

Cover of the book from which this Editor's Choice is excerpted.

EDITOR'S CHOICE

Elinor Frost: A Poet's Wife

SANDRA L. KATZ



Abstract: *During the 1980s and 1990s Westfield State University's Institute for Massachusetts Studies published over a dozen books on local history. In this issue we offer the following "Editor's Choice" as one of our most popular selections.*

*Despite inspiring the work of one of America's most well-loved poets, Elinor Frost has inspired precious little biographical research. Published in 1988, Sandra L. Katz's *Elinor Frost: A Poet's Wife* remains one of the touchstone pieces; more than twenty years later, no other full-length biography exists of Elinor Frost.*

Katz paints her subject as a talented and budding poet in her own right who may well have ceased writing creatively to protect the fragile ego of her then-high school boyfriend, "Rob" Frost. In these first chapters Katz describes the couple's secret, unofficial marriage and the strenuous circumstances leading up to their real marriage, all the while examining the poems that Robert wrote to mark this period and how they relate to his relationship with Elinor. These formative years, during which Robert's poetry consisted largely of fodder for his high school newspaper and, a few years later, a self-published volume hand-delivered to Elinor at school, form the basis of these excerpts from Katz's work.

*Sandra L. Katz is Professor Emerita of English at the University of Hartford. She is also the author of *Dearest of Geniuses: A Life**

of Theodate Pope Riddle (*CT: Tidemark Press, 2003*). *Dearest of Geniuses is the first definitive biography of one of America's first successful female architects.*

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PREFACE

Not much is known about Robert Frost's wife, Elinor Miriam White (1873 - 1938). There has never been a comprehensive biography of her, and in the many studies of her husband, she is a shadowy figure at best. Those who know Elinor Frost, from either Lawrance Thompson's "official" 1966 biography, *Robert Frost: The Early Years*, or from reviews of this encyclopedic work, would think her a strange and unattractive person.¹ For example, Martha Duffy, in her review, wrote:

The most enigmatic figure is Frost's wife, Elinor... Elinor Frost's accustomed weapon against her husband was uncanny silence... Elinor Frost's final silence was most appalling. As she lay dying, the poet desperately sought her blessing or some reassurance about his treatment of her. Though she had been at his side for forty-three years, she refused to admit him into her room.²

This description of Elinor is as jaundiced as the monstrous portrait Thompson drew of Robert Frost. The Frosts' daughter-in-law, Lillian LaBatt Frost, told me that when Thompson interviewed her, he did not want to hear anything that contradicted his notion of Elinor as an "unhappy and stern woman."³ In his more recent, 1984 study, *Frost: Literary Life Reconsidered*, author William Pritchard presented a more reasonable view of the poet, but he uncritically accepted Thompson's negative portrait of Elinor. Pritchard attached little importance to her as a person or as an influence on her husband and his art.⁴

I disagree with both Thompson and Pritchard. Elinor Frost was a complex human being whose life and personality are fascinating. She was a beautiful, intelligent, highly-educated woman from an affluent family who married a poor, hot-tempered, immature, younger man. Elinor had just graduated from college; "Rob" had dropped out of college and had not held a job for more than a few months. From their first meeting in high school, Elinor believed that Rob was a "good poet" and over twenty years later, when he published his first book of poetry, readers came to agree with her. Robert

Frost became famous, and his extraordinary fame changed his, Elinor's, and their children's lives.

This biography is not a psychoanalytic study. I tell Elinor's story, show her strengths and flaws, but I leave it to the reader to draw conclusions. I also hope to provide some new insights into Frost's poetry. A year before Elinor died, Frost confided to a friend: "She had been the unspoken half of everything I ever wrote, and both halves of many a thing from 'My November Guest' to the last stanzas of 'Two Tramps in Mud Time' – as you may have divined."⁵ Frost rarely wrote poems that were overtly autobiographical, but as Wellek and Warren point out: "[A] poet's work may be a mask, a dramatized convention, but it is frequently a conventionalization of his own experiences, his own life."⁶ As I found out more about Elinor, I realized that many of Frost's poems were based on their relationship and the experiences they shared. Elinor is the subject of certain poems: she is the "Subverted Flower," the girl Robert Frost passionately courted; she also is "The Silken Tent," the woman who was the center of his life. Thompson and others argue that because Frost gave "The Silken Tent" to his secretary, the poem was about his love for her, not for Elinor. But if one knows Elinor and the poem, as well as some facts about its composition, one realizes that "The Silken Tent" is Frost's final tribute to his wife. Another important influence Elinor has on her husband's poetry was indirect. Often ambiguous religious and political views in several poems derive not so much from inner conflict as from Frost's wrestling with the contrary ideas of his wife.

Thus, in this life of Elinor Frost, I hope to accomplish two goals: to make Elinor live again in these pages and to show her relationship to her husband's poems. Without Elinor, there might not have been the poetry of Robert Frost, or at least not the same poetry.

CHAPTER 1: "THE SUBVERTED FLOWER"

In the late spring of 1892, because of an oppressive heat wave and the fact that most American streets at the time were unpaved, dust covered the town of Lawrence, Massachusetts. The drought had become so severe that, according to the *Lawrence Eagle*, the meetings of the Water Board were as hot as the weather.⁷ At the latest session, the night before the high school graduation, the Superintendent of the Board angrily resigned. The following day, despite the almost unbearable heat, graduation exercises took place. Almost all the townspeople had made their way to City Hall, up the winding stairway under the stained-glass dome, and into the auditorium on the second floor, where the Lawrence High School Class of 1892 sat on the flower-lined



Elinor Miriam White as a student at St. Lawrence University.
Courtesy: Special Collections, St. Lawrence University Library, Canton, NY



Robert Lee Frost at age eighteen.

Courtesy: Special Collections, Jones Library, Amherst, Massachusetts

stage. The class speakers sat in the front row. The girls looked cool in their white dresses, the boys flushed and uncomfortable in stiff collars.

There would be many speeches that hot afternoon, the most important being those made by the two valedictorians, Elinor Miriam White and Robert Lee Frost. Elinor and Rob, as he was called, had achieved the same grade averages when the valedictorian was chosen, though Elinor's final grades were higher. Principal Nathaniel Goodwin, however, decided to have young Frost deliver the valedictory address. Elinor would be recognized as the co-valedictorian, but she would give the salutatory speech.⁸

After the class historian delivered a witty description of the highlights of the past few years at Lawrence High, Elinor White stood and came forward to the podium. Barely five feet tall and slim, she wore a long white dress with a fluted collar; her lovely cameo face was framed by thick dark hair pulled up at the back of her neck. Pausing before she began, she gave the impression of being entirely calm and self-assured, even though she was nervous speaking in public for the first time. For weeks before graduation, her co-valedictorian Robert Frost had been terrified to the point of becoming physically ill. Elinor had tried to help Rob by having him rehearse his speech with her. Now, as Elinor was about to speak, she noticed that the seat at the end of the first row was empty. Rob had fled the stage.⁹

While Elinor slowly delivered her speech, Rob paced offstage. Elinor's topic was "Conversation as a Force in Life," in which she expressed romantic, idealistic notions: "Our moral and intellectual welfare," she said, "requires that we exchange a few words each day with persons whose views of life are broad and sympathetic, with whom there is no restraint, who look into our eyes and give answers to our meaning rather than our words."¹⁰ Elinor sincerely believed that people needed others with whom they truly could communicate. Her emphasis was on key phrases: "*exchange a few words*," rather than talking endlessly, and "*give answer to our meaning rather than our words*." Her final point was: "Say *nothing* if there is nothing in you that imperatively demands a voice."¹¹ Elinor preferred silence to frivolous conversation.

By the time Elinor finished her speech and the applause subsided, Robert Lee Frost was back in his seat waiting to give the valedictory address, "A Monument to After-Thought Revealed." He stood and walked to the podium. His blond hair was uncombed, and his blue eyes stared out defiantly as if he were facing a firing squad. He began the speech at breakneck speed, talking faster and faster, unable to slow down. With almost hysterical melodrama, he practically shouted several passages.¹² The members of the audience were mesmerized, as if they were watching an extraordinary feat, like a tightrope

walker doing his tricks while racing across the highwire. Elinor knew that few in the audience could possibly follow the complexities of what she believed to be a brilliant speech. In fact, Rob's repetition of the central phrase, "after-thought," started to sound absurd.

While Rob spoke, Elinor maintained a calm, interested expression. Finally, he relaxed, and turning slightly to face his classmates, he delivered the valediction, beginning with "And now a last after-thought." After-thought. What Rob meant was his own understanding of the importance of memory, of thinking about the past before one decides on its meaning. As he continued to present his ideas to the class, he spoke with greater assurance and force, and his idealism struck the right note: "Who or what can bound our aspiration? . . . Let hope be limitless for all and let each follow hope as best he may."¹³ Elinor shared Rob's ambition. She too would go on to college and develop her mind and her talents. Exhausted, Rob finished his exhortation and returned to his seat at the end of the row.

Taking over the podium, Principal Goodwin announced that the exercises would conclude with the awarding of prizes. Although some of the winners knew and waited expectantly for the announcement of their names, Rob appeared shocked to receive the Hood Medal for General Excellence in his studies. Although her grades were higher than his, Elinor received no prize. Then, the Class of '92 sang a hymn, with words by Robert Lee Frost and music by Beethoven.¹⁴ Elinor's mother helped Rob arrange the music for his poem.

The graduates filed out of City Hall onto the front lawn, across from the Common in the center of town. Overlooking them from the top of the City Hall cupola was a nine-foot statue of a golden eagle, poised as if ready to soar. At the public well, which had gone dry during the hot spell, a tin cup swung on its metal chain. The graduation of 1892 was over.

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The past year had not been particularly unusual in Lawrence, Massachusetts. Winter had begun early. From late fall in 1891, snow had blanketed the town, delighting the children. On their way to Lawrence High School, the youngsters chattered and laughed as they walked under the snow-frosted elms of the Common. After school, there were sleigh rides and evening socials; candy pulls were especially popular. For other residents of Lawrence, however, winter deepened the gloom of the gray mill town. They spent their days just a few blocks from the Common inside the long wall of attached brownish-red brick factories. After the great stone dam was built

across the Merrimack River, the mills sprung up fast in Lawrence. They lined the river, nearly blocking the view of the beautiful Merrimack, which once could be seen from the Common.

With the coming of spring, the mood of the town was more cheerful. At the high school there was great excitement about graduation, and most members of the class were eagerly making plans to leave Lawrence and go off to college. But spring did little to lift the spirits of the mill workers. The daily paper, *The Lawrence Eagle*, testified to their misery by reporting grotesque accidents at the mills and a surprisingly large number of suicides for such a small town. In May, the townspeople read that the women who lived next door to Edwin and Henrietta White on Valley Street had hanged herself.¹⁵

The Whites were shocked by the suicide, but Elinor's father, Edwin White, was a quiet man who would not gossip about the misfortunes of others. Because of a loss of faith, Edwin had left the ministry – to the chagrin of his wife. Henrietta White, Elinor's mother, came from a socially-prominent Lawrence family, and she viewed her husband's decision as a disgrace, especially since he now made his former hobby of cabinet-making into a full-time occupation. Henrietta and Edwin did not have the kind of "broad and sympathetic" relationship that their daughter's speech described. In fact, her parents barely tolerated each other.¹⁶

Edwin White was an aloof man. Superior in intelligence, introverted, and stubborn, Edwin had little in common with his wife Henrietta and two of his three daughters. Attractive Henrietta delighted in gossip, and Leona, the most beautiful of the girls, resembled her mother in personality. Leona was vivacious and talkative, and she also was a talented artist, especially in portraiture. The Whites' oldest daughter, Ada, had been sickly for as long as anyone could remember and was practically an invalid, confined to her bed. No one knew exactly what was wrong with Ada, but like Poe's Roderick Usher, she complained of terrible sensitivity to noise and light. The shades drawn, Ada stayed in her bedroom, too tired or ill to carry on conversations with her family.¹⁷

Edwin did feel an affinity, however, for his youngest child, Elinor.¹⁸ The Whites' third daughter was similar to her sisters in some ways, but was most like her father in character and personality. Not quite so gifted as Leona in art, Elinor had some artistic talent; she loved to paint and was a "good drawer."¹⁹ When she was in the eighth grade, some of her drawings were displayed in an exhibit. Elinor had fine features rather than the striking beauty of her mother and sister Leona, and she lacked their energy. For a while Edwin and Henrietta feared that Elinor might become as sickly as Ada. Elinor was out of school for over two years because of a heart condition, what the doctors

called "slow fever."²⁰ She eventually recovered, and when Elinor returned to Lawrence High, she quickly made up the work she missed.

Elinor always got along well with her father, but she found it difficult to talk to her mother. Elinor rarely criticized Henrietta; rather, she showed her disapproval by maintaining long silences when her mother attempted what Elinor considered trivial conversation. Sometimes in her replies to Henrietta, Elinor implied that her mother was not intelligent enough to speak with her daughter. It was curious that Elinor's friend Rob, a frequent visitor at the Whites' home, did not share Elinor's opinion about meaningless conversation. Rob actually enjoyed gossiping with Mrs. White, and he and Henrietta were good friends.²¹

In contrast to his wife's enthusiasm about their daughter's beau, Edwin did not approve of young Robert Frost. Although the boy had achieved excellent grades at the high school and Elinor was certain that one day he would be successful, her father thought otherwise. He doubted that Rob would ever amount to much, since his recent outstanding academic and athletic records had been preceded by a reputation for being lazy.²² Most people saw Rob as a dreamer, not a doer, and Edwin thought he probably would end up working in the mills.²³ In addition, Rob was two years younger than Elinor and immature. Elinor knew few others with whom to compare Rob; there were only six boys in her high school class.²⁴ The poorest boys in Lawrence quit school early to work in the mills, and the wealthier left to attend nearby Andover Academy to prepare for Harvard.²⁵ Because Edwin wanted Elinor to meet other young men when she went to college, he looked forward to the separation of the two after graduation: Elinor at St. Lawrence University in Canton, New York, and Rob at Dartmouth. Robert would attend Dartmouth because his grandparents did not wish him to go to Harvard, the alma mater of his dead father, their son. Since Rob's grandfather had offered to pay his tuition, Rob had no choice.²⁶ In any case, Edwin White was determined that unlike the other women in his family, Elinor would become well-educated. Concerned about the extent of her romantic attachment to young Robert Frost, he waited impatiently for her to graduate from high school so that he could send her away to college.

Elinor had met Robert Frost at the beginning of her senior year. By chance they were assigned seats next to each other in the large study hall used to house all three classes at Lawrence High.²⁷ Elinor knew all about Rob, the most important boy in school: editor of the school newspaper, *The Bulletin*, officer of the debating club, member of both the football and the baseball teams, and the smartest one in the class. After his poem, "La Noche

Triste,” appeared in *The Bulletin*, he also had the reputation of being the best poet in the school.

Rob was quite good-looking in a boyish way. He was tall and thin, and the dominant feature of his sensitive face was his large, light-blue eyes, which sometimes were hidden by unruly locks of thick, wavy, blond hair. Rob, however, was not popular. There were stories about his bad temper and fights he had been in. Many of his classmates resented his need to prove his superiority and they thought him to be aloof, conceited, and arrogant.²⁸ But Elinor did not agree. She felt that she understood Robert Frost.

Because she was older, having returned to school after her long illness, Elinor did not know many of her classmates, and she shared Rob’s sense of being an outsider. Rob commuted daily by train the ten miles from Salem, New Hampshire, to Lawrence. When Rob, his sister Jeanie, and his widowed mother first came to Lawrence, they lived with his father’s parents in the town, though they had been made to feel like poor relations.²⁹ Trying to support her small family by teaching school, his mother found a position teaching in Salem. Isabelle Moody Frost, however, was a poor disciplinarian, and she was having difficulty keeping her position.³⁰ In addition, Rob’s mother could not manage the little money that she earned, and as a result the three were becoming nearly destitute.

Elinor realized that Rob’s proud, antagonistic attitude was a mask behind which he hid deep feelings of insecurity and shame that stemmed from his poverty. She also was aware of her friend’s great resentment toward his grandfather. When his daughter-in-law and her children had returned from San Francisco with his son’s body, he wanted to keep the more spacious second floor flat for rent-paying tenants, so he only would give them a small attic apartment in his two-family house.³¹ Rob’s hostility toward William Prescott Frost had since spread to others who might think him inferior in any way—be it as an athlete, a scholar, or even as a poet.

Rob had joined the football team because one of the players teased him by implying that he wasn’t good enough to play, and his high grades were also the result of his efforts to surpass his classmates. When Elinor realized that she posed a threat to Rob for his valedictory honors, she was glad he did not act resentfully towards her. In fact, when it appeared that her grades would be higher than his by the end of the year, he told Principal Goodwin to let Elinor be the valedictorian. The principal decided that the two would share the honors, but that Rob would give the address to the class.³² He thought that the young man’s charge to strive, to seek, and to aspire would be more effective than one given by the demure Miss White.

The fact that Rob's competitiveness and jealousy did not extend to Elinor was evident in his admiration for her accomplishments. For example, when Elinor showed Rob some of her own poems, as editor of *The Bulletin*, he published two of them. "Now" appeared in the September 1891 issue.³³

"It might have been," means nothing;
 The strange past changeth not;
 Even God on high can not make die
 The evils I have wrought;

And, "O, *that it may be*,"
 Means little or means much;
 Our best hopes die, while we but sigh
 As they vanish at Time's touch.

"Oh, *that it might be now*,"
 Means all of life to me,
 O "Now," thou hast all of the past
 And much that is to be.

"Now" appeared with the pseudonym ORLINN, which again appeared under a second poem that Rob published, in the October issue of *The Bulletin*. "An Infinite Longing," which is more complex than "Now," indicates a religious as well as a romantic speaker.³⁴

An Infinite Longing

The Father Omnipotent dwelt
 In His eternal place;
 Ruler supreme was He,
 Over the realms of space.
 'Round Him angelic throngs
 Chanted eternal praise,
 And all the powers obeyed His will
 As they moved in their various ways.

But still the Infinite Mind
 Craved something more than this;
 To rule with power supreme
 Gives not eternal bliss;

To rule with realms of space,
 Obeded by the powers above,
 Gives not the joy to The Infinite Mind
 That does our finite love:

So we were made to serve
 The Ruler of heaven above,
 And into us God breathed
 His spirit of Infinite Love;
 It is not strange we find
The craving to be loved
That was in the Infinite Mind.

Both “Now” and “An Infinite Longing” employ italics, a device Elinor also used when she wrote letters. Elinor had the habit of over-emphasizing and becoming intense at times in speaking as in writing, yet her poems indicated promise and talent.

Rather suddenly, however, Elinor stopped writing poetry. After giving Rob some love poems and receiving his assurance that he admired them, Elinor acted strangely, denying that she had written the poems. Further, she told Rob that her sister Leona was the poet, although artistic Leona never wrote poetry.³⁵ Elinor apparently had sensed jealousy behind Rob’s compliments. Realizing how fierce Rob’s competitive spirit was on the football field and the baseball diamond, as well as in the classroom, she also knew that his dream was to become a famous poet. Since he judged himself in comparison to “rivals,” the success of others threatened him. Elinor feared that her poetic efforts weren’t worth the effect they might have on Rob, or – more particularly – on their relationship.

From the beginning Elinor and Rob knew they were destined for each other. They were kindred spirits who shared idealistic aspirations, a love for literature, and a feeling of separateness from others.³⁶ Rob was convinced that their being named co-valedictorians was a sign that they also were meant to share their lives. Even the peculiar similarity of their names was portentous to their poetic, young minds. “Frost” and “White” might suggest the loveliness of a New England winter or the cold, icy blankness of death, but negative meanings did not occur to the young lovers. Elinor and Rob saw only that theirs was an extraordinary relationship. When she described in her graduation speech those persons “whose views of life are broad and sympathetic, with whom there is no restraint,” Elinor had Rob and herself in mind. They both were confident that their attraction to each other derived

from deeper, more beautiful feelings than the shallow ones of most other people, for Elinor's and Rob's love was based on intellectual, spiritual, and poetic sympathies.

Elinor was certain of two things: that Rob Frost was a good poet and that he was deeply in love with her. If it were up to him, they would marry immediately after graduation. But she held back. Although they had secretly become engaged, she was determined to go to college. Earlier Rob tried to persuade Elinor to attend Harvard Annex, the new women's division of Harvard University, so that they could be married while earning their degrees.³⁷ Even before old Mr. Frost insisted that his grandson go to Dartmouth not Harvard, Elinor had refused. Her father wanted her to go to New York and, besides, she had won a scholarship to St. Lawrence University.

The summer after graduation, Elinor and Rob took excursions up the Merrimack River to their favorite picnic spots. They were amused when the little Holmes boy tagged along and asked to go with them on the boat Rob had rented. Since the Holmes family had been kind to Rob, he responded by being attentive to the two youngest children,³⁸ but this summer Rob wanted to be alone with Elinor, for they had much to discuss.

As when Rob used to walk Elinor home from Lawrence High, they spoke of literature, especially poetry. Elinor had read more widely in English literature, and inspired by her superior knowledge, Rob read all the authors she spoke of and tried to find ones she did not know. One of his first gifts to her was a two-volume edition of the works of the poet, Edward Rowland Sill, while a second gift was the poetry of another recently deceased New England poet.³⁹ Rob presented Elinor with an olive, cloth-bound volume, stamped with gold Indian pipes on the cover, with the title, *POEMS*, by Emily Dickinson. They both preferred Dickinson to Sill; on literary matters, they always agreed.⁴⁰ In Dickinson, Elinor felt a nature particularly sympathetic to her own. Disdaining fame and writing her remarkable verse in the small town of Amherst, Massachusetts, among only the family and few friends she loved, Dickinson had preferred to live in quiet dignity and seclusion, on an idealistic and elevated plain of art.

Elinor too was an idealist; during her senior year she had written an essay on the contemporary novel in which she expressed her dislike of realism, "that something which strips from life the glamour of fancy and imagination and accentuates its sordid details." The ideal was "as difficult to outline as that far off hill against the sky, but which is surely the best of life."⁴¹ Rob agreed. He also spurned sordid reality and admired the ideal.

That summer Elinor and Rob discovered together the poet who best expressed the highest of romantic ideals: Percy Bysshe Shelley.⁴² As Rob

rowed their little boat on the Merrimack, Elinor held a volume of Shelley's poems. That summer, they read practically everything that Shelley had written. How pleasant it was for Elinor to sit under the trees, hidden from the world, and listen to Rob read. Sometimes Elinor could hear the laughter and shouts from excursion boats that went by. But most of the time she felt at peace, contented to be alone with Rob, cool in this shady spot, hearing only the summer breezes through the leaves and the glorious poetry of Shelley. Rob was especially fervent when he read to her the poet's long poem, "Epipsychidion."⁴³

Shelley's impassioned, platonic love for a young woman, Emily, who had been imprisoned in a convent, spoke directly to Rob and Elinor. Rob read certain passages with deep feeling:

I love thee,....
 Would we two had been twins of the same mother!
 Spouse! Sister! Angel! Pilot of the Fate
 Whose course has been so starless! O too late
 Beloved. O too soon adored, by me!

Shelley's frequent repetition of "Emily" in the poem started to sound like "Elinor" after a while. Rob continued:

We—are we not formed, as notes of music are,
 For one another, though dissimilar;
 Such difference without discord, as can
 Make the sweetest sounds...?

The dramatic conclusion of the poem could have been a prophesy about Elinor and Rob's future:

We shall become the same, we shall be one
 Spirit within two frames,
 One hope within two wills, one will beneath
 Two overshadowing minds, one life, one death.

That summer Elinor and Rob discussed Shelley, expressing their mutual wonder at the beauty of his poetry and their admiration for the originality of the radical poet's thinking. Agreeing with Shelley about the hypocrisies of society, Rob praised him especially for his stance on marriage, believing that society had no right to institutionalize love. True lovers should not have

to legalize their love for one another, according to Shelley, to degrade their relationship by procuring a marriage license and participating in a public ceremony. If two people were soul-mates, such as Percy Bysshe Shelley and Emily, or Robert Lee Frost and Elinor White, they need not conform to the rules society makes for ordinary people. Inspired by "Epipsychidion," Elinor and Rob conducted their own private wedding ceremony. Solemnly exchanging vows by the banks of the Merrimack, each gave the other a simple gold ring.⁴⁴

Rob's long poem, "The Subverted Flower,"⁴⁵ which would not be published until almost fifty years later, suggests an incident that occurred because Elinor considered their "marriage" spiritual, while Rob revealed that he wanted more than a platonic relationship. After their "marriage," Elinor was shocked when he made a clumsy attempt to embrace her. When she rejected his advances, her fear and disgust became apparent, and his frustration and shame turned to anger. The opening lines set the scene of the two young lovers:

She drew back; he was calm
 "It is this that had the power."
 And he lashed his open palm
 With the tender-headed flower.

The tension between the reluctant girl and the calm boy is typical of romantic scenes in the Victorian Age, but the young man's words and action are unusual. His lashing his palm with the "tender-hearted flower," a symbol of female sexuality, suggests the strong physical desires that the girl does not understand or refuses to recognize:

He smiled for her to smile,
 But she was either blind
 Or willfully unkind.

Frustrated by her silence, the boy throws away the flower and loses his self-possession:

And another sort of smile
 Caught up like fingertips
 The corners of his lips
 And cracked his ragged muzzle.

The word “muzzle” suggests that the boy’s lust has distorted his appearance, making him appear an animal. With her beautiful, long hair, the girl stands apart from him in the meadow, and he longs to touch her:

She was standing to the waist
 In goldenrod and brake
 Her shining hair displaced.
 He stretched her either arm
 As if she made it ache
 To clasp her—not to harm,
 As if he could not spare
 To touch her neck and hair.

One sees Elinor with the braids that she usually wore as a crown loosened, her thick, shining, chestnut-brown hair let down and free.

Desperately hoping that she shares his passion, the boy asks, “If this has come to us / And not to me alone--,” but her lack of response makes him feel clumsy and bestial: “And the effort made him choke / like a tiger at a bone.” Frozen in an attempt to dissuade him from making any further advances, the girl sees him as brutal:

She dared not stir a foot,
 Lest movement would provoke
 The demon of pursuit
 That slumbers in a brute.

Hearing her mother’s voice, she feels relief but fears that he “would pounce to end it all / Before her mother came.”

The speaker’s sympathy clearly is with the young man, for there is another consequence of the girl’s rejection. Her response reveals a lack of passion for her lover, a distrust of him, and even more important, a disgust over his actions that the young boy then accepts and shares. He now sees himself as the repulsive animal she views him as, and he becomes agitated and ashamed:

A hand hung like a paw,
 An arm worked like a saw
 As if to be persuasive,
 An ingratiating laugh
 That cut the snout in half,
 An eye became evasive.

Deeply offended, the girl believes that the flower, an obvious sexual symbol, “had marred a man.” She cannot see “that the flower might be / Other than base and fetid,” and she does not realize that her attitude has made the incident sordid—sexual passion does not have to be brutal. It is her fault, not only his, that things have turned out badly; in fact, she has hurt him more than he has hurt her. Because she has seen him as an animal, the young man becomes the beast she believes him to be:

She looked and saw the worst
And the dog or what it was
Obeying bestial laws,
A coward save at night,

Turned from the place and ran.
She heard him stumble first
And use his hands in flight
She heard him bark outright.

Elinor’s capability for biting retorts surfaces here when, having reduced her lover to a doglike state, the young woman further takes the offensive by attacking him verbally:

And, oh, for one so young
The bitter words she spit
Like some tenacious bit
That will not leave the tongue.

Ironically, in her cruelty, the girl is as much of a beast—a mad dog—as he:

Her mother wiped the foam
From her chin, picked up her comb
And drew her backward home.

During that summer on the banks of the Merrimack River, Elinor’s “too meager heart” degraded Rob. She was a “subverted flower” or a subverting one as well, who had turned his romantic sexuality into bestial lust. Perplexed and humiliated by the experience, young Rob felt anger toward the girl he loved. Elinor was “a woman and a puzzle,” a complex enigma whom he

would try to understand, please, and at times strike out against in the way he knew best. For only in his poems could Frost think through and order his past experiences, achieving what he later would call “a momentary stay against confusion.”⁴⁶

CHAPTER II

“A LOVE THAT WANTED RE-RENEWING”

In the fall both Elinor and Rob left for college, she with enthusiasm, and he with dread. Before long Rob was sick of studying and lonely for Elinor. From her letters, it was apparent that she loved college life – too much, in Rob’s mind. On the other hand, he knew he couldn’t stay at Dartmouth. He took some pleasure in participating in typical college pranks, but he was becoming lonelier and more depressed as the New Hampshire snows deepened. At Christmas, Elinor wrote that because of the expense and the bad weather, she was going to stay in the college town of Canton, New York over the vacation. Finally, Rob left Dartmouth. Telling only one of his fellow students, he slipped away early in the morning. Because his mother was having difficulty dealing with some of the “ruffians” in her new teaching position in Methuen, he used the excuse that he had to go back home to help her.⁴⁷

Disappointed in Rob, Elinor wrote him that he had abandoned the ideals and aspirations that expressed in his valedictory address less than a year earlier. Stung by her criticism, Rob told Elinor that she should leave college, that he needed her, and that they should marry. Elinor refused, but Rob continued to press his case. After all, he wrote, his leaving Dartmouth was her fault to some extent; if she had come home during Christmas vacation, he would not have become despondent.⁴⁸ But Elinor was determined to finish what she started – she would get her college degree. There was nothing further to discuss. Rob had been right about his fears that Elinor was enjoying college life. She was busy and happy, and her academic record was outstanding. Shy and aloof, Elinor impressed her classmates and professors with her superior intelligence. As a result, many of the young men at St. Lawrence University were in awe of her. Her quiet manner, serious dark eyes, and lovely face attracted them. She was not easy to be with, however. Elinor was the opposite of a flirt; in fact, it was difficult to think of her in a romantic way. It was not that she wasn’t friendly; everybody liked Elinor, but she was not interested in frivolous things. The young men at St. Lawrence admired her, but they did not tease her or joke with her.⁴⁹ One student, Glenn Kratzer, who was too awkward to approach the more popular, easy-going coeds, took Elinor

to several school functions. Another close friend, Owen Young, was already engaged, but he and Elinor happened to be in some of the same classes, and they often continued class discussions after class. Elinor felt a need to talk to someone with whom she could communicate on an elevated level, and she found that she could have meaningful conversations with Owen. Never telling him that she too was engaged, though unofficially, or that she was unofficially “married” as well, she did mention Rob a few times, but only as a boy from home who wrote “good poetry.” Owen’s impression was that Elinor still had not met the man of her dreams, who, he suspected, would look a lot like a “knight in armor.”⁵⁰

Back in Lawrence, Elinor’s father was not at all surprised that Rob had left Dartmouth. Edwin White’s low opinion of Rob was further confirmed when he heard that Rob, trying to help his mother, had struck several of her unruly pupils.⁵¹ Edwin also disapproved of Rob’s latest project. Because Henrietta White was convinced that her invalid daughter Ada must be moved from the noisy mill-town of Lawrence, she and Rob were making plans to take her to a secluded place that Rob knew in Salem, New Hampshire.⁵² Edwin could often hear his wife and Rob talking in the kitchen. Rob and Henrietta got along well, and Rob was a frequent visitor since he left Dartmouth. Henrietta went so far as to share with Rob her letters from Elinor. Insensitive to Rob’s feelings, she read Elinor’s descriptions of social events and the boys she had met. Henrietta would read on, while Rob listened, tormented by the thought of Elinor with other men.

In the spring Rob took charge of the arrangements to move Ada and Henrietta to the old Oliver Saunders’ house in Salem. Ada was brought on a litter by her mother and Rob, who was now unemployed. Shortly after they arrived, they were joined by the Whites’ second daughter, Leona, who, although she was pregnant, had run away from her husband because she no longer loved him. Rob gave the beautiful Leona some advice: she should not return to her husband—and she should try to induce an abortion by taking mustard baths. Rob bought a large supply of mustard at the local general store, but after many baths, Leona was still pregnant.⁵³ The spirits of the group were high, however, as Ada’s health had improved, and Rob and the vivacious Leona were having a grand time together. They planted a garden and took long walks along the shore of Lake Canobie. Suddenly Henrietta White had a disturbing premonition that Rob and Leona were falling in love, and, as usual, she acted quickly. She sent a telegram to inform Elinor that Ada’s condition had deteriorated. Elinor must leave school and come at once to Salem. She implied that if Elinor waited, it might be too late.⁵⁴

At St. Lawrence University, Elinor wondered about her mother's telegram. Was Ada really that dangerously ill? Elinor knew her mother's tendency to exaggerate and act impulsively. It was only April, and if Elinor left school, she might miss the final examinations and have to repeat the entire term. But how could she refuse her mother's summons to come to Salem immediately?

When Elinor arrived at the Saunders homestead, she soon realized why her mother had lied to her about Ada. The truth was that Ada was better than she had been for years. Elinor was exasperated—Henrietta's concern that Rob and Leona were in love was ridiculous. Even Leona was embarrassed by her mother's suspicions; Leona wasn't at all interested in her sister's boyfriend. Indeed, right after Elinor came, Leona left Salem and returned to her husband, and Rob did not mind at all. On the contrary, he was overjoyed that Elinor had come. Almost immediately, Rob began to beg Elinor not to return to college, insisting that they marry. Finally she quietly and firmly spoke her mind. How could he talk of marriage, she asked. He had no way of earning a living, and he had no plans. What kind of future would they have? How could he have given up his studies, betrayed his promises, disappointed her, his mother, and his grandparents? Also, Elinor asked why didn't he care that she wanted an education?⁵⁵

Angered and shocked at this barrage, Rob shot back accusations of his own.⁵⁶ What new boyfriend had she met at college? Who had influenced her to speak this way to him? She knew what his plans were, he exclaimed. He was going to become a famous poet. He didn't need a college education for that. He could always earn a living—teach school or work at the mill—to support them. What was her real reason for wanting to go back to college? Who was her new interest?

Affected by the confrontation, Elinor made a difficult decision. She would stay, but only for the summer. She would take a chance on losing the term, but she intended to go back to St. Lawrence in the fall. Rob's happiness was almost complete; for him the summer of 1893 would be idyllic. There would be picnics in the woods and rowing across Canobie Lake with Elinor.

But things had changed. There were no more arguments—just the opposite. Elinor had little to say, and her long silences became increasingly frequent.⁵⁷ She retreated into the pattern of behavior that she, like her father, had exhibited in their home on Valley Street in Lawrence. As if they meant to punish those for whom they felt anger or disapproval, both Edwin and his daughter would remain silent, and attempts by other members of the family to draw them out would only elicit a terse remark.

Elinor's behavior frightened Rob. Desperately he tried to reestablish their relationship, but feelings of resentment darkened her mood. She looked at

him with detachment, not listening to his words. Rob became more nervous and evasive, and he accused her of not loving him or at least not loving him as much as he loved her.

That fall when Elinor returned to college, Rob got a job at the Arlington Mill, fulfilling Edwin White's prediction that like the other poor boys of Lawrence, Rob would spend his life in the mills. Later, in "A Lone Striker," Frost would recall the day he left the mill.⁵⁸ Actually, Rob had not made a deliberate decision. As usual he had overslept, and on that particular morning he arrived at the Arlington Mill as the bell tolled and the gate closed. Standing outside the "many-many-eyed" mill, Rob resented being locked out. He would have to wait a half-hour and his pay would be reduced.⁵⁹ In this poem, he satirically notes that he could not hope that his forlorn machine's heart would not break, and he views the incident as a fateful sign that he should change his direction:

He knew a path that wanted walking;
 He knew a spring that wanted drinking;
 A thought that wanted further thinking;
 A love that wanted re-renewing.

Rob would not give up either his poetic ambition or his love of Elinor, the two being intricately connected.

Rob left the mill to become an elementary school teacher in South Salem. Shortly after, he wrote Elinor that his poem "My Butterfly: An Elegy" had been accepted for publication in a magazine, *The Independent*. Rob's mournful description of the dead butterfly reflected his own distraught state over Elinor: ironically, his despair had produced his first poetic triumph.

During her college years, Elinor realized how deeply Rob was hurt every time she did not come home to be with him, but since she had decided to accelerate her studies in order to complete her college degree in three rather than four years, she couldn't take time off, even for a weekend. In 1894, Elinor doubled her courses, studying in her junior year two semesters of German, French and Physics, and one semester each of History, Botany, Parliamentary Law, Debate, Rhetoricals, Cicero, Latin Prose, Latin, Chemistry, Ecology, English, Ethics, Logic and Economy. With this schedule, she had little time for a social life, but Rob was certain that she had found someone else. He worried that Elinor had changed, influenced by her college friends, and he wrote her of his fears, expressing them poetically. "Warning" he published later, disguising its autobiographical nature by changing the "She" in the final line to "He."⁶⁰

Warning

The day will come when you will cease to know,
 The heart will cease to tell you; sadder yet,
 Tho you say o'er and o'er what once you knew,
 You will forget, you will forget.

There is no memory for what is true,
 The heart once silent. Well may you regret
 Cry out upon it, that you have known all
 But to forget, but to forget.

Blame no one but yourself for this, lost soul!
 I feared it would be so that day we met
 Long since, and you were changed. And I said then,
 He will forget, he will forget.

With the reversal of pronouns, Frost's voice comes through in that of the woman; this practice will appear in later poems as well. The speaker fears her lover's rejection. She sees him as someday regretting his mistreatment of her, which is the result of his being too caught up with new friends. He has become a "lost soul," neglecting his true love whom he will most likely forget. Although it was unreasonable for Rob to fear that Elinor was staying away from him, at the end of the semester she informed him of new plans that, to him, justified his suspicions. In the spring of 1894, she accepted a summer position in Boston, working for a composer.⁶¹ It was too good an opportunity to miss.

Finally Elinor came home at the end of the summer, and Rob immediately ran over to the Whites' home to see her. The Whites were entertaining the president of St. Lawrence University, and when Elinor came to the door and saw Rob standing there, breathless from running, dressed in old clothes, and his hair disheveled, she hesitated. A wave of disappointment and shame swept over him and he bolted up the street.⁶²

That fall, Elinor was anxious to return to college for her senior year. Although Henrietta did not notice, Elinor's doubts about Rob were evident, as was her father's unspoken satisfaction over the anticipated estrangement. Rob was not working; he could not find a suitable job and, equally disturbing to Elinor, he had stopped writing poetry.

At St. Lawrence, Elinor met another young man, Lorenzo Dow Case. Handsome, sophisticated, and charming, Lorenzo was the “Beau Brummel” of the class of 1895.⁶³ It would have been difficult not to be attracted to Lorenzo, and Elinor was flattered when he asked her to save one evening a week for him. Elinor wrote her mother about the arrangement, not knowing that Henrietta would inform Rob. The other girls were clearly jealous when Lorenzo came by week after week. Little did they know, however, that he only admired the lovely Miss White; he always acted properly and never spoke of love. Unlike Rob, Lorenzo was mature and polished, but somewhat bland. He lacked the passionate nature that accompanies poetic genius.

On a cold, gray morning in November, a visitor for Elinor White was announced at Miss Moore's, a private home for St. Lawrence coeds, where strict rules were enforced to insure the reputation of the young ladies.⁶⁴ Who could it be at this early hour, Elinor wondered. Was there something wrong at home? Upon hearing the description of her gentleman caller, Elinor knew it was Rob. She passed the other girls on her way to the door. How could he embarrass her so? Was he going to plead with her again – so all could hear – to leave college, and to marry him? Elinor opened the door, stepped onto the porch landing, and closed the door behind her.

In the bitter cold Rob looked awkward, pathetic, and childish. He stammered. Could he come in? Of course not! Could they go into Canton and talk? No. She'd see him when she went home to Lawrence, she said. He held out a small book. Not looking at it, Elinor took it from him off-handedly. Then, without a word, Rob turned and ran back down toward the Canton railroad station.

When she went back into the house, Elinor glanced at the little book he had given her. On the cover was the title, *Twilight*, a book of poems by Rob that he had privately published. Besides “My Butterfly,” there were four others that described the summer after their high school graduation: “An Unhistoric Spot,” “Summering,” “The Falls,” and “Twilight.” Except for “My Butterfly,” which had some lines of grace and beauty, these youthful poems were not at all extraordinary, but they did justify Elinor's opinion of Rob as a “good poet.” Realizing that he had traveled through the night from Lawrence to give her *Twilight* and that he had bought a new suit for the occasion, Elinor sat down and wrote a letter of apology.⁶⁵

She did not know that when Rob left her he went down to the railroad station, but instead of waiting for the train, he walked down the tracks in the bitter cold, tearing his copy of *Twilight* into small pieces and scattering them as he walked. She was unaware also that after he received her letter, which did not tell him what he wanted to hear, he made up his mind that he would

destroy more than his poetry. On November 6, 1894, he left Lawrence, Massachusetts, and headed for the Dismal Swamp in Virginia, a fitting place to throw away one's life.⁶⁶

When Rob disappeared, his mother was frantic. Elinor wrote letters to Belle Frost, but she remained at St. Lawrence. Had Rob really run away to commit suicide? Three weeks dragged by before Elinor heard that Rob had returned, that he had suddenly appeared at a candy pull at the Holmes's house...⁶⁷

In the fall, Elinor joined Belle Frost's teaching staff at the small private school Belle had established in an office building in the center of Lawrence, and Rob got back the teaching position in South Salem that he had held earlier. Finally, on December 19, 1895, a cold winter day, the wedding took place in one of the two office rooms Belle rented for her school.⁶⁸ There were few guests. With her serene, dark beauty, Belle looked more like the bride's mother than the groom's, as she sat with Rob's younger sister, blonde, blue-eyed Jeanie. The Reverend John A. Hayes began the ceremony. Humiliated by the absence of her husband, Henrietta was furious that Edwin had let everybody in town know that he disapproved of Rob. She had wanted to have the wedding at their home, but Edwin wouldn't listen; then he refused to attend his daughter's wedding. As the brief service came to an end, Elinor could sense a change in her twenty-one year-old husband. He stood tall, remarkably calm and confident, his blue eyes reflecting triumph.



Editor's Note: Both Elinor and Robert Frost had roots in Lawrence, Massachusetts. In their life together they resided in Amherst as well as on farms in Vermont and New Hampshire. Katz's study provides an in-depth description and analysis of the life of Elinor Frost, focusing not only on her role as wife and mother, but, as this excerpt reveals, her contributions as a collaborator whose assistance and inspiration played an important role in shaping her husband's poetry.

If you would like to continue reading, copies of *Elinor Frost: A Poet's Wife* can be ordered from www.amazon.com or from the *Historical Journal of Massachusetts*, Westfield State University, 577 Western Ave., Westfield MA 01086. If you order directly from HJM, please send a check for \$5.00 (includes postage) made payable to the WESTFIELD FOUNDATION.

Notes

¹ Lawrance Thompson, *Robert Frost: The Early Years* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1966).

² Martha Duffy, *Time Magazine* (1970).

³ Lillian LaBatt Frost to Sandra Katz, Oregon, October 11, 1982. The author interviewed several family members and Frost family friends for this study.

⁴ William H. Pritchard, *Frost: A Literary Life Reconsidered* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984).

⁵ Robert Frost to Louis Untermeyer, Hotel Stonehaven, Springfield, Mass., October 4, 1937, in *The Letters of Robert Frost to Louis Untermeyer* (New York: Holt, Reinhart and Winston, 1963): 295-96.

⁶ Rene Wellek and Austin Warren, *Theory of Literature* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1956) p. 79.

⁷ *Lawrence Eagle*, July 1, 1872, p. 1.

⁸ Thompson, *Robert Frost: Early Years*, p. 125.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 129.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Lawrence Eagle*, May 27, 1892.

¹³ Thompson, *Robert Frost: Early Years*, p. 131.

¹⁴ *Facsimile of Lawrence High School, "Programme"*, in Watkinson Library, Trinity College, Hartford, Connecticut.

¹⁵ *Lawrence Eagle*, May 27, 1892.

¹⁶ Thompson, *Robert Frost: Early Years*, p. 135.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 150.

¹⁸ Letter from Lillian L. Frost to Sandra Katz, October 11, 1982.

¹⁹ Thompson, *Robert Frost: Early Years*, p. 511. Thompson cites the *Lawrence Eagle-Tribune* 1953 Centennial Edition, p. 7. Also letter to Lillian LaBatt Frost to Sandra Katz, Oregon, February 17, 1983.

²⁰ Thompson, *Robert Frost: Early Years*, p. 108.

²¹ Lawrance Thompson, *Robert Frost: The Years of Triumph* (New York; Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1970) p. 721.

²² Thompson, *Robert Frost: Early Years*, p. 498.

²³ "Classmates of Robert Frost Regarded Him as a Dreamer," *The Evening Tribune*, March 14, 1939.

²⁴ *Facsimile of Lawrence High School "Programme"*.

²⁵ Lawrence High School *Bulletin*, September 1891, Vol. XIII, No. 1, in Watkinson Library, Trinity College, Hartford, Connecticut.

²⁶ Thompson, *Robert Frost: Early Years*, p. 137.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 503.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 355.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 50.

- ³⁰ Ibid., p. 517.
- ³¹ Ibid., p. 50.
- ³² Ibid., p. 125.
- ³³ *Facsimile of (Lawrence) "High School Bulletin"*, September 1891, Vol. XIII, No. 1, p. 1, in Watkinson Library, Trinity College.
- ³⁴ Ibid., November 1891, No. 2, p. 1.
- ³⁵ Thompson, *Robert Frost: Early Years*, p. 504.
- ³⁶ Ibid., p. 126.
- ³⁷ Ibid., p. 133.
- ³⁸ Ibid., p. 136.
- ³⁹ Ibid., p. 123.
- ⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 124.
- ⁴¹ Ibid., p. 125-126.
- ⁴² Ibid., p. 136.
- ⁴³ Percy Bysshe Shelly, "Epipsychidion," in *Complete Poetical Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin & Co., 1901), lines 42-45, 129-31, 142-44, 573-74, 584-85.
- ⁴⁴ Thompson, *Robert Frost: Early Years*, p. 137.
- ⁴⁵ Robert Frost, "The Subverted Flower," in *The Poetry of Robert Frost* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1969), pp. 339-41.
- ⁴⁶ Frost, "The Figure a Poem Makes," in *Complete Poems* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1953), p. vi.
- ⁴⁷ Thompson, *Robert Frost: Early Years*, p. 145.
- ⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 171.
- ⁴⁹ Rev. Lorenzo D. Case to Lawrence Thompson, December 16, 1946, ms. in Elinor White Frost Collection, Owen D. Young Library, St. Lawrence University.
- ⁵⁰ Thompson, *Robert Frost: Early Years*, p. 170.
- ⁵¹ Ibid., p. 148.
- ⁵² Ibid., pp. 150-153.
- ⁵³ Ibid., pp. 150-151.
- ⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 151.
- ⁵⁵ Ibid.
- ⁵⁶ Ibid., pp. 151-152.
- ⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 152.
- ⁵⁸ Frost, "A Lone Striker," in *The Poetry of Robert Frost* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1960), lines 43-46.
- ⁵⁹ Thompson, *Robert Frost: Early Years*, p. 160.
- ⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 169.
- ⁶¹ Elizabeth Shepley Sergeant, *Robert Frost: The Trial By Existence* (York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1960) p. 42.
- ⁶² Ibid.
- ⁶³ Thompson, *Robert Frost: Early Years*, pp. 175, 529.
- ⁶⁴ Ibid., pp. 175, 520.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid., pp. 177-178; see also Sergeant, *Robert Frost*, p. 43.

⁶⁷ Susan Priscilla Holmes, "Robert Frost in Lawrence – A Remembrance of 60 Years," *Lawrence Eagle-Tribune*, May 9, 1963, p. 16.

⁶⁸ Thompson, *Robert Frost: Early Years*, p. 211.¹⁵ *Lawrence Eagle*, May 27, 1892.

¹⁶ Thompson, *Robert Frost: Early Years*, p. 135.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 150.

¹⁸ Letter from Lillian L. Frost to Sandra Katz, October 11, 1982.

¹⁹ Thompson, *Robert Frost: Early Years*, p. 511. Thompson cites the *Lawrence Eagle-Tribune* 1953 Centennial Edition, p. 7. Also letter to Lillian LaBatt Frost to Sandra Katz, Oregon, February 17, 1983.

²⁰ Thompson, *Robert Frost: Early Years*, p. 108.

²¹ Lawrence Thompson, *Robert Frost: The Years of Triumph* (New York; Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1970) p. 721.

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²³ "Classmates of Robert Frost Regarded Him as a Dreamer," *The Evening Tribune*, March 14, 1939.

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²⁶ Thompson, *Robert Frost: Early Years*, p. 137.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 503.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 355.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 50.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 517.

³¹ Ibid., p. 50.

³² Ibid., p. 125.

³³ *Facsimile of (Lawrence) "High School Bulletin"*, September 1891, Vol. XIII, No. 1, p. 1, in Watkinson Library, Trinity College.

³⁴ Ibid., November 1891, No. 2, p. 1.

³⁵ Thompson, *Robert Frost: Early Years*, p. 504.

³⁶ Ibid., p. 126.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 133.

³⁸ Ibid., p. 136.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 123.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 124.

⁴¹ Ibid., p.125-126.

⁴² Ibid., p. 136.

⁴³ Percy Bysshe Shelly, "Epipsychidion," in *Complete Poetical Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin & Co., 1901), lines 42-45, 129-31, 142-44, 573-74, 584-85.

⁴⁴ Thompson, *Robert Frost: Early Years*, p. 137.

⁴⁵ Robert Frost, "The Subverted Flower," in *The Poetry of Robert Frost* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1969), pp. 339-41.

⁴⁶ Frost, "The Figure a Poem Makes," in *Complete Poems* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1953), p. vi.

⁴⁷ Thompson, *Robert Frost: Early Years*, p. 145.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 171.

⁴⁹ Rev. Lorenzo D. Case to Lawrence Thompson, December 16, 1946, ms. in Elinor White Frost Collection, Owen D. Young Library, St. Lawrence University.

⁵⁰ Thompson, *Robert Frost: Early Years*, p. 170.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 148.

⁵² *Ibid.*, pp. 150-153.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, pp. 150-151.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 151.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 151-152.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 152.

⁵⁸ Frost, "A Lone Striker," in *The Poetry of Robert Frost* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1960), lines 43-46.

⁵⁹ Thompson, *Robert Frost: Early Years*, p. 160.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 169.

⁶¹ Elizabeth Shepley Sergeant, *Robert Frost: The Trial By Existence* (York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1960) p. 42.

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ Thompson, *Robert Frost: Early Years*, pp. 175, 529.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 175, 520.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 177-178; see also Sergeant, *Robert Frost*, p. 43.

⁶⁷ Susan Priscilla Holmes, "Robert Frost in Lawrence – A Remembrance of 60 Years," *Lawrence Eagle-Tribune*, May 9, 1963, p. 16.

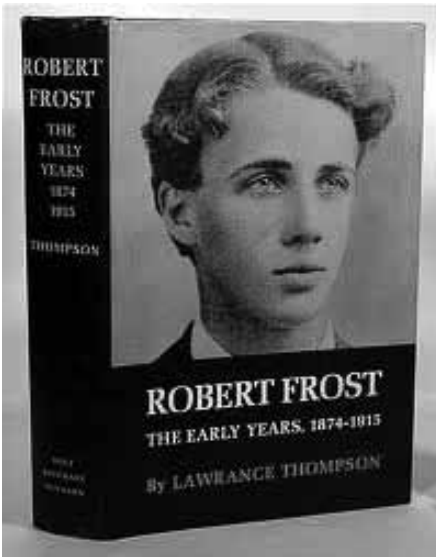
⁶⁸ Thompson, *Robert Frost: Early Years*, p. 211.



Robert Frost in England, 1913

Courtesy: Special Collections, St. Lawrence University Library, Canton, NY

Elinor and Robert Frost: Photos and Commentary by the Editors



Lawrence Thompson's 1966
"Official" Biography



The "Robert Frost" Home in Derby, N.H.

Elinor is not mentioned. The official website reads: "The Robert Frost Farm was home to Robert Frost and his family from 1900–1911."



Robert and Elinor Frost at Plymouth, New Hampshire, 1912

The Frank P. Piskor Collection of Robert Frost, MSS 62
Special Collections, St. Lawrence University Libraries, Canton, NY



The Frost Family, 1916–1917

Courtesy of the Frank P. Piskor Collection of Robert Frost, MSS 62
Special Collections, St. Lawrence University Libraries, Canton, NY



Elinor and Robert Frost in a Passport Photo, 1928

Courtesy: Special Collections, St. Lawrence University Library, Canton, NY



The Frost Tombstone in Bennington, Vermont