

An Interview with Robert Frost

Robert Frost was born in San Francisco California in 1874. When Frost was 11 years old his father died of tuberculosis. Then their family moved to Massachusetts. Frost attended high school in Lawrence, Massachusetts and began writing poetry. He attended Dartmouth College briefly but withdrew during his first year and went to work. From 1897 to 1899, he attended Harvard College, but he left before receiving a degree. In the early 1900s, the family owned a small poultry farm and Frost taught at a small private school nearby.

Frost continued to write poetry but he was unsuccessful at publishing his work. Seeking better literary opportunities the family sold their farm and moved to England in 1911. In England Frost achieved his first literary success. His book of poems *A Boy's Will* (1913) was printed by the first English publisher he approached. In England he met other American poets.

In 1915, Frost and his family returned to the United States where his poetry had become popular. He continued to write for the rest of his life. He taught literature at various colleges and universities. Frost won the Pulitzer in poetry four times (1924, 1931, 1937 and 1943) and became known across the country when he recited his poem *The Gift Outright* at President John F. Kennedy's inauguration in January 1961. He died in 1963.

He offered greetings with a quiet and diffident friendliness to the interviewer in his house in Cambridge, Massachusetts. He was strong, lively, spontaneously expressive and attractive. He has created and preserved equally great public image. He was never moved by any fashion or movement like the Georgian, Edwardian.

Frost was not very happy with the ideas of recording his interview because a machine could not convey the message naturally expressed in face to face talking. Frost never used table for writing. He lived in Cambridge in the winter and in Ripton Vermont in summer. But Cambridge was his office and business place. Bread Loaf School near Vermont was a centre where he started conferences of literary people after the school was over.

He wrote three books when he went to England: A Boy's Will, North Boston and Mountain Interval. Frank Flint mediated Frost's meeting with Ezra Pound, another American poet. But Pound did not welcome him warmly. In England he was also in touch with W. B. Yeats and Heuffer.

Before 1890, he studied a lot in classics and wrote Greek and Latin sentences. Both of his parents were teachers. They started teaching at high school right after coming out of high school. Frost had teachers like that. Frost himself started teaching at the age of 20. He followed his parents in teaching, newspaper work and farm work.

His opinion about modern poet is that a modern poet must be one that speaks to modern people no matter when he lived in the world.

Pound seemed to him like a troubadour. Frost got Pound out of jail by talking to the Attorney General. Pound sent him a few letters of thanks. But he did not express real gratitude and left for Italy even without saying goodbye to Frost.

Frost was also interested in science. He studied astronomy and wrote about it. He had the objection to the fact that Massachusetts Institute of Technology was offering literary courses. He suggested that they should concentrate on pure science. He shared with the Teachers' College the idea that there is not any immediate connection between psychology and their classroom work.

He always wondered what Santayana really meant. He understood years afterwards that all was illusion, of two kinds: true and false. He decided false illusion would be the truth because two negatives make an affirmative.

In *The Death of the Hired Man* he put it two ways about home.

One is the man's way and other is the feminine way. That is his new deal. *The Death of the Hired Man* is often anthologized. But Frost wanted somebody to dig up a new one. Some of his poems are *A Servant to Servants*, *The Most of It*, *The Subverted Flower*. Frost never urged anyone

to include any of his poems in their anthologies. There are certain poems that Frost never read in public: Putting in the Seed, Subverted Flower, Subverted Mower.

Lionel Trilling, in his speech at Frost's eighty fifth birthday emphasized poems of a darker mood. Many critics defended Frost in their later book reviews against Trilling.

The poems of Pound and Eliot are doggedly obscure. In Frost's poems there is variety in tones of voice, suggestiveness and hinting. He said the sense of sacrifice and risk is one of the greatest stimuli in the world. A poem is a performance and a poet is a performer. A poem should have a wit. It should sparkle. Every thought is a feat of association.

Regarding the appropriate time for writing, Frost says "No tears in the writer, no tears in the reader. No surprise for the writer, no surprise for the reader. A feat of a poem turns that way, it helps to remember, be reminded, talk about it and score.

Performance, prowess and feat of association are the features of a poem that motivate him for reading it.