startling" fidelity and "preposterous" faithfulness.[11] This is the inverse of Greg's motivating concern, again, that the printers' tendency not to respect the original punctuation would leave editors with layers of changes from various causes all collapsed into a confounding mishmash. One wonders, therefore,

[10] See Lathem's textual notes for "A Hundred Collars" (536) and "The Bonfire" (542).
[11] See Lathem's introduction to the limited edition of *The Poetry of Robert Frost* (Barre, MA: The Imprint Society, 1971), xxxiii-xxxiv.

why Lathem decided to reject later forms of punctuation in cases that do not appear to be random, such as in "Home Burial."[12]

In fact, Lathem has gotten Greg's rationale exactly backwards. Given reliable and tractable documentation of punctuation, Lathem tries to justify his own project to restyle and modernize Frost's text. Thus, Lathem represents the problem that led to the development of copy-text editing; he himself causes the type of textual complications that Greg's suggestions try to mitigate. We have enough documentation available to us to peel away Lathem's layer of accidentals, but in them we can see the difficulties that might be introduced into a historical witness. The accidentals are targets for a combination of modernizing, stylistic preferences, personal pet peeves, and random errors, and without corroborating evidence it would be quite a task to ascertain the significance of the changes. Moreover, the reality of the Lathem punctuation and its continuing circulation brings another of Greg's observations close to home, namely that when dubious changes are introduced into the accidentals, it is often not considered worth correcting.

His problems notwithstanding, Lathem does not deserve sole blame for his confused interpretation of accidentals, substantives, and copy-text editing. In his excellent discussion of modernized editions, Philip Harth notes that editors who wish to modernize and restyle an older text will typically point to the uncertain status of accidentals in historical printing as if that alone justifies further restyling.[13] Harth detects the habit of such editors to dismiss out of hand interest in authorial punctuation, moving facilely from the ambiguity of accidentals to the doctrinaire belief that no author would have bothered with the "impossible" undertaking of controlling the published accidentals. What I would add is that any editor who believes *a priori* in redoing a text's punctuation will find it easy to be satisfied with sweeping generalizations about how accidentals are merely marks of the printing house or whatever. Greg, by contrast, took care not to presume

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[12] See Hall, 86.
[13] "The Text of Dryden's Poetry," review of *The Poems of John Dryden*, ed. Paul Hammond, *Huntington Library Quarterly* 63.1 (2001): 227-44.

how accidentals ought to be interpreted. He responds to a practical question of how they are recorded in the witnesses, and Harth emphasizes that this is the area where there is great room for elaboration. Harth stresses that the relationships among printers, authors, and accidentals were hardly monolithic and need to be examined case-by-case. Even if printers thought of accidentals as "their own province," in which authors should not meddle (and this is arguably not true), isn't it still possible that printers could try to work with an author who had exact wishes? There is no doubt that printers considered it part of their job responsibility to clean up the accidentals—but only as necessary. They also considered it their job to follow the author's instructions. Moreover, all these generalizations are modified by the simple fact that practices for "cleaning up" the text varied from one printer/compositor to another (not to mention variability in level of competence). The authors' attitudes are similarly varied and should be studied case-by-case. It is certainly true that authors often expected the printer to apply house style to the accidentals of his writing. Some authors were grateful to have the printer take care of such details for him, but other authors merely acquiesced to the changes as a necessity of getting published. A pragmatic author knows that printers tend to make changes, but he can still consider his own accidentals to be the valid ones and work to get them into print. Given the complex origins of punctuation as recorded, Harth cautions that modernization attempts tend to gloss over and obscure interpretive possibilities and as a practical effect can be just as varied as previous treatment of accidentals and end up seeming relatively arbitrary.

Before wrapping up this discussion, I should acknowledge Lathem's own explanation, which he published in 1971 when his Frost text was offered as a limited edition by the Imprint Society. I wish to review Lathem's introduction to this volume in the interest of fairness, but I cannot say it helps his case, for he badly misinterprets Frost's comments with regard to punctuation. As I said before, an editor who believes *a priori* in redoing a poet's punctuation will be easily satisfied by any indication of problematic accidentals, and as Harth points out, this attitude is at odds with studying

the real range of possible determinants for accidentals. Lathem does not have the option of pinning everything on printing house practices, but he does make the case that Frost, on occasion, accepted suggestions from others to change punctuation and showed appreciation to Lathem specifically for such "corrections." Of course Frost was answering concerns brought up by others, not reviewing or signing off on a specific program to re-punctuate his poems en masse. Lathem does offer examples of what he deems to be problems, but in my earlier discussion of Lathem's specific changes, I argued that none seem to corroborate a case for necessary or worthwhile changes. Strangely enough, Lathem's own discussion explicitly reinforces that impression. Lathem throws into relief the paradox of modernization, that it is justified by declaring the material's lack of significance. Note how odd Lathem sounds in explaining that one of his examples is "perfectly intelligible as it stands, and it could be passed over just as it is, without the editorial insertion of a comma," and he cannot help but conclude that the punctuation makes "a difference which *might* claim the reader's consciousness, if only vaguely or momentarily so... [emphasis mine]" (xix-xx). Towards the end of his discussion, Lathem reiterates that in the cases he treats, "punctuation is not so much an absolute difficulty as it is merely a deterrent to immediate comprehension" (xxii).

One final case that I would like to mention is the infamous serial (Oxford) comma in "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening," which Lathem has punctuated: "The woods are lovely, dark, and deep." This being Frost's most famous poem, every critic has felt compelled to condemn Lathem's insertion of the serial comma into this line, pointing out that it destroys the possibility that "dark and deep" is in apposition to "lovely." While I agree with the spirit of these criticisms, there is a problem with emphasizing this example. Frost did not generally use the serial comma, and so there is a good chance that "lovely, dark and deep" is meant as a list of three adjectives. The real problem is that Lathem never considers punctuation to be anything more than a matter of standard use, so Frost's line represents the same question of comma usage as, for example, writing that a car is used, red, and 4-door. Lathem is perfectly comfortable answering this question, while

questions of the poetics of punctuation do not even exist when one assumes from the start that punctuation has only an "accidental" role. Lathem is able to say, with no sense of unintended irony:

> Diverse spellings and irregularity of practice in punctuation are not, of course, apt to render text unintelligible, but they can distract, puzzle, and indeed annoy readers, undesirably intruding upon an assimilation of what the author has wished to communicate. (xviii)

The modernizing editors of which Harth complains project this attitude onto all the house editors and compositors of the past, and those modernizing editors then adopt the same assumptions themselves in their restyling. Lathem is more honest than most, taking pains to reiterate that he merely addresses tiny annoyances and distractions, and he is content to claim this very limited payoff for he must feel there was little or nothing to lose in the process.

Towards the end of his *apologia,* Lathem makes his closing argument: "The editor's assigned task was *to edit* [Lathem's emphasis]," as if the purpose of editing were self-evident. Lathem appeals to the authority of the editor as if there were no schools or disciplines of editing, scholarly or creative. But being so certain of what a license to edit means, Lathem all the more absorbs unawares prevailing habits about editing and texts, and these as much as Lathem the person define this book of collected works. We can fault widely-held presumptions about accidentals for reinforcing Lathem's own attitude, but we can also say his edition benefits from the expectations for proper research and methodical documentation of textual history as well as a record of all emendations. This would not have happened without the ubiquity of copy-text editing. Though it may pick up and then carry along certain corruptions, the inertia of method also helps sustain certain standards. The benefits of method are certainly limited without human thought and understanding, but a coherent method will encode at least some wisdom. Lathem responded to the sensible documentary procedures baked into copy-text praxis and so produced a book that allows us to deduce Lathem's thinking and helps us see that the Frost preserved in this book comes from the meeting of the editor with the practice of editing and assumptions about how past books were made.

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