

THE PENNSYLVANIA STATE UNIVERSITY  
SCHREYER HONORS COLLEGE

SCHOOL OF MUSIC

RANDALL THOMPSON'S *FROSTIANA*: A POETIC EXPERIENCE

JOHN STEPHEN LIVINGSTON  
SPRING 2014

A thesis  
submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements  
for baccalaureate degrees  
in Music and English  
with honors in Music

Reviewed and approved\* by the following:

Christopher Kiver  
Associate Professor of Music  
Thesis Supervisor

Mark Ballora  
Associate Professor of Music  
Honors Adviser

\* Signatures are on file in the Schreyer Honors College.

## ABSTRACT

Randall Thompson's *Frostiana: Seven Country Songs*, based on selected poems of Robert Frost, must be considered an important piece of the American twentieth-century choral repertory. Composed in 1959 for the bicentennial of Amherst, Massachusetts, the seven-movement work features a depth of character and meaning that is enhanced by Thompson's idiosyncratic style. Thompson fuses his own musical sensitivity with the density of meaning found throughout the oeuvre of Frost, thereby compounding the deep meaning of the text with his compositional settings. Through a performance-oriented analysis of this piece in terms of both text and music, I aim to not only uncover a poignant significance of meaning deep within the piece but also demonstrate the sheer mastery and brilliant craftsmanship of the poet, composer, and the work itself.



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract .....	i
Table of Contents .....	ii
Acknowledgements .....	iii
Chapter 1. Introduction .....	1
Chapter 2. "The Road Not Taken" .....	8
Chapter 3. "The Pasture" .....	15
Chapter 4. "Come In" .....	20
Chapter 5. "The Telephone" .....	27
Chapter 6. "A Girl's Garden" .....	35
Chapter 7. "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening" .....	45
Chapter 8. "Choose Something Like a Star" .....	56
Conclusion .....	68
Appendix: Concert Program and Audio Files .....	70
Bibliography .....	71

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In putting together both a performance of such a large work and an analytical thesis thereof, there are a vast number of people who ought to be thanked. With my sincerest gratitude and acknowledgement that I could not have done this alone, I wish to thank the following:

Christopher Kiver, my thesis advisor, for supporting this idea from day one, meeting with me to aid with the rehearsal process, going out of his way to provide any assistance I have needed, and for having been such a profound influence on my life as a musician and person;

Mark Ballora, my honors advisor, and the Schreyer Honors College, for providing not only the impetus for doing such a project but also extensive financial and academic support;

John Marsh of the English department, for meeting with me throughout the fall and setting my analyses straight, or at least guiding them from being egregiously erroneous;

Steven Smith, my applied piano teacher, for shaping me for the past four years into the pianist and musician who I am today;

Lynn Drafall, for assisting with the logistical considerations of the performance;

Russell Bloom, Camille Selden, and the staff of Esber Recital Hall, who made the performance run smoothly;

Eli Campbell, for his exquisite skill in the art of page-turning;

Chris Wahlmark and J. R. Schmitt, for their excellent recordings of the performance;

Will Wadlington, for directly and indirectly providing the inspiration for this project;

My parents and family, for everything;

And, finally, the twenty-four singers that comprise the chorus, for not only having showed up to the first rehearsal with their music learned, for having endured seven weeks of rehearsing with me, and for committing themselves to this project with talent, thoughtfulness, and warmth.

## Chapter 1

### Introduction

Robert Lee Frost, one of the most important American poets of the twentieth century if not of all time, was born in San Francisco on March 26, 1874. With a rugged individualist and aspiring journalist as a father and a New England-raised Swedenborgian as a mother, Frost experienced a childhood characterized by the self-discovery that comes with imaginative exploration. When Frost's father died in May of 1885, the family relocated back to the East Coast in Lawrence, MA, to live in closer proximity to the boy's mother's family. It was here that the burgeoning creativity of Frost took root through a vigorous schooling that proved to be an outlet for the young writer.

Partly inspired by the sheer thrill of education for edification's sake and partly inspired by a healthy competition with his co-valedictorian Elinor Smith—whom Frost would eventually marry—the budding poet began to hone his creative energies through the craft of writing. In subsequent years, he attended and dropped out of both Dartmouth College and Harvard University, but his writing remained a steadfast fixture in his life. His first publication, “My Butterfly” in the fall of 1892 in *The Independent*, marked the beginning of a long career for Frost. Philip Gerber writes, “Although it promised little in terms of future distinction for its author, the poem was at least a beginning” (2).

Frost's career went on to blossom with countless successes. Among them were faculty appointments at Amherst College and the University of Michigan, four Pulitzer

prizes, a Congressional Gold Medal, over forty honorary doctorates, as well as the distinction of having read “The Gift Outright” at the inauguration of President Kennedy. Frost died on January 29, 1963, but his prestige and importance within the literary world live on. Jean Gould writes of his life:

He was a singer whose aim was song, whose leitmotif was love. He wrote his own epitaph in ‘A Lesson for Today,’ when he expressed the wish to have written of him on his stone, ‘I had a lovers’ quarrel with the world’; and one might add that, quarrel or no, he was always faithful to the world he loved. (295)

To summarize Frost’s style succinctly, one ought to know three defining characteristics. The first of these is the organic nature of Frost’s poetry. He said, “The freshness of a poem belongs absolutely to its not having been thought out and then set to verse”; Philip Gerber compares this over-analysis to “composing music to suit a pre-selected set of lyrics. It would result in art only by happenstance and against great odds” (90). Thus, a poem must find genesis in the simplicity of its own idea; Gerber writes, “How an individual poem can retain its pure organic function...and at the same instant be committed to [structure and form] is to be recognized as the first mystery of poetic art” (91).

This leads into the second characteristic of Frost’s work, his insistence on structure. Speaking of his contemporaries’ fascination with the breakdown of poetic structure and form in lieu of free verse, he would say, “I would as soon write free verse as play tennis with the net down” (Gould, 4). While some critics have attacked Frost’s traditionalism as a limit of his range, Gerber argues, “His range may be doubted, but his skill within it is generally granted” (66). Indeed, Frost’s mastery of the craftsmanship of

the poetic art sets him apart from his contemporaries and exhibits an impressive degree of virtuosity throughout his work.

Finally, a distinctive characteristic of the poetry of Frost is his employment of vernacular speech. This simplicity of diction sets Frost's poetry apart from the esoteric, compounded meanings of the poetry of his contemporaries, like Ezra Pound and T. S. Eliot. Gerber writes that Frost's mastery of everyday speech "does convey a most convincing illusion of real conversation," but he goes on to remind the reader, "this fluency *is* an illusion" (97). Regardless of the conversational tone as an illusion or not, Frost's poetry retains a simplicity that does not seek to obscure the meaning. The poems retain a sense of flow, and they become more human in their organic structure.

\*       \*       \*

Born in New York on April 21, 1899, Randall Thompson achieved a success that, on paper, remains unparalleled by any other American composer. With a résumé that includes degrees from Harvard University and the Eastman School of Music, faculty appointments at Wellesley College, the University of California at Berkeley, Harvard University, and Princeton University, the director position of the Curtis Institute of Music and the music department of the University of Virginia, as well as several nationally granted awards, including membership in the Institute of Arts & Letters and the Italian-granted *Cavaliere ufficiale al merito della Repubblica Italiana*, one feels compelled to ask, why has Thompson remained on the fringe of musical scholarship? David Francis Urrows refers to Thompson as the "most frequently performed and least written about American composer of the twentieth century" (Benser, x). This conundrum becomes even more perplexing if one considers Urrows's assertion that Thompson's *Alleluia* (1940) is

the “single most popular piece of American choral music,” as well as the assertion that Thompson “established himself as the primary American figure in the world-wide renaissance of choral composition and performance to which the twentieth century has been witness” (1).

Two reasons abound for why Thompson has been overlooked from a historical perspective. The first is that, like Frost, Thompson rejected the modernism of his contemporaries. When the esotericism of serialism and modernist experiments in sonority became the popular trend in the art music world, Thompson remained fixed in his traditionalism. Thompson’s style, like Frost’s, is often described in terms of its vernacular elements. Influenced by the sounds of Americana—ragtime, jazz, dance tunes, shape-note hymnody—Thompson composed music that was both easy to listen to and easy to sing. In fact, he defended this simple style against the overtly difficult styles of his contemporaries, addressing the Intercollegiate Music Council at Yale University in May of 1959 by saying, “If a piece is too difficult for amateurs to sing, then the chances are that it is not good enough” (36).

The second reason why Thompson’s compositional influence has been swept under the rug is because of his work in the academic world. An idealistic defender of the liberal arts, Thompson saw music education as more than a technical endeavor to be honed in a practice room. As the director of the Curtis Institute, for example, he endeavored to bridge the gap between music and a broader liberal arts education: he required his students to participate in a school-wide chorus, attend assemblies, and hear distinguished speakers throughout the year (25). However, as Urrows puts it, “The fact was that Curtis and Thompson were essentially incompatible” (27). Thus, the composer-

educator became caught between two worlds, and the heads with whom he butted his own began to steadily reject him. Though the rest of his career enjoyed moderate success, he seemed to carry this chip on his shoulder, a weight he bore until his death on July 9, 1984.

\*       \*       \*

*Frostiana: Seven Country Songs* is a choral work comprising seven movements, based on seven poems of Robert Frost from different collections of poetry. The movements—and the breakdown of vocal parts—are as follows:

1. The Road Not Taken, SATB (from *Mountain Interval*, 1920)
2. The Pasture, TTBB (from *North of Boston*, 1915)
3. Come In, SSAA (from *A Witness Tree*, 1942)
4. The Telephone, SAATTBB (from *Mountain Interval*, 1920)
5. A Girl's Garden, SAA (from *Mountain Interval*, 1920)
6. Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening, TBB (from *New Hampshire*, 1923)
7. Choose Something Like a Star, SATB (from *Steeple Bush*, 1943)

Randall Thompson composed *Frostiana* on a commission from the city of Amherst, Massachusetts, for the town's bicentennial in 1959. Originally, Thompson was approached to set Frost's poem "The Gift Outright"; however, the composer rejected this idea, concerned with the poem's "lamentably imperialistic tone" and the irony of setting a text with Manifest Destiny undertones for the bicentennial of a town founded by a charter from King George III (Benser, 35). Urrows asserts that Frost and Thompson had known each other for years, so the process of text selection might have been collaborative.

Thompson originally wrote the piece for chorus and piano, later orchestrating the set in a version that premiered in 1965. In preparing for the premiere, the men and women of the chorus had rehearsed mostly separately, thus explaining the need for the four gendered pieces. The piece was initially premiered on October 18, 1959: Thompson

conducted while Professor J. Heywood Alexander of Amherst accompanied on the piano. While mixed accounts of Frost's reception abound, the most likely is the account from Benser and Urrows's biography of Thompson:

At the conclusion of the premiere on the 18<sup>th</sup> of October in 1959, Frost rose spontaneously from his seat and bellowed, "Sing that again!" Thompson often did this at later performances, to the amusement of the audience and the confusion of conductors, who thought he meant the whole work! (35)

\* \* \*

The following analysis represents an amalgamation of scholarly research, personal reflection and analysis, and collaborative discussion with faculty, friends, and the performers of the work itself. However, it would be reductive to claim that the ensuing pages represent a culmination of the work put into this thesis. The true culmination of my efforts came on the evening of October 20, 2013, when twenty-four singers and I (as the pianist and conductor) performed *Frostiana* in its entirety. The public performance was preceded by a forty-five minute lecture that gave an analytical frame for the performance of the work. Recordings of this performance are included in an appendix at the end of this thesis.

The first step in the preparation of this performance, after receiving the necessary permissions and support from the choral faculty, was the recruitment of the singers. Arriving at the number of twenty-four singers—three on each eight-part split and six on each four-part split—I began to actively recruit singers in the spring of 2013. The singers that eventually comprised the chorus came from all backgrounds, from several vocal performance majors to graduate students in German and Mathematics. In recruiting these



singers, I sought out not only strong voices with well-developed senses of musicality, but also thoughtful intellects who would be willing to dive into such an intense project.

The rehearsal process began in September of 2013. For two hours on six consecutive Sundays, we met in 122 Music Building II and pored over the text and music of the piece. Additionally, this process involved weekly one-on-one meetings with Dr. Christopher Kiver, in which we worked through issues of the rehearsal process, i.e. rehearsal techniques, theories on the proper voicing of a chorus, overall logistical flow, et cetera. In the rehearsals, the singers and I not only polished notes and rhythms in order to work towards a unified sense of musicality, but we also discussed the texts in depth. In doing so, an effort was made to connect with the text's meaning on a deeper level than normally experienced in a choral setting. The effect was a sincerity about the musical process and an achieved significance that I feel came through in the performance.

\* \* \*

The following can be thought of as an analytical frame for the purposes of enhancing the performance and reception of *Frostiana* as a poetic experience. It is by no means exhaustive in its research, and much of the analysis can be rightly contested. However, the analyses found within the following chapters define the interpretations that were expressed through our performance. Essentially, then, the following analysis serves one objective: to enhance the reception of our performance for the purpose of enjoyment. It is my sincere hope that this analysis, paired with our performance, will guide the reader and listener to a sense of fulfillment through the compounding of Thompson's composition and Frost's texts, the masterpiece known as *Frostiana*.

## Chapter 2

### The Road Not Taken

*“And sorry I could not travel both”*

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

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

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

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

“The Road Not Taken” could well be considered one of Frost’s most recognizable poems. Written in variations on iambic tetrameter, the poem draws the reader into a mysterious wood in what eventually becomes a meditation on the human process of choice. The simple scenario set forth by Frost is that of a traveler who faces a fork in the road and must choose which to take. However, the speaker, craning to see beyond the bend in each road, must make the choice with fallible information. He then projects into the future, predicting that, “with a sigh,” he will retell the story of how he took the “road less travelled” and that it “has made all the difference.”

Despite the poem’s familiarity to a widespread audience, it is often one of the most misinterpreted of Frost’s works. It can be misread as an encouragement to take the road less travelled; as such, the poem has become an unfortunately clichéd placeholder for sentiments such as “*Carpe diem!*” The poem’s meaning, though, carries a much deeper complexity. In the reflection of the two roads that diverge, the poem speaks not only to the dilemma of the fallibility of human choice but also the means by which we deal with choice. In order to comprehend the text, it becomes necessary to understand the relationship between the past, present, and future; more specifically, one must examine the place of the speaker in relation to his past, present, and future.

The poem begins in the past tense as “two roads diverged in a yellow wood,” a lamentation of the opportunity costs of choice. From its first line, the poem carries the knowledge that one road must be chosen and the other left behind. More unsettling than this realization, though, is the speaker’s acknowledgement of the limit of his knowledge.

As the speaker “looked down one as far as [he] could,” he fails to see beyond the point where the path “bent in the undergrowth.”

The speaker then makes his choice, albeit with uncertainty. He describes his chosen road as “the other,” the road with “perhaps the better claim.” The qualifier “perhaps” reveals the seed of doubt—the speaker does not declare that the road *indeed* or *indubitably* has the better claim, just that it “perhaps” does. He states his intention to eventually return and test his tentative hypothesis, but quickly admits his doubt “if [he] should ever come back,” leaving the reader with far more questions than answers about this other road.

The use of the past tense in this mysterious memory must indicate the existence of a present in which the speaker relays his story or at least reflects upon it. However, this present hardly exists in the poem; Frost launches beyond this moment as his speaker projects into the future, a time “ages and ages hence” when he “shall be telling” this tale again. All of a sudden, he has certainty of his choice in this future: he declares that he “took the one less travelled by.” This phrase ought to stand out as incongruous with the preceding three stanzas of text. In fact, the speaker had previously described the roads thus: “And both that morning equally lay, / In leaves no step had trodden black.” When one compares the uncertainty of “perhaps” with the definitiveness of “equally,” it becomes clear that something has changed. Even more troubling is the speaker’s admission of telling the tale “with a sigh.” The speaker’s future self sighs not from nostalgia but from the tension he has created between his story and the actual reality.

Thus, the speaker has constructed a false past. Like the too common misreading of the poem, the speaker creates for himself a sense of *carpe diem*, patting himself on the

back for his choice of the “one less traveled by.” However, the reader must remember that at the time of his choice, the chosen road was certainly not the one less traveled by! Furthermore, the speaker asserts that this choice “has made all the difference,” implying that his life has been greatly affected by this falsely constructed moment of choosing the road less traveled by.

When one compares the actual trajectory of events, from the two roads’ diverging to the projection of the future, with the falsified product of the speaker’s imagination, the projection backwards from the future to the choosing of the road less traveled by, one can visualize these two divergent paths. Much like the yellow wood, the speaker’s projections into the past and the future create a fork in the road. And like the speaker’s craning to see beyond the bend in the undergrowth, the reader must decipher which path is real and which is imagined.

The deep meaning of the poem becomes clear with the speaker’s confession of having to make the choice in the first place. In fact, the admission laments not just that choice but also the despondent realization of not being able to experience both choices at the same time. With his fallible information, the speaker must confront the possibility that he is taking the road *without* the better claim and never know whether he was right or not. Thus, in order to cope with this uncertainty, he constructs a false narrative in a projected future in which he looks back and determines he made the right choice. On this self-reflected dissonance, Isadore Traschen writes, “Frost acknowledges that life has limits...yet he indulges himself in the sentimental notion that we could be really different from what we have become” (173). In other words, the constructed past becomes an escape from the present reality. One can view this escape as a poor coping mechanism for

the guilt of confronting difficult choices; one can also view this as a relinquishing of the obsession to make the right decisions, as all roads will lead to the future regardless.

Either way, the speaker—and the reader—is left with a realization of the uncertainty of choice, feeling truly “sorry I could not travel both.”

\*       \*       \*

Thompson’s setting of the poem underlines this uncertain meditation on the metaphor of the two roads. From the movement’s first measure, Thompson paints the picture of two divergent roads in the outer voices of the piano accompaniment. The soprano and bass voices move in opposition, weaving and intertwining in allusion to the opposition between Frost’s two roads. The extended undulation of the two lines emphasizes the length of these roads, a length that extends far beyond the point where they bend in the undergrowth. However, the roads possess a sense of stability in this musical line; the parallel fifths in the left hand seem to indicate the groundedness of these roads. They have been in the yellow wood for a long time, even if no step had trodden upon the fallen leaves. Thus, the introduction itself reveals an ingenious capturing of the agonizing choice between the two roads that the speaker must face.

The initial entrance of the choral part brings a sense of stability as the vocal line creates direction within the musical line. Utilizing a natural-sounding (mostly) pentatonic scale, the chorus sings in unison for the first two stanzas. However, as the speaker reveals the truth of the matter in the third stanza—that “both that morning equally lay”—the choir breaks into four-part homophony (pickup to m. 33). Much like the piano accompaniment, the basses and sopranos now stand in opposition as vocal manifestations of the choice. Furthermore, the forward motion of the piano accompaniment halts, now

becoming nothing more than musings and disjointed afterthoughts (such as the evocation of fallen leaves in the gently falling eighth notes of the piano in m. 34). This removal of the motion of the accompaniment seems to indicate a sense of the speaker's standing still, perhaps pondering the scene before making his choice. With this introspection compounded by a thicker choral part with increased depth, doubt has subtly planted its seed.

The interlude between the third and fourth stanzas features a robust assertion in the piano accompaniment (m. 44). With a crescendo from *piano* to *fortissimo* and a thickening of chords and harmonic density, a sense of finality is almost achieved. Musically speaking, this becomes the moment when the speaker takes a step on the chosen road and continues his journey towards the future. However, the fourth stanza begins with a tender hesitance (m. 51). Marked *pianissimo*, the momentum nearly stops. The piano accompaniment becomes even more timeless than in the third stanza, and full measures between the sung phrases indicate a sense of introspection, as if the speaker now pauses between phrases in order to inwardly reflect. If doubt musically planted its seed in the third stanza, it has now grown and taken over the reflection.

After the choir asserts, "that has made all the difference," with a lush E-flat chord (m. 65), we are left with a cadence in D major (m. 67). A departure from the otherwise somber D minor, the piano interlude that follows the fourth stanza floats delicately into the atmosphere, much like the speaker's wistful memory of his day in the yellow wood. However, this lighthearted reflection retains a dark undertone. While the playful melody is characterized by an ascending contour, the accompanying voices often aim downwards, not only invoking the opposition between the two roads but also hinting at a

melancholy seeded deep within. As the interlude melts away with a half cadence, a silence ensues for two beats before the chorus restates the final line of the poem (mm. 75–76).

Again, the word “all” is set on a flat VII chord, which leads back to the melancholy of D minor (m. 78). When the piano enters on the final syllable of “difference,” it gently floats upwards, now with both voices in parallel motion (m. 80). This could hint at the composer’s reading of the text, that preoccupation and obsession over the “right choice” is futile because all paths lead towards the future. It also could be a foreshadowing of the upward trajectory of the final movement of the work, a work that also meditates upon human choice and the repercussions thereof. Regardless, the upwardly floating melody creates a haunting hollowness that is quietly emphasized with the final two D minor chords, marked *pianissimo* and *pianississimo*, like distant death knells, reminders of the ultimate human limit at the end of the road.



### Chapter 3

#### The Pasture

*“You come too”*

I’m going out to clean the pasture spring;  
 I’ll only stop to rake the leaves away  
 (And wait to watch the water clear, I may):  
 I sha’n’t be gone long.—You come too.

I’m going out to fetch the little calf  
 That’s standing by the mother. It’s so young,  
 It totters when she licks it with her tongue.  
 I sha’n’t be gone long.—You come too.

The earliest poem of the set, “The Pasture” comes from the collection *North of Boston* (1915). In fact, the poem appears unlisted and before the table of contents, seemingly as a link between Frost’s first volume, *A Boy’s Will* (1913), and *North of Boston*. One of Frost’s biographers, Jean Gould, indicates this introductory inclusion “as a link between the two volumes, denoting the transition, through love, from the ‘wind’s will’ of a boy to the controlled and seasoned judgment, the insight of a mature man”; Gould goes so far as to declare “The Pasture” as the “origin of poetry” for Frost, an eight-line assertion of his love, the deepest meaning behind his poems (136).

“The Pasture” is, in essence, a love poem. Perhaps set at the end of the day, before the speaker retires to bed, the poem is an invitation from the speaker to an unnamed

spoken-to to accompany him as he carries out his chores. Structured in almost perfect iambic pentameter, the meter's gentle rhythm gives the poem a sense of fluidity, almost like a reassuring lullaby or soothing lyric. The only rhythmic exception is the poem's brief refrain that closes each quatrain: "I sha'n't be gone long.—You come too." While one could interpret the stresses of this line as iambic pentameter, the line seems to carry more weight to it. Thus, the stressed words become "I *sha'n't* be *gone long*.—*You* come *too*." In fact, Thompson's setting seems to follow this stress pattern as opposed to a continuation of the iambic scheme of the preceding lines.

This repeated refrain, then, becomes one of the focal points of the poem. The other focal point comes in the form of more subtle repetition. Note the amount of chores and tasks outlined by the speaker. He must go out "to clean," "to rake," and "to fetch." In a sense, the speaker presents a laundry list of the work that must be done before the end of the day. One does not need to stretch his or her imagination too far to hear these words coming directly from the mouth of Frost, the infamous poet-farmer of New England.

However, each quatrain features a turn away from these chores. In the first stanza, the speaker states that after raking the leaves away, he may "wait to watch the water clear." This no longer represents a task that must be done; on the contrary, it represents a pause, a breath in which the speaker reflects. The imagery of stilling water possesses an almost hypnotic quality to it, and the subtle alliteration creates a fluid rippling effect, pulling the reader into the speaker's own introspection and away from the chores of everyday life. When the speaker then invokes the spoken-to, the invitation carries more wait. No longer is the invitation a call for help; it is a call to watch the stirred pond settle.

In the second stanza, the speaker aims to “fetch the little calf” but then similarly pauses when he notices that the calf is “standing by the mother.” The parallel drawn between the calf and its mother and the speaker and the spoken-to becomes obvious. Like the calf that is so young that it “totters when she licks it with her tongue,” the speaker reveals a tenderness to his desire for companionship. It is this desire that compels the speaker to repeat the longing refrain, almost desperately imploring the spoken-to, “You come too.”

Thus, the poem becomes more than a bucolic memory of days on the farm from long ago. It serves two simultaneous functions: it reflects on the present moment, organized into tasks, and it calls to the spoken-to with tender longing. If the speaker of “The Road Not Taken” avoided the present or lamented its indeterminable choices, the speaker of “The Pasture” fully immerses himself in the present, only stopping to watch the water clear. More importantly, however, is what makes this enduring through the present bearable for the speaker—the promise that his beloved might come, too.

\*       \*       \*

The musical setting of the poem captures its bucolic simplicity with a sense of natural pastoralism. Thompson sets the movement for men’s voices, adding a gendered pointedness to the poem’s meaning as a love lyric. Set in the very grounded, natural key of F major—a key historically associated with pastoralism—the movement begins with a piano introduction characterized by a gentle harmonic progression in the bass octaves of the left hand and a sweeping, almost flute-like melodic dance in the right hand, creating a rich pastoral imagery of perhaps a shepherd’s flute. Though the musical line moves to the

climactic point of the high A in m. 6, the introduction seems suspended in a sense of gentility.

When the men enter in m. 10, the meter slightly shifts from the softly twirling 6/8 to a more directionally flowing 4/4. This metrical juxtaposition represents the opposition or distance between the various pairs in the text. If one considers the 4/4 sections to be the speaker's words and desires, then the 6/8 sections perhaps become the spoken-to, not confined by chores to do but simply floating in the wind. Thus, in opposition to the carefree and lilting 6/8, the 4/4 creates a sense of movement, underlining the speaker's words with a quiet urgency.

Then, with a gentle lift in m. 15, the urgency evaporates and stills like the water. The men sing, "I sha'n't be gone long" as the accompaniment sighs (m. 16). Another lift and a lower, more intimate, repetition of the line emphasizes the point. After three beats of silence, the speaker then says what he really means: "You come too" (mm. 17–19).

With only slight alterations in the voicing of the accompaniment, the introductory gesture returns at the downbeat of m. 19. The text itself retains the same metrical structure from stanza to stanza; it only seems natural, then, that the music do the same. Furthermore, the repetition emphasizes the cyclical nature of the poem, the fact that each day there are pasture springs to clear and calves to fetch. Thus, the re-entry of the voices in m. 28 recalls the memory of an old friend, the familiarity of the present moment.

Thompson highlights the almost onomatopoeia-like sounds of the tottering and licking with a heavily articulated vocal line in m. 32. The surge of energy then continues through the climax on "tongue" in m. 33. Then, after an emphatic lift, the return of the refrain features an augmentation of the line. Instead of two short iterations, like in the

first verse, this verse culminates with an extended plea. This elongation compounded with the downward melodic contour creates a sense of deliberate pleading, setting up the next line. And so the three glorious beats of silence return, allowing the voices to punctuate “You come too” with a continuation of the augmented desperation (mm. 35–37).

The introductory gesture returns; this time, however, it leads to the climactic A in m. 42 and holds it with a fermata. With an A minor chord underneath this high point, the tender desperation of all preceding lines reaches a peak. The music then falls slowly, leading to the men’s final attempted invitation in m. 46. Taken almost out of time, marked “Poco meno mosso,” the final four measures achieve a profound sense of stillness. As the men sustain the vowel of “too,” sounding much like a soothing lullaby, the piano returns to a sense of compound meter, thus finally unifying the opposition from before (m. 48). In a sense, then, Thompson allows for his own subtle hint that the speaker asks and the spoken-to indeed comes, too.

## Chapter 4

### Come In

*“But no, I was out for stars”*

As I came to the edge of the woods,  
    Thrush music—hark!  
Now if it was dusk outside,  
    Inside it was dark.

Too dark in the woods for a bird  
    By sleight of wing  
To better its perch for the night  
    Though it still could sing.

The last of the light of the sun  
    That had died in the west  
Still lived for one song more  
    In a thrush’s breast.

Far in the pillared dark  
    Thrush music went—  
Almost like a call to come in  
    To the dark and lament.

But no, I was out for stars;  
    I would not come in.  
I meant not even if asked;  
    And I hadn’t been.

“Come In,” from *A Witness Tree* (1942), is one of the latest of Frost’s poems to appear in the set, and it is also one of the most cryptic. It possesses several dense layers of meaning as well as a rich saturation of descriptive detail. In this way, it provides quite a contrast from “The Pasture,” broadening the emotional depth of the set and, in doing so, showing off Frost’s versatility as a poet. At face value, the poem tells the story of a speaker whom a thrush compels to enter a patch of dark woods at sunset. The speaker reflects on the scene, watching the sun’s descent and listening to the thrush’s song before ultimately deciding that she “was out for stars,” thereby refusing the thrush’s invitation. In a chilling turn, then, the speaker admits that even if she had wanted to enter the woods, she had not been asked. Thus, the speaker brings the reader to the edge of the woods and, at the last moment, turns away and leaves the questions unanswered.

The poem’s structure and form are rather clean, perhaps indicating a refined maturity of an aged Frost. In terms of meter, the poem’s lines alternate between trimeter (three stressed syllables) and dimeter (two stressed syllables). Though the distinction between the two can be ambiguous, depending on the inflected prosody of the speaker—such as the line “Inside it was dark”—each quatrain roughly follows the scheme of three-two-three-two. The rhyme scheme echoes this crisp simplicity: each quatrain follows its own ABCB scheme, only repeating two rhymes throughout (hark/dark/dark and in/in/been). This stylistic simplicity gives the poem an almost haunting quality; its uncomplicated skeleton and stylistic maturity pull the reader in and strip away all other superfluities, leaving behind only the haunting echoes of the poem.

Perhaps the most striking detail of “Come In” is the intense saturation of sensory details throughout the poem. More specifically, the poem dwells upon two details:

“thrush music” and light, or the lack thereof. The auditory details of the birdsong appear four times in the poem: “Thrush music—hark!”; “Though it still could sing”; “Still lived for one song more”; and “Thrush music went.” The visual description of the opposition between light and dark appear with similar frequency: “Inside it was dark”; “Too dark in the woods for a bird”; “The last of the light of the sun / That had died in the west”; “Far in the pillared dark”; and “To the dark and lament.” Thus, the poem defines itself according to a consistent detail, the persistence of the thrush’s music set against the backdrop of the fading of light.

However, these details abruptly stop in the last stanza. The first line of that stanza begins, “But no,” thus indicating a dramatic turn from what had previously been described. At this point, the speaker turns away from the woods, indicating that she is “out for stars.” Moreover, the sensory detail of the singing and the dark disappear from the text—even the stars are not described in terms of any light. This halting of descriptive detail emphasizes the speaker’s turn and further distances the reader from what might have been in those woods. Finally, the speaker indicates that the thrush’s invitation is a false invitation. She confesses that she had not been called to come in; on the contrary, the thrush had been simply singing as thrushes do. The invitation had been constructed in the speaker’s mind. Thus, in four short lines, Frost manages to negate the entirety of the scene that had been presented in the preceding four stanzas!

In order to understand this turn, one must understand that this concept of almost-resolution is a consistent theme in much of Frost’s poetry. Philip Gerber writes, “Critics are quite correct in noticing that while Robert Frost steps up shoulder to shoulder with the final questions, he invariably withdraws, veers off on a tangent, or changes the subject”;



furthermore, he explains why: “[Frost] has no answer to the greatest query. Death remains the undiscovered country from whose bourne no traveler returns” (148). In other words, Frost is no stranger to questions of such existential gravity; on the contrary, he embraces these questions. However, he does not possess the hubris to proffer an answer, instead leaving the reader with a question of profound importance. One must then draw the distinction between avoidant trepidation and the humility of acknowledging a lack of an answer. It is not that Frost avoids these situations—the speaker of “Come In” certainly listens to the thrush and comes to the edge of the woods—but it is that the poet refuses to give the demanded answer to the proposed question. Gerber writes in admiration the humanness of this humbly wise approach: “[Frost] was too honest either to deny the existence of the dark woods or to ignore its appeal. He was too honest also to affirm a solution to a puzzle he felt no human can solve and still be flesh and blood” (148).

Thus, “Come In” becomes a poem about movement. Like the “last of the light of the sun” that disappears beyond the horizon, the speaker’s hypnotic pull towards the woods creates a sense of direction. The point at which the directional trajectory is interrupted and reversed—“But no, I was out for stars”—becomes the crux of the poem. Whether motivated by fear, avoidance, or a sincere ignorance, the speaker pivots and turns away from the mystery of the woods. If Gerber’s assertion that the woods “typify the great concern of man for knowledge of the unknown that awaits him” can be accepted as true (146), then this turn becomes an unsettling acceptance of the mysteries that are beyond the poet, speaker, and reader. Without this artificial closure provided by a glimpse into the woods, the reader is left with far more questions than answers, and the thrush simply sings on.

\* \* \*

If the text of “Come In” can rightly be said to focus on the aural and visual dimensions of the thrush music and the dark, then the same can be said of Thompson’s musical setting. The introduction features a pianistic interpretation of the thrush’s song. Characterized by *leggiero* bursts of broken intervals interspersed with rapidly repeated notes, this birdsong remains rather present throughout the movement, returning in each interlude and the final, short codetta.

The thrush music’s being accounted for, the presence of the “dark” can be found in the vocal lines. Set homophonically, nearly every vocal line planes downwards. For example, the first line (“As I came to the edge of the woods” of mm. 6–8) reaches a high point on “came” on a chord spelled G-Bb-Eb. The phrase then falls steadily until the setting of “woods” on a chord a sixth lower, spelled Bb-D-G. This planing creates a downwardly sloping wall of sound, much like the deliberate descent of the sun whose light “had died in the west.”

Beyond the capturing of these two crucial details, the thickening harmony of the musical setting emphasizes the heightening of tension felt as the speaker approaches these woods. While the first verse (beginning at m. 6) possesses a rather straightforward harmonic structure—with the exception of a Phrygian A-flat in m. 9—later verses become more convoluted. The second verse, a lower setting of the same melody that requires a richer, darker chest voice quality of the women, invokes the Phrygian A-flat almost immediately, in the first phrase (m. 21). It then nullifies the E-flat of the key signature in the major IV chord of “wing” (m. 23) and again in the minor ii chord of “for”

(m. 25). The mysterious A-flat returns again on the word “still” in m. 26, but this time it resolves to an E-flat chord in a sort of deceptive cadence.

The third verse continues the darkening of the harmonic structure. Retaining the color of the A-flat from the previous two verses, this verse introduces a flattened fourth degree on the word “died” (m. 37). The line continues and extends this newfound darkness, briefly tonicizing E-flat minor, the parallel minor of the relative major of the movement’s G minor! Thompson sustains this sense of confusion and displacement as he eventually cadences on an F major chord on the word “breast” in m. 42. At this point, the tonal area has been so far removed from G minor that the listener feels the sense of darkness and existential crisis that the speaker must feel at the edge of the woods!

The final verse begins at the top of the register in both the voices and piano with an all-the-stops *forte* (m. 49). In splitting up the poem by pairing the final two stanzas together and setting this final verse with such a robust entrance, Thompson seems to interpret this point as the moment of decision. The subito *piano* in m. 53, then, clears the air and becomes the pointed question the speaker must ask: “Should I go in ‘to the dark and lament?’” The line is accompanied by a broad crescendo (and more harmonic thickening, such as the G major seventh in m. 54) that leads to the answer in m. 57: “But no, I was out for stars!” It must be noted that Thompson’s high level of dynamic indication throughout the movement underlines the speaker’s intentions. Many of the cadences are preceded with a long crescendo and a subito *piano*, perhaps indicating the speaker’s hesitance in continuing through into the woods. At this climactic point, the continued crescendo and eruption of the *fortissimo* assertion in m. 57 then answers the

initial question posed by the thrush. Unfortunately for the curious reader/listener, the answer is “no.”

From this climactic point onwards, the music falls away. The dynamics steadily subside, and the downward planing brings the music from the heights to the lower ranges of the women (mm. 57–63). However, because of the *piano* markings, this low register does not possess the lush vocal quality of the previous lower sections. Instead, it possesses a hollow quality, perhaps evoking the self-consciousness of the speaker’s existential questionings. The return of the birdsong in the accompaniment in mm. 63–65 then becomes a final question posed by the thrush. After over two measures of introspection, the women finally reply with a *pianissimo* “And I hadn’t been” that cadences on an open G skeleton, leaving a sense of ultimate ambiguity (m. 67). The extended codetta of the piano accompaniment retains the thrush’s song. Even if the song is not a call to come in, it still remains the same, ever in the distance and fading away. The final four measures (mm. 75–78) drastically augment the movement’s sense of time, and a three-measure decrescendo from *pianissimo* carries the birdsong back into the darkness of the woods where it remains in the dark with its unanswered questions.

## Chapter 5

### The Telephone

*“Someone said, ‘Come’”*

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

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

“I may have thought as much, but not aloud.”

“Well, so I came.”

From the same collection as “The Road Not Taken” and “A Girl’s Garden,” “The Telephone” comes from Frost’s third volume of poetry, *Mountain Interval*, published in

1920. Like many of the other poems from the collection, “The Telephone” uses a natural setting of a thick woods onto which the meaning of the poem is projected. Though Frost rejected the idea that he was a bucolic poet, it cannot be denied that he possessed a mastery of breathing life into his poetic landscapes. Set “as far as [the speaker] could walk” from his home, the poem begins in the thick of the woods, which, like the woods of “Come In,” serve as a place of metaphorical exploration of deeper, inter- and intrapersonal issues. As the speaker traipses through these woods, then, he suddenly hears a voice coming from a flower. He indicates another speaker, asserting that the voice was hers, and asks if she remembers what she said. A cold response comes from this second speaker, denying an answer to the question. The first speaker then replies that he heard the word, “Come,” but the second speaker answers, “I may have thought as much, but not aloud.” Almost as shrugging, then, the first speaker replies, “Well, so I came.”

The action of the poem can be rather confusing. The relationship between the two speakers is not abundantly clear; one can also question the intention behind the seemingly cold responses of the second speaker; one can even wonder about whether a voice was heard from the flower or not! However, analyzing the form and structure of the poem can reveal a subtle meaning woven in the text that clears up much of the mystery. This meaning, then, not only reveals the crux of the poem but also exemplifies Frost’s brilliance as a wordsmith.

Known for his mastery of capturing vernacular speech in his works, Frost employs a conversational tone throughout “The Telephone,” creating a sense of fluid, natural speech patterns. Indeed, Frost valued this authentic approach to speech patterns. In his introductory remarks to Sidney Cox’s *Swinger of Birches* (1957), Frost wrote, “The

living part of a poem is the intonation entangled somehow in the syntax idiom and meaning of a sentence... I say you can't read a single good sentence unless you have previously heard it spoken... Words exist in the mouth not in books" (Gould, 122). Philip Gerber argues that Frost's mastery of this technique explains why his poetry resonates with American audiences: "What readers hear and respond to in the poems are the recognizable rhythms of standard American colloquial speech" (98). Indeed, the poem flows with organic fluidity, as if the conversation were naturally occurring and merely transcribed by the poet.

However, the true mastery is revealed through the structural form of the poem within which Frost weaves the conversational flow. Frost himself believed strongly in the value of structure and form, as he often said that he "would as soon write free verse as play tennis with the net down" (Gould, 4). Structured in varying alternations between lines of five stresses (pentameter) and two stresses (dimeter), the poem maintains a metrical consistency that propels it forward. More than the forward motion that the meter functions to evoke, it also sets the lines of dimeter apart, adding emphasis. For example, the spondaic line, "All still" creates a pause, emphasizing the utter stillness of those woods. Another example comes in the final line—"Well, so I came."—as the first speaker's abruptness is underlined by the directness of the dimeter.

It is only through analyzing the rhyme scheme, though, that the reader can fully grasp the ingenious meaning embedded within the poem. In examining the end rhyme throughout the poem, "The Telephone" at first seems to be written in blank verse. However, closer analysis reveals displaced couplets throughout the entire poem. "Walk" of the first line rhymes with "talk" of the sixth line; "to-day" of the second line rhymes

with “you say” of the seventh line, et cetera. The distance between these rhyming pairs, then, becomes the distance between the two speakers. The first response of the second speaker reinforces this distance, as her “heard” creates sonoric dissonance with the first speaker’s “said.” Thus, the first speaker is “as far” from the second speaker as the couplets are far from each other.

The first adjacent couplet at the end of the poem, then, becomes a turning point. After having set up the distance between the speakers through a symbolic function of the rhyme scheme, Frost’s speakers come together in the last lines. The first speaker’s second attempt at acknowledgement (“*Someone* said ‘Come’—I heard it as I bowed.”) finally aligns with the second speaker’s response (“I may have thought as much, but not aloud.”) Thus, the second speaker’s concession that she might have thought that she wanted the first speaker to come is met with the reconciliation of the poetic distance as well.

This small detail perhaps reveals the situation and background of the poem’s dramatic action. It begins with significant distance between two speakers, evidenced both by the text and rhyme scheme. The first instance of dialogue between the two reinforces this distance, again through the coldness of the text and the disconnected end rhyme. Then, the final lines provide slight reconciliation as the second speaker not only concedes and confirms the first speaker’s conjecture but also rhymes with his speech, bringing the two characters together again.

However, this cathartic couplet does not end the poem. The first speaker responds, “Well, so I came.” Again, the abruptness of the dimeter calls into question the speaker’s meaning. Then, when one rereads the previous couplet between the two speakers, it becomes clear that the second speaker’s response is not a full reconciliation.



While she concedes that she “may have thought as much,” she continues to deny her saying it aloud. The reconciliation thus being only partially achieved, the first speaker’s short response becomes a terse add-on, confusing the sense of a happy ending.

While many interpretations exist regarding the situation and resolution of the poem, the following two seem most likely. The first focuses on the reconciliation between the two speakers. Reading into the resolution of the rhyme scheme and the second speaker’s admission of having thought the invitation aloud, this first reading explores the almost mystical connection between the two lovers; this connection manifests itself through flower-driven telepathy despite whatever fights ensued earlier. Thus, the second speaker’s response becomes a coy admission of her boundless love for the first speaker, and the final line becomes an answering wink.

The second interpretation, however, focuses on the remaining disconnect between the two speakers. Much like the abandoned prospect of resolution in “Come In,” this reading of “The Telephone” asserts that the two speakers only *almost* come together, sharing a brief moment of catharsis, but this catharsis is interrupted by the natural barriers between individuals. Marion Montgomery writes of this Frostian concept of barriers, “It is because of barriers that we understand each other, and, far from striving to tear them down as is the modern tendency, Frost insists on recognizing them. He even builds them wherever they seem necessary” (147). The son of a west coast, turn-of-the-century Democrat, Frost saw himself as a rugged individualist, and this isolation bleeds through the almost-resolution of “The Telephone.” As the second speaker maintains distance in not admitting to having said anything, this barrier-driven reading views the first speaker’s response as a brash manifestation of the distance between all people. In coming back to

the second speaker, despite confirmation of the invitation, the first speaker admits that he acted of his own accord; acting on one's own will and volition, then, becomes the only means of action. Thus, "The Telephone" becomes not a snapshot of the transcendence of lovers' reconciliation but instead a meditation on the space between lovers, no matter how strong the connection.

\*       \*       \*

After the ethereal space created by the quiet birdsong in the final measures of the preceding movement, "The Telephone" begins with an energetic rush of A major. An upward-moving sequence of arpeggiated staccato fourths in the right hand leads to a burst of electricity that evokes the ringing of a telephone in m. 3. Almost like a comedown from the surge of energy in the previous measures, the descending fourths of mm. 4–5 create a sense of calm before the men enter in m. 6.

Thompson's setting of the conversational flow created by Frost matches the poet's brilliance. Through the utilization of precise articulatory markings and a saturation of ebb and flow in the heavy rubato of each line, the vocal part flows with a natural inflection. However, Thompson leaves room for text painting as well. For example, the spondee "All still" is set on half notes. Whereas the previous lines were comprised of motion on eighth notes with perpetual motion in the melodic contour, "All still" stops the line, almost creating a sense of timelessness in an unusual meter (mm. 9–10).

The conversation continues in a similar fashion until the accompaniment drops out at m. 17. With the two beats of silence in m. 16, then, this unaccompanied line seems to stand out. In thus emphasizing this line, Thompson draws attention to the first speaker's question. He adds musical emphasis to the reader/listener's apprehension

regarding how the second speaker will respond. When the second speaker, voiced by the women, responds, the suspicions of emotional distance are confirmed: they sing in the relative F-sharp minor (mm. 22–26), further adding a sense of coldness to the interchange.

Much like the end of the introduction, the gestures of the accompaniment grow to a climactic point in m. 28 and then cascade downwards in a pattern of descending open fourths, thus neutralizing the tension yet again. When the men enter at m. 30, then, the phrase begins anew. In this verse, though, the musical line seems to be extended. Rather than a pause or halting of momentum, like that of mm. 9–10, the momentum surges forward. Tracing the high points of each sub-phrase in the tenor I part, one easily observes the increasing altitude of the contour, from the B of “head” (m. 33), to the C-sharp of “And” (m. 33), the D of “by” (m. 34), the E of “list-” (m. 35), the F-sharp of “thought” (m. 36), the G-sharp of “word” (m. 36), and, finally, the A of “was” (m. 37).

Another unaccompanied section follows, this time with rather extreme dynamics, such as the crescendo and decrescendo from *piano* to *forte* and back to *piano* in mm. 37–39. A decrescendo from *pianissimo* into a beat of silence in mm. 39–40 then sets up the desperate pleading of the first speaker’s final imploration, “*Someone* said ‘Come’” in mm. 41–43. As the contrary motion of the tenor I and bass II parts fold in on the subsequent line while the baritones resolve their suspension downwards, the speaker bows in anticipation of the reply.

Now, Thompson’s setting of the subsequent lines of text reveals his own interpretation of the poem. While the second speaker responded in the relative minor after the first verse, the women enter in m. 47 in A major, answering the dominant chord that

the men's half cadence rested upon in m. 46. Furthermore, the alto I motion in m. 50 softens the rhythmic coldness and creates a sense of warmth in the progression. The sudden burst of energy in the accompaniment of m. 52 seems to be a second wind granted to the first speaker. The playfulness of the dynamics and articulation in the men's reply, then, seems to be more flirtatious than bitterly empowered. As the women hum in m. 57 while the piano evokes the telephone's ringing again, one can sense a sort of resolution and final reconciliation. The gentle playfulness of the accompaniment's final measures put to rest any suspicions of lingering disconnect as Thompson removes any doubt, therefore interpreting the text as a triumph of love's transcendent ability to construct reconciliation.

## Chapter 6

### A Girl's Garden

*"A little bit of everything, a great deal of none"*

A neighbor of mine in the village  
Likes to tell how one spring  
When she was a girl on the farm, she did  
A childlike thing.

One day she asked her father  
To give her a garden plot  
To plant and tend and reap herself,  
And he said, "Why not?"

In casting about for a corner  
He thought of an idle bit  
Of walled-off ground where a shop had stood,  
And he said, "Just it."

And he said, "That ought to make you  
An ideal one-girl farm,  
And give you a chance to put some strength  
On your slim-jim arm."

It was not enough of a garden,  
Her father said, to plough;  
So she had to work it all by hand,  
But she don't mind now.

She wheeled the dung in the wheelbarrow  
Along a stretch of road;  
But she always ran away and left  
Her not-nice load.

And hid from anyone passing.  
And then she begged the seed.  
She says she thinks she planted one  
Of all things but weed.

A hill each of potatoes,  
Radishes, lettuce, peas,  
Tomatoes, beets, beans, pumpkins, corn,  
And even fruit trees

And yes, she has long mistrusted  
That a cider apple tree  
In bearing there to-day is hers,  
Or at least may be.

Her crop was a miscellany  
When all was said and done,  
A little bit of everything,  
A great deal of none.

Now when she sees in the village  
 How village things go,  
 Just when it seems to come in right,  
 She says, "I know!

It's as when I was a farmer—"
   
Oh, never by way of advice!
   
And she never sins by telling the tale
   
To the same person twice.

"A Girl's Garden," the third poem from *Mountain Interval* (1920), exemplifies Frost's fascination with the people of New England. Edward Garnett, in an essay published in 1915, praises Frost's ability to capture the human condition because "his record of the present passing scene suggests how much has gone before, how much these people have lived through, what a lengthy chain of feelings and motives and circumstances has shaped their actions and mental attitudes" (40). In fact, Garnett posits that this Frostian ability to bring the authenticity of life New England to his poetry (or perhaps vice versa!) will set him apart from his contemporaries, that it will "doubtless be characterized as a manifestation of American provincialism" (41). This honest depiction of human life not only has indeed proven to set Frost apart, as Garnett predicted in 1915, but it also breathes life into "A Girl's Garden," a poetic glimpse of a particular woman's story about her childhood garden.

The poem describes a seemingly foolish endeavor of a young girl to plant a garden. An unnamed narrator who speaks of his "neighbor in the village" frames this endeavor and tells her tale. The story itself is rather simple: the girl begs her father's permission and help in setting up a small garden plot to "plant and reap and tend herself." The father obliges, seeing the value in allowing his daughter to experience learning and "to put some strength / On [her] slim-jim arm." However, the youthful curiosity and enthusiasm subside as the work required becomes too much for the girl. She avoids the

unpleasantness of the fertilizing dung, hides from passers-by instead of plowing, and fails to plan her garden: she admits that she planted “A little bit of everything, / A great deal of none.” The narration then returns to the present, as the now-mature woman reflects on when she “was a farmer.” Frost’s narrator assures the reader, though, that this anecdote only occurs “when it seems to come in right”; furthermore, the woman “never sins by telling the tale / To the same person twice.”

The longest poem of the set, “A Girl’s Garden” possesses a form that stands out from the other works. Metrically speaking, each quatrain features two lines of trimeter followed by one line of tetrameter. The last line of each quatrain, however, is rhythmically ambiguous. Many of these lines could be read as dimetric, such as “A *childlike thing*.” Others seem to be trimeter with an embedded spondee, such as “A *great deal of none*.” Regardless of the answer, each option leads to a similar feeling of clumsiness, a metrical tripping over one’s feet at the end of the quatrain. In this way, the meter exaggerates the young girl’s brash foolhardiness and foreshadows the garden’s eventual clumsy end.

The rhyme scheme of poem is rather straightforward, with each quatrain organized according to ABCB then DEFE, et cetera. However, the first line of each stanza possesses a feminine rhyme, where the final stress lies on the penultimate syllable. Because this line remains unrhymed with the other lines of the quatrain, it poses no threat to the metrical stability. However, it subtly interrupts the crispness of the flow; in a language characterized by mostly iambic verse, these feminine lines seem rushed or unsettled. Thus, like the fourth line’s metrical hiccup, the first line’s feminine cadence echoes the girl’s disorganized endeavor in the garden.

The story of the girl's mishandling of a garden essentially becomes a straightforward tale of childlike innocence. It begins with a daughter's asking her father to indulge her curiosity. His reply of "Why not?" acknowledges that her wide-eyed exploration possesses the potential to reap positive benefits. In his explanation of his approval, he states the pragmatism of the girl's venture: that it will, one, make her an "ideal one-girl farm" capable of producing goods and, two, that it will give her strength on her otherwise "slim-jim arm." However, not only does the father's encouragement reinforce the girl's status as an innocent, but the mere existence of the patriarchal father figure also defines the girl in dependent terms. She loses the identity of an autonomous agent and becomes a man's daughter, making her into an even more childlike figure. The girl's mishandling of the garden becomes a problem that can be attributed to this sense of innocence. Whereas a seasoned farmer would hardly bat an eye at the prospect of fertilizing her crop, the young girl ditches her "not-nice load" and hides from "anyone passing." However, one cannot ignore the effort it would take to plant her "miscellany" of a crop, including:

A hill each of potatoes,  
Radishes, lettuce, peas,  
Tomatoes, beets, beans, pumpkins, corn,  
And even fruit trees.

Therefore, it is not for a lack of effort that the girl's garden eventually fails, but it is certainly for a lack of precision and discipline, both markers of age and maturity that the girl does not yet possess.

It can be tempting to assert that the poem laments the innocence of youth. One could also argue the opposite, that it celebrates the consequence-free nature of childlike



curiosity—after all, the girl’s garden causes harm to no one. However, a deeper meaning emerges from a particular word in the final stanza. In the only words actually spoken by the woman, she boasts, “*I know! / It’s as when I was a farmer.*” This self-affixed label of “farmer” stands out as peculiar. The land that comprised the garden was no more than some “walled-off ground where a shop had stood,” by no means a farm. Furthermore, the woman could describe herself as a failed gardener, but “farmer” seems to be self-aggrandizing and, simply, wrong.

Perhaps the woman says this with a wink, as if to self-deprecatingly indicate her own folly as a warning to others in the village. The narrator quickly assures the reader that this is not the case, explicitly stating that this story never occurs “by way of advice.” Another possibility could be that the woman tells the tale as a humorous account of her childlike folly. This explanation seems just as unlikely, though, because the narrator states that “she never sins by telling the tale / To the same person twice.” If the tale were a comical anecdote shared with friends in the village, one surely would not refer to its telling as a “sin,” and it would not be out of place to hear the story more than once.

Thus, the remaining possibility is that the woman’s retelling of her tale is a construction of a false past, much like the speaker of “The Road Not Taken,” from the same volume of poetry. Instead of acknowledging her innocence as a product of her youth, she concocts a tale of the time when she proved her experience as a “farmer.” Unlike the imagined audience of “The Road Not Taken,” though, the villagers of “A Girl’s Garden” know the truth and refuse to hear the exaggerated tale more than once.

What becomes an even more peculiar detail is that the girl’s story is framed within the woman’s retelling, which is framed by the narrator’s depiction of the woman

herself. While the woman tells her exaggerated tale to the people of the village, the narrator—and, thus, the reader—knows the truth of the matter. In this way, the reader never experiences the false past constructed by the woman. He or she only knows what *actually* happened, as retold by the narrator. Thus, the reader cannot be shrouded by the woman’s tale; he or she sees the construction of a false past plainly and clearly.

In this sense, the poem becomes an echo of the themes of “The Road Not Taken.” Both works begin with a depiction of the past, a glimpse into the actual events that transpired. Both then project forward into the future, a moment of reflection on the past. Tragically, both poems’ reflections are false, whether in attributing cosmic significance to a choice in the yellow wood or giving oneself too much credit for a summer spent gardening. The poems, therefore, reinforce this human tendency to misappropriate one’s own meta-narrative; in obsessing over this narrative and its appearance, both the traveler in the yellow wood and the woman who did a “childlike thing” avoid their own choices. Philip Gerber writes, “Frost’s poems are studded with individuals who accept the inevitable or who resist it” (119); the characters of these two poems from *Mountain Interval*, then, resist the inevitability of human error. Regardless of the size of this error, the characters serve as reminders to the reader that human error lays not in the mistakes we make but in how we recover from and handle those mistakes.

\*       \*       \*

The musical setting of “A Girl’s Garden” embodies the girl’s innocence. Written for women’s voices that sing entirely in unison until the last lines, the movement retains a sense of simplicity throughout, much like a young girl’s singing to herself as she plays and toils in her garden. Thompson sets the movement in D minor, which achieves two

functions. The first is that the minor sonority juxtaposes with the movement's upbeat energy, creating a sort of rustic dance. This playful character removes the sense of tragedy from the piece, while leaving room for reflection on the girl's mistake as a "childlike thing." Secondly, the key echoes the D minor of "The Road Not Taken." As the only two movements set in D minor, the two reflections on human choice and action become thus musically connected.

One of the busiest accompaniments in the entire set, the piano part of "A Girl's Garden" adds to the dance-like feel of the movement in its rhythmic drive. For the first twenty-six measures, for example, the left hand plays only on the beat while the right hand plays only on the offbeat. Furthermore, the left hand's being comprised of either open fifths or octaves evokes the imagery of a bluegrass band playing in a barn as the country folk square dance with each other.

A defining characteristic of the vocal part is its navigation of the rhythmic complexity of the poem. Thompson handles the rhythmic peculiarities of the text with ease, utilizing 2/4 measures for the many of the quatrain's final lines, such as "And he said, 'Why not?'" in m. 12. At other points, he adds a hint of syncopation to not only maneuver around the metrical bump but also add to the energy of the dance. For example, in m. 20, the eighth rest that precedes "Just it" stabilizes the rhythm of the line, drives the momentum forward, and emphasizes the text by setting the father's words apart from the rest of the line.

As the tale spins on, so does the accompaniment. Matching the freneticism of the girl's haphazard gardening, the piano part gradually becomes more and more complex. Whereas the first two verses feature a steady eighth note pulse divided between the

hands, the chords break at m. 27, now becoming sixteenth notes passed between the hands. When the women re-enter in m. 29, the accompaniment returns to the eighth note pulse, but this time with more pronounced contour. In fact, it ascends so high that the left hand part abandons the bass clef and finds itself on the treble clef (mm. 31–32)! This verse also sees the inclusion of increased pedal markings and more extreme dynamics, like the *forte* accent in m. 38 that interrupts a decrescendo before immediately returning to a staccato *piano*.

The next verse begins with a brief interlude characterized by a burst of rising sixteenth notes in the right hand (m. 39). The measured trill gives way to a rising sequence of tetrachords that climaxes on a high D, marked *fragoroso* or “deafening” in m. 40. The accompaniment continues the energy as the women enter in m. 43, now mixing the sixteenth note figurations with a dramatic contour of chords pulsed on eighth notes. The pedal markings also become rather specific, alternating between sustained and *secco* nearly every quarter note. As the interlude repeats and culminates with another *fragoroso* in m. 53, the women enter in m. 55 as the piano now spins on with perpetual sixteenth notes with dramatic contour. The pedal markings become more consistent, but the piano part becomes slightly acrobatic, demanding a hand crossing in mm. 59–60, heightening the frenzy even further!

When the interlude returns yet again, it climbs higher than the D, stretching a fifth higher to a high A (m. 67). Marked *strepitoso* or “boisterously,” the arrival on A reinforces the dominant and heightens the harmonic tension that pulls toward the tonic. As the music then falls towards the resolution of the tonic, the women sustain an A on the word “Now.” In a signal of the imminent climax of the piece, the note is articulated with

a *sforzando* marking, immediately followed by a subito *piano*, and then marked with “*crescendo molto*” (mm. 69–70). When the women arrive at “when she sees in the village” in m. 71, the other end of the narrator’s frame, the accompaniment returns to the eighth note pulsing that characterized the initial part of the narrator’s frame. However, the music carries more weight than the simplistic opening, as both the accompaniment and women’s part are marked *marcato*.

While, up to this point, the women had been voicing the part of the narrator, in a glorious burst of harmony in m. 74, they become the woman’s voice herself. Marked *sospirando* (“sighing”), their “I know” sighs downwards on a glissando. Thompson constructs an important connection between this sigh and the sigh of “The Road Not Taken.” In the first movement, the line “I shall be telling this with a sigh” begins with a B-flat chord and moves to a suspended C major chord that resolves on the word “sigh” (mm. 51–53). The sigh of “A Girl’s Garden” similarly moves from a B-flat major seventh chord to a resolution on a C major (mm. 74–75), thereby connecting the two movements (and their meanings) even further!

The following lines feature extreme fluctuations in tempo separated by rests that add emphasis to the lines. The first—“when I was a farmer”—is marked *Lento*, perhaps aggrandizing the weight of the woman’s words (mm. 75–77). The next line—“Oh, never by way of advice”—picks up to *Allegro*, seemingly indicating the narrator’s quick assertion that the woman’s tale does not come in the form of advice (mm. 78–79). The following two lines begin with another *Lento* exaggeration of the gravity of the woman’s tale, perhaps still in jest of her own self-image, but the emphatic gesture gives way to a playful *Allegro* wink (m. 80–81). The piano part then continues the measured trill figure

from the previous interludes, ascending a full two octaves to a high D (mm. 82–85). The penultimate chord is a D minor triad with an E included, perhaps as one last, unsettled joke about the failed garden before the final *pianississimo* ping of the low Ds in m. 86 that give the movement a sense of finality much like the final chords of “The Road Not Taken.”

## Chapter 7

### Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening

*“The woods are lovely, dark, and deep”*

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

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

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

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

Philip Gerber calls “Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening” (*New Hampshire*, 1923) Frost’s “most perfect poem” (85). Jean Gould writes that the poem was a favorite of President Kennedy, who often recited the final lines of the poem at the conclusion of cabinet meetings (3). When one considers the poem as an example of Frost’s sheer mastery of poetic form and structure, one can hardly disagree with the assessment of the

poem as a work of genius. The poet himself would refer to the work as “my heavy duty poem to be examined for the rime pairs” (Gerber, 85). With an ingeniously interwoven rhyme scheme and a crispness of metrical consistency, “Stopping by Woods” certainly deserves the scholarly attention it has garnered. When this attention to detail is compounded with the deep meaning of the text, it becomes clear why and how the poem has achieved its status as one of the most important of the Frost canon.

The mechanics of the rhyme scheme reveal Frost’s mastery of the genre. Each quatrain features an AABA rhyme scheme, creating a density of rhyme that unifies the poem. Even more astounding, though, is that each quatrain seamlessly weaves into the following quatrain: the secondary rhyme (B) of the first quatrain becomes the primary rhyme (A) of the second quatrain. Thus, “here” of the first quatrain rhymes with “queer,” “near,” and “year” of the second quatrain, just as “lake” rhymes with “shake,” “mistake,” and “flake,” et cetera. In describing the genesis of this scheme, Frost has said, “There’s an indulgent smile I get for the recklessness of the unnecessary commitment I made when I came to the first line in the second stanza...I was riding too high to care what trouble I incurred. And it was all right so long as I didn’t suffer deflection” (Gould, 230).

While the end rhymes achieve unification through a sense of haunting echoes, the meter of the poem steadily trudges forward. Frost sets the poem in perfect iambic tetrameter, with no exceptions or discrepancies. James Cox, in his essay “Robert Frost and the Edge of the Clearing, argues that the rhyme and metrical schemes taken together “imitate and suggest the hypnotic power of the forest” (151). He goes on to explain the brilliance of Frost’s preoccupation with structure: “He sees the form as both instrument and embodiment of the will braving the alien entanglements of experience...for it must



organize and at the same time contain its material” (151). Thus, in painting such a precise portrait of the woods through the poem’s crisp structure, Frost invites the reader into the darkness of the woods to stop and see the snow.

At face value, the speaker of the poem relates the story of traveling through a dark wood on a wintry night. As the narrator passes through on horseback, he suddenly stops to watch the “woods fill up with snow.” However, the narrator’s horse questions the pause, perhaps thinking it “queer / To stop without a farmhouse near.” The horse “gives his harness bells a shake” but the speaker seems to remain hypnotized by the stillness of the “darkest evening of the year.” The poem evokes that ethereal silence achieved by a blanket of snow in the middle of a winter night: “The only other sound’s the sweep / Of easy wind and downy flake.” But alas, despite the woods’ being “lovely, dark, and deep,” the speaker remembers his “promises to keep,” and, in a haunting line that repeats itself in order to intone a sense of somber finality, the speaker adds, “And miles to go before I sleep.”

The first intriguing detail of the poem becomes the alien quality of the woods. In the very first line, the speaker admits, “Whose woods these are I think I know,” qualifying his orientation with a sense of doubt. As the speaker then stops, he states, “He will not see me stopping here.” It is not that the speaker has permission to stop; it is that he will go unnoticed. This becomes an important distinction, for as Cox writes, “[The woods] are alien enough and belong to someone else enough for [the speaker] to sense the trespass of his intent gaze into them at the same time he recognizes their sway over him” (151). By drawing attention to this “intent gaze,” Frost not only makes the action

more deliberate but also allows the reader to trespass along with the speaker in his transfixed stare into the darkness.

The second mysterious detail becomes that of the horse and its place in the woods. As an instinct-driven animal, the horse simply cannot understand the intrigue of the woods. It thinks not of the “easy wind and downy flake”; rather, it wonders why the speaker would stop “without a farmhouse near.” The horse becomes so perplexed that it shakes its harness bells as if to “ask if there’s been some mistake.” However, it becomes necessary to remember that the horse is nothing more than an animal. It does not stand in existential quandary in these woods; it just feels cold and wants to return home. The projection of consciousness onto the horse comes from the narrator’s hypnotized musings; Cox refers to the horse’s function as an “indifferent animal” who, in the imagination of the master, “sounds the alarm which rings above the whispered invitation” (151). Thus, like the woods filling up with snow, the horse becomes a natural canvas onto which the speaker projects his interior landscape of doubt and wonder.

The third and most perplexing detail concerns the question of why the speaker finally turns from the woods. While it seems to be a response to the horse’s shaking of the bells, one must remember that the speaker’s interpretation of this shake comes from his own projections. So why does the speaker suddenly remember his “promises to keep?” Roberts French analyzes this turn by unpacking the metaphor of the woods to reveal a much darker meaning. He argues that the “somber stillness of the woods” entices the speaker to stop and reflect in a “melancholy, pensive mood” (161). However, these woods promise “no revelation, but only stasis, a cessation of activity suggestive of death” (162). This idea of the woods as a metaphor for death explains the imagery of the

profound sense of stillness: the woods' steadily filling up with snow, the "frozen lake," the "darkest evening of the year," and even the lack of sound. The question still remains, though, why does the speaker turn away?

The answer comes in the penultimate couplet, a two-line exhortation of what it means to be alive: "The woods are lovely, dark, and deep, / But I have promises to keep." Though the stillness of the woods—the mysterious release of death—entices the speaker and hypnotizes his sense of fantasy, he snaps out of it and remembers a crucial facet of human life. In turning from the woods to the "promises to keep," the speaker makes his choice; French declares that this turn indicates, "Human obligations, human responsibilities, must take precedence" (162). Thus, the speaker turns away from the darkness of solitary death towards the light of human relationship. He realizes, after all, that the time has not yet come, for he still has "miles to go" before he sleeps.

"Stopping by Woods," in this sense, becomes thematically similar to "Come In." Both poems feature dark woods as a backdrop onto which the speaker projects internal quandary. Both poems feature an animal that, despite first impressions, exemplifies the divide between man and nature. Finally, both poems culminate with a turn away from ultimate mystery. However, an important distinction lies in each speaker's locus in relation to the woods. While the speaker of "Come In" approaches the woods, she only gets as far as the edge before turning away in search of stars. The speaker of "Stopping by Woods," on the other hand, begins his story deep within the dark woods. Already steeped in this mystery, the narrator then chooses to pass through, not from fear or ignorance but from a sense of obligation to the living world. Marion Montgomery argues

that this subtle distinction exemplifies a mature handling of the divide between man and nature, the known and the unknown:

Each man is, in a sense, a stranger in this world, and so he remains. His is not to question why he is alone or why the world seems to be against him. He is to begin the breathless opening and closing of the mind, the hand, the heart, the eye upon the world, growing as he does so. As he grows he understands himself more, and as he understands himself he also understands more of the world and of his fellows. With understanding comes love which makes him respect the chaos of the world with which he is in conflict, the material with which he works.  
(148)

Thus, the woods are indeed “lovely, dark, and deep.” The mysteries contained within hypnotize the speaker and reader alike, drawing each in with promise of revelation. However, as Montgomery argues, these questions are not for us to answer; rather, one must focus on his or her own “promises to keep.” And, after a life of fulfillment through human obligation—the many “miles” each traveler must travel—we each have the promise of the ultimate mystery, the release of “sleep.”

\*       \*       \*

A commonly performed movement from the set, “Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening” evokes the text’s meditation on the profound stillness of the woods. Just as the text exemplifies Frost’s mastery of his craft, this choral setting for men’s voices exemplifies Thompson’s mastery of the art of choral music. From his use of extended and haunting melodic material, subtle text painting, carefully constructed strophic structure, and a depiction of the stillness of sleep, the movement seems to be suspended in time, much like the speaker’s transfixed gaze into the unknown.

This sixth movement of *Frostiana* is the only movement set in F minor. Because of the somber gravity of its color, the key has been historically associated with tragedy. Perhaps due to the harshness of the four flats in historical temperament systems, the key's heaviness lends a sense of tragic passion to works such as Beethoven's "Appassionata" sonata, Chopin's second Piano Concerto, and Haydn's "Passione" symphony. In setting "Stopping by Woods" to this key, Thompson thus aligns it with a rich history of tragic reflection, adding an even greater density to the speaker's silent sojourn in the woods.

The movement begins with the piano accompaniment's gently falling snowflakes in the introduction. With sustained whole notes in the left hand and a *pianissimo*, staccato skeleton of a descending F minor arpeggio in the right hand, the dance of "A Girl's Garden" immediately gives way to a sense of utter stillness. As the F minor chord falls to an enharmonic spelling of an F half-diminished seventh in m. 2, the snow falls even lower. Finally, as the left hand joins the arpeggiated figure of the right hand in mm. 3–4, the snowflakes eventually sweep the earth as the men enter at the end of m. 4.

Like Thompson's setting of "The Pasture," this movement features a juxtaposition of compound and simple meter. If this metrical dissonance represented a divide between man and nature (or a sense of opposition in general) in "The Pasture," then this opposition reaches a peak in "Stopping by Woods." While the march-like quality of the 4/4 of the snow-laden introduction evokes a natural simplicity, the 6/8 of the vocal line becomes an unsure lilt of the speaker's waffling between the woods' hypnosis and an overriding sense of human obligation.

One of the challenges of the movement becomes the maneuvering of the extended musical line of each verse. Though the harmonic progression of each verse almost

reaches a half-cadence in the middle of each quatrain, e.g. “His house is in the village though” (m. 8), the line hardly pauses. Though artistic license could lend itself to a lift or subtle *ritardando* at these moments of pseudo-stasis, only at the end of each stanza does the music fully achieve rest. Ironically, this forward momentum creates a sense of dissonance with the text. Whereas the speaker and his horse fully stop in the woods to watch the snow, the music—perhaps foreshadowing the pull of human obligation—relentlessly moves onward.

Another defining characteristic of the vocal line is the fluidity of each part. With all three parts moving in mostly stepwise motion with anything but static contour, this sense of melodic motion and relentless momentum is reinforced. Furthermore, moments such as the major sixth leap of “He will not see me” in m. 9 create a sense of profound longing. The fact that this longing only achieves a sense of resolution four measures later after a sequential descent from the F of “see” to the Eb of “To” to the Bb of “fill” heightens the despondency of the longing not only through musical delay but also through a melancholic acceptance of the downward motion.

The return of the introductory material in the accompaniment at m. 13 and similar musical material in the second verse, beginning at m. 16, signals the strophic nature of the movement. This structure both reinforces the perfect simplicity of Frost’s highly formulaic poem and increases the dramatic tension through repetition. Rather than a linear development of thought, the movement becomes a snapshot or meditation on the speaker’s existential hypnosis. Like the steady snowfall, the speaker’s thoughts waft in the air both with and without a sense of defined direction. Thus, the music, like the speaker’s pause in the woods, passes as one moment in time.

In the interlude between the second and third verses, beginning at m. 25, Thompson inserts a degree of text painting. Suddenly interrupting the *pianissimo* snowfall, a dissonant, arpeggiated chord appears in m. 28. When the singers re-enter in m. 30, it becomes clear that the chord evokes the horse's shaking of its harness bells. The brilliance of this compositional technique is that the sound of the harness bells precedes the explicit mention of the bells. In doing so, the bells interrupt the musical hypnosis in a similar fashion to the speaker's abrupt reminder from his horse.

With the strictly strophic nature of the movement thus interrupted, Thompson introduces another change in the piano accompaniment in this verse. As the singers verbally invoke the quiet sound of the "sweep / Of easy wind and downy flake," the piano gently sweeps upwards in a scalar motion from the F above middle C to the C three octaves higher (mm. 35–39). However, the gesture hardly draws attention to itself; with a decrescendo written at the peak of the scale, the motion seems to fade away like snowflakes carried by a gentle gust of wind.

With a *pianississimo* entry, the fourth and final verse enters with an ethereally haunting tone color (m. 43). If this point in the text marks the poignancy of the question, "Should I stay or should I go?" for the speaker, then the music emphasizes the tension. While the preceding verses flow through each line with hardly a pause, the music comes to eerie halts in this final verse. For example, the word "deep" is sustained for over a measure while the piano quietly repeats a ii half-diminished seventh (mm. 45–47). The harmonic motion continues as the next moment of stasis occurs under the word "keep" with a V chord over an F pedal tone (mm. 48–50). However, Thompson introduces a harmonic change with the subsequent line, as the harmonic progression leads not to the

tonic but to a flat VII chord on “sleep” while the piano accompaniment gently caresses a rhythmic ostinato that suspends the moment in a sense of timelessness (mm. 52–55).

This seemingly odd harmonic insertion seems to evoke a sense of mystical longing. As the speaker perhaps feels the compelling pull towards proverbial “sleep,” the music underlines the ethereal foreshadowing of the emotional tension. In fact, the use of a flat VII chord—especially an E-flat chord in an F-based key—to mark a moment of mystical foreshadowing appears elsewhere in the set. In “The Road Not Taken,” the appearance of the flat VII comes at several key moments. First, it underlines the word “undergrowth” in m. 14, as the speaker cranes to see into his possible future. Next, in a humble admission of both roads’ equality and a foreshadowing of the poem’s ironic end, a flat VII chord adds a sobriety to “Had worn them really about the same” in m. 28. In the third verse, the flat VII returns to cast doubt over the narrator’s “ever” coming back to the two roads (m. 42). Finally, in both instances of the final line, a flat VII emphasizes the tragedy of the speaker’s projection into the future as he (falsely) asserts that his choice has made “all the difference” (m. 65, m. 78).

As a similar marker of poignant reflection, the pseudo-cadence on the flat VII in m. 55 of “Stopping by Woods” lends itself to a moment of utter stillness. Taken almost entirely out of tempo, the repetition of the line “And miles to go before I sleep” meditates not only on the foreshadowed E-flat major chord but also on the eventual stillness of the speaker’s proverbial sleep (mm. 55–60). After a full measure of absolute silence (m. 61), the introductory snowfall of the accompaniment returns in m. 62. The snow eventual settles to the ground as both hands fall to the bass register in m. 66. The horse makes one last appeal through the shaking of its harness bells in mm. 66–68, and a low C-F motion



intones a dark finality to the movement as the speaker turns from the woods to his miles  
to go and promises to keep.

## Chapter 8

### Choose Something Like a Star

*"I burn"*

O Star (the fairest one in sight),  
 We grant your loftiness the right  
 To some obscurity of cloud—  
 It will not do to say of night,  
 Since dark is what brings out your light.  
 Some mystery becomes the proud.  
 But to be wholly taciturn  
 In your reserve is not allowed.  
 Say something to us we can learn  
 By heart and when alone repeat.  
 Say something! And it says "I burn."  
 But say with what degree of heat.  
 Talk Fahrenheit, talk Centigrade.  
 Use language we can comprehend.  
 Tell us what elements you blend.  
 It gives us strangely little aid,  
 But does tell something in the end.  
 And steadfast as Keats' Eremite,  
 Not even stooping from its sphere,  
 It asks a little of us here.  
 It asks of us a certain height,  
 So when at times the mob is swayed  
 To carry praise or blame too far,  
 We may choose something like a star  
 To stay our minds on and be staid.

The latest poem of the set, “Choose Something Like a Star” (also titled “Take Something Like a Star” in various volumes) was first published in *Steeple Bush* in 1947. Fashioned as an ode to a distant star, the poem possesses a much more puzzling meaning than many of the other poems of the set. Not only does the speaker praise the star’s “loftiness,” but he also begs the star for guidance. In demanding a response to the open-ended, “Say something!” the speaker reveals much not only about human nature but also the nature of knowledge in general. The poem thus becomes the most didactic poem of the set, offering advice from the star’s example to the reader who, like the speaker, thirsts for guidance from above.

In order to uncover this meaning, it first becomes necessary to understand an important allusion made in the poem—the reference to Keats’s “Eremite.” The line refers to the poet John Keats (1795–1821), an English Romantic poet who is perhaps best known for his odes, such as “Ode to a Grecian Urn” and “Ode to a Nightingale.” The reference to his “Eremite” specifically invokes his poem, “Bright Star,” composed in 1819:

Bright star, would I were stedfast as thou art—  
 Not in lone splendour hung aloft the night  
 And watching, with eternal lids apart,  
 Like nature's patient, sleepless Eremite,  
 The moving waters at their priestlike task  
 Of pure ablution round earth's human shores,  
 Or gazing on the new soft-fallen mask  
 Of snow upon the mountains and the moors—  
 No—yet still stedfast, still unchangeable,  
 Pillowed upon my fair love's ripening breast,

To feel for ever its soft fall and swell,  
 Awake for ever in a sweet unrest,  
 Still, still to hear her tender-taken breath,  
 And so live ever—or else swoon in death.

Keats's poem begins with the speaker's desire to be as "stedfast" as the bright star, with the ability to experience the totality of humanity from afar, like "nature's patient, sleepless Eremite." Then, the speaker changes his mind and decides he would rather remain "Pillowed upon [his] fair love's ripening breast." Though he wishes to remain "still stedfast, still unchangeable" like the star, he prefers the position of adjacency to his beloved. The final line evokes a sense of finality through this love, that in giving himself over to this loving steadfastness, he will achieve immortality, or, with equal bliss, "swoon in death."

Keats's definition of steadfast, therefore, invokes a sense of stability. He describes the star in terms of its infinitude: "with eternal lids apart," like a "sleepless Eremite." The term "Eremite" is nothing more than an archaic term for hermit, which one can define as an entity that takes an eternal vow to remain in solitude. When the speaker turns from the star towards his beloved, he retains this sense of infinity. He aims to "feel for ever" the "fall and swell" of his lover's breast; he wishes to remain "awake for ever in sweet unrest"; finally, he expresses a desire to "live ever" or embrace the final infinity of death. It becomes an important detail that the word "still" appears four times in this fourteen-line poem. Thus, the aim of steadfastness invokes an unchanging sense of being, stilled in the infinity of timelessness.

Frost's subtle homage to Keats's star expands upon this meditation on steadfastness. In fact, the word "steadfast" and its derivatives ("staid" and "stay") appear three times in the poem. However, Frost's speaker goes beyond an ode-like praise of the star's steadfastness. The speaker makes a demand of the star. Even though the speaker grants the star "the right / To some obscurity of cloud" because "Some mystery becomes the proud," he explicitly states, "But to be wholly taciturn / In your reserve is not allowed." Thus, the speaker takes an audacious step towards the star and boldly demands an answer to his burning questions.

What becomes interesting about this demand is its ambiguity. Despite the brashness of the speaker's assertion of a right to an answer, he almost immediately backs away from asking a direct question. Rather, he pleads, "Say something to us we can learn / By heart and repeat. / Say something!" The choice of the word "something" should be almost frustrating for the reader. In a genre where each word carries a precise weight, such an ambiguous term seems cheap or hollow. In fact, the word appears two more times in the poem: when the speaker reflects on the star's words ("It gives us strangely little aid, / But does tell something in the end.") and in the final didactic message ("We may choose something like a star.").

The ambiguity of both the speaker's question and the moralistic takeaway from the star's response emanates from Frost's deep-seated mistrust of the scientific realm. Jean Gould, in writing of Frost's years spent teaching literature and philosophy to young men at Amherst, relays Frost's insistence to the boys that "science, for all its precision, can only measure height; it can never measure worth, love. Science could never tell them

how true anyone's love might be, because science could never know" (290). Perhaps this mistrust of the scientific method comes from an even deeper-seeded darkness that pervades the Frostian oeuvre. Philip Gerber pinpoints it thus: "Always the great inescapable fact is that man comprises an imperfect being who operates within a larger but equally imperfect universe" (123). In other words, the quest for ultimate knowledge becomes a fool's errand because this ultimate knowledge is both unknowable and possibly nonexistent. Thus, the speaker's attempt to define the star in terms of Fahrenheit or Centigrade becomes foolish; at best, that could only provide a number. What becomes important, then, is that the star says "something" at all.

Thus, we are left with the actual "something" said by the star: "I burn." In order to unpack the mystery of this two-word sentence, one must remember that the poem functions as a meditation on steadfastness, defined as the quality of being stilled in the unchanging infinity of timelessness. Three facts connect the star's message to this quality of steadfastness. First, the star expresses itself in the present tense. It burns *now*; it does not express a desire to burn, nor does it reveal that it had once burned—it continually burns in the instantaneous moment we call the present. Second, the star's burning creates light. The speaker himself defines the star according to the opposition between its light and the surrounding night sky, for "dark is what brings out [the star's] light." In creating this light, then, the star defines itself as a beacon of the night sky, an unwavering light to which the speaker calls for steady guidance. Finally, the concept of a star's burning fuses past, present, and future into one act. Essentially, the act of burning one's own chemical makeup for fuel becomes a metaphorical fusion of the act of self-construction *and* self-

destruction. A star only exists because it burns, and a star only fades because it burns out. Thus, “I burn” hints at this perpetual incorporation of the past and future into the present action of burning. Furthermore, the star’s cryptic “I burn” becomes the key to understanding the concept of steadfastness: to be steadfast, one must remain in the present and burn.

The remaining question then becomes, how does one burn? Although the speaker initially rejects the star’s message as giving us “strangely little aid,” he immediately recognizes that it “does tell something in the end.” He then directly invokes Keats’s *Eremita* and appeals to the reader that the star’s message carries an obligation that we must fulfill. The message, simply put by the speaker, becomes:

So when at times the mob is swayed  
To carry praise or blame too far,  
We may choose something like a star  
To stay our minds on and be staid.

Thus, the didactic message becomes to remain steadily in the present despite external circumstances. Ironically, the message comes from the star’s example and not solely from its words. Through the speaker’s carrying praise (“the fairest one in sight”) and blame (“But to be wholly taciturn / In your reserve is not allowed”) to the star, he becomes part of the “mob.” Therefore, the star’s steadfast response to the speaker’s demands provides its moralistic message not only through its text but also through its steadfast imperviousness to the demands of the speaker. So, to “choose something like a star” becomes a twofold act: to burn and to resist any influence to diminish that burning.

This didactic guidance becomes an orientation for the reader, much like the bright star of the night sky. In burning and meta-narrating that act of burning, the star provides not only actual light in the darkness but also the proverbial light of advice. Captured in the text of the poem, this message becomes a foundation that the reader can stand upon. In doing so, the poem creates what the poet often referred to as a “momentary stay against confusion”; Frost writes of a poem’s ability to orient the reader thus:

It should be of the pleasure of a poem itself to tell how it can. The figure a poem makes. It begins in delight and ends in wisdom. The figure is the same as for love. No one can really hold that the ecstasy should be static and stand still in one place. It begins in delight, it inclines to the impulse, it assumes direction with the first line laid down, it runs a course of lucky events, and ends in a clarification of life—not necessarily a great clarification, such as sects and cults are founded on, but in a momentary stay against confusion. (Napier, 136–37)

\*       \*       \*

As the musical culmination of the set, “Choose Something Like a Star” serves as a powerful finale. Set for mixed voices, the movement exemplifies Thompson’s ability to achieve profound beauty with utter simplicity. From the significance of the key signature to the consistent homophony to the text painting, this final movement constructs an emphatic end to *Frostiana*, an end that lifts the listener to the stars and leaves him or her there in peaceful reflection.

If the text of the poem preoccupies itself with the concept of steadfastness, the setting of the music matches it so. First, the music immediately grounds itself with a stable G pedal tone in the bass of the piano accompaniment. This bass—usually with the



fifth degree D on top—remains gently pulsing on the quarter note for the entire first verse until “Some mystery becomes the proud” in m. 28. This groundedness creates a sense of steady stability through its unchanging nature. Second, while the other three parts carry the text of the first verse in simple homophony, the sopranos repeat “O Star” in octave leaps from D4 to D5 (e.g. mm. 4–5, 7–8). Compounded with the pedal tone of the accompaniment, the entirety of the musical line becomes enwrapped in this expansive open fifth, thus further stabilizing the music with a steadfast G sonority. Lastly, the slow yet deliberate motion of the homophony throughout the movement adds to this feeling of steadfastness. Not only does this chordal setting bring out the text through its simplicity, but it also unifies the direction of the musical line. Rather than a frenetic sense of polyphony, the homophony of “Choose Something Like a Star” becomes steadfast in its stable motion.

Beyond the evocation of the star’s steadfastness is the evocation of the star itself. The very first musical gesture of the movement is a scalar ascent from the D above middle C to the D two octaves higher (mm. 1–5). Matching the sopranos’ D on “Star” in m. 5, this scale becomes a representation of the ascent to the star, even if just through an imploring gaze. It becomes interesting that both evocations of the star arrive on the fifth degree of the scale, the dominant that pulls towards the tonic. Perhaps this indicates the star’s strong hypnotic pull on the speaker; perhaps it symbolizes the lack of resolution that comes from stargazing; or, perhaps more simply, it symbolizes the requirement of the stability of the steadfast tonic pedal tone in order to have any meaning. In other

words, the ascent to the star, symbolized by the dominant fifth degree, marks a point of inquiry whose answer lies in steadfastness.

Thompson's ability to write extended musical lines becomes readily apparent in this movement. While the homophonically set text of the first verse comes to points of rest at the end of each textual line ("sight" in mm. 7–8, "right" in mm. 11–12, "cloud" in mm. 15–16, and "night" in mm. 19–20), the line does not achieve stasis until the cadence on "your light" (mm. 24–25). Thus, Thompson stretches one musical line over three full pages!

When the bass of the accompaniment finally shifts in m. 28, a sense of direction suddenly is incited. As the sopranos join the other three parts, the harmonies thicken, as if evoking the sense of "mystery" emanating from the star (m. 29). For the next several measures, the musical tension increases with the use of suspensions, such as the altos' D of "mysteries" in m. 29 or their E of "your reserve" in m. 32. After this mysterious exploration of such harmonies as a C-sharp minor seventh in m. 31 and a B dominant seventh in m. 32, the music then rests in a briefly tonicized C-sharp major in m. 33. An abrupt crescendo in m. 34 from *piano* to *mezzo forte* introduces the emphatic plea that the star "Say something" (m. 35). The energy momentarily dissipates as the speaker reflects on the prospect of repeating this "something" alone. In a musical painting of this introspection, the music decrescendos to *piano* and the voices condense with collapsing contrary motion and a further decrescendo that pauses on "repeat" (mm. 38–40).

Marked "*forte subito*," the voices' "Say something!" reinvigorates the momentum from before and, finally, the star speaks (m. 41). On the words "I burn," all four vocal

parts move upwards (the basses and tenors move upwards twice!), not only adding tonic accents to the text but also evoking the ascent to the star; moreover, the sopranos return to D5 in a direct echo of the previously set musical definition of the star (mm. 42–44). As the piano echoes this two-octave leap to the star three times in a row, the third high D is marked with a *martellato* accent with the dynamic marking of a triple-*forte sforzando*, virtually the loudest sound a piano can achieve (m. 45). The vocal parts match this intensity with a crescendo to a robust *fortissimo* that extends all the way to a decrescendo in m. 51, leading into “Tell us what elements you blend.” This decrescendo begins a steady cooling of the intensity, almost as if the speaker becomes aware of his audacity and introspectively realizes the profundity of the star’s message. In m. 57, “something” of “But does tell something in the end” is set apart by the first rest in the piano accompaniment in the movement. Emphasizing the mystique of the “something” that can be learned from the star, this silence also brings out the subsequent accompaniment gestures: the repetition of the octave leap to the star over a rudimentary three-part canon of an ascending scale upwards to the star (mm. 57–61).

Marked “*Sostenuto e sereno*” (“sustained and serene”), the accompaniment cadences on a G major chord with a high D in the top voice as the voices re-enter and settle on a full G major chord on the word “steadfast.” In this profoundly beautiful moment of musical steadfastness, the basses remain set on a low G while the sopranos sustain a D5 for almost the entire line, “And steadfast as Keats’ Eremite / Not even stooping from its sphere” (mm. 61–69). Then, with another section peppered with suspensions (e.g. the altos’ D of m. 70 and the tenors’ A of m. 71) and a steady

crescendo, a sense of movement towards the final climax arises. The sopranos heighten this tension, as each line moves upwards by a third (E of “asks” in m. 70, G of “asks” in m. 72, B of “So” in m. 74, D of “carry” in m. 77, and the F-sharp of “far” in 78). Not only does this upward motion again evoke the star, but also the movement by thirds as opposed to stepwise scalar motion quickens the pace of the ascent, adding to the dramatic tension.

The music achieves climax on the word “choose” in m. 80. From this point onwards, two things happen: both the choral part and the accompaniment steadily decrescendo to *pianississimo*, and every gesture in the accompaniment faces upwards. As the voices sing the final line “and be staid” in mm. 87–90, they come together in octave unison on a D, a final nod to the star’s dominant pull. Underneath, the piano part gently climbs upwards in chordal motion of parallel fifths and sixths, much like the final accompaniment gesture of “The Road Not Taken.” When one considers the D minor of “The Road Not Taken” to be the minor dominant of the G major of “Choose Something Like a Star,” this final gesture seems to be a response to the final gesture of the first movement. As if putting to rest the questions of doubt and uncertainty from “The Road Not Taken,” this gesture simply ascends to the star with quiet acceptance. Then, in a resolution of the death knells of the first movement, three G major chords (“and be staid,” mm. 93–95) assure the listener of the comfort in steadfastness. Finally, the piano pays homage to the sleepless Eremite one last time, with a two-octave leap from D4 to D6 in the right hand and a soft but steady G1 in the left hand. Taken as a musical culmination of the entirety of *Frostiana*, then, these final moments seem to communicate a sense of

utter resolution of previous moments of doubt, and that, guided by the light of this bright star, we can indeed choose something like a star and burn in steadfast acceptance of the lives we live.

## Conclusion

Perhaps the strongest conclusion to this analysis comes in the form of a question. More specifically, it comes in the form of “A Question,” from the same collection as “Come In,” *A Witness Tree*, published in 1942. The poem reads:

A voice said, Look me in the stars  
And tell me truly, men of earth,  
If all the soul-and-body scars  
Were not too much to pay for birth.

More simply, is this life worth it? Is the fearful paralysis of facing the choice of two roads worth it? Are the relentless chores of clearing pasture springs and fetching little calves worth it? Is the self-consciousness of turning from the dark woods and the thrush’s call worth it? Are the pains of choked communication in relationships worth it? Are our childish mistakes and refusal to learn worth it? Are these dark and deep woods worth it?

To answer these questions, it becomes necessary to take another look at these poems for, though Frost poses the questions, he also hints at an answer. Despite the agonizing choice between the diverging roads in front of us, the “yellow” wood remains breathtakingly beautiful. Sometimes watching the water clear with *you* makes the chores more bearable. Even if we turn from the woods, we remain “out for stars.” Relationships may be marked by the price of pain and loss, but still we come home. Perhaps planting a

harmless garden and toiling in the carefree sun is good enough. And, the woods are more than dark and deep—they are truly lovely.

Like the subjects of these poems, we may never fully understand the deepest mysteries of life, whether they come to us as roads bent in the undergrowth or thrush's songs at dusk. Even if we were to glimpse into this supreme understanding, the chores of this world and our natural human limits prevent us from garnering total control over life's circumstances. However, we can find a momentary stay against the confusion of this world. We can burn like Keats's Eremite, continually raging against the dying of light by creating our own. Moreover, we may choose something *better* than a star; we can burn together.

*Frostiana: Seven Country Songs* thus becomes more than a seven-movement choral work for mixed voices. It becomes a meditation on a human question that goes deeper than questions of why and how. It asks, do we want this? Is life worth it? After an extensive analysis of the work, after a long rehearsal process and successful performance of the work, after writing nearly seventy pages on the subject, and after an intense reflection on the texts and music of the poetic experience of Randall Thompson's *Frostiana*, I can give my affirmative answer. It is indeed worth it; in fact, I would bet my life on it.

## Appendix

### Concert Program and Audio Files

#### Program

*Frostiana: Seven Country Songs*  
 The Road Not Taken  
 The Pasture  
 Come In  
 The Telephone  
 A Girl's Garden  
 Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening  
 Choose Something Like a Star

Randall Thompson  
 (1899–1984)

#### **Soprano**

Ann Dolly  
 Jamie Rapaport  
 Lisa Rogali  
 Juliane Schicker  
 Christa Schimitsch  
 Allyson Wunsche

#### **Tenor**

Adam Baker  
 Robert Burgard  
 Bradley Middleton  
 Kenneth Moore  
 Ryan Ordnung  
 David Schmiech

#### **Alto**

Jana Bontrager  
 Heather Brewer  
 Alison Geesey  
 Laurel Ann Gonsecki  
 Margaret Ortbal  
 Caroline Swanson

#### **Bass**

Michael Belsky  
 William Broaddus  
 Kyle Masson  
 Nathan Shugarts  
 Nicholas Sikoutris  
 David Zach

PENN STATE  
 COLLEGE OF ARTS AND ARCHITECTURE

---

School of Music

presents

A Lecture Recital

## Randall Thompson's *Frostiana*

A Poetic Experience

John Livingston, piano

This recital is given in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
 for a baccalaureate degree in musical arts with honors in music.  
 John is a student of Dr. Steven Smith,  
 and his thesis is advised by Dr. Christopher Kiver.

Sunday, October 20, 2013  
 6:00 p.m.

Esber Recital Hall, Music Building I

Please refrain from the use of recording devices during this performance. Uploading video and/or audio recordings of any portion of this concert to social media sites such as Facebook and Youtube violates copyright law and is prohibited. This publication is available in alternative media on request. Penn State is committed to affirmative action, equal opportunity, and the diversity of its workforce.



1. The Road Not Taken



5. A Girl's Garden



2. The Pasture



6. Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening



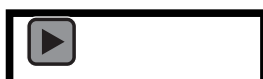
3. Come In



7. Choose Something Like a Star



4. The Telephone





## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Benser, Caroline Cepin and Urrows, David Francis. *Randall Thompson: A Bio Bibliography*. New York, NY: Greenwood Press, 1991. Print.
- Cox, James M. "Robert Frost and the Edge of the Clearing." Ed. Philip Gerber. *Critical Essays on Robert Frost*. 1<sup>st</sup> ed. Boston, MA: G. K. Hall & Co., 1982. 144–54. Print.
- French, Roberts. "Robert Frost and the Darkness of Nature." Ed. Philip Gerber. *Critical Essays on Robert Frost*. 1<sup>st</sup> ed. Boston, MA: G. K. Hall & Co., 1982. 155–62. Print.
- Frost, Robert. *Complete Poems*. 17<sup>th</sup> ed. New York, NY: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1964. Print.
- Garnett, Edward. "A New American Poet." Ed. Philip Gerber. *Critical Essays on Robert Frost*. 1<sup>st</sup> ed. Boston, MA: G. K. Hall & Co., 1982. 35–42. Print.
- Gerber, Philip L. *Robert Frost*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Boston, MA: G. K. Hall & Co., 1982. Print.
- Gould, Jean. *Robert Frost: The Aim was Song*. 5<sup>th</sup> ed. New York, NY: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1964. Print.
- Montgomery, Marion. "Robert Frost and His Use of Barriers: Man Vs. Nature Toward God." Ed. James M. Cox. *Robert Frost: A Collection of Critical Essays*. 10<sup>th</sup> ed. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1962. 138–50. Print.
- Napier, John T. "A Momentary Stay Against Confusion." Ed. James M. Cox. *Robert Frost: A Collection of Critical Essays*. 10<sup>th</sup> ed. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1962. 123–37. Print.
- Traschen, Isadore. "Robert Frost: Some Divisions in a Whole Man." Ed. Philip Gerber. *Critical Essays on Robert Frost*. 1<sup>st</sup> ed. Boston, MA: G. K. Hall & Co., 1982. 170–80. Print.

# academic vita

<b>education</b>	Pennsylvania State University	<i>Class of 2014</i>
	Bachelor of Musical Arts, Piano Bachelor of Arts, English Schreyer Honors College	<i>Fall 2011–Spring 2014</i>
<b>academic distinctions</b>	Student Marshal, Penn State School of Music	<i>May 2014</i>
	The Evan Pugh Scholar Award	<i>Spring 2012, Spring 2014</i>
	The President Sparks Award	<i>Spring 2011</i>
	The President's Freshman Award	<i>Spring 2010</i>
<b>professional affiliations</b>	Pi Kappa Lambda Music Honor Society	<i>Fall 2012–Present</i>
	Phi Kappa Phi Honor Society	<i>Summer 2012–Present</i>
<b>solo experience</b>	Applied Teacher: Dr. Steven H. Smith	<i>Fall 2010–Spring 2014</i>
	Winner, Penn State Philharmonic Orchestra Concerto Competition	<i>February 2013</i>
	Solo Recitals	<i>December 2011, December 2012, April 2014</i>
<b>awards and recognitions</b>	Scholarship Competition Awards	
	▪ Marjorie Jane Brewster Memorial Scholarship	<i>November 2013</i>
	▪ Gladys and Reuben Golumbic Scholarship	<i>March 2013</i>
	▪ Presser Scholarship	<i>February 2013</i>
	▪ William J. and Lois Kesterson Leight Memorial Award	<i>March 2012</i>
	▪ Eleanor Beene Memorial Award	<i>March 2011</i>
	Jury Recognition	<i>Fall 2010, Fall 2011, Spring 2012</i>
	Jury Honors	<i>Spring 2011, Fall 2011, Spring 2012, Spring 2013</i>
<b>collaborative experience</b>	...with vocal and instrumental soloists	<i>Fall 2009–Present</i>
	▪ collaborated with a variety of voice parts as well as strings, brass, and woodwinds	
	▪ accompanied students' lessons, masterclasses, and end-of-semester juries	
	▪ performed in numerous recitals and public performances both on and off campus	
	...with an ensemble	
	▪ Keyboardist, Penn State Philharmonic Orchestra: Bernstein's <i>Mass</i>	<i>Spring 2013</i>
	▪ Guest Pianist, Elgin Youth Symphony Orchestra (Gettysburg, PA)	<i>March 2012</i>
	▪ Accompanist, Penn State Concert Choir	<i>Fall 2010–Spring 2014</i>
	▪ Accompanist, Penn State Glee Club	<i>Fall 2009–Spring 2014</i>
	...with a theatrical production	
	▪ Pianist/Coach, Penn State Opera: Poulenc's <i>Dialogues of the Carmelites</i>	<i>Fall 2013</i>
	▪ Pit Pianist, Penn State No Refund Theatre	<i>Fall 2010, Spring 2011</i>
	▪ Pit Keyboardist, Park Forest Middle School (State College, PA)	<i>Spring 2010</i>
	...with a church choir, cantor, or congregation	
	▪ University Baptist and Brethren Church (State College, PA)	<i>Fall 2010–Spring 2014</i>
	▪ St. Michael's Catholic Church (Johnstown, PA)	<i>September 2004–July 2009</i>
	▪ Our Mother of Sorrows Catholic Church (Johnstown, PA)	<i>Fall 2003–Spring 2014</i>
<b>related experience</b>	Music/Vocal Director, Valley Players (Ligonier, PA)	<i>Summer 2012, Summer 2013</i>
	taught and rehearsed the soloists and ensemble; conducted from the piano during performances	
	Staff, Penn State Summer Music Camp (University Park, PA)	<i>July 2011, July 2012</i>
	accompanied the camp's Concert Choir; co-taught a class on Performance Practice	
<b>leadership experience</b>	Pianist, Numero Uno Italian Restaurant (Johnstown, PA)	<i>April 2005–August 2009</i>
	entertained patrons by playing of classical, jazz, and pop selections; fulfilled patron requests	
	Vice President, Penn State Concert Choir	<i>Spring 2011–2013</i>
	President, Penn State Glee Club	<i>Spring 2011–2012</i>
	Dance MaraTHON Chair, Penn State Glee Club	<i>Spring 2010–2011, Spring 2012–2014</i>