

ROBERT FROST AT AGNES SCOTT

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. . . Up where I live --- know so much about you through me, that I'm set up to be an authority, not only on Agnes Scott but on the South. When you go anywhere, when you go ANYWHERE, you're expected when you get back to talk about it and tell people what your impression is, if its only one hour or one week. And if you've been to England or South America, or if you've just been in the neighboring state, if you've been out of Vermont into New Hampshire, they want to know what New Hampshire is like now - what is your impression.

And Mr. Niebuhr, who goes around much as I do, sees a great many audiences in America, particularly, I suppose, on Sunday. His report is that a --- his latest report, I understand, is that this generation (I'm speaking to college undergraduates and graduate school) this generation is a generation that will take no nonsense, and that amuses me a lot. It's as if he's tried some nonsense on them and some not-nonsense. LAUGHTER. And he could tell --- he can tell by the way they responded which they took. Or else he's --- we won't put it that way. I'm just being funny. LAUGHTER. He's watched other people talking their nonsense and he sees it doesn't work, and then he gives them his sense and it does work, or something like that. I don't know. LAUGHTER.

Now if you want the latest thing I've noticed --- I guess I should have noticed it before. Everywhere I've been the last forty years

it seems that people are more interested in gossip about authors than they are in the author's works. LAUGHTER. They love --- a --- a --- my --- the --- this last season --- its just come over me --- I --- when you want to find out what's going on in a place, you don't find out by asking questions, you find out by answering questions. It's the questions you're asked that tell you what the world's thinking of --- and --- The only thing I've been asked so far since I was sprung, as you might say, from the North, from Vermont, the only thing I've been asked is about certain authors and all. Not one word, not one author has been quoted, not one idea of any of them been quoted, but I've been asked about the scandal of their lives. LAUGHTER. That's all. And it's Joyce and Pound and --- a --- and Jones and even Henry Miller. Just think of that. That's all I've been asked about.

I've been two or three places already. All that's rather a surprise, but I've long ago decided that there are only three things in the world. There's religion and science and gossip. LAUGHTER. And the greatest of these is gossip. LAUGHTER. Because out of that all literature is made, hearsay and observation and talk about our neighbors, and --- and penetrating into their lives. The ruling passion in man is not what Freud says, it's minding each other's business. LAUGHTER. That's the heart of it all. It's out of that all of the literature and drama and poetry and everything comes. So that's the great --- the great --- that's one of the three greats. I --- I must not put it above religion and science. I leave philosophy out because there's no such thing as any --- as philosophy for me unless it's God philosophy. It's just a --- it's the Gardener, the Gardener in the Garden of Eden. It comes in to prune

things, prune religion and cut off certain things --- rationalize religion to a certain extent. But it belongs with religion. The philosophy of our time has gone off into --- it's studying it's own pruning hooks, it's own weapons. It's not --- it's lost. It forgets what its purpose is. To take care --- to rationalize our God religion, you see.

Isn't it strange about the gossip that way. Now --- a --- you see, everybody wants to know how bad everybody is, especially --- and how much I admire them for being that bad. LAUGHTER. I could --- That didn't begin just now though. It's just dawned on me. I'm slow. I'm slow on the uptake. A --- But years ago it used to be about how --- what Amy Lowell was doing in Boston. And how she --- when she went to a hotel, how she had to have the pillows brought to her to see whether they were thick enough and had one opened and another poured into it, you know, and that sort of thing. They all wanted to hear about those things, and how she treated the help and so on. I got all that kind of question.

I just saw in New York day before yesterday, so to speak, last week, I saw the Ambassador from Guatemala, no, from Nicaragua. Though, at this distance I don't distinguish them very --- LAUGHTER. I think it's one --- and he was a young poet I saw forty years ago being entertained by Amy Lowell in Boston, and all the old days came back to me and how badly she treated him. What a story I could tell. And now he's got over poetry and he's an ambassador. LAUGHTER. She cured him. And such things as that. Those seem to be the great interests. Nobody's speaking of Shelley. I heard the other day about Shelley and Keats, the other day, in just such company, intellectual college-crowd professors, as a matter of fact, and they got into a quarrel as to which was the

better poet -- Shelley or Keats, and they didn't quote one line of either. 'Twas just their lives and the way they looked at things. No one said of Shelley, "Pinnacled dim in the intense inane," to quote his own words. "Pinnacled dim in the intense inane!" That would have been nice to come in with. Nothing like that. No. Just that he married Godwin's daughter and he didn't treat her very well and so on. LAUGHTER. And that kind of thing. Now I don't --- not complaining --- this is just as I find it and you --- when I'm here with you I like to lift it out of that a little into saying what --- what.

What am I here for? Well, I suppose if I went by the professors I know, they'd like to know what I think's the matter with the world, see, and can it be shown in my poetry. What I indicate what I think's the matter and what I think ought to be done about it, see. I consider that sociology more than poetry. But that's what they want to know. And --- a --- I've been thinking --- looking into myself a little about it, wondering what I did --- do think is the matter, if anything --- and you know how sad I think the world is, not how bad, really. I'm more interested in how said it is than how bad. --- where the tragedy comes in.

One night with Amy Lowell years ago, since I named her, she said to me, "What, after all, is the difference between your stor--- New England stories (she called them that) and my New England stories (her New England stories)." I said, "Look, Amy, you're like Shakespeare, you can't have a tragedy without the help of a villain. And I can get up a tragedy when nobody's to blame." LAUGHTER. She said, "I can see you don't like mine." I said, "Oh no," I said, "you're more like Shakespeare."

Then she was happy. LAUGHTER.

My sorrow in life is the conflict of good and good. I can't deal with the worlds of the past and the troubles of the world without seeing the conflict of good and good. I can't bear a world of blackguarding on both sides. And I can't bear literature that blackguards God and the world. The blackguarding is what I --- They say, "That's just a little aristocratic, isn't it?" But I don't know whether it is or not. Anyway, that's it.

And the --- the conflict --- what's the matter with the world is matter. We all have to eat matter, we have to get matter for our doctor's theses -- we can't write a thesis without material. Matter. And the trouble is --- the sorrow is --- that the spirit often gets lost in the matter. That's not only so in --- speaking bodily, but mentally. The material often overwhelms the spirit. The spirit doesn't come through. Someone like Toynbee we admire because he tackles such a huge mass of matter, the whole thing you know, and he tries to bring something of spirit, that is to say, meaning to the whole. And --- a --- that's one of the great things in the world. Once in so often, somebody like Spengler, somebody like Toynbee, somebody that tries the whole thing. That --- that --- it almost always has something to do with God in some form or other, however it's worded, wherever the name is taken.

Take the religion, the big thing, one of the three big things. The religion is the believing part. It even comes into our believing the future in. You believe in God and you believe the future in, see. And we do it, you know, that's our trouble --- that's our --- that's our successes and our failures, whether we lose the spirit in the matter.

And that's so with what we eat, see. One can eat such a meal easily that he can't think. And one can grow, grow grosser, easily, in the world. Grow gross and get lost. And that's always there. You take somebody with a mass of material that sounds terribly real, a great big fat book of material and does he get lost in it? Nine times out of ten, in the cases I know. He just gets credit for being a lost person. Like the rest of us, they say, but who --- for that ---. Speak for yourself, you know. Are you lost? Do you think the most representative person of your time is a person just lost in our life and in his own material? Like Dreiser, for instance, not to name contemporaries. Just somebody bothered, confused and making a massive --- massive ---. Back to chaos, out of which we come. Out of which we come momentarily. It's not out of the remote past, it's every minute. We lift out of chaos. We don't come from it, and journey from chaos through the ages. We lift from chaos all the time, every minute. I just thought I'd say that to you. You know I'm irresponsible. LAUGHTER.

I --- I've been thinking a good deal about the spirit entering into matter and it got started in the poem I was writing. One --- one of the things you have to think about it, one of the interesting things. The spirit has to substantiate. Thought has to have it's material. The spirit has to substantiate. And --- and you have to remember that the God of your religions came down to show that the supreme merit was to risk spirit in substantiation. He substantiated Himself, see. That's what your --- what your Christian religion says. At the risk of the spirit always -- that's the supreme merit. At the risk of the spirit. And our race, our world, not the world of Spengler, not the world of

those people that have just got lost. Our's is a constant misgiving, fear, anxiety for the spirit that it shan't be lost in substantiation. It's necessary -- substantiation.

Is it in Job? Job, I guess it is that says, "Thou art more to me . . ." God, the spirit, the soul of things, "Thou art more to me than my necessary food." He didn't leave the word "necessary" out. Shows our predicament. The necessary material --- and that you can get the spirit --- can be lost in. What I read will have nothing to do with that.

You know, you could say this about the time. Let's put it this way. The people ask me, "Is there a great revival going on ala Graham?" "Is there a great restoration going on ala Charles II?" That's for the educated. LAUGHTER. It's a restoration, I think. One of the signs of the time is that Whicherly's "Country Wife" is being put on to great applause up in New York. That very restorational poem --- restorative --- or whatever you want to call it --- a play, of course ---. It's more a restoration ala Charles II than a revival ala Billy Graham that I see in the country, and down here too, and more --- less a revival than, well you might say, it's really a --- rather --- revel and more --- less --- more a revel than a revival --- and less --- and more, well you might say, less a revel, even, than a wallow. Right down to that. That's just speaking --- that's just taking a few prominent names that are thrown in my face wherever I go. I'd name them for you but I won't go over that. That means that they're all --- they're all that kind of people. They're the kind that wallow. They're not reveling, they're wallowing. I could take a revel better than I could a wallow. LAUGHTER. I like a bad time too, now and then, if there's any wit or something in it.

They say there's wit in a --- in a --- in Whicheverly, but he seems to me about as sodden a wallower as --- as ever wrote plays. "The Country Wife" -- go home and read it, get it out, don't wait. I don't go to theaters as much as I should, but I often give an evening to a whole play at home --- read one. I read that just the other night to see whether I was right about it. LAUGHTER. That's another thing. I --- I often leave a book around a long time --- a --- you know, looking at its spine, thinking about what it's probably about. Then I don't have to read it at all. Very hard when I look at it to see if I was right. LAUGHTER. Just look at the last chapter, maybe, then I can deliver opinions wherever I go. LAUGHTER.

Now, one of the troubles after talking this way that I get started on, get off on some little theme of my own that way. It's hard for me to pick up the poems, to see what one I'll begin with from that. Ought to have something to do with it. Here's a little one, figure of speech one. Just the whole figure itself. It's about floods, freshet that swept away everything up in Vermont same as it does down here --- down in Texas. I saw --- I saw one in, that this is based one, I saw part of this in, clear out in New Mexico. I saw an amusing one. We were riding along in a train and down the arroya came a flash flood. You could see it. It came up over --- the water rose over the track and we went through it slow, and right out one side of us an automobile came to a bridge, and just as --- and just as the automobile got there the bridge went away and they backed away a little, the automobile did, and looked at things and then a great big piece of the world broke off and went down in the flood. They backed away a little further and then another piece,

a big cake went off and they backed a little further and they decided to go home. LAUGHTER. This is more of --- poem --- not only --- Vermont, but it's partly a memory of that day that I saw that.

Not only sands and gravels
 Were once more on their travels,
 But gulping muddy gallons
 Great boulders off their balance
 Bumped heads together dully
 And started down the gully.
 Whole capes caked off in slices.
 I felt my standpoint shaken
 In the universal crisis.
 But with one step backward taken
 I saved myself from going.
 A world torn loose went by me.
 Then the rain stopped and the blowing
 And the sun came out to dry me.

You see, that's got both those --- both --- two of the floods in it, buried in it; but the meaning is, you see, something added to it ---

And the sun came out to dry me.

The universal crisis, you see, you could enlarge on that --- always talking about the universal crisis.

I felt my standpoint shaken

I named that, I think I named it "One Step Backward Taken," or else, yes, I changed its name two or three times. LAUGHTER. First I said ---. I usually take a name out of a poem somewhere and I had "I Felt My Standpoint Shaken," and once I called it --- and somebody said, "You've been reading Karl Marx too?" And that's what that meant to 'em. So "With One Step Backward Taken" I named it, and then someone said to me, "You mean we ought to recede about the bomb?" You know. And then I told that to some boys in college to see how we're all in on this game of playing with meanings. That's the fun of it. That meaning wrong --- and the boys

said to me, "Why don't you call it 'Bumped Heads Together Dully'?"

LAUGHTER. And there's something to that.

Then take one sort of about universal things that way. "The Woodchuck." This is the woodchuck speaking, you know. Some of you know, some groundhog, different names --- different parts of the country. And the woodchuck speaking, it's another rhymed one. You notice the rhyme in that --- crisis and all that. Slices and crisis, you know, that kind of thing. And that's part of the fun for me, these playing with rhymes, fresh rhymes. "The Woodchuck." This is a smug poem and sort of a love poem too. Smug poem and a love poem. The woodchuck says:

My own strategic retreat
Is where two rocks almost meet,
And still more secure and snug,
A two-dog burrow I dug.

With those in mind at my back
I can sit forth exposed to attack
As one who shrewdly pretends
That he and the world are friends.

All we who prefer to live
Have a little whistle we give,
And flash, at the least alarm
We dive down under the farm.

We allow some time for guile
And don't come out for a while
Either to eat or drink.
We take occasion to think.

But [sic] if after the hunt goes past
And the double-barreled blast
(Like war and pestilence
And the loss of common sense),

If I can with confidence say
That still for another day,
Or even another year,
I will be there for you, my dear,

It will be because, though small
 As measured against the All,
 I have been so instinctively thorough
 About my crevice and burrow.

LAUGHTER. See that's another way of looking at it.

One short one that might go with that that was written almost the same time and it has some of the same meaning in it. It's more outspoken in its meaning. It's called "Triple --- Triple Bronze" or "Triple Armor" or some name like that. I've changed the name of that two or three times, but it's about the triple --- triple armor we live in.

The Infinite's being so wide
 Is the reason the Powers provide
 For inner defense my hide.
 For next defense outside

I make myself this time
 Of wood or granite or lime
 A wall too hard for crime
 Either to breach or climb.

Then a number of us agree
 On a national boundary.
 And that defense makes three
 Between too much and me.

LAUGHTER. That's the point of that,

. . . too much and me.

And again we say temper, you know temper --- the wind and all that. That's what it is. All these boundaries we have of clothes and walls and institutions and nations, boundaries -- all are between too much and me. --- and make it so it isn't so bad as it might be. Bad as it is. Then suppose I just say one, some of the old ones too. This --- two or three of the little ones.

No, suppose I say this first just to depart as far as I can from what I've been talking about. Get away from --- shake it off ---

these meanings --- these ---. This is called "The Gift Outright." It comes under the head, though, of what I was saying about the conflict of good and good -- not the conflict of good and evil. It's my history, short history, of the Revolutionary War. This is all there was to it. Just as they say --- I have a doctor friend who's always saying, when I got anything the matter, he says, "There's nothing the matter with you, nothing but -- nothing but." Then he tells me what it was nothing but. This was making revolution, nothing but what it was, you see.

- The land was ours before we were the land's.

That's really the heart of the whole thing. I shot it right off like a newspaper article. LAUGHTER.

The land was ours before we were the land's.
 She was our land more than a hundred years
 Before we were her people. She was ours
 In Massachusetts, in Virginia,
 But we were England's, still colonials,
 Possessing what we still were unpossessed by,
 Possessed by what we now no more possessed.
 Something we were withholding made us weak
 Until we found out that it was ourselves
 We were withholding from our land of living,
 And forthwith found salvation in surrender.
 Such as we were we gave ourselves outright
 (The deed of gift was many deeds of war)
 To the land vaguely realizing westward,
 But still unstoried, artless, unenhanced,
 Such as she was, such as she would become.

That's all.

The land was ours before we were the land's.

This was put foremost. I've just been over in the other country, and there was an anthology over there made for, I suppose, partly for my coming, I don't know; but Auden made it, and he put as the frontispiece in the book for the British this poem about the Revolutionary War --- a ---

They would understand. And someone said to me over there, "Of course, the other colonies are ripening off. You fell off green." LAUGHTER. And that's all right. It's amusing. But they're ripening off, and maybe that's one way. --- another way --- They're going, going, going, gone. Then --- a --- let's see --- a --- another different tune --- a --- this is --- a --- praise of a lady. It's called "Never Again Would Birds' Song Be the Same." You see, quite --- and the rhyme and all that --- the play --- different --- it's a little fantasy.

He would declare and could himself believe
 That the birds there in all the garden round
 From having heard the daylong voice of Eve
 Had added to their own an oversound,
 Her tone of meaning though [sic] without the words.
 Admittedly an eloquence so soft
 Could only have had an influence on birds
 When call or laughter carried it aloft.
 Be that as may be, she was in their song.
 Moreover her voice upon their voices crossed
 Had now persisted in the woods so long
 That probably it never would be lost.
 Never again would birds' song be the same.
 And to do that to birds was why she came.

That --- that's a sonnet. Then another tune. Do you want to hear that twice to see how nice the rhyming is? CHUCKLES. See, you don't have that chance hearing it that you have reading it. I once thought I'd like to carry a little sheaf of --- well, a little folder, you know, with half a dozen of the short poems on it. But the trouble with that was what Mr. Alston was speaking of. Everybody wanted it autographed afterward. There were about a thousand there and I, I had to be taken out by the police. LAUGHTER. Let's see --- The form of it is what I like people to see, you know. These thoughts that I talked about first are none of them to me so serious that I don't like 'em best when they're

played with in a play, in a play, mind you, in a play. They say --- they say, "Isn't "Lear" a terrible thing." Well, it surely is, but it's a play. Somebody's play. Shakespeare's playing with it, you gotta remember. It isn't like a work on sociology. That --- that's what Tolstoy thought was the matter with it. That's why he condemned it. It was his favorite hate, because he was a sociologist. "He would declare," you see, the lighter tone of this, the lighter tone.

He would declare and could himself believe
 That the birds there in all the garden round
 From having heard the daylong voice of Eve
 Had added to their own an oversound,
 Her tone of meaning though [sic] without the words.
 Admittedly an eloquence so soft
 Could only have had an influence on birds
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 Be that as may be, she was in their song.
 Moreover her voice upon their voices crossed
 Had now persisted in the woods so long
 That probably it never would be lost.
 Never again would birds' song be the same.
 And to do that to birds was why she came.

You see, those sentences in there --- The approach to poetry that I want all the time is the pleasure of seeing form, seeing sentences inlaid, see, sentences inlaid in the verse form. It's like --- it's like inlay work. That --- that --- that's the pleasure I want people to have, not talk about what it signifies too much about what it signifies. Signify enough without my bothering. Can't help signifying somewhat.

Then --- it's kinda long. Suppose I say "Birches" to you now. Somebody'll say you ought to have said it if you don't, if I don't. And again, you know, here's just boys play in trees, and so on --- and one of the things I go by without ever having the chance to speak of it --- boys' life too far from town to learn baseball. I lived that way a long time

and you know what I did? I found things to play myself. One of them was baseball off the roof -- until they stopped me because I was breaking up the shingles. LAUGHTER. But you're always alone that way.

When I see birches bend to left and right
 Across the lines of straighter darker trees,
 I like to think some boy's been swinging them.
 But swinging doesn't bend them down to stay
 As ice-storms do. Often you must have seen them
 Loaded with ice a sunny winter morning
 After a rain. They click upon themselves
 As the breeze rises, and turn many-colored
 As the stir cracks and crazes their enamel.
 Soon the sun's warmth makes them shed crystal shells
 Shattering and avalanching on the snow-crust--
 Such heaps of broken glass to sweep away
 You'd think the inner dome of heaven had fallen.
 They are dragged to the withered bracken by the load,
 And they seem not to break; though once they are bowed
 So low for long, they never right themselves:
 You may see their trunks arching in the woods
 Years afterwards, trailing their leaves on the ground
 Like girls on hands and knees that throw their hair
 Before them over their heads to dry in the sun.
 But I was going to say when Truth broke in
 With all her matter-of-fact about the ice-storm
 I should prefer to have had [sic] some boy bend them
 As he went out or [sic] in to fetch the cows--
 Some boy too far from town to learn baseball,
 Whose only play was what he found himself,
 Summer or winter, and could play alone.
 One by one he subdued his father's trees
 By riding them down over and over again.
 Until he took the stiffness out of them,
 And not one but hung limp, not one was left
 For him to conquer. He learned all there was
 To learn about not launching out too soon
 And so not carrying the tree away
 Clear to the ground. He always kept his poise
 To the top branches, climbing carefully
 With the same pains you use to fill a cup
 Up to the brim, and even above the brim.
 Then he flung outward, feet first, with a swish,
 Kicking his way down through the air to the ground.
 So was I once myself a swinger of birches.
 And so I dream of going back to be.
 It's when I'm weary of considerations,
 And life is too much like a pathless wood
 Broken across it, and one eye is weeping

From a twig's having lashed across it open.
 I'd like to get away from earth awhile
 And then come back to it and begin over.
 May no fate willfully misunderstand me
 And half grant what I wish and snatch me away
 Not to return. Earth's the right place for love:
 I don't know where it's likely to go better.
 I'd like to go by climbing a birch tree,
 And climb black branches up a snow-white trunk
 Toward heaven, till the tree could bear no more,
 But dipped its top and set me down again.
 That would be good both going and coming back.
 One could do worse than be a swinger of birches.

Another line in there that means more to me than it did when I wrote it.

I put in there --- I wrote that very young and said

It's when I'm weary of considerations

I don't know what consid --- I didn't know what considerations were
 when I wrote that. I know now. LAUGHTER. Too much politics ---

Well, let's make another sound. That's what I --- for my own
 relief that I make 'em sound different. This --- this one is called
 "Provide, Provide." You say it like that -- "Proviide, Proviide."
 LAUGHTER. I had a letter from, this last week or two, from a friend of
 mine who led a strike at Harvard, years ago, for the scrubwomen. It was
 quite a thing in our papers. Made front page all over the country.
 Strike of the scrubwomen it was called at Harvard. And he led it. And
 he's a noted radical now. He stays that way. He began that way and he
 stays that way. Lead any kind of a rumpus. But he wrote me to ask if
 it was true that (I --- I must have dropped this somewhere, speaking in
 my careless way) if it was true that I had him in mind. But if I did,
 I took off from him and went a way off, you see.

The witch that came (the withered hag)
 To wash the steps with pail and rag,
 Was once the beauty Abishag,

The picture pride of Hollywood.
 Too many fall from great and good
 For you to doubt the likelihood.

Die early and avoid the fate.
 Or if predestined to die late,
 Make up your mind to die in state.

Make the whole stock exchange your own!
 If need be occupy a throne,
 Where nobody can call YOU crone.

Some have relied on what they knew;
 Others on being simply true.
 What worked for them might work for you.

No memory of having starred
 Makes up [sic] for later disregard,
 Or keeps the end from being hard.

Better to go down dignified
 With boughten friendship at your side
 Than none at all. Provide, provide!

See, say it like that. I don't know whether he liked the way I took off what I take off into that. He --- he --- he doesn't own all the stock exchange, but he owns a lot. LAUGHTER. Yet he's always on the other side about it all. And he --- he once said to me he didn't like that. He thought it was, you know, "better to go down dignified with boughten friendship than none at all. Provide, provide!" See. He said something about that years ago. He's forgotten that. And --- a --- I said to him, "Don't you see, there's nice things in there. There're three nice lines for you.

Some have relied on what they knew

He was a professor then. He relied on what he knew.

Others on being simply true

"That's your wife," I said. Two nice ways out of it. He hasn't got it through his head yet. LAUGHTER.

Now, some little ones like, a little tiny one like this. The way moods change --- about how you change your mood. Changes my mood if I open the paper and find something going right somewhere. LAUGHTER. My --- my --- the home team has won a game, meaning by that the U.S.A. lost a game, didn't lose a game, lost the quarter. That's all. I never get very excited about that. There's a lot of people start cheering on the other side when they --- when you --- when you've lost the first quarter, but you just keep still and win the last. That's all. The way --- See how innocent this looks of all that.

The way a crow
Shook down on me
The dust of snow
From a hemlock tree

Has given my heart
A change of mood
And saved some part
Of a day I had rued.

Just that bath of snow in the face, you know.

The way a crow
Shook down on me
The dust of snow
From a hemlock tree

Has given my heart
A change of mood
And saved some part
Of a day I had rued.

Sometimes when young people --- I have a rule that if I sign, that if they want my autograph, they must write out something of mine --- and sometimes they write out something of mine ---. In any college you go to, you know, anywhere, one of the surprising things is they don't know how to break the lines. What's the matter with them? They've all been reading too much free verse, I guess, or something. And the one

important thing is the way the rhyme is cuttered, and the break at the line. The way the sentence lies and breaks and all that in it. I just wrote --- I just saw some of that just where I've been. I wrote my name to it just the same, bad as it was. Was something they knew anything I'd said anyway. So I was flattered, really flattered. But all --- the break of the lines is so important, isn't it. This is called "After Apple-Picking." Apples up in our state, peaches down here.

My long two-pointed ladder's sticking through a tree
 Toward heaven still,
 And there's a barrel that I didn't fill
 Beside it, and there may be two or three
 Apples I didn't pick upon some bough.
 But I am done with apple-picking now.
 Essence of winter sleep is on the night,
 The scent of apples: I am drowsing off.
 I cannot rub the strangeness from my sight
 I got from looking through a pane of glass
 I skimmed this morning from the drinking trough
 And held against the world of hoary grass.
 It melted, and I let it fall and break.
 But I was well
 Upon my way to sleep before it fell,
 And I could tell
 What form my dreaming was about to take.
 Magnified apples appear and disappear,
 Stem end and blossom end,
 And every fleck of russet showing clear.
 My instep arch not only deeps the ache,
 It keeps the pressure of a ladder-round.
 I feel the ladder sway as the boughs bend.
 And I keep hearing from the cellar bin
 The rumbling sound
 Of load on load of apples coming in.
 For I have had too much
 Of apple-picking: I am overtired
 Of the great harvest I myself desired.
 There were ten thousand thousand fruit to touch,
 Cherish in hand, lift down, and not let fall.
 For all
 That struck the earth,
 No matter if not bruised or spiked with stubble,
 Went surely to the cider-apple heap
 As of no worth.
 One can see what will trouble

This sleep of mine, whatever sleep it is.
 Were he not gone,
 The woodchuck could say whether it's like his
 Long sleep, as I describe its coming on,
 Or just some human sleep.

And then --- a ---

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.

And then another little one. This is about the terribleness
 of things, in a way. This is called "Desert Places." These are not ---
 that one is not necessarily a Northern, isn't it. That's an autumnal
 one that you get down here the same as we do.

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood
 Yellow wood, roads, and walking places. This --- this one is a little
 more deep in winter.

Snow falling and night falling fast, oh, fast
 In a field I looked into going past,
 And the ground almost covered smooth in snow,
 But a few weeds and stubble showing last.

The woods around it have it--it is theirs.
 All animals are smothered in their lairs.
 I am too absent-spirited to count;
 The loneliness includes me unawares.

And lonely as it is that loneliness
 Will be more lonely ere it will be less--
 A blanker whiteness of benighted snow
 With no expression, nothing to express.

They cannot scare me with their desert places [sic]
 Upon stars where no human race is. [sic]
 I have it in me so much nearer home
 To scare myself with my own desert places.

Some of these sound almost as if they had something to do with what was being talked about in this moon-struck age. Poets used to be called moon-struck, didn't they? All the comic-strip readers have been moon-struck lately. Now here's a hard one. A short one though. So don't worry. That makes me think I should have put, you know ---. You miss a chance to say phrases. They come to you partly right. More revel than revelation, I should have said, see, more revel than revelation. And more --- and less revel than wallow, see. That's the way to phrase that. Next time I will. LAUGHTER. More revel than revelation. This is called "All Revelation" and this is one that you'll have to see, but I just --- I think it's once in a while interesting to inflict something very odd.

A head thrusts in as for the view,
 But where it is it thrusts in from
 Or what it is it thrusts into
 By that Cyb'laean avenue,
 And what can of its coming come,

And whither it will be withdrawn,
 And what take hence or leave behind,
 These things the mind has pondered on
 A moment and still asking gone.
 Strange apparition of the mind!

But the impervious geode
 Was entered, and its inner crust
 Of crystals with a ray cathode
 At every point and facet glowed
 In answer to the mental thrust.

Eyes seeking the response of eyes

That's our life, isn't it? That much of it is easy.

Eyes seeking the response of eyes
 Bring out the stars, bring out the flowers,
 Thus concentrating earth and skies
 So none need be afraid of size.
 All revelation has been ours.

The last stanza is easy.

Eyes seeking the response of eyes
 Bring out stars and bring out flowers [sic]

You see, we look for eyes in the sky and the earth. And we get those because we gotta have the earth and skies concentrated. Skies are concentrated in stars, and the earth is concentrated in flowers. It's easy, you see. So none may be afraid of size. See, that's one of the great diseases of our time -- fear of size. And everybody that thinks long enough about it comes to his senses and says, "It's nothing but, you know, nothing but size." That's the way out of that. Philosophy they call that.

All right now, should there be one, something else that you want to read. "Mending Wall." And I think it's fun to tell you that nobody ever asked me to change a word in England or asked me, "Do you say that in America?" or anything, but once, and I didn't think of it ever. I published --- My books have been over there a long time and I never --- it's never occurred to me. I notice sometimes when my publisher changed the spelling, once in a while, to please over there without

consulting me. I don't care. I don't mind. I'm no great speller myself. Everything was that ---. But one person said --- I speak of it introducing this poem. A novelist you know. He was with a lot of other novelists and poets and all to dinner and he said, "We were all agreeing, one and another, contributing to the conversation, we were all agreeing that the greatest surprise a writer gets is to find people get meanings out of you . . ." out of him that he'd never thought of putting in, you know. That's always occurring, getting you entirely wrong. And up spoke this man, I don't believe I oughta name him, but he's a well known writer, and he said, "One of the most difficult things I ever encountered in literature was your saying that 'Good fences make good neighbors.'" And I said, "Well, don't blame me for it, I'm only quoting." LAUGHTER. Then I said, "I think it goes back to the PENCHER TENTRA ." I knew he hadn't read that and I had. LAUGHTER. And he said, "Oh." Swallowed it. But anyway, he hadn't got it. I didn't explain it to him, and I wasn't going to. But if that's hard for anybody, I wonder where they've been, you know, in any country. It's an old, old thing. It's old English. Tisn't the PENCHER TENTRA but it's old, old, old. "Good fences make good neighbors." Old, old.

Something there is . . .

You know? Whatever it is started that way [he laughs]

Something there is that doesn't love a wall,
That sends the frozen-ground-swell under it,
And spills the upper boulders in the sun;

I just feel like lingering over that a second. That happens in the desert. If there is no forest or heaving ground, the walls are always falling.

Something there is that doesn't love a wall,
 That sends the frozen-ground-swell under it,
 And spills the upper boulders in the sun;
 And makes gaps even two can pass abreast.
 The work of hunters is another thing:
 I have come after them and made repair
 Where they have left not one stone on a stone,
 But they would have the rabbit out of hiding,
 To please the yelping dogs. The gaps I mean,
 No one has seen them made or heard them made,
 But at spring mending-time we find them there.
 I let my neighbor know beyond the hill;
 And on a day we meet to walk the line
 And set the wall between us once again.
 We keep the wall between us as we go.
 To each the boulders that have fallen to each.
 And some are loaves and some so nearly balls
 We have to use a spell to make them balance:
 'Stay where you are until our backs are turned!'
 We wear our fingers rough with handling them.
 Oh, just another kind of outdoor game,
 One on a side. It comes to little more:
 There where it is we do not need the wall:
 He is all pine and I am apple orchard.
 My apple trees will never get across
 And eat the cones under his pines, I tell him
 He only says, 'Good fences make good neighbors.'
 Spring is the mischief in me, and I wonder
 If I could put a notion in his head:
 'WHY do they make good neighbors? Isn't it
 Where there are cows? But here there are no cows.
 Before I built a wall I'd ask to know
 What I was walling in or walling out,
 And to whom I was like to give offense.
 Something there is that doesn't love a wall,
 That wants it down.' I could say 'Elves' to him,
 But it's not elves exactly, and I'd rather
 He said it for himself. I see him there
 Bringing a stone grasped firmly by the top
 In each hand, like an old-stone savage armed.
 He moves in darkness as it seems to me,
 Not of woods only and the shade of trees
 He will not go behind his father's saying,
 And he likes having thought of it so well
 He says again, 'Good fences make good neighbors.'

You know, I wonder how many people haven't had an experience
 of that kind about boundary lines. Goes on with me all the time. I just
 had my line run all around the farm so as to be sure I wasn't trespassing

and the other fellow wasn't trespassing. And --- a --- there had been little accidents, no fight about it. But, you know, somebody said, "Which side are you on in that question -- walls or no walls?" See. I said, "I thought I made that poem a stand-off." LAUGHTER. A stand-off between the two kinds. If it isn't, I --- I'm sorry. Just the same, good and good, good and good.

So I don't want to go into any of the long ones. Shall I do another rather ---. Here's an amusing one -- a short one. A good many of you, you know, gonna do something that I'll never, never do. You'll write on a letterhead, the top of your letter sometime "2000," won't you? Funny to think of. Makes me sore. LAUGHTER. I don't know how to get even with you. Lot of people are flattering about that and think you're going to amount to something. Maybe you are. That's up to you. But this --- this is a riddle about that. Here's just a tiny bit --- a tiny one. "It Is Almost . . ." the name of it, "It Is Almost the Year Two Thousand." See, that oughta mean something when you tell them that. They thought it was going to be, you know, second coming, end of the first thousand. Why that should be anything special, but it feels that way, doesn't it? As if when you say 2000, that day oughta be something different.

To start the world of old
 We had one age of gold
 Not labored out of mines,
 And some say there are signs
 The second such has come,
 The true Millennium,
 The final golden glow
 To end it. And if so
 (And science ought to know)
 We well may raise our heads
 From weeding garden beds
 And annotating books
 To watch this end de luxe.

LAUGHTER. And then:

We dance round in a ring and suppose
I make little couplets sometimes, you know.

We dance round in a ring and suppose
That the secret sits in the middle and knows.

And then one I made the other day. I said to an audience, last spring this was, when I was out on the --- out --- out kicking around, I said to 'em:

It takes all kinds

No.

It takes all sorts of in and out door schooling
You see, "in and out door schooling." Get that.

To get adapted to my kind of fooling.

See, that's --- that's what's the matter with the new poets all the time. He looks terrible strange and everybody is unhappy about him. Browning or anybody else. You watch it all along. Or Eliot or anybody. Bothers them because his kind of fooling is --- you've got to get adapted to it. It's all play, mind you, play. I used the word "fooling," but play. Play. Play. Play. Mr. Alston was saying that he spent a whole summer on Shaw to find out when he was fooling or when he wasn't or what it was, you know, when he said he was serious, even, was he fooling. It's hard to get the hang of a man like Shaw, especially, isn't it. But they seem to be amused at not getting the hang of him. They used to get mad at Browning -- be cross with him.

This a --- no, I want one or two more little ones. "Choose Something Like a Star" this is, to stay your mind on. "Choose Something Like a Star."

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 take [sic] something like a star
 To stay our minds on and be staid.

That applies in literature and everything.

So when at times the mob is swayed
 To carry praise or blame too far

we may go back and think of some ancient poet, or some ancient story, or something like that; we may choose something a way off like a star to stay our minds on and, and be staid. Not look foolish with the mob all the time. That's to myself I'm saying that. I've two or three times been deceived by the world. Two or three. LAUGHTER. Or more.

All right then, shall I wind up with one more absurdity. My old absurdity, sacred absurdity. It's not my ---. This is called "Departmental." The height of the thing, you know, the height of this sort of thing is, as I tell you, the rhyme and the carrying on of the rhyme. When a person is influenced by the rhyme, you watch him to see

if he's amusingly interested, bothered by it, or pleasantly bothered by it. If he's awkwardly and foolishly bothered by it, it turns you against him -- him and the poem too. But there was always the little neceness the way we take out little difficulties in company, you know. The way some people take them awkwardly and some people take 'em nicely, you know, and make pleasure out of it and the rhyming is like that too. You know, there's always a little --- a little something of deflection that's either charming or not charming. This one is --- I --- I've got the rhymes so close together, it's rather fun to watch them. See what they do to me and I do to them. It's about an ant.

An ant on the tablecloth
 Ran into a dormant moth
 Of many times his size.
 He showed not the least surprise.
 His business wasn't with such.
 He gave it scarcely a touch,
 And was off on his duty run.
 But [sic] if he encountered one
 Of the hive's enquiry squad

I should have accented that.

But if he encountered one
 Of the hive's . . .

You see, you gotta rhyme that with something.

But [sic] if he encountered one
 Of the hive's enquiry squad
 Whose work is to find out God
 And the nature of time and space,
 He would put him onto the case.
 Ants are a curious race;
 One crossing with hurried tread
 The body of one of their dead
 Isn't given a moment's arrest--
 Seems not even impressed.
 But he no doubt reports to any
 With whom he crosses antennae,
 And they no doubt report
 To the higher up at court.
 Then word goes forth in Formic:

That's that acid language that the critics use, you know. LAUGHTER.

Then word goes forth in Formic:
 'Death's come to Jerry McCormic,
 Our selfless forager Jerry.
 Will the special Janizary
 Whose office it is to bury
 The dead of the commissary
 Go bring him home to his people.
 Lay him in state on a sepal.
 Wrap him for shroud in a petal.
 Emblam him with ichor of nettle.
 This is the word of your Queen.'
 And presently on the scene
 Appears a solemn mortician;
 And taking formal position
 With feelers calmly atwiddle,
 Seizes the dead by the middle, [LAUGHTER]
 And heaving him high in air,
 Carries him out of there.
 No one stands round to stare.
 It is nobody else's affair.

It couldn't be called ungentle.
 But how thoroughly departmental.

LAUGHTER. APPLAUSE. That means you're on my side. LAUGHTER.

It'll amuse you about another couplet I made. I, I go around throwing off, scattering couplets around. At the UN up there, they have a --- they have a --- I told you about this a year or so ago. They have in the meditation room on the ground floor -- they now have it, it was coming when I told you about it before -- they now have a lump of pure iron, a gift of the King of Sweden, I believe, not Norway -- Sweden, Sweden and Norway are not the same as Guatemala and Costa Rica. LAUGHTER. They're too far away, you see. But it's from one of the kings, and it's in a little room now, all set up for meditation. And there are four chairs in it for you to go and meditate in. Just four can meditate at once. Don't go --- don't go in crowds. And now the purpose of it is, I suppose, think about our troubles or something like that, I don't know

what it's for. And it's Mr. Hammarskjold's idea and the King of Sweden's and --- a --- it's all right with me, but I didn't think I'd ever go look at it. They came to me about it and they wanted some poetry, I'm pretty sure. They didn't say that, but that was the idea. They said it to others around me. Didn't report it to me. It was very nice the way they did it. LAUGHTER. Very indirect and subtle. Some of them said I was going to get the worst of this in the end. These were ---. The one who was doing it to me was a very fine, attractive Pakistani, educated in England, of course. And --- a --- he --- we were trying to out-subtle each other, you know. Out-subtle each other. He's very fine. He's so likeable I can hardly bear to disagree with him, you know, about anything -- God or man. I went to look at it. There it lies like a big socaphagous. It weighs five or ten times --- solid iron --- purest in the world --- purest lump --- pure ore --- meant to be just one thing, I think, to represent unity and oneness, you know, and all that stuff. Probably that's the symbol. They want to exult over that, you see. I don't exult. That isn't my line, but I wrote this little couplet for them last summer --- sent it to --- my great friend there is Amad Buccaerri, President of the University there. He's given it up to be Secretary of the UN. Oh, you know this great world needs people like that. He came up to see me at the farm, and for diversion I talked about my family. I said I knew my family twelve generations back and then I lost them in obliquity and something. And then I said, "You go back, I suppose, very far in Pakistan." He said, "We go back fifty generations." He said, "I know every male ancestor fifty generations." And I multiplied in my head, you know, and that takes you pretty back [sic]. I said to

the prophet, "We are of that family." LAUGHTER. Just as nice as that. And then he left me, the kind of gesture that --- that --- I've been there since --- that's what made me go in the end --- they get me down there for this thing. You know, really, they don't hope for any more than I hope. What do they want? They don't expect peace. They talk about peace all the time, but they need an army down there too. They got one, got one over there. They want arms. They just got another way of getting an army. I've got a good mind to start a mercenary army and rent myself to them. LAUGHTER. I like 'em so much.

But as he left me, he said he'd never forget it up there in the mountains. Beautiful day. He left my little cabin up there. Casa Allegra. You know where Casa Allegra was? Here --- Decatur --- do you know, any of you? Raise your hand. Somebody who knows where Casa Allegra was, where the poet that put Poe going lived. I wouldn't call mine Casa Allegra ~~was~~ that was self-conscious sorrow. But it's a nice name, isn't it, Casa Allegra? Marker is over there. I must never come here without visiting him. I just tap it with my finger, touch it for the sorrow of those things -- those poets that get lost. But as he left me, Amad Buccaerri, he, tall man, puts his hand up this way. He said, "The rest of my life to you." That's the way he left me. I've enquired whether that's a conventional thing there and it seems not. That's his. "The rest of my life to you." Very pretty. And he wanted to know what the lines --- coup --- the two lines --- the couplet was. It was not meant to be accepted. I knew they wouldn't take that. But I sent it to them. And they were not so polite about that. They didn't acknowledge it, even. LAUGHTER. It went like this. Here's this pure iron, you see.

It looks one thing. An element, see, and yet, what is it? It's tools, isn't it? Iron is tools and weapons, both the things. It's two things while you look at it. You think you're looking at one. So I said:

Nature within her inmost self divides
To trouble men with having to take sides

And Amad Buccaerri said to me when I saw him --- "You got my poem?" He said, "Oh, yes." And I said --- He said, "It's not one of the best things you ever wrote." LAUGHTER. I knew they wouldn't care for it, but these are pleasant relations. They're nice people and they see this with you, you know, they see with --- that the army --- but they've got to have troops too. That's the inconsistency of it. If they're gonna be true pacifists, they just oughta lie down and get run over like Gandhi. I've said enough, haven't I.

One more something nicer than all that. I like to talk to you. Let's see. Suppose I just read one more. This goes with this other thing. This is called "My Objection to Being Stepped On." [sic].

At the end of the row
I stepped on the toe
Of an unemployed hoe.
It rose in offence
And struck me a blow
In the seat of my sense.
It wasn't to blame
But I called it a name.
And I must say it dealt
Me a blow that I felt
Like malice prepense.
You may call me a food,
But WAS there a rule
That weapon should be
Turned into a tool?
But [sic] what do we see?
The first tool I step on
Turned into a weapon.

LAUGHTER. Weapon and step on, you see. Bow myself out, with a rhyme.

But you see, that's the reverse of the old sentiment. That was my Christmas card. What has it got to do with Christmas? Nothing.

LAUGHTER. That amused my friends. Then I've thought if you would like to listen a minute or two or three. This is one that goes deeper --- got the sorrows and things in it. I'll say it slowly. "Directive" it's called.

Back out of all this now too much for us,

See that.

Back out of all this now too much for us,
 Back in a time made simple by the loss
 Of detail, burned, dissolved, and broken off
 Like graveyard marble sculpture in the weather,
 There is a house that is no more a house
 Upon a farm that is no more a farm
 And in a town that is no more a town.
 The road there, if you'll let a guide direct you
 Who only has at heart your getting lost,
 May seem as if it should have been a quarry--
 Great monolithic knees the former town
 Long since gave up pretense of keeping covered.
 And there's a story in a book about it:
 Besides the wear of iron wagon wheels
 The ledges show lines ruled southeast northwest,
 The chisel work of an enormous Glacier
 That braced his feet against the Arctic Pole.
 You must not mind a certain coolness from him
 Still said to haunt this side of Panther Mountain.
 Nor need you mind the serial ordeal
 Of being watched from forty cellar holes
 As if by eye pairs out of forty firkins.
 As for the woods' excitement over you
 That sends light rustle rushes to their leaves,
 Charge that to upstart inexperience.
 Where were they all not twenty years ago?
 They think too much of having shaded out
 A few old pecker-fretted apple trees.
 Make yourself up a cheering song of how
 Someone's road home from work this once was,
 Who may be just ahead of you on foot
 Or creaking with a buggy load of grain.
 The height of the adventure is the height
 Of country where two village cultures faded
 Into each other. Both of them are lost.

And if you're lost enough to find yourself
 By now, pull in your ladder road behind you
 And put a sign up CLOSED to all but me.
 Then make yourself at home. The only field
 Now left's no bigger than a harness gall.
 First there's the children's house of make believe,
 Some shattered dishes underneath a pine,
 The playthings in the playhouse of the children.
 Weep for what little things could make them glad.
 Then for the house that is no more a house,
 But only a belilaced cellar hole,
 Now slowly closing like a dent in dough.
 This was no playhouse but a house in earnest.
 Your destination and your destiny's
 A brook that was the water of the house,
 Cold as a spring as yet so near its source,
 Too lofty and original to rage.
 (We know the valley streams that when aroused
 Will leave their tatters hung on barb and thorn.)
 I have kept hidden in the instep arch
 Of an old cedar at the waterside
 A broken drinking goblet like the Grail
 Under a spell so the wrong ones can't find it,
 So can't get saved, as Saint Mark says they mustn't.
 (I stole the goblet from the children's playhouse.)
 Here are your waters and your watering place.
 Drink and be whole again beyond confusion.

Now --- now I'm going to say something gayer than that to end
 with and say good night to you. One that would go with the ant one.

This is called "A Considerable Speck." "Considerable Speck."

A speck that would have been beneath my sight
 On any but a paper sheet so white
 Set off across what I had written there.
 And I had idly poised my pen in air
 To stop it with a period of ink
 When something strange about it made me think.
 This was no dust speck by my breathing blown,
 But unmistakably a living mite.
 With inclinations it could call its own.
 It paused as with suspicion of my pen,
 And then came racing wildly on again
 To where my manuscript was not yet dry;
 Then paused again and either drank or smelt---
 With loathing, for again it turned to fly.
 Plainly with an intelligence I dealt.
 It seemed too tiny to have room for feet,
 Yet must have had a set of them complete

To express how much it didn't want to die.
It ran with terror and with cunning crept.
It faltered: I could see it hesitate;
Then in the middle of the open sheet
Cower down in desperation to accept
Whatever I accorded it of fate.
I have none of the tenderer-than-thou
Collectivistic regimenting love
With which the modern world is being swept.
But this poor microscopic item now!
Since it was nothing I knew evil of
I let it lie there till I hope it slept.
I have a mind myself and recognize
Mind when I meet with it in any guise.
No one can know how glad I am to find
On any sheet the least display of mind.

LAUGHTER. APPLAUSE.