The Theory of Contraries in Robert Frost's Narratives

Peggy E. Wahlen

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Abstract

THE THEORY OF CONTRARIES IN ROBERT FROST'S NARRATIVES
by Peggy E. Wahlen

Robert Frost's theory of contraries pervades both his short, lyric poems and his longer, narrative poems. This theory, which is the idea that life consists of two opposing elements, is recognized by the critics to be one of the most common themes running through his lyric poems. However, the narrative poems are almost exclusively approached critically from the standpoint of form and style.

This thesis shows that the theory of contraries is an important concept in the narratives. The framework of Frost's theory has been applied to three areas pertinent to his treatment of the men and women in his narratives: (1) philosophy or the question of man's nature and his relation to the universe; (2) psychology or the mental and emotional reaction of people to their physical and social environment; and (3) sociology or the relationship of men and women to each other and to their community.

The philosophical division of the theory includes the question of man's nature and his relation to the universe. It develops the opposing forces of man's nature versus woman's nature
and the contrasting powers within one individual's nature. Also, man's struggle against the negative tension of the universe is developed.

The psychological division of the theory probes into man's conflict in deciding to choose or to drift, and in reacting with fear or courage to his environment.

And finally, the sociological division delves into the contrasts within the communication patterns in marriage, the conflict of man's duty to others or to himself, and the tension in the contrast between man's need for association and his need for solitude.

This thesis examines the theory of contraries in Frost's narratives by first giving a background explanation of Frost's theory of contraries and a brief look at the contraries in Frost's own life. The body of the thesis is an analysis of seven of the narratives which demonstrate how the poems support Frost's theory of contraries.
THE THEORY OF CONTRARIES IN ROBERT FROST'S NARRATIVES

by

Peggy E. Wahlen

A Thesis in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Master of Arts Degree
in the Field of English

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Each person whose signature appears below certifies that this thesis in his opinion is adequate, in scope and quality, as a thesis for the Master of Arts degree.

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Chapter I
Introduction

Robert Frost, long thought to be a simple poet of New England nature scenes, has come to be recognized by some critics of his lyrics as a philosopher-poet as well. In his short lyric poems he comments on man, his place in the universe, and his relationship to others, developing what Frost himself calls his philosophic theory of contraries. His longer, narrative poems, however, have mostly escaped this philosophic critical analysis. Critics typically have appreciated his fresh narrative style and have pointed their comments about his narrative poems in that direction. However, these longer story poems, that take their life blood from the hearts of the New England men and women who people their pages, also contain philosophical, psychological, and social comments that add to and enrich his theory of contraries.

Frost's philosophy of life, as developed in the lyrics, is a theory of contraries or conflicting forces within any given person, relationship or situation. For example, in the lyric poem, "Bond and Free," Frost established the major division in life between science or thought and religion or love. Critic James Radcliffe Squires comments that "in this
poem Frost can make no choice between love and thought, though
the reader may feel that love is the sweetest way of finding
the elegant secrets of the universe." And the conflict within
the heart of every man is presented in the last lines of
"Reluctance:"

Ah, when to the heart of man
Was it ever less than a treason
To go with the drift of things,
To yield with a grace to reason,
And bow and accept the end
Of a love or a season.

As the poet wanders, in the poem, over the hills and views
his world, he feels a sense of loss, an emotional yearning
for life to continue, not end. The final lines, however,
acknowledge a possible opposite reaction—a rational acceptance
of the death of a love, or a summer season. Thus, as biog-
grapher and critic Lawrance Thompson points out, the eternal
conflict between man's heart and man's mind is again estab-
lished.

Another conflict, the forces between the harsh realities
of life and the escape that can be found in the abstract world
of dreams and ideas, is referred to in "Birches." Squires
comments that in this poem Frost used the trees and the ice
storms and boys who bend the trees to illustrate the balance
man must find between heaven and earth. Reality becomes a
weariness, a "pathless wood," where cobwebs and lashing twigs
can burn and tickle. But there is always the escape of climb-
ing "black branches up a snow-white trunk / Toward heaven ..." (p. 122, ll. 55-56). Frost's final lines of "Birches" affirms his belief that balance is the key; the reality of earth is good, but only when one can get away in thought and dreams in order to come back again:

That would be good both going and coming back. One could do worse than be a swinger of birches. (p. 122, ll. 58-59)

Critic James Melville Cox refers to yet another conflict man must face--the choice between the symbolic land or sea of the lyric, "Neither Out Far Nor In Deep." Cox sees the land as a figure of the finite realm and the sea as a figure of the infinite realm. The sea is a mystery--incomprehensible but always a lure to man. Frost said, "The land may vary more" (p. 301, l. 9), but when did the known ever rank in interest with the unknown? Frost saw the duality of the universe and even understood human curiosity that attracts people toward the unknown, but he seemed scornful of those who cannot maintain a balance between the land and sea and who spend all their time looking at the sea. Frost seemed to feel that truth may just as well be on land, for after all, "The water comes ashore . . ." (l. 11).

In another lyric, "Mending Wall," critic Richard Thornton sees two more elemental and opposed forces. First there is the seeker after causes, "the apple grower who cannot see the use
of a stone fence between neighbors. Then there is the "lover of tradition," the grower of pine trees who insists that "Good fences make good neighbours" (p. 33, l. 27). Frost saw this traditionalist as "an old-stone savage" moving in darkness. Thornton proposes that the two forces are nationalism versus internationalism or blind obedience to custom versus questioning iconoclasm.

The criticisms of other lyric poems could be explored to further develop this extensive use of Frost's shorter, lyric poems to explain his theory of contraries. Such poems as "Oven Bird," "After Apple-Picking," "Provide, Provide," "Directive," and "Fire and Ice" are typically used by critics to establish the opposing forces between love and thought, heaven and earth, chaos and order, reality and the abstract. But the point is simply that scholars have traditionally used Frost's lyrics as the primary source for gaining insight into his theoretical positions.

The narrative poems as a group, however, have come under an entirely different kind of spotlight. Because Frost boldly introduced a form of narrative poetry quite different in its action and sound from his lyric poems and from most other narrative poetry of his time, his narrative poems have been discussed by the critics mainly in a technical way. The syntax, tone, and effective pauses have been the most popular angle in
critical discussions of these narratives as a category.

Critic Reuben Brower, who says that Frost's main technical achievement was the invention of a new blank verse rhythm, believes that the form Frost used in his narratives was inseparable from his sense of people and the entire human condition. In other words, Frost's verse form itself was an integral part of his view of life. Critic J.R. Vitelli explains:

Frost controls the accents, determines the pace, and in those minimal directive touches, provides the significant symbolic details around which the characters' voices resound. What the poet 'means' will be found in the tones and over-tones, even, as in "The Servant to Servants" in the nervous silence of the couple the speaker is presumably addressing.

Lawrence Thompson is another critic primarily interested in the sound theories connected to Frost's dramatic narratives. He feels that Frost's theory of poetry had a psychological basis which was conveyed through sound. According to Thompson, Frost began by exploring the psychology of sound which had two planes of meaning: one plane which revealed the strict meaning of the word--written or spoken--and the second plane which revealed the connotation given by the tone of the voice. Thompson also comments that throughout Frost's dramatic poems the reader can see Frost's theories about speech rhythms and the connection between sound and sense:

The concern with simple and clear images expressed
in plain-spoken and sometimes idiomatic phrases stripped of poetic artifice; the desire to let expressions of emotion and thought get along with a basic iambic pattern of metrical structure; the conscious interest in the posture of complete sentences; and the final pleasure in carrying off each piece with a quietly dramatic intensity—all these varied factors are managed with the confidence and sureness of maturity.

Some critics have also been interested in classifying the narrative forms. John Fairbanks Lynen, for example, discusses at some length the differences between dramatic dialogue, dramatic monologue, pastoral dialogue, philosophic dialogue, and narrative monologue. The dramatic dialogue, exemplified by "The Death of the Hired Man," contains action as its main interest, while dramatic monologues are characterized by psychological action which is presented in the speech of a single character. "A Servant to Servants" is an example of this second type. Pastoral dialogues, such as "A Hundred Collars," contain action which is presented merely as a means of illustrating a social relationship. Philosophic dialogues which use action to dramatize not a situation but a philosophic idea are illustrated by "West-Running Brook." And finally, "The Housekeeper" is an example of the narrative monologue in which action is of little importance except to provide the occasion for the telling of a story.

Critic Elaine Barry also categorizes the narratives according to form, but she uses different terms in classifying. She
uses such terms as static drama and obvious drama. Barry also nicely sums up her critical opinion of Frost's narratives in general and suggests the basis most critics see as a reason for analyzing them:

In his dramatic narrative, Frost made his most distinctive contribution to poetry... He created a new blank verse rhythm, wedded firmly to "the sound of sense" and capturing with accuracy and flexibility the sounds of the speaking voice. He gave poetry a new dimension, taking it as close to drama as it could possibly go. And in the Browningesque mold he created a range of characters and moods... a technical mastery that no other poet has equaled.13

The critics who have discussed the human aspects of the narratives have done so in a less than cohesive way. George Nitchie, for example, in his book, Human Values in the Poetry of Robert Frost, uses the narratives occasionally to support his various philosophic points. But he does not attempt to analyze a significant number of the narrative poems in the light of Frost's theory of contraries. Nor does any other critic do so.

After carefully reading Frost's narrative poems, I have concluded that they, as well as the lyrics, have rich possibilities that could be explored more fully and in a more organized manner. The men and women of these poems speak, act, react, and interact significantly and consistently, and they demand a discriminating audience to which to play their lives.
It is my contention, therefore, that these narrative poems support Frost's dualistic concept called his theory of contraries. I further contend that the narrative poems demonstrate the theory of contraries in a specifically structured way. In order to make this structure more easily discernible, I have applied Frost's theory to three areas pertinent to his treatment of the men and women in his narrative poems: (1) philosophy or the question of man's nature and his relation to the universe; (2) psychology or the mental and emotional reaction of people to their physical and social environment; and (3) sociology or the relationship of men and women to each other and to their community.

In this study I will first give a background explanation of Frost's theory of contraries--as presented by Frost himself as well as by critics of Frost--within the context of the philosophical, psychological and social structures. Then I will give a brief glimpse into Frost's personal life and into influences which possibly add some light or interest to the discussion of the poems and the theory of contraries. And finally, I will analyze seven of the narrative poems, demonstrating how the poems, and specifically the men and women in them, illustrate Frost's position on the theory of contraries within the context of the three-pronged structure. The following narratives will be used in the analysis: "The Death of the Hired
Chapter II
Frost's Theory of Contraries

Frost's view of life has often been summarized and condensed into a conceptual nutshell termed the theory of contraries. Briefly explained, the theory of contraries is the idea that life consists of two opposing elements. These extremes are sometimes called love and thought, sometimes mercy and justice, sometimes emotion and reason. Thus stated, the theory is so broad and generalized that it is unmanageable for the purposes of analyzing the narratives. Therefore, I have applied the theory to three areas pertinent to Frost's treatment of the men and women in his narrative poems: (1) philosophy or the question of man's nature and his relation to the universe; (2) psychology or the mental and emotional reaction of people to their physical and social environment; and (3) sociology or the relationship of men and women to each other and to their community. Each of these three areas includes further contraries such as positive-negative, male-female, mind-spirit, or others-self. These contraries will be used later as a basis for interpreting the narratives. However, this chapter is directed toward an explanation of the theory of contraries as seen by Frost and by his critics--but explained inside the philosophical, psychological, sociological structure
I have devised.

Lawrance Thompson explains that Frost's philosophic position was grounded in the metaphor of life "dangerously surviving at the confluence of two extremes." The two extremes most elemental in the drama of human activity, Frost believed, were desire and reason, or heart and mind. To Frost, the ultimate paradox of life was that man should be created with these two halves within himself. He once said:

Someone said to me once, years ago: "I hope you have a soul above buttons." That means that the material and the spiritual are opposites. Take freedom and equality—they are as opposed as spirit and matter. Freedom means justice. Equality means mercy. It's unmerciful to be as strong as we can. A judge has to be juster than an executive. As to the conflicts of our age, I am the conflicts, I contain them.

But rather than producing a life-destroying conflict within man, the presence of these two extremes, if rightly understood and utilized, has the power to strengthen man and enrich his life. Frost was convinced that living at the edge of danger, as man was by the very structure of his nature, necessitated struggle, which in turn, produced strength.

Looking outside of man into the universe, Frost enlarged his theory of contraries. He saw a world which seemed evil, confused, and hopeless, a universe of sorrow and despair. But Frost believed in balancing the negative with a strong positive or in confronting one force with another equally as powerful.
On this point Frost said:

You often hear it said that the age of the world we live in is particularly bad. I am impatient of such talk. . . . All the ages of the world are bad—a great deal worse than Heaven. . . . Fortunately . . . there is something we can be doing without reference to how good or bad the age is. There is at least so much good in the world that it admits of form and the making of form . . . calls for it. . . . Anyone who has achieved the least form to be sure of it, is lost to the larger excruciations.  

In a letter to George Whicher about the insanity of Jeanie, Frost's sister, he wrote, "It is a coarse brutal world, unendurably coarse and brutal." But as Reginald Cook observes, this seeming impossibility of life was simply a challenge to Frost to evaluate his strengths and virtues and to try to give life some form and meaning—converting the liabilities into assets.

Thompson explains that Frost saw two kinds of people: those who see life as a perfection to be worked toward (the idealists) and those who take life as they find it and do the best they can with what they have (the realists). Obviously Frost aligned himself on the side of the realists and supported the concepts of hard work and strong loving as the means of carving out a life for himself in a harsh and unsympathetic environment. Frost was always ready to make the best of the worst situation because he was convinced that in just such impossible situations, man is brought to struggle and thus brought
to survival. He insisted that "earth's the right place for love" (p. 122, l. 52), and, that even though earth was a cruel battleground, the fight—to survive both the inner battles of warring opposites within man's own soul and the outer battles of man against a hostile universe—helped man shape his own reality and enabled him to exist with some measure of peace and self-integrity.

With this philosophic background, it can be understood how Frost has been seen as an optimist in a predominately pessimistic age. Elaine Barry explains:

At a time when naturalism, with its philosophy of pessimistic determinism, had a strong foothold in American literature, Frost refused to admit that men's fate might be determined by such factors as heredity or environment. Heroic will, conscious choice, self-definition through suffering: these are the concepts through which Frost tried to find an intellectual rationale for his pragmatism, his acceptance of life as it is.20

Even though Frost saw man buffeted by his own natural contraries and by an outer world of unsympathetic circumstances, he consistently maintained a position of acceptance and positive recognition of both limitations and possibilities.

The psychological realm or the concerns of human behavior were just as important to Frost as the philosophic concerns. Reginald Cook contends that Frost had a great psychological curiosity and that "he [was] as interested in man's behavior as he [was] in man's thought." Critics have discussed two
main areas of Frost's psychological interest: the decision-making process and the emotional reactions of people to their physical and social environment. In both of these areas, Frost again seemed to demonstrate a two-pronged approach or a theory of contraries.

George Nitchie, in his discussion of Frost's position on the decision-making process, first establishes that this process was a central concern with Frost. He comments that in Frost's opinion, "man can very nearly be defined as a choice-making animal... who fulfills himself in the act of choosing." He also talks about "Frost's fondness for situations in which the problem of choice is reduced to an ultimate either-or, or to take the plunge or not to take the plunge. He uses the popular short poem, "The Road Not Taken," as a classic example of this sort of duality. Nitchie contends that Frost's most effective poems present vital choices between avocation and vocation or between love and need or between desire and necessity. And to make the choices even more vital, he believes Frost usually showed the two sides of the choice as totally incompatible contraries between which the character must choose.

Besides the aspect of conflict within the choice itself, some critics have seen conflicting or opposite positions in the very ways man may relate to the process of decision-making. Critic Gorham Munson feels that Frost was convinced that in man
there was a "duality of consciousness, a struggle between his impulse to unify himself and his impulse to drift with the stream of life." Munson is saying that Frost's sense of contraries included man's will. There are conflicting desires between taking a stand in the face of difficult circumstances and accepting the consequences of such a deliberate commitment or drifting with the whimsical impulse and making the casual decision or even allowing circumstances to make the decision. In a letter to Mrs. Helen Thomas, the widow of his dear friend Edward Thomas who had just died in World War I, Frost wrote of the dilemma of choice in death: "Of the three ways out of here, by death where there is no choice, by death where there is a noble choice, and by death where there is a choice not so noble, he found the greatest way." However, being an admirer of Emerson, Frost surely would have tuned into Emerson's concept about choice: the effort to compromise is proper at times because facts are not really facts and so crucial acts of choice are not always really necessary. Frost's allegiances seem to be divided. Although it is clear that sometimes Frost admired choice-makers who courageously move in the face of adversity, it is also suggested that Frost believed there are times to drift. In 1923 when invited to face the dilemmas of modern life, Frost remarked: "Me for the hills where I don't have to choose." In the final analysis, however, whatever the choice,
whether it be between two opposing forces or between choosing or drifting, Frost would have revelled in the very conflict of interest, believing that being caught in the throes of contraries would produce struggle which would, in turn, produce strength.

Besides being involved in the question of how man faces dilemmas and choices in life, Frost showed a real interest in how people responded emotionally to their environment. Being acquainted with the New England countryside, he well knew the hard existence it presented to its inhabitants. Short summers and rocky soil combined in a contest of wills against the farmers who were trying to make lives for themselves. Thompson says that Frost "has never forgotten his respect and admiration for the courage and self-dependence he saw about him. . . . The rigorous trial by existence in rural communities requires ability and cunning if life is to go on." Cook also reports that Frost was an admirer of the courageous, those who could face great odds and come off victors:

What he likes is the upstanding, able, natural man who can do things for himself—the independent and versatile man. . . . These are also the men of energy—the pioneering types—who scramble to the top of the pile by dint of initiative, character and intelligence.30

As early as his senior year in high school, Frost gave evidence of this tremendous admiration of courage and of those who possess it. In his valedictory he spoke of men who die with such grandeur that they are distinguished high above their fellows: "They
seem like Merlins looking ages from their deep calm eyes. With what awe we stand before the mystery of their persons."

Later in life, he wrote ironically of his sister Jeanie's insanity: "I admire the courage that is unwilling not to suffer everything that everyone is suffering everywhere."

But Frost had a second, contrary side to this concept of the courageous response to trial. There were times, he felt, when fear was an appropriate and even necessary answer to life. In the preface that he wrote for Edwin Arlington Robinson's *King Jasper*, Frost asserted:

> Two fears should follow us through life. There is the fear that we shan't prove worthy in the eyes of someone who knows us at least as well as we know ourselves. That is the fear of God. And there is the fear of Man—the fear that men won't understand us and we shall be cut off from them.  

Frost knew both fears, and he also knew courage to act in the face of these fears, thus becoming strong in confronting these contrary forces of human emotion.

The third area of human experience which Frost has utilized in his poetry to convey the tension of life is the sociological or the study of relationships between people.

Biographer Ernest Poole tells of an incident that occurred while he was visiting on his farm. It was in October and the two had gone for a walk at dusk. They had stopped momentarily and were listening to the deep stillness when Frost spoke:
"These folks like this. So do I. People say that I hate New York. I don't. I like it, but I get so worked up down there that I don't sleep nights. I'm made that way. I grew up on a farm and I like it quiet." A cow mooed half a mile away. He smiled. "Even that cow's too much," he said.

However Frost felt about New York or any other large congregation of people, it is clear from his poetry that he was primarily concerned with a much smaller social group: the family, and mostly just a husband and wife. Nichie criticizes Frost for this restriction. He feels that it is less than responsible for Frost to completely ignore social problems on a large scale and whole segments of society and concentrate on "rural, Protestant, Anglo-Saxon New England." He does concede, however, that Frost's family units are not social panaceas. There is a tension there that sometimes leads to successful relationships, sometimes to failure.

However, the issue here is not whether or not Frost should have broadened his scope but rather what his articulated social concerns were as generally seen in the husband-wife relationships. On this point Frost saw three possible areas of contrary ideas: the communication process between the marriage partners, the sense of duty the couple feels toward others in need, and the desire they feel for outside association.

The first social concern has to do with the verbal relationship between people. In 1935 Frost wrote:
We begin in infancy by establishing correspondence of eyes with eyes. We recognize that they were the same feature and we could do the same things with them. We went on to the visible motion of the lips--smile answered smile; then, cautiously by trial and error, to compare the invisible muscles of the mouth and throat. We were still together. So far, so good. From here on the wonder grows. It has been said that recognition in art is all. Better say correspondence is all. Mind must convince mind that it can uncurl and wave the same filaments of subtlety, soul convince soul that it can give off the same shimmers of eternity. At no point would anyone but a brute fool want to break off this correspondence. It is all there is to satisfaction; and it is salutary to live in fear of its being broken off.  

That Frost felt basic communication was essential is clear. His opinion on communication between man and woman, however, is a more specific and more difficult opinion to pin down because he felt that marriage was a supremely private affair, not to be inspected too closely by outsiders.

His own marriage, however, which was a solid and satisfying one, gives some clues as to his ideas on the matter. Biographer Jean Gould states that Elinor and Robert would spend many evenings quietly at home. He would sit and read and write and Elinor would rarely speak, "knowing full well that these were Rob's best hours for concentration; but she was an eager listener if he felt like reading." On the other hand, Sidney Cox writes that Frost thought "indifferent independence" in a marriage was not possible, that clashes were inevitable and really a healthy sign. Cox also says
that Frost felt that a quarrel had positive possibilities, that it could intensify caring and, with a little humor, get by the obstacle and even be fun. On this point Daniel Smythe reports that Frost admired Elinor's poetic abilities greatly, even feeling her to be a greater poet than he. He respected her criticism and according to Smythe, Frost used to say "he would get her 'mad' so she would give him valuable words straight from the shoulder." Frost's marriage consisted of a strong, verbal member balanced by a steady, quiet one. It was also a marriage where the strengths could rise up in opposition but where the forces always seemed to survive and be better for the conflict. Gould writes that if occasionally the Frosts had their differences, "the incident jolted them into recognizing the individual in each though their lives were so closely bound together."

The second social concern where Frost saw contraries was the family's awareness of the need of other people and a sense of duty in this regard. Frost clearly believed in neighborliness. Thompson says that in writing his poetry, Frost was motivated by "the spontaneous expression of friendliness and love, the outgoing spirit of sympathy." However, Frost had no time for certain kinds of humanitarian work. Thompson says
that Frost felt that the help which organized institutions such as schools, relief societies, and government offered was not help at all but a discouragement of self-dependence and discipline. Also, Frost believed in a kind of selfishness. His contention was that a person must develop self first before he can give anything to others and self was developed in such acts as writing, falling in love, and farm work or work of any kind. Frost recognized the contrariety in these divided opinions of self versus others and said, "Self help. Helping each other. The issue is drawn between them. Nearly all my poetry has something to do with that." And again two forces, equally valid and strong, express themselves in Frost's poetry and point up once more that tension, of whatever nature, can be a springboard for all kinds of human possibilities.

The third and final social contrary is aptly expressed by Frost himself:

The most exciting movement in nature is not progress, advance, but expansion and contraction, the opening and shutting of the eye, the hand, the heart, the mind. We throw our arms wide with a gesture of religion to the universe; we close them around a person. We explore and adventure for a while and then we draw in to consolidate our gains. The breathless swing is between subject matter and form. Frost adds another comment in a letter to Mr. Braithwaite, the poetry reviewer of the Boston Transcript:

I kept farm, so to speak, for nearly ten years, but
less as a farmer than as a fugitive from the world that seemed to "disallow" me. It was instinctive, but I can see now that I went away to save myself and fix myself before I measured my strength against all creation. I was never really out of the world for good and all. I liked people even when I believed I detested them.46

Frost's need for human contact was firmly balanced by just as strong a conviction that occasional solitude was a must. And in Frost's opinion, the act of balancing these two opposite needs strengthened people and made them whole.

Specifically stated, then, the theory of contraries can be applied to the three areas originally stated: (1) philosophy, (2) psychology, and (3) sociology. Philosophically, Frost sees an essential conflict in man's nature--emotion versus reason--and in man's relation to the universe--the unsympathetic universe versus optimistic man. Psychologically, Frost handles contraries relating to man's power of choice--forceful choice versus drifting, and man's relating to his environment--fear versus courage. And sociologically, he uses the theory to explain communication within marriage--man versus woman, duty toward those in need--self versus others--and the need for people--solitude versus association. These are the specific tensions that can be found in Frost's narrative poems, tensions concretely worked out either within the heart of one individual in a poem or within a husband-wife relationship, tensions that can be heard in the voices of men and women speaking with strong
New England accents and acting out the drama of their lives in the poetry of one of New England's favorite sons.
Chapter III
The Contraries in Robert Frost's Life

In trying to establish an understanding of Frost's theory of contraries that he developed in the lives and relationships of his poetic characters, it is interesting to take a look beyond his specific theoretical positions into his own personality and into the possible influences that the people closest to him had in the formulation of his unique talent and ideas, especially his theory of contraries.

Frost's personality was a study in paradoxes. On one hand, he was a passionate and sensitive poet. Cook says that Frost had a charged sensibility that saw and felt the flowers and butterflies and even the growing of the corn. He was sensitive to people also, and he always had his nerve endings bare to injustices or other emotionally charged circumstances. On the other hand, he was a natural sage. Cook comments that Frost's wisdom was of the type that was "not so much an acquisition of any social or intellectual class as a natural endowment." Cook also goes on to say that Frost had a critical intelligence that gave him a fine philosophic balance between the "being and becoming," between the "supernaturalist and the naturalist." This precise blending of mind and spirit,
of mental and emotional strengths, can be better understood, perhaps, in the light of two great motivating forces in Frost's personality.

Lesley Frost, Robert Frost's oldest daughter, writes that her father suffered from an extreme insecurity. She says that from his childhood he was burdened with fears and tragedies that "were accentuated by years without recognition, years marked by financial distress. On the New Hampshire farm, there were fears of his own isolation, and correspondingly, an acquaintance with the night." Thompson also adds that Frost's most terrible fight had been against his own fears.

In a letter to Professor Carleton Wells, Frost himself wrote:

Thanks for your letter of praises. When I get off here by myself I can hardly believe I'm the same fellow that faces crowds so heroically on nothing but tea and one raw egg. We're creatures of strange extremes.

Afraid of failure, afraid of himself and the future, and afraid of his own fears, Frost fought to control his phobias.

Thompson comments that, at his mother's knee, Frost had been taught of the great classical and biblical heroes. And his father had named him after the great military hero, Robert E. Lee, and had filled his young ears with heroic tales of battles fought and victories won. "Thus the boy was taught to build his own ideals around the accomplishments of those whose actions reflected courage, skill, cunning, wit, nobil-
Biographer Arnold Grade also points out Frost's great interest in and admiration for professional athletes. He says that Frost's admiration is easy to understand since Frost felt that these men were really "acting out his drama and displaying those dearly developed traits of skill and courage for which he had the highest possible regard." A man driven by personal fears but also consumed by an admiration for courage, Frost seemed to embody the theory of contraries within his own soul.

Besides the paradox of fear and courage in Frost's life, there were other seemingly contradictory forces. Frost himself recognized a contrariety in his poetic method. He said: "If it [poetry] is with outer seriousness, it must be with inner humor. . . . If it is with outer humor, it must be with inner seriousness. Neither one alone without the other under it will do." And in writing to the author Elizabeth Sergeant, Frost gave this further advice: "Keep the crooked straightness. . . . A crooked straightness in character is my favorite just now--an absolute abandoned zig-zag that goes straight to the mark." Sergeant nicely sums up the puzzling sense of opposites within Frost's personality when she says:

The private struggle between Frost's Promethean gift and his agonized Puritan conscience still goes on, as it has always done. But somehow the opposites in his nature have fused into mellowness, and he has found means to reconcile the passionate poet-dreamer and the man of action and of earth and thus
to externalize both his poetry and his wisdom. 57

A possible explanation of the source of these conflicting forces within Frost's being lies in an analysis of the most meaningful relationships of his life: his mother and himself, his father and himself, and Elinor White Frost, his wife, and himself.

Thompson explains that Frost's mother was over-indulgent with Frost. She spoiled and petted him and smothered him with love and attention. She was, however, genuinely, if misguidedly, concerned about his welfare, and she worked to support the family after she was left a widow. A follower of the mystical theologian Swedenborg, she believed in the supernatural experiences of "second sight"—the ability to contact the world of heaven and angels. She told Frost about Joan of Arc and Samuel and encouraged him to listen for voices. This idea appealed to the boy's imagination but terrified him at the same time. Thompson reports that the boy did begin to hear voices. "If left alone in a room for some time, he was often simultaneously fascinated and terrified by hearing a voice which spoke to him as clearly as the voice had spoken to Samuel or to Joan of Arc."

This imaginative and emotional mysticism as well as the affectionate strength of his mother's influence was counterbalanced by an entirely different influence from his father.
This man was irresponsibly harsh and often punished Robert severely with an eye for "justice" which was usually blind to the injustice of his irrationality. Thompson says that in the father's occasional efforts to play with the children, he would worry the mother with his clumsy, humorless, rough handling of them which most often brought them fear instead of enjoyment. He was also a gambler and drinker who left the family penniless when he died at an early age—when Robert was only eleven.

It is not too difficult to imagine the effect of this violently contrary relationship on the life of young Frost. Thompson says that "the results were predictable. . . . In later life Frost was never quite able to understand or fully resolve some of his inner conflicts, which seemed to mirror the opposed attitudes of his parents."

Later when Frost married and established his own marriage relationship, he experienced yet another set of opposite attitudes—his own and Elinor's. Elinor was a practical-minded person who insisted on financial security before their marriage. Frost, who felt she was rejecting him, responded to that idea with a hysterical trip to a southern bog where he contemplated suicide for several days before he returned to his senses and to his home. Arnold Grade reports that Elinor was a strongly opinionated person, as was Frost, and
that their opinions often collided. She seemed to serve as a firming influence on his life, bringing "order and discipline to the farmhouse of art." Lesley Frost speaks of her mother as a balance that restored her father. Even as a child in the home, Lesley sensed that aura of steadiness that Elinor carried about her. "She [Elinor] wrote every absentee child two or three times a week! After she was gone, the family correspondence was immeasurably reduced and we were to discover that what we had assumed was a patriarchy had actually been matriarchal." Elinor's death, which was one of the great sorrows of Frost's life, seemed to finally clarify in his mind the tremendous help and strength this woman had given to his temperamental poet's existence.

Elizabeth Sergeant, in her search for an explanation for Frost's inner contraries, offers the fact that Frost was born only nine years after the end of the Civil War, "in a period when two American opposites, North and South, were struggling to become one again." Thus, she contends that Frost's perpetual struggle for balance was partly innate. But it cannot all be explained so simply. Frost was not just a product of his time. He was a distinct and forceful man who insisted on taking life on its own terms. Sergeant says he "seemed to be the center of converging lines of light, which made for paradox. He enjoyed confusion, though ever searching for form."
He was a cheerful skeptic, an elusive spirit who had one foot firmly on New England soil. He was, indeed, a man who had a "lover's quarrel with the world."

While it is interesting to study the contrasting forces within Frost's own experience and to speculate on the degree to which these forces actually influenced his poetry, one must realize that "proving" the connection between the influence and the result is well-nigh impossible. It is probably safe to say that to the degree in general that people's environments influence their thoughts, to that degree Frost's environment and family influenced his poetry.
Chapter IV
Two Poems Analyzed in General

Frost's theory of contraries is rather theoretical until one sees it at work within his poems. As soon as the critical reader of Frost's poems analyzes the narratives, he begins to see the theory take on reality in the form of New England men and women. In the lives of these sometimes stern, taciturn, and sometimes vulnerable, warm-hearted folk who live in the narratives, the reader sees unfolding a network of philosophical, psychological and sociological contraries that support the abstract theory outlined in Chapter Two.

One of Robert Frost's most popular poems, "The Death of the Hired Man," is an excellent narrative with which to begin analysis because it dramatically illustrates in all three areas--the philosophical, psychological, and sociological--the poet's characteristic interpretation of human experience as a plan of opposing forces. This narrative, which has three characters--Warren, a farmer; Mary, his wife; and Silas, an on-again, off-again hired man--unfolds as Warren and Mary discuss the fortunes of the now-returned wanderer. And as the dialogue progresses, the reader becomes aware that each
of the three characters is involved in conflicting forces of one kind or another. The relationship between Mary and Warren reveals contraries centering mainly in the psychological area of emotional reactions and in the sociological area of communication. Silas, on the other hand, being the lone figure that he is, struggles primarily against the contrary forces of his own emotions and against the force of the universe.

The psychological contrary is introduced with a review of the two opposing emotional reactions that Warren and Mary demonstrate in their marriage. The reader meets Mary first, and her first words, "Silas is back" (p. 34, l. 5) and then "Be kind" (1. 7), give the reader an immediate impression of Mary's outstanding quality—her concern for other people and her gentle kindness. She sees a need for a soft hand with Silas. He is a man whose dignity is in danger, and she wants Warren to be kind to him. She herself has shown her mercy by bringing Silas in, feeding him, preparing a bed for him, and kindly listening to him talk. Now she appeals to Warren's sense of mercy by telling how pitiful Silas looks and by saying that he has come home to die. She openly admits that the home protection she offers is "Something you somehow haven't to deserve" (1. 120), but she tries to persuade Warren that kindness is the better way. She is keenly aware of Silas'
great need, and she never stops to think of her own sacrifice but only of how Silas looks, how Silas must feel, and how Silas has been doing. Mary is the one with the gentle spirit. Frost evidently felt her emotional color could best be portrayed pictorially, for he used a number of descriptive passages to develop this aspect of her personality. As the poem begins, she is found musing quietly on the lamp-flame, listening for Warren's return from the market. When she hears his step, she moves into action, but it is action in keeping with her previous posture: she "tip-toes" down the dark hallway. Later, in the middle of the poem, as she is trying to convince Warren to be gentle with Silas, Mary is seen in a particularly fine portrait, surrounded by a setting perfectly suited to her emotional quality:

Part of a moon was falling down the west,  
Dragging the whole sky with it to the hills.  
Its light poured softly in her lap. She saw it  
And spread her apron to it. She put out her hand  
Among the harplike morning-glory strings,  
Taut with the dew from garden bed to eaves,  
As if she played unheard some tenderness  
That wrought on him beside her in the night. (11. 103-110)

Finally, as the dialogue draws to a close, Mary tells Warren to go in and see Silas for himself. She will wait and watch the clouds in the night sky to see if "that small sailing cloud / Will hit or miss the moon" (11. 160-161). The image that follows those lines seems to symbolically identify Mary:
Then there were three there, making a dim row,  
The moon, the little silver cloud, and she. (11.  
162-163)

She is one with the softer lights of the night, a gentle spirit that can best be perceived in the subdued scenery of an evening garden.

Warren, on the other hand, operates more on a practical level. He must work hard and provide for his family, and so his immediate reactions have more to do with what is reasonable and financially realistic, not with what is sensitive and kind. When Warren first discovers that Silas has come back once again to be taken in after he had deserted them during haying time, he says in an indignant tone:

But I'll not have the fellow back ...  
I told him so last haying, didn't I?  
If he left then, I said, that ended it ...  
In winter he comes back to us. I'm done. (11. 12-14, 30)

Warren's sense of fair play has been injured, and he firmly declares his position: a man cannot dance and not pay the piper. After all, what is right is right. Besides, Silas is too old to be much help on the farm, and Warren must think of the good of the family. Warren does not want to be thought unkind however, and he asks Mary, "When was I ever anything but kind to him?" (1. 11). Warren simply does not think first in terms of others' feelings or thoughts; he is a practical-minded man who looks out for his own concerns. This fact is
illustrated in a rather ironic conflict that occurs between Silas and Warren. Warren expresses that haying time is the time when he needs Silas most. It is when Warren needs work done on his farm that he feels drawn toward Silas—for what Silas can do. But, ironically, it is just at this time that Silas will sometimes decide he does not need Warren. Warren laments this fact:

What help he is there's no depending on. Off he goes always when I need him most. (11. 17-18)

And then when Silas does come home in dire need of Warren's mercy and protection, Warren decides that Silas is just exactly what he does not need—a financial drain.

Pictorially, Warren is connected with the blazing July sun burning overhead as he labors in the fields during harvest. The one direct visual image of Warren which the poem offers appears toward the end after Warren and Mary have defined what home is to each of them:

Warren leaned out and took a step or two, Picked up a little stick, and brought it back And broke it in his hand and tossed it by. (11. 121-123)

The contrast is obvious. Mary reaches out her hand to the vines in a tentative, sensitive gesture while Warren acts in a direct, matter-of-fact, and even somewhat insensitive manner. Warren reveals his emotional personality in yet another way in the tone of irritation when he asserts, "But I'll not have
the fellow back." He then proceeds to ask with hard-headed common sense:

What good is he? Who else will harbor him
At his age for the little he can do? (11. 15-16)

And when Mary asks him to speak more softly so that Silas can not hear, Warren's cool logic reveals his straight-forward approach to life. He says, "I want him to: he'll have to soon or late" (l. 32).

However, Warren is not a hard man. As the poem progresses, the reader sees a remarkable and touching transformation take place, so that by the end of the poem, the reader is ready to hear Warren, along with Mary, welcome Silas back home.

The contraries which Warren and Mary represent are also seen on the sociological level in the conversational roles each plays in the dialogue. Warren is not much of a talker. Of the 151 lines of dialogue in the poem, he speaks only 49 to Mary's 102. The quantity of conversation, however, is not the real indicator of their roles. The nature of the contributions each makes is what is meaningful. Warren speaks mainly in one-liners that are penetrating probes for the facts, the main ideas. "What did he say? ... I just want to know" (11. 44, 47). Warren demands to be told the exact nature of Silas' visit. And later when the responsibilities of Silas' banker brother are discussed, Warren again zeroes in on what
he already knows for certain and precisely what it is he would further like to know. "We know it though" (1. 130), he says in regard to his knowledge of the brother, and then "I wonder what's between them" (1. 139). Mary, in contrast, enjoys the art of storytelling. She takes her time in recounting in detail what Silas looked like and what he said. Further evidence of her love of conversation, as well as of her kind concern, is her effort to get Silas to tell her what he had been up to:

I dragged him to the house,  
And gave him tea and tried to make him smoke.  
I tried to make him talk about his travels. (11. 40-42)

She is the opposite of Warren who openly admits that he "took care to keep well out of earshot" (1. 70) in order to avoid being drawn into the talks Silas and Harold, another hired hand, used to have out in the fields.

Reuben Brower points out that the stress of the language that each uses is another point of conversational contrast. Warren punctuates his speech with sharp, clipped words and phrases such as: "I'll not have . . . " (1. 12), "that ended it" (1. 14), "there's no depending on" (1. 17), "someone else will have to" (1. 24), and "I'm done" (1. 30). Mary, however, counters with a concerned "Shi!" (1. 31) and then continues to speak in soft tones with mild inflections that never become
more vigorous at any point than the gentle inflections of reproof in her answer to Warren when he guesses Silas has come to ditch the meadow: "Warren! . . . Of course he did. What would you have him say?" (ll. 47-48). The last word of dialogue that each speaks in the poem is particularly meaningful in terms of stress and its revelation of contrasting roles. Warren has gone inside to see Silas while Mary sits outside and waits. He returns after just a moment, and, surprised at how quickly he has come back, Mary speaks his name:

"Warren?" she questioned.  "Dead," was all he answered. (1. 166)

How fitting for her last word to rise in a fragile tone of uncertainty while his last word, a solid, unequivocal mono-syllable, falls with a sound of finality and authority on the ears of the reader.

Warren's and Mary's diction is also noticeably contrary. In two places in the poem, Warren departs from his characteristic style of one-lining and gives speeches that contain revealing word choices. In his first extended speech, which appears at the opening of the poem, Warren is declaring he will not have Silas back. The stress of the words and phrases is obviously important, as has been pointed out, but a closer inspection of the actual word choice produces an interesting series of terms unified in a financial context. Such phrases
as "earn a little pay," "buy tobacco," "beg and be beholden," "can't afford to pay," "fixed wages," and "pocket-money" (ll. 19-28), show Warren's interest in the practical world of monetary matters. In the second and last extended speech that Warren gives, the reader notes another practical interest—the world of work and action. In these lines Warren speaks of "bundling," "tagging," "numbering," "finding," "dislodging," "unloading," "doing that well," "taking it out," "standing," "trying to lift," and "straining" (ll. 89-95).

Mary, in contrast, is more interested in matters of the heart and imagination. Her word choice includes a number of references to feelings such as: "and frightening, too—" (l. 36), "he made me feel so queer" (l. 56), "I sympathize. I know just how it feels" (l. 76), "Poor Silas" (l. 99), "But have some pity on Silas" (l. 135), "he hurt my heart" (l. 147), and "You'll be surprised" (l. 152). And her imaginative language enables the reader to see Silas "Huddled against the barn door fast asleep" (l. 35), then being "dragged" (l. 40) into the house and finally rolling "his old head on that sharp-edged chair back" (l. 148). Earlier in the poem, as Warren and Mary discuss home and what it means to them, they each offer a significant detail that seems to symbolize their essential differences in how they express themselves. Mary remarks in her characteristically imaginative way that Silas is nothing more
to them "Than was the hound that came a stranger to us / Out of the woods, worn out upon the trail" (ll. 116-117). The metaphoric reference to the hound on the trail strikes a responsive chord in Warren, but his mind turns the image into a strictly realistic observation:

Silas has better claim on us you think
Than on his brother? Thirteen little miles
As the road winds would bring him to his door.
(11. 124-126)

Both Mary and Warren have envisioned Silas as a wanderer on a trail, but each has interpreted it differently, one in a figurative, creative way, the other in a practical, literal way.

Silas, the center and subject of the contrary forces that concern Mary and Warren, has his own conflicts: Silas is facing an inner psychological struggle, a battle with himself between pride and shame. Even Warren, who did not show a great deal of sympathetic insight into Silas' feelings at the beginning, recognizes that Silas is driven by a fierce pride:

He thinks he ought to earn a little pay,
Enough at least to buy tobacco with,
So he won't have to beg and be beholden. (11. 19-21)

Mary also adds to this by asking Warren to give Silas a job if for no other reason than to save Silas' self-respect. And later she asks Warren not to laugh at Silas, not to embarrass
him and strip him of his pride. It is clear that Silas' self-image and pride are connected to his work skills and that his ability to farm is what defines his worth to himself. As a result, he takes great pride in stacking hay or clearing the meadow, and he feels that if he could have another chance to "lay this farm as smooth" (l. 63), he could get another grasp on life and on himself.

Perhaps Silas' pride is as fierce as it is because it is continually threatened by a sense of shame. Mary knows why Silas has come to them:

Silas is what he is--we wouldn't mind him--
But just the kind that kinsfolk can't abide.
He never did a thing so very bad
He don't know why he isn't quite as good
As anybody. Worthless though he is,
He won't be made ashamed to please his brother.
(11. 140-145)

Outside of the realm of farm and farm work, Silas begins to feel displaced. His brother's world is vaguely confusing and demeaning because it demands a performance that Silas cannot give. Instead he has come to Warren and Mary's home where he can hold his shame at bay and protect his fragile pride a bit longer. Here with Warren, who also understands the way a man has to work the land to make his way, and with Mary, who is kindly sympathetic, he can relax and simply offer what he has.

Another pair of contraries in this narrative--important
because of what it reveals about Silas' inner emotional conflict--appears between Silas and Harold Wilson, the young college boy who had been hired four years before during haying season. Harold represents the traditional product of formal education. He has done well and gone on to teach in his alma mater. But he is just the kind that Silas cannot stand--not him, personally, but his education. Mary comments that "Harold's young college-boy's assurance piqued him" (1. 73). It was totally incomprehensible to Silas how Harold could stand to study Latin "Because he liked it" (1. 81). The clincher, in Silas' opinion, that Harold was "the fool of books" (1. 98) was that Harold did not believe Silas could find water with a hazel prong and that he did not know how to build a proper load of hay. Silas is convinced that if he could teach Harold these things, if he could pound some common sense into his head, Harold would be worth something. To Silas, Harold is "daft / On education" (11. 65-66), and Silas is proud that he can do many practical things Harold cannot. At the same time, Silas has a sneaking feeling of frustration and shame that he cannot shake off. Whenever he remembers the long debates they used to have and how Harold could always get the best of him, he thinks of all the "Good arguments he sees he might have used" (1. 75). Silas is torn between pride in what he knows he can do and shame for his intellectual ignorance that seems to be
the unpardonable sin in the realm of college boys and banker brothers.

Silas is also caught in the serious philosophic conflict of the unsympathetic forces of the universe versus the skill and ability of the human to shape order out of chaos and to survive with meaning. Mary's observation about Silas and his life reveals what his world is like:

Poor Silas, so concerned for other folk,  
And nothing to look backward to with pride,  
And nothing to look forward to with hope,  
So now and never any different. (11. 99-102)

Silas lives in a world of despair and shame. An old man, regarded as worthless, not because of any fault of his, but simply because he is what he is, Silas is surrounded by the powerful pull of the universe that Frost saw drawing all men toward death and emptiness. But, as critics David Sohn and Richard Tyre point out, the one mark Silas has made on the world, his one accomplishment, testifies that he has not bowed to the inevitable. Warren remembers it--how Silas can build a load of hay:

He bundles every forkful in its place,  
And tags and numbers it for future reference,  
So he can find and easily dislodge it  
In the unloading. Silas does that well.  
He takes it out in bunches like big birds' nests . . .  
He thinks if he could teach him that, he'd be  
Some good perhaps to someone in the world. (11. 89-93, 96-97)

Silas faces a universe that threatens to drag him down. It
is a life that is ticking away into old age, dependence, and death, but Silas meets it head-on and asks, as his last request, to be allowed to ditch the meadow and clear the upper pasture.

This narrative, which seems to draw its very strength from the forces of the contraries within it, ends on a most interesting and unique note: the major conflicts are reconciled. But instead of weakening the structure, the conclusion strengthens and beautifies the whole. For example, Warren's and Mary's opposing emotional reactions of sensitivity versus common sense follow converging paths that lead Mary at one point to observe in a practical vein:

I think his brother ought to help, of course. I'll see to that if there is need. (11. 131-132)

And Warren at another point gently says: "I can't think Sil ever hurt anyone" (1. 146). Even though both Warren and Mary maintain their separate identities right to the end, as can be heard in their characteristic voices speaking their last words, they have reached a mellow point of balance that is appropriately symbolized by Warren's final genture. He "Slipped to her side, caught up her hand and waited" (1. 165). Blended hand in hand, Warren and Mary are a unit of strength and comfort to each other, and together they can face their world.

And finally, Silas, with his undependable ways that have brought
shame and reproached to him, now has a plan, a way of reconciling himself to his universe, of aligning "that small sailing cloud" with the moon. In the end Silas is accepted by the people who matter most to him, and he will not be leaving home again this time.

The narrative poem, "Home Burial," is a story of a husband and wife who share the loss of their child but who, because of their basic, irreconcilable differences, cannot share their grief. It has been suggested by various critics that the death of the Frost's oldest son from cholera at the age of four is partially suggested in this poem. Frost himself said that the poem was about the death of a relative's child. However, Elizabeth Sergeant probably comes closest to the truth when she says the poem is simply a composite of the poet's broad experience. She says the poem reveals how a married couple can be "pulled apart by the shared hurt consciousness that a man and his wife can find no common ground on a stark peak of mutual loss." The husband of the poem and Amy, the wife, lack common ground on three points: their natures are contrary; their psychological reactions to grief conflict; and their efforts at communication operate on different levels. In short, this husband and wife, and per-
haps Frost was saying all husbands and wives to some degree, take different approaches to life, and when a crisis arises, such as a death of a child, these fundamental contraries can become even more pronounced.

The most basic difference between Amy and her husband, as John Doyle points out, is the obvious and universal one of man versus woman. This difference is referred to by both Amy and the husband. After the husband has asked in frustration, "Can't a man speak of his own child he's lost?" (p. 52, 1. 35), Amy responds with a frantic need to get out of his very presence. But then she answers him, "I don't know rightly whether any man can" (1. 38). Perhaps the husband has unconsciously set up her response by asking his question in the general and universal third person of "a man." But at any rate, Amy immediately reacts by affirming that in her opinion all men are hopelessly foreign to her understanding. Presumably, she is also implying that all women would feel the same way. The husband underlines this division of men and women when he comments that "A man must partly give up being a man / With women-folk" (11. 49-50). He is, at the least, establishing his understanding of the difference between the natures of men and women and seems also to be implying that men, in his opinion, are not only different, but somehow superior and must come down a notch or two in order to relate with their
women-folk. A little later in the poem, the husband bursts out in anger, "God, what a woman!" (1. 69). It seems significant that at a moment when this couple's conflicts and difficulties seem irreconcilable, the husband responds by labeling Amy in that particular role. At that point of alienation and frustration, the man does not see Amy as a wife or as a mother, but as a woman.

After the man-woman contrary has been established, the questions arise: Precisely what makes the contrary? What makes Amy and the husband so different? The narrative answers by illustrating first and foremost a basic struggle between two separate natures, one emotional, the other primarily rational. Amy operates on a strictly emotional level. The narrative begins with a picture of Amy, unconscious of being watched by her husband. She is a picture of fear and doubt. As she vacillates on the steps between dwelling on her sorrow or moving ahead with her daily tasks, the husband asks what is troubling her. She can only respond with emotion: "And her face changed from terrified to dull" (1. 9). As the real issue emerges--the death and burial of their child--she becomes increasingly more emotional. She cries hysterically: "Don't, don't, don't, don't" (1. 30), when he mentions the child's mound, and she interprets his most casual comments about the child's memory as a sneering remark. Perhaps the
most vital key to Amy's nature is turned when she reveals what it is about her husband that she despises: "If you had any feelings ..." (1. 72). And in another place, "You couldn't care!" (1. 97). She is accusing him of a lack of any true emotions and, in doing so, implies that emotion—the quality by which she has lived her life—is the most important quality a person can possess.

On the other hand, Amy's passionate emotional nature is counterbalanced in the narrative by her husband's rational, cool-headed approach to life. He is actively involved in his work and the wife's most vivid mental images of him have to do with his digging gravel and building fences. She can only see him framed in the entry with a spade beside him or sitting in the kitchen with fresh earth clinging to his shoes. As the husband struggles to understand Amy's grief, and patch together the pieces of her shattered life, he clearly demonstrates in yet another way his bent for logic. He pleads with her to tell him her fears so that he can understand and things will be all right again. He obviously has the idea that a common-sense explanation can fix what is emotionally disturbing or difficult in life, and he simply cannot comprehend that only an emotional demonstration of grief will satisfy Amy that he does indeed care. Unfortunately it is just this kind of emotional gesture that he cannot call up. The man is not to-
tally unemotional, however, as can be seen from his moments of anger and frustration. At one point he even seems infected by his wife's emotional excesses. He says in desperation:

I shall laugh the worst laugh I ever laughed.
I'm cursed. God, if I don't believe I'm cursed.
(11. 89-90)

But his emotional moments seem to be simply the reactions of a frustrated, usually straight-forward male who is thwarted in his attempts to remedy the problem as he sees fit because an emotional woman will not budge an inch.

Perhaps the differences in the natures of this man and woman can be seen most clearly in the contrasting physical behavior of each during the first part of the narrative. As the poem begins, the husband stands at the bottom of the stairway and watches Amy's movements: "She took a doubtful step and then undid it" (1. 4). Then he spoke to her, and "She turned and sank upon her skirts . . ." (1. 8). Later "She withdrew, shrinking from beneath his arm" (1. 31). She even describes her own actions in such a way as to imply emotional insecurity: "And I crept down the stairs and up the stairs" (1. 79). The husband, on the other hand, is seen acting out his more straight forward nature in positive, almost aggressive behavior. "He spoke / Advancing toward her . . ." (1. 5-6). And then he is seen "Mounting until she cowered under him" (1. 11). As their conversation pro-
gresses, he begins to realize that he will have to give in if there is to be a meeting of minds. And so he consciously alters his physical behavior to correspond with this new tactic: "I won't come down the stairs" (1. 40), he says. He will soften his aggression, and even as "He sat and fixed his chin between his fists" (1. 41), he was making an effort to contain and control his powerfully direct nature in order to correspond with her more fragile, emotional one.

Besides focusing on the contrary natures of a husband and wife, "Home Burial" highlights a second contrary: two opposing psychological reactions to death. These differing responses are portrayed in two places in the narrative and have to do with the degree to which each, the husband and wife, has allowed the death of their child to affect their lives. The first place in the narrative which portrays this basic difference is a scene near the beginning of the poem. Amy is standing on the stairs looking back over her shoulder to the family cemetery which can be seen through the window. The husband, passing by the bottom of the stairs, sees her there and comes to where she is. Then the two of them together stand and look out the window. Both of them are facing the concrete evidence of death—the tombstones in the graveyard, but their conversation soon establishes a vastly separate response to what each has passed through. Critic Elaine Barry
points out that Amy has allowed the death of her child to take over her life. She dwells on her grief and persistently hugs it to her heart. This involvement with death is shown when Amy starts down the stairs, takes a step to go past the window, but then returns to look out again at her child's mound. She appears unable to tear herself away even to carry on her housework. Also, the window which frames the graveyard and serves as a portal through which Amy can view her world, seems to symbolize the narrow boundaries which she has constructed around her life and which limit her concentration to a single consuming interest. She is bound up in her sorrow and, distraught with grief, she can only think of this great loss which has overshadowed all else. The husband indicates that this is not the first time he has seen her looking out the window. He asks: "What is it you see / From up here always?" (11. 6-7). Evidently Amy's grief has drawn her to this window many times before.

The husband has responded to the death of their child in a much different way. As he stands beside Amy at the window and looks to see what she is seeing, he finally realizes what she is looking at. He has been caught up in his work and obviously has not been constantly aware of their loss, as Amy has. He admits, "I never noticed it from here before" (1. 21). As his attention is drawn toward the graveyard, he tells what
he sees:

The little graveyard where my people are!
So small the window frames the whole of it.
Not so much larger than a bedroom, is it?
There are three stones of slate and one of marble,
Broad-shouldered little slabs there in the sunlight
On the sidehill. We haven't to mind those.
But I understand: it is not the stones,
But the child's mound--. (11. 23-30)

It is significant that even when the husband finally recognizes the evidences of death and turns his attention toward the graves, he speaks of the cemetery in terms of all his people first, not just in terms of his most recent loss. Evidently the death of this child has already assumed a natural spot in his mind along with the other deaths in his family. Also, to him the scene seems to be surrounded with an aura of life. The graveyard is likened to a bedroom, a place of rest and restoration; the tombstones, which he personifies when he describes them as "Broad-shouldered little slabs," become objects of human strength with burden-bearing ability; and all of the scene is covered with sunlight, the source of life and power. Both the husband and wife stand at the window and look toward their loss, but one is totally submerged in grief, while the other has absorbed his grief and allowed life to triumph over the grave.

The second place in the poem which illustrates the differing responses toward death appears at the end in a speech
which Amy gives. She is lashing out at the husband for his seeming lack of concern:

I can repeat the very words you were saying:
'Three foggy mornings and one rainy day
Will rot the best birch fence a man can build.'
Think of it, talk like that at such a time!
What had how long it takes a birch to rot
To do with what was in the darkened parlor?
You couldn't care! The nearest friends can go
With anyone to death, comes so far short
They might as well not try to go at all.
No, from the time when one is sick to death,
One is alone, and he dies more alone.
Friends make pretence of following to the grave,
But before one is in it, their minds are turned
And making the best of their way back to life
And living people, and things they understand.
But the world's evil. I won't have grief so
If I can change it. Oh, I won't, I won't! (11. 91-107)

Amy accuses the husband of insensitivity, but a more objective person might interpret the scene in a different light. The husband has maintained a hold on the world of the living. Even in the very face of his child's open grave, he speaks of such practical matters as the weather. This is not to say he is unfeeling, for it is important to note that the weather of which he speaks is fog and rain, the elements which will rot and destroy even the best birch fence. But he has not allowed death and his grief to remove him from the reality of life. Amy, however, relates to the death of their child in an entirely different way. She is convinced that most people who lose a loved one only make a hypocritical pretense of grief and are
really more interested in life and living people. She has determined not to be like this and has announced her plan to be different: "I won't have grief so / If I can change it." She believes that true grief must be expressed by denying attachments to the living world and by following the dead—in mind and heart—to the grave. And this is what she intends to do. In an earlier speech in the poem, the husband has pinpointed these essential differences in their reactions to the death of their child when he says:

I do think, though, you overdo it a little.
What was it brought you up to think it the thing
To take your mother-loss of a first child
So inconsolably—in the face of love.
You'd think his memory might be satisfied-- (11. 62-66)

The death of their child has presented to them both a peak of sorrow, a summit to overcome; the husband has faced it and handled it realistically by quietly admitting his grief while holding onto life at the same time, but Amy has been unbalanced by her loss and has fallen into an emotional abyss.

The third major contrary of the poem has to do with the communication process between the husband and wife. Throughout the entire poem, the husband tries to establish a line of communication with Amy. He feels that openness would help solve their problems, and so he encourages her to talk. He asks her questions such as, "What is it you see?" (1. 10).
He forthrightly declares his desire to talk: "I want to know" (1. 7), and "There's something I should like to ask you, dear" (1. 42). However, he recognizes his ineffectualness, and at one point, he even pleads with her to help him:

My words are nearly always an offence.  
I don't know how to speak of anything  
So as to please you. But I might be taught,  
I should suppose. I can't say I see how . . .  
We could have some arrangement  
By which I'd bind myself to keep hands off  
Anything special you're a-mind to name.  
Though I don't like such things 'twixt those that love.  
Two that don't love can't live together without them  
But two that do can't live together with them. (11. 45-48, 50-55)

He obviously loves Amy a great deal and wants to be let into her world of silent grief. In every way he knows how, he is asking her to open the door and admit him. But she seems unable to comply. Sometimes she responds to him in silence: "She, in her place, refused him any help, / With the least stiffening of her neck and silence" (11. 13-14). And at another time: "Her fingers moved the latch for all reply" (1. 44). Sometimes she responds in hostility: "You don't," she challenged. "Tell me what it is" (1. 19), and "There you go sneering now!" (1. 67). And sometimes she responds in outright attacks on his efforts to communicate: "You don't know how to ask it" (1. 43). And "You can't because you don't know how to speak" (1. 71). She seems offended even by the sound of his voice which she describes as "rumbling." And his most
casual remarks about the child, the weather, or his work seem inappropriate and cruel to her. Her final lines aptly capture her total rejection of "talk" on his terms: "You--oh, you think the talk is all. I must go-- / Somewhere out of this house. How can I make you--" (11. 112-113). It sounds as if she is saying that there is a level of communication that she would appreciate, if she could only make him understand what it is. But "talk" is inadequate for her needs and is even frustrating to her. She therefore rejects it and him and declares her intention to escape.

With no open line of communication, the couple's relationship stands little chance of survival, and the deterioration process can be seen from beginning to end. When the husband's efforts at communication fail, he resorts to aggressive demands and force: "You make me angry. I'll come down to you" (1. 68). And at the very end: "I'll follow and bring you back by force. I will!--" (1. 116). She responds by withdrawal and escape from both her husband and from reality. She says at the beginning of the poem: "Not you!--Oh, where's my hat? Oh, I don't need it! / I must get out of here. I must get air." (11. 36-37). And again at the end she says: "I must go-- / Somewhere out of this house" (11. 112-113). Critic R. H. Swennes points out that she has progressed from silent withdrawal to declarations of alienation and escape and that
even though this kind of confrontation and escape may have occurred before, this time the husband's threat of force, coupled with Amy's desperate frame of mind, will spell disaster.

In the poem the reader meets two very contrary natures, one emotional and one primarily rational. Amy, it would seem, had been a devoted and loyal mother, centering her life around the child and its needs. However, now that the child is gone, she has become unbalanced and morbid, unable to accept the loss herself or to understand her husband's doing so. On the psychological level, she can be seen as emotion gone awry, an irrational perversion of her former self. On the other hand, the husband is more realistic in confronting his grief. He has always handled his life on a more rational level, and now he can fall back on his previous patterns and manage to cope with his loss. However, he also brings a sociological weakness to the relationship. He is unable to totally sympathize or communicate; he tries, but when results are not immediate, he loses patience. His insensitivity to Amy's grief makes him extremely slow to perceive her emotional state and even slower to understand the reason for and extent of her resentment. Both Amy and the husband bring strengths and weaknesses to their marriage, but the death of their child and their contrary ways of facing that death and of facing life
in general have raised giant barriers between them. They have moved from the possibility of togetherness as they stand side by side looking out the window toward their child's mound to inevitable separateness implied by the last lines. Amy threatens to leave and to close the door, thus threatening to erect the final, physical barrier between them.
Chapter V
Philosophic Contraries in
"West-Running Brook" and "In the Home Stretch"

In "West-Running Brook," of all his narratives, Robert Frost best expresses his theory of contraries on the universe and the human place in it. Another important aspect of the poem deals with the opposing forces within marriage. The philosophic contraries along with the social contraries combine to make this narrative one of the most significant of Frost's longer works and one of the best expressions of his theory of contraries.

Through the explicit speech of Fred, the main character of the narrative, Frost reveals his concept of the nature of life and man. Fred and his wife are observing a unique brook that runs west among all the other east-running brooks of the region. The wife finds the brook an interesting phenomenon and enjoys the fantasy of imagining it to have her human capabilities. Fred patiently explains to her that the brook is simply a part of the scheme of life and has not heard her speak or has not waved in response. It is at this point in the poem that Fred has a thought, and at the prompting of his wife, he muses aloud about the nature of the universe and existence:
Some say existence like a Pirouot  
And Pirouette, forever in one place,  
Stands still and dances, but it runs away!  
It seriously, sadly, runs away  
To fill the abyss's void with emptiness.  
It flows beside us in this water brook,  
But it flows over us. It flows between us  
To separate us for a panic moment.  
It flows between us, over us, and with us.  
And it is time, strength, tone, light, life and love--
And even substance lapsing unsubstantial;
The universal cataract of death  
That spends to nothingness--
Our life runs down in sending up the clock.  
The brook runs down in sending up our life.  
The sun runs down in sending up the brook.
And there is something sending up the sun. (p. 259,  
11. 45-57, 64-67)  

He believes that life is simply a running away into death and ruin, that humans are caught in a universe that shows no favors, and that there is no hope of stopping the process because it is part of the nature of things.  

If Fred were to stop on this fatalistic note, Frost's philosophy of life would sound ultimately depressing, but Fred immediately continues to say that man, as he is caught in this difficult position, does not have to resign himself to it. In fact, if he is to survive, man must meet the force of the universe with his own balancing force. In terms of the poem, this balancing force is the "strange resistance" that characterizes the brook:  

It has this throwing backward on itself  
So that the fall of most of it is always  
Raising a little, sending up a little...
It is this backward motion toward the source, 
Against the stream, that most we see ourselves in . . . 
It is from this in nature we are from. 
It is most us. (ll. 61-63, 68-69, 71-72)

This is the converging of contraries. Critic H.H. Waggoner points out that the force of the universe meeting the valiant efforts of man to hold back the inevitable running away into emptiness is one of the most important philosophical points of our time. Even though the universal pull is so powerful, so commanding, man must bend his strength to counteract it. It is this struggle to "throw back" that, in Frost's opinion, gives man's existence any meaning or form at all.

A symbolic use of color in the poem also helps to emphasize man's dilemma in the universe. Fred describes the powerful force of the main stream as black and later as "black forever." This description is in contrast to the white of the wave that throws itself against the current. A second image adds to the white color symbol:

And the white water rode the black forever, 
Not gaining but not losing, like a bird 
White feathers from the struggle of whose breast 
Flecked the dark stream and flecked the darker pool 
Below the point, and were at last driven wrinkled 
In a white scarf against the far-shore alders. (ll. 21-26)

Both the white froth of the wave beating against a sunken rock and the white breast of a bird contending with the dark stream bring to mind the purity of man's courageous fight against the
black shadows of death and decay that lurk beneath the surface of the stream.

In contrast to Fred's explanation of the universal scheme of things, Fred's wife, in her own way, comments on what the human reaction to the dark stream can be:

We must be something.
We've said we two. Let's change that to we three.
As you and I are married to each other,
We'll both be married to the brook. We'll build
Our bridge across it, and the bridge shall be
Our arm thrown over it asleep beside it. (ll. 10-15)

Her opinion takes a very different direction from Fred's view of resistance. She sees the human place to be cooperation with the inevitable dark stream. In suggesting building a bridge to span the brook, she is suggesting they join with the stream into a constructive, useful unit. Like Fred, she sees the human role to be an active one, a taking charge of a mysterious or threatening situation. But unlike Fred, she feels more can be gained if humans approach life with a sympathetic attitude, not an attitude of resistance or contrariety.

In the final analysis, the philosophic contraries of the universe and man's place in it are twofold in this poem. The first set of contraries is given by Fred as he describes the negative force of the world and man's battle against being swept into submission to that force. The color symbols add
visual support to that concept. The second set of contraries takes the form of Fred's view of the human reaction versus his wife's view, in relation to the human reaction to life's emptiness.

The second type of contrary in "West-Running Brook" is the sociological contrary of the marriage relation. Fred's wife, upon observing the unique stream, reveals her opinion that there are contraries at work between them:

It must be the brook
Can trust itself to go by contraries
The way I can with you--and you with me--
Because we're--we're--I don't know what we are.
What are we? (11. 6-10)

She seems unsure of the nature of their relationship, but a few lines later, through her own words, she dramatically shows her contribution to the marriage:

Look, look, it's waving to us with a wave
To let us know it hears me. (11. 16-17)

When Fred counters that the brook could not possibly be waving, she insists that maybe it was not waving to him, but it was to her, and not just a wave, but an annunciation. She playfully interprets the unusual turn of the water to be a message to her. Even though this is an illogical conclusion, she likes the thought and insists on it. Also, in her first speech about the contraries of the brook and their marriage, her hesitating statement about what Fred and she are to each
other reveals her lack of analytical thought. Reuben Brower points out that she is romantic, impulsive and emotional, and that she thinks in terms of home and marriage. She easily relates a brook to human behavior. Fred can see this side of her, and he comments:

Oh, if you take it off to lady-land,
As't were the country of the Amazons
We men must see you to the confines of
And leave you there, ourselves forbid to enter--
It is your brook! I have no more to say. (11. 32-36)

Fred recognizes the opposite roles each plays in their marriage. He can see that there are boundaries that mark the sides each occupies in the relationship and that her side is characterized by the feminine imagination. He uses the legendary lady-land of the Amazons to represent how powerful and distinct his wife's place is in their marriage.

Fred's role in the marriage forms the opposite half of the contrary. When he sees the brook that runs counter to the other brooks and the splashing wave that results from the water dashing against the shore, his thoughts go immediately to the universal condition:

Why, my dear,
That wave's been standing off this jut of shore-- . . .
Ever since rivers, I was going to say,
Were made in heaven. . . . (11. 17-18, 28-29)

He then goes on to expand his thoughts about what the brook represents to him. It is a Pirouette, the universal cataract
of death, a running clock. To Fred, the brook is a symbol of the ancient human struggle; instead of viewing the scene as a momentary fancy as his wife does, he relates it to the outer world of ideas and deeper meanings. Fred is a logical person who thinks philosophically and rationally. Even a simple nature scenario draws him into a reflective moment of considering the nature of the universe and man's place in it. Fred's wife evidently knows well this tendency toward meditation, for when he declares he has no more to say, she responds: "Yes, you have, too. Go on. You thought of something" (1. 37).

With all the opposing forces at work in this particular marriage, there still exists an attitude of compatibility. Each has his own view of the brook, but each shows deference to the other's view. Fred patiently answers her questions and encourages her hesitant thoughts, while she insists on hearing him out even after he expresses reluctance to speak. Each, in the end, says he will remember the day for what the other has said:

"Today will be the day
You said so."
"No, today will be the day
You said the brook was called West-Running Brook."
"Today will be the day of what we both said."

Evidently Frost sees the contraries within this marriage as constructive forces meeting and uniting in a blend of real-
ism plus romanticism. Brower supports this idea when he says, "As the poem goes along, there is again a gradual re-approachment between roles and attitudes, each growing in deference to the other."

"West-Running Brook," even though it is the prime example of Frost's philosophy of contraries in man's universe, is not the only narrative poem that Frost wrote that demonstrates this contrary. "The Death of the Hired Man" also gives evidence to the theory, as has previously been pointed out, by showing Silas' predicament and his means of coping with it.

Another narrative poem that dramatically illustrates the contrary is "In the Home Stretch." An elderly man and his wife have retired to an isolated farm, and the poem presents their first evening in their new home, after the movers have left. The reader gains a clear picture of their new world, first through the eyes of the wife, and then the husband. As the wife stands against the kitchen sink, she looks ahead to the coming years. But what really meets her eyes through the dusty window are weeds growing tall. Then as she looks behind her, she sees the "confusion of the room, / Of chairs turned upside down to sit like people / In other chairs" (ll. 5-7). At this moment her world sounds chaotic and looks bleak:
And bang goes something else away off there.  
It sounds as if it were the men went down,  
And every crash meant one less to return  
To lighted city streets we, too, have known,  
But now are giving up for country darkness. (11. 55-59)

Joe, the husband, takes a much brighter view of their situation, but even he comments on the woods that are "Waiting to steal a step on us whenever / We drop our eyes or turn to other things" (11. 116-117).

In this narrative, the two characters present the two possible ways humans may meet their existence—positively, meeting force with force or negatively, drawing back to let the universal pull have its way. Joe represents the forceful way. He, as well as his wife, sees the tumult around them, but instead of cursing the darkness, he lights a candle. Throughout the entire poem, Joe makes reference to different types of illumination. At the beginning of the narrative, he calls his wife to observe one of the movers climbing into the truck. He especially wants her to notice one detail:

Watch this husky swarming up  
Over the wheel into the sky-high seat,  
Lighting his pipe now, squinting down his nose  
At the flame burning downward as he sucks it. (11. 62-65)

Later as they prepare to eat, he is the one to find the lantern and matches and light the stove. And as they are preparing for bed, he asks:
Is it too late
To drag you out for just a good-night call
On the old peach trees on the knoll, to grope
By starlight in the grass for a last peach
The neighbors may not have taken as their right
When the house wasn't lived in? . . .
The first thing in the morning, out we go
To go the round of apple, cherry, peach,
Pine, alder, pasture, mowing, well, and brook.
All of a farm it is. (11. 187-192, 195-198)

An incurable optimist, he sees the pieces of their lives lying around them, but he insists on talking about the various kinds of light, about the tasks to come, about the coming sun, about Sunday when Ed will come to tell them what needs to be done, and about the promise of the future years which the wife refers to as "latter years" (1. 49).

The contrast between the husband and wife can best be seen through the continuation of the light-dark imagery. She is the one who points out the "country darkness" (1. 59) and is careful to note, to the movers, that "It's almost dark" (1. 16) so they should hurry and finish their work. When Joe tries to lift her spirits by having her notice the mover's pipe, she can only observe, "See how it makes his nose-side bright, a proof / How dark it's getting" (11. 66-67). And when the movers finally leave, and they are left alone, she confesses her depression:

I confess
It's seeming bad for a moment . . .
It's nothing; it's their leaving us at dusk.
I never bore it well when people went. 
The first night after guests have gone, the house 
Seems haunted or exposed. (ll. 127-128, 130-133)

It is clear that the two have responded to their small 
universe in opposite ways. However, Joe, being the forceful 
confronter of the opposing forces of chaos and depression, is 
strong enough to carry his wife toward his own position. The 
poem ends with her statement: "I'm going to put you in your 
bed, if first / I have to make you build it. Come, the light" 
(ll. 199-200). She has begun to shape her world, and the 
light that "got out through crannies in the stove / And danced 
in yellow wrigglers on the ceiling" (ll. 202-203) warms her 
kitchen and seems to suggest that together the couple can 
face their universe and survive.

In the two poems, "West-Running Brook" and "In the Home 
Stretch," Frost has presented especially well his philosophic 
contrary of man versus the forces of the universe. Both the 
natural world of "West-Running Brook" and man's domestic world 
of "In the Home Stretch" hold the pull of negative forces 
that threatens to drag man down. However, both forces also 
present the balancing force which serves to establish the hope 
that man can have some degree of control over his life.
In "The Housekeeper" Robert Frost creates a dramatic situation that illustrates his fondness for the psychological dilemma of choice. First, choice between two totally incompatible contraries is explained in the characters of Estelle and John. And secondly, the contrary between forceful choice and drifting is developed in the poem.

Estelle, the strong-willed country housekeeper of the poem, had lived, along with her mother, with John on an old poultry farm. The elderly mother, who is the narrator of the poem, explains to the neighbor man who drops in to visit that she has lived there with John for fifteen years. The significant detail of the entire arrangement is that Estelle and John had fallen into a common-law marriage relationship.

This non-conventional relationship between Estelle and John is what forms the basis for Estelle's dilemma of incompatible choice. On one hand, she could have chosen to stay with John and maintain the relationship. On the other hand, she could have chosen to break away from John and establish a more conventional lifestyle. The situation between these two people had evidently reached a point of crisis in Estelle's
mind, and she felt a choice must be made. Even though Estelle and her mother originally came simply to care for John's house and to provide a home for the mother, the years had brought a change that Estelle could no longer face with self-respect.

The two sides of Estelle's choice—to stay with John or to leave him—were complicated by another set of contrary circumstances, which made the decision even more traumatic. The choice to stay would mean a continuation of public humiliation and shame. The visiting neighbor directly pinpoints Estelle's source of embarrassment: "Yes, but he should have married her" (p. 84, l. 76). "I know" (l. 76), the mother responds. Estelle knew too. She knew that the community rejected her way of living and that she could never really hold her head up under the present circumstances. The neighbor, in a position to be sensitive to the village reaction, asks for an explanation of Estelle's actions: "Is it the neighbors, / Being cut off from friends?" (l. 168-169). The mother answers that Estelle has friends and that they are not the reason she chose to leave John. But the neighbor insists: "She's let it worry her" (l. 171). Staying with John would mean staying in a disgraceful situation that had become a tremendous source of discomfort to Estelle. The choice to stay with John is not weighted with negative aspects only. Staying with him would also mean to Estelle that she could comfortably stay put on the farm in
a setting she found very satisfactory. The mother knows how well off Estelle has been: "I mean Estelle has always held the purse" (11. 98). Estelle has had a position of real responsibility, and being a woman of ability, she would appreciate such a position. Her mother also explains Estelle's favorable place on the farm:

We came here for a home for me, you know, Estelle to do the housework for the board of both of us. But look how it turns out: She seems to have the housework, and besides, half of the outdoor work, though as for that, he'd say she does it more because she likes it. You see our pretty things are all outdoors . . . . But Estelle don't complain: she's like him there. She wants our hens to be the best there are. (11. 104-110, 117-118)

Estelle has worked hard, but evidently she has enjoyed it and has felt she was working for her own profit and security. And so, in considering staying with John, Estelle was faced with both the mental strain of public shame and condemnation and the enticing opportunity to continue in a comfortable and rewarding farm life.

Estelle's other possible course of action—leaving John—is likewise complicated by the same set of contraries. By breaking loose from a questionable relationship she would gain the respect of the community, as well improve her own self-respect. Yet, Estelle had to consider that leaving John would mean a major change in her comfortable lifestyle. She
would have to leave behind a fifteen-year investment in a poultry farm of which she is justifiably proud. Even the visiting neighbor recognizes that Estelle has had it good. When the mother says that she has turned away from John he asks, "But why, when she's well off?" (1. 168). The mother gives the best answer to the question when she says:

The strain's been too much for her all these years: I can't explain it any other way. (11. 77-78)

Estelle faced a dilemma—to go or to stay. What makes it an especially agonizing choice is that each of the alternatives has built-in contraries of its own, pros and cons that are real points of conflict.

Estelle is not the only one in the narrative who faces a dilemma of choice. John also confronts a decision complicated by opposing circumstances. Evidently the mother has put the choice before him numerous times in the past. She reports her own words:

But when I've said, Why shouldn't they be married, He'd say, Why should they?—no more words than that. (11. 90-91)

John could either marry Estelle and make theirs an honorable relationship, or he could continue on being his usual careless but kind self and hope for the best with her.

Both choices pose real problems for John because neither one is entirely satisfactory for all involved. The mother
clarifies the entire situation:

He knows he's kinder than the run of men.  
Better than married ought to be as good  
As married--that's what he has always said.  
I know the way he's felt--but all the same!  (11.  
80-83)

There is no doubt that John is a mild, kind man. The mother  
calls him "fair" (1. 92) and reveals that "What was his was  
always hers" (1. 93). Also he is softhearted with the animals.  
He is "fond of nice things" (1. 116). John thinks that being  
good to Estelle should satisfy her. He seems to believe that  
if he gives her everything she wants in the way of material  
things and kindness, she will be happy. But she is not. The  
mother's words--"but all the same!"--reveal the dissatisfaction  
with such an arrangement. She implies: But all the same, he  
should know she wants to be married. So John's two choices--  
marrying Estelle or remaining single--are neither one going to  
totally answer both their needs. If he marries Estelle, John  
will be violating his own desires, and if he remains single,  
as he wishes to do, Estelle will be unhappy. The essence of  
John's dilemma, then, is that the two choices he faces are both  
unsatisfactory.

Besides contrary sides within a single choice, the narrative also contains the problem of whether to decide or not to decide. In this set of contraries, the reader observes Estelle as a forceful decision-maker and John as a drifter.
Estelle is the deliberate choice-maker. She has faced a difficult situation, a real dilemma as has been pointed out, but she has reasoned out what she believes to be the correct course of action:

She thinks if it was bad to live with him, it must be right to leave him. (11. 74-75)

Even though Estelle has faced the hard choice of whether to go or stay, she has definitely arrived at a decision. "Estelle's run off" (l. 20), her mother reports, and "She's in earnest, it appears" (l. 22). And later the mother re-emphasizes Estelle's position: "It's as I say: She's turned from him, that's all. . . . / She won't come back" (11. 167, 177). Estelle has not just decided to leave John. She has made the ultimate, bridgeburning decision: She has married someone else. In anticipation of the neighbor's questions, the mother says:

Who'd marry her straight out of such a mess? Say it right out--no matter for her mother. The man was found. I'd better name no names. John himself won't imagine who he is. (11. 186-189)

Estelle has not only married someone else, but she has married someone who will be a vast surprise to John. In doing so, she has done not only the difficult but the unexpected.

John, in contrast to Estelle, is a drifter when it comes to decision-making. When he is faced with a difficult circumstance, he backs away and refuses to come to grips with it. The mother points out his precise problem:
John's no threatener
Like some men folk. No one's afraid of him;
All is, he's made up his mind not to stand
What he has got to stand. (11. 68-71)

John has not been able to bring himself to face marriage to
Estelle, and when she leaves him, he is not able to cope with
that either. John is indecisive about other matters too.
Even in the smallest thing such as going visiting, he has dif­
ficulty in being stable. The mother asks:

Haven't you seen him? Strange what set you off
To come to his house when he's gone to yours.
You can't have passed each other. I know what:
He must have changed his mind and gone to Garland's.
(11. 14-17)

And in making his own meals, now that Estelle is gone, the
mother says:

He gets some sort of bakeshop meals together,
With me to sit and tell him everything,
What's wanted and how much and where it is. (11.
31-33)

He seems unable to grasp a problem and act on it. Instead it
wrestles him to the ground. The mother predicts what will
happen to him:

What I think he will do, is let things smash.
He'll sort of swear the time away. He's awful! . . .
He's just dropped everything. He's like a child. . . .
That's no way for a man to do at his age:
He's fifty-five, you know, if he's a day. (11. 51-
52, 55, 63-64)

In the final analysis, the reader can see a complex web
of choices: Estelle had to choose to go or stay, and her choice
involved deciding between community and personal respect or comfort. John's choices were between marrying or remaining single, and his choice involved a decision between his desire for legal uninvolvement and Estelle's happiness. Even more to the point, the narrative handles the contrary views of forceful choice versus drifting. Frost has presented a strong-minded woman who is willing to take life as it is and to make the best of it. In direct contrast to Estelle is Frost's portrait of John. He is a bewildered figure of a man who, when faced with a difficult choice, refuses to meet it head-on and instead drifts along until he loses everything.
"The Hill Wife" is an unusually structured narrative poem which contains five lyric poems that combine to tell the story of a young wife. Because she cannot stand the loneliness of the isolated farm on which she and her husband live, she runs away and is never found again. The contraries of this narrative are primarily seen in the social interaction between the husband and wife, particularly in the area of communication and need of association, and in the relationship each of them has with the outside community.

The communication within the marriage is a prime factor in the plot as well as an obvious contrary between the husband and wife. The wife dominates the first four lyrics with her comments about birds, strangers, and trees. She seems to feel a compulsive need to express her fears and sorrows. Even though much of what she says probably is born of a paranoid reaction, she is at least verbalizing her thoughts and feelings. The husband does not speak until the last lyric. Obviously, he is the silent type who speaks only when an absolute emergency arises, as it does when the young wife disappears at the end.
Besides this rather apparent and general contrary between the speaking patterns of the husband and wife, there are ironic contraries to be seen in the way each one develops in the story and reacts to the crisis at the end. The wife at first tells her innermost thoughts. She tells what makes her sad:

One ought not to have to care
So much as you and I
Care when the birds come round the house
To seem to say good-bye; (p. 126, ll. 1-4)

And she tells that the songs of the returning birds make her glad. Underneath the simple emotions of sadness and happiness lurk her more complex emotions of fear, suspicion and loneliness which she also openly reveals to her husband. Her fear is of the empty house at night; her suspicion is of thebegging stranger who came to their door; and her loneliness comes from being alone with no work or child to keep her busy and is expressed implicitly with her commentary on the seasonal comings and goings of the birds. All these feelings she communicates to her husband—until the crisis occurs in the fifth lyric. She has come to the breaking point. Her emotions have overcome her, and she can no longer try to hold up a normal appearance or to maintain an open, communicating relationship. It is at this point of crisis that the wife changes in her speaking pattern:
She strayed so far she scarcely heard
When he called her--
And didn't answer--didn't speak--
Or return.
She stood, and then she ran and hid
In the fern. (11. 15-20)

Ironically, when she is at her moment of greatest need, she establishes an unexpected contrary within herself and closes out her husband, breaking off the communication that might have served to restore her.

The husband follows the same ironic pattern in the plot progression which also culminates in the fifth lyric, the point of climax in the narrative. His pattern throughout the first four lyrics is the opposite of his wife's: he is silent and uncommunicative. Not once does he express his unique thoughts or feelings. It is true that in the first and second lyric, the wife tells of her fears and joys and includes him in the statement, but at no point does the husband speak for himself or does the poet speak for him—until the crisis in the fifth lyric. When the wife breaks and runs away, then the husband undergoes his ironic behavior change. He calls her and even goes to the mother's house to ask after her there. Elaine Barry points out that the prolonged silence that he has maintained until the fifth lyric has been one of the primary contributing factors in driving his lonely, isolated wife away. He has been so occupied he has not noticed her need
until the narrative reaches its climax. It is both ironic and tragic that these two people are so inept at judging each other's needs that at the precise time when each one needs to reach out in communicating to the other, it is at this exact moment that each turns away and encloses himself in a shell of silence, creating in each strange and unexpected inner contrar-ies.

The second major type of contrary that can be seen in "The Hill Wife" is in the area of association or need of other people. The husband, as might be concluded from his speech patterns, is a loner. He is involved with his farm work and perfectly contented to carry on his life without much outside involvement. He furrows his fields and fells the timber with only an occasional night away from the "lonely house."

However, the wife is a different type altogether:

It was too lonely for her there,  
And too wild,  
And since there were but two of them,  
And no child,  

And work was little in the house,  
She was free . . . (11. 1-6)

She obviously is a social woman who needs people about her. Her need is so great that when she fails to receive the association she craves, she becomes emotionally disturbed. She befriends the birds around the house and imagines that they seem to speak to her. She is so unbalanced in her need of
people that she even begins to imagine that dangers are lying in wait in the dark and that the stranger who comes to their door is watching her from down the road and laughing at her. It is clear that living in isolated circumstances has warped her sense of reality and that she cannot function in a solitary situation as her husband can.

This contrary need of association contains a rather ironic contrary in each of the characters' lives. The husband initially thrives on his solitude; his wife is around but there is little evidence that he pays much attention to her. He seems entirely satisfied with his work. However, when his wife disappears, he suddenly realizes his need of her. He drops everything and begins a frantic search. Unfortunately, it is too late, and his need goes unanswered. The situation of the wife is just the opposite. To begin with, the wife is lonely—in need of association. Her longing for company is poignantly emphasized by Frost's lines:

She rested on a log and tossed
The fresh chips,
With a song only to herself
On her lips. (11. 9-12)

At the moment of her greatest need, she does the unexpected—she runs away from civilization altogether. The implication is that she merges with the forest and ferns, never to be seen again. While the husband moves from isolation to need of asso-
ciation, she moves in the opposite direction—from need of association to isolation. However, the wife's isolation is not of the same kind as the husband's. His is by choice while hers is a desperate, distracted reaction to prolonged neglect.

In five short lyrics, Frost not only has stated the truth of contraries in marriage—both in communication and outside and inside association—but also has stated the ironic tragedy that results when these contraries go awry within the individual and create an opposite reaction and a destructive lack of balance.

In the summer of 1909, the Frost family took a camping trip to northern Vermont. One day the Frosts stopped by a local farmhouse to buy milk and eggs, and in talking to the lonely farmer's wife, Frost received the kernal of the idea for "A Servant to Servants." Thompson adds this bit of background:

Haggard and careworn from her daily rounds of cooking for her husband and his hired men, Mrs. Conally feared that she could not keep up the pace demanded of her. Frost was touched by her fears more than by her predicament. She admitted that insanity ran in her family, that her father's brother "wasn't right," and she herself had been "put away" for a short time. Recently, she had begun to fear that the same thing might happen again.
This narrative poem covers a broad spectrum of contraries. The philosophic contraries of the universe and the nature of man are briefly touched as well as the psychological contrary of choice. However, the most significant contraries, I believe, are seen in the sociological contraries of duty to others and the need of outside association. Both the husband and wife of this dramatic monologue vividly demonstrate these particular areas in the tragic tenor of their lives.

The philosophic contrary forces of the narrative are first seen in the broad scope of man's relationship to the universe. To Len, life is a challenge to be met, a job to be worked at, an unfinished task to be brought to order. He works long hours and surrounds himself with workmen in order to see his universe take an orderly shape. The wife says that Len's philosophy is "one steady pull more ought to do it" (p. 64, l. 55). Also, "He looks on the bright side of everything . . ." (l. 45). Len's way is to plunge straight into life and with vigorous effort, put life in its place.

The wife, however, contrasts with Len in her view of the universe. She sees life as total chaos and insanity. She refers to her family history of mental disorder and identifies herself with the mentally disturbed uncle who was left in a cage:
It got so I would say—you know, half fooling—"It's time I took my turn upstairs in jail"— (ll. 145-146)

She sees her world through the frustrated and confused eyes of a defeated woman. She says she cannot express her feelings anymore and she does not know for sure how she feels. Work, which is one thing that could serve to bring satisfaction, is no cure for her as it is for Len. She comments to the campers who have stopped to visit:

Bless you, of course you're keeping me from work, But the thing of it is, I need to be kept. There's work enough to do—there's always that; But behind's behind. The worst that you can do Is set me back a little more behind. I shan't catch up in this world, anyway. (ll. 171-176)

An interesting symbol of the confusion in this woman's life is seen in the water imagery of the poem. In front of their cottage is a long, beautiful lake. The wife describes it:

You take the lake. I look and look at it. I see it's a fair, pretty sheet of water. I stand and make myself repeat out loud The advantages it has, so long and narrow, Like a deep piece of some old running river Cut short off at both ends. (ll. 16-21)

Even though her mind tells her the lake is lovely, she is in such emotional turmoil that she must constantly remind herself of its beauty. Her tendency is, instead, to think of the lake as it is during stormy weather:
It lies five miles
Straightaway through the mountain notch
From the sink window where I wash the plates,
And all our storms come up toward the house,
Drawing the slow waves whiter and whiter and whiter.
It took my mind off doughnuts and soda biscuit
To step outdoors and take the water dazzle
A sunny morning, or take the rising wind
About my face and body and through my wrapper,
When a storm threatened from the Dragon's Den,
And a cold chill shivered across the lake. (11. 21-31)

The lake in storm seems to symbolically match her own condition and her view of the universe, and she is instinctively drawn to it. These two, Len and his wife, live side by side in their lakefront farmhouse, but each one views the world in his own way: one sees it as a challenge to work and bring to order, while the other sees it as a senseless and chaotic experience with no hope of improvement.

The other philosophic contrary of the narrative appears in the diverse natures of the husband and wife. The wife is the kind of person who lives for love and appreciation. One of the first things she says is that her feelings have been numbed. It is distressing to her that she can no longer know for sure what her emotions are. Marriage and family are of supreme importance to her. Her monologue centers around the love interests and needs of Len, her uncle, and her father and mother. On the other hand, as Elaine Barry points out, Len is a practical man whose life is work, money, and business.
He is not particularly sensitive to feelings as his wife notes: "I'm past such help-- / Unless Len took the notion, which he won't" (11. 156-157). Everything to Len is his outside projects: his cottages, the highways, the lake property, and his hired men. Both Len and his wife have such radically contrasting natures that there seems to be no meeting place.

The psychological contrary of the poem appears in the contrasting approaches toward choice that the husband and wife take. Len is the decision-maker in the family. The wife reveals that "It was his plan our moving over . . ." (1. 61). Besides deciding on his own on such a family-oriented choice as a move, Len also is the one who determines what will be done about his wife's condition. He makes the decision that she will "be all right / With doctoring" (11. 46-47) and that "the best way out is always through" (1. 56). The wife knows that Len's decision concerning her health and need for mental attention is final and that his getting a notion to obtain help for her is something he will not do. In contrast to Len, however, the wife is a drifter. When Len made the decision to move, she waited meekly in the background, hoping against hope that he would make the move. She says:

Mind you, I waited till Len said the word.  
I didn't want the blame if things went wrong.  
I was glad though, no end, when we moved out. (11. 149-151)
Concerning her mental health, the wife again takes a passive role in decision-making. When Len suggests to her that just keeping at it or "one steady pull more" will fix her up, she agrees with him:

And I agree to that, or in so far
As that I can see no way out but through--
Leastways for me--and then they'll be convinced.
(11. 57-59)

Even though she knows work or simply trying harder is not the solution to her problem, she is willing to let Len decide what should be done. In the meantime, she will stand back and wait for whatever dreadful thing may happen to happen so that "they" will "be convinced" that she needs professional help. "I won't ask him" (1. 158), she says. She is too afraid of failure to take the risk involved in forceful decision-making. Even so small a thing as sleeping out overnight in a tent overwhels her. She is so beaten down and afraid that all she can say is, "but I don't know!" (1. 153).

However, in the midst of the wife's weak drifting and lack of decisive strength, there is an irony. She knows that she is heading for a mental disturbance; she has been there before, and she knows the signs. But still she says:

I s'pose I've got to go the road I'm going:
Other folks have to, and why shouldn't I? (11. 159-160)

She lacks the courage to decide to risk a move to a new house,
to ask for help and even to camp out overnight but, as John Doyle, a Frost critic, notes, she has the courage to face her bleak life that holds no help or hope for an improved future. In being able to make such a decision on her own, she demonstrates an interesting and ironic contrary within herself.

The social contraries of "A Servant to Servants" center around the concepts of duty, first, and association, second. The contrary of duty which involves the swing between doing for others and doing for self is illustrated in the wife's situation. In her conversation with the campers she reveals her lot in life:

> From cooking meals for hungry hired men
> And washing dishes after them--from doing
> Things over and over that just won't stay done. (11. 50-52)

This woman's life is a round of cooking and washing, chores accomplished for others--her husband and his hired hands. While Frost believed in helping others and in extending oneself in neighborliness, he also expressed the contrasting need of self-development. In this narrative he expressed this contrasting need in the weakness of the wife when she neglects the first and foremost duty to herself. She is worn out by her constant attention to others, and she realizes the situation:

> With a houseful of hungry men to feed
I guess you'd find... It seems to me
I can't express my feelings, any more
Than I can raise my voice or want to lift
My hand (oh, I can lift it when I have to).
Did ever you feel so? I hope you never. (ll. 5-10)

The wife has intolerably overburdened herself for others to
the point where she can no longer function completely. Instead of feeding her own needs first, and in doing so, becoming a whole individual, she has handed out bits and pieces of herself in the form of home-cooked meals until the hired hands have eaten her alive.

The second social contrary in the narrative takes the form of the positive and negative forces of association, or in other words, isolation or alienation versus involvement with others. Besides showing the basic contrary of isolation versus association within the lives of Len and his wife, the poem utilizes the two main characters to demonstrate the destructiveness of an extreme of either side of the contrary without the balancing side.

The wife is the model for isolation. She is so alienated from real companionship that she welcomes even the stranger-campers who come to her door, and she begs them not to leave:

I didn't make you know how glad I was
To have you come and camp here on our land. (ll. 1-2)

And later she says: "I'd rather you'd not go unless you must"
During her conversation with the visitors, she brings up a number of topics that convey her sense of alienation. She talks of the hired help:

We have four here to board . . .
No more put out in what they do or say
Than if I wasn't in the room at all. (1. 76, 79-80)

She speaks of the lack of traffic at their cottages for rent: "It would be different if more people came" (1. 39). Three times she mentions "coming and going": the campers coming and having to go, the hired help's coming and going, and the visitor's letting "things more like feathers regulate / [Their] going and coming" (11. 36-37). She is obviously aware of how others manage to balance their lives with movement toward and away from society and of how hopelessly entrenched she is in her lonely spot in the world.

Besides expressing her sense of loneliness and alienation, the wife also reveals the damage to herself that such a situation had once wrought:

I've been away once--yes, I've been away.
The State Asylum. I was prejudiced;
I wouldn't have sent anyone of mine there;
You know the old idea--the only asylum
Was the poorhouse, and those who could afford,
Rather than send their folks to such a place,
Kept them at home; and it does seem more human.
But it's not so; The place is the asylum.
There they have every means proper to do with,
And you aren't darkening other people's lives--
Worse than no good to them, and they no good
To you in your condition; you can't know
Affection or the want of it in that state. (11. 90-102)

She had broken mentally to such an extent that she now sees it as kindness to have been put away from others. But at the same time, she realizes that in such a condition, a mentally disturbed person needs specialized people--people who are trained in techniques that will fit her to return to her circle of family and friends. There is an irony in the situation: alienation from others has caused the illness, and alienation from certain others will affect the cure.

Len, the husband, is the model in the narrative for the other side of the contrary--association. He is entirely surrounded by people: the houseful of hired men, the highway workmen and the townspeople. On the surface this kind of lifestyle seems to be what he needs. He is an optimistic, decisive person who seems in control of his life. But the lack of balance and the ensuing destruction is seen in his life as well as in his wife's. He has an insensitive, unrealistic view toward people and things that even the wife can see. In his business he has ventured into two projects that have been less than successful. She says:

As it is,
The cottages Len built, sometimes we rent them,
Sometimes we don't. We've a good piece of shore
That ought to be worth something, and may yet.
But I don't count on it as much as Len. (11. 40-44)

And she also says:

He's into everything in town. This year
It's highways, and he's got too many men
Around him to look after that make waste.
They take advantage of him shamefully,
And proud, too, of themselves for doing so. (11.
71-75)

Len has gone to such an extreme that he has lost touch with
the reality of his own needs. But an even greater problem
appears in his relationship with his wife. Len is so con-
vinced that what his wife needs is a dose of hard work and
exposure to people that he moves them to the lake where he
plans to start a vacation resort. Because of his own over-
involvement with business and people, he believes his wife
can be helped with the move and change of social structure.
And while it is true that she lacks a certain type of con-
tact with others, Len grossly fails to be sensitive to her
real need for professional help.

In this poem, Frost has skillfully presented two people
who demonstrate the two extremes of social involvement: iso-
lation and over-association. But he has taken the contrary a
further step and illustrated in each case the negative effects
that result from such extreme positions.
Conclusion

Robert Frost's narratives are a gold mine of riches for the scholar interested in technique and methodology. He has given a legacy of poetic innovation in his fresh blank verse style and in his careful structuring of vocal phrasing. But it is my opinion that the form of the narratives is not their foremost value. As with the lyrics, the narratives are also filled with statements about life and the human condition. And even more than the lyrics, the narratives present walking, talking men and women concretely demonstrating Frost's concepts.

The concept of opposing forces in life was a basic truth for Frost. He saw the negative pull necessary for the positive reaction to occur. He believed that the chaotic, unsympathetic, and fearful in life could call out the orderly, sympathetic, and courageous in man and therefore create a balance. At any rate, the contraries as Frost perceived them come alive in a special way in his narrative poems. In these verse stories we meet the men and women of New England, living, loving, and surviving within their little universe. It is clear that such poems as "The Death of the Hired Man," "West-Running Brook," "The Hill Wife," and others have much more to
offer than a study in technique. Instead they are a group of finely-wrought art pieces that collectively demonstrate that life can be philosophically viewed as a field of opposing forces.
Notes


4 Squires, p. 50.


9 Thompson, p. 44.

10 Thompson, p. 118.


13 Barry, p. 78.

14 Thompson, p. 123.

15 Elizabeth Shepley Sergeant, Robert Frost: the Trial by

16 Sergeant, p. 320.
17 Sergeant; p. 232.
19 Thompson, p. 208.
21 Cook, p. 27.
24 Nitchie, p. 161.
26 Sergeant, p. 208.
29 Thompson, p. 112.
30 Cook, p. 27.
31 Sergeant, p. 17.
32 Sergeant, p. 232.
33 Sergeant, p. 200.
34 Ernest Poole, "When Frost Was Here," New Hampshire
Troubadour, 16 (1946), 12.

35 Nitchie, p. 118.
36 Nitchie, p. 118.


41 Gould, p. 80.
42 Thompson, p. 214.
43 Thompson, p. 214.
45 Thompson, p. 93.
46 Sergeant, p. 163.
48 Cook, p. 34.
49 Cook, p. 37.


52 Sergeant, p. 196.

53 Thompson, Robert Frost, the Early Years, p. xiii.
54 Grade, p. 277.


56 Sergeant, p. xx.

57 Sergeant, p. 358.

58 Thompson, Robert Frost, the Early Years, pp. 35-36.

59 Thompson, Robert Frost, the Early Years, p. 19.

60 Thompson, Robert Frost, the Early Years, p. xvi.

61 Thompson, Robert Frost, the Early Years, p. 212.

62 Grade, p. 275.

63 Lesley Frost, p. ix.

64 Sergeant, p. xxvi.

65 Sergeant, p. xviii.

66 Brower, p. 162.


68 Barry, p. 6.

69 Sergeant, p. 74.


71 Barry, p. 77.


74 Brower, pp. 188-189.

75 Brower, p. 189.

76 Barry, p. 37.

77 Thompson, Robert Frost, the Early Years, p. 352.

78 Barry, p. 64.

79 Doyle, p. 113.
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