



VERMONT WRITING

BY MARGARET EDWARDS

This column, usually called A VERMONT WRITER, is an offering of the Danforth Library in Barnard. Its original purpose has been to introduce Vermont writers deserving wider renown by profiling them. Instead, however, this month's offering introduces two often overlooked poems worth closer scrutiny, both written by justly famous Robert Frost, a Vermont poet who needs no further acclamation. By way of contrast, an in-depth study of Frost's often quoted "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening" appeared in The Barnard Bulletin of January 2024.

Robert Frost

1874 – 1963



Robert Frost was not a native Vermonter, nor was he born in New Hampshire, though he resided and owned property in both states during his long lifetime. Both are featured consistently in his poems. His readers are often surprised to learn that America's grizzled, white-haired, stereotypical New England bard was born and spent his boyhood in San Francisco.

Only after the death of his father was young Robert, at the age of ten, brought east by his schoolteacher mother to Massachusetts. But the rural life "north of Boston" that he later lived as a married man and young father gave him the imagery fundamental to his work. His fame rests on iconic rural scenes: a walk through woods ("The Road Not Taken"), a break in country isolation ("Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening") and various chores of farming ("Mending Wall", "After Apple-Picking").

Readers usually get their introduction to Robert Frost's poetry in elementary and high school. He seems an

"easy" poet because the bulk of his work is deftly rhymed and metered. It looks and sounds like the poetry of the nineteenth century. Even as Frost met the challenge to bring his verse into line with modern speech, intending that it fit the tongue and the mind as effortlessly as conversation, the fact that his prosody is traditional gives everyone the assurance that this really *is* poetry they're reading—not fancy prose broken into line lengths.

Coming to that expertise was a slow process for the writer. This poem that Frost first composed in 1900 has the flavor of a nineteenth century lyric:

To A Moth Seen in Winter

*Here's first a gloveless hand warm from my pocket,
A perch and resting place 'twixt wood and wood,
Bright-black-eyed silvery creature, brushed with brown,
The wings not folded in repose, but spread.
(Who would you be, I wonder, by those marks
If I had moths to friend as I have flowers?)
And now pray tell what lured you with false hope
To make the venture of eternity
And seek the love of kind in wintertime?
But stay and hear me out. I surely think
You make a labor of flight for one so airy,
Spending yourself too much in self-support.
Nor will you find love either, nor love you.
And what I pity in you is something human,
The old incurable untimeliness,
Only begetter of all ills that are.
But go. You are right. My pity cannot help.
Go till you wet your pinions and are quenched.
You must be made more simply wise than I
To know the hand I stretch impulsively
Across the gulf of well-nigh everything
May reach to you but cannot touch your fate.
I cannot touch your life, much less can save,
Who am tasked to save my own a little while.*

The poem reads as if it were rhymed—but isn't. Instead, it is classic, unrhymed blank verse. The majesty of its statement arises strictly from its metrical precision.

The vocabulary of "To A Moth Seen in Winter" veers back and forth between casual twentieth century speech ("Here's first a gloveless hand warm from my pocket") and nineteenth century formality ("And now pray tell what lured you with false hope"). In one line—"Nor will you find love either, nor love you"—a reader must mentally reconstruct the truncated sentence to read: "You won't find anyone to love... or find anyone to love you." And the command "But stay and hear me out" seems to rise straight out of Shakespeare.

In 1900 Robert Frost clearly was not the expert versifier who, almost forty years later, would write "A Considera-

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Frost - Cont. from previous page

ble Speck,” demonstrating his consummate mastery of form:

A 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.*

This poem is every bit as metrically precise as “To a Moth...” while also being distinctly rhymed throughout. And yet its formalities of style vanish in the reasonable, pragmatic, casual voice of the poet as storyteller.

Both poems rely on an unplanned encounter with an insect, but the “speck” is more closely observed than the moth. Despite remaining a sexless “it,” the “living mite” on the white sheet of paper, becomes, in Frost’s description, a distinct character displaying “inclinations” and emotions. The poet recognizes, and clearly shares, “its” courage, anxiety and despair.

In both poems, Frost manages to construct not only a portrait, but a *self*-portrait. To the moth, he extends not just his warm, “gloveless hand,” but also his overt sympathy (“And what I pity in you is something human”). He recognizes such “pity” won’t be enough to save the life of the moth, even as that same pity—a self-pity,

born of acknowledging their shared plight—isn’t going to save *his* life either. Death, sooner or later, is coming for them both.

The lesson of “To A Moth...” is the classic *memento mori*. A call to readers to remember their mortality is a poet’s timeless stock in trade. By contrast, the meanings we can derive from “A Considerable Speck” are more complicated. Its mood is lighter, almost comedic, playful. The title’s word “considerable” suggests the speck is worthy of the poet’s “consideration”—his examination of it in detail—and, in addition, it possesses greater potency than its appearance might suggest.

Robert Frost’s self-portrait that emerges in this poem (written decades later than “To A Moth...”) is not that of a compassionate poet eager to commiserate and pity the unfortunate, himself included. In fact, Frost now feels disgust for that “tenderer-than-thou” personality. He’s become suspicious and perhaps even ashamed of “the hand I stretch impulsively/ Across the gulf of well-nigh everything.”

Frost’s rejection of “*collectivistic regimenting love/ With which the modern world is being swept*” put him out of step with his times. The line first read “*political regimenting love*” (italics mine). When this poem was first published—in 1939 in *The Atlantic Monthly*—Europe was convulsing as Hitler’s armies marched. Compassion for the Jews was animating America’s left wing. Frost’s good friend Louis Untermeyer, a Jew, was putting pressure on Frost to use his clout and make political statements. As Jay Parini put it in his 1999

biography of the poet: “Frost...worried that his conservative political ideas would damage his reception as a poet. As ever, he wanted to think of himself as a ‘lone striker’ and could not bear the notion of being associated with any school or ‘ism.’ He claimed to loathe socialism, communism, anarchism, and even humanism.”

In “A Considerable Speck” Robert Frost amends his earlier self-portrait. In his maturity, with his fame and popularity growing, he prefers to offer the insect he encounters something better and more dignified than mere pity; he offers “it” his intellectual respect.

*I have a mind myself and recognize
Mind when I meet with it in any guise.*

To read both poems, among the many others by Robert Frost, visit Barnard’s Danforth Library on Route 12, across from the Unitarian church. There you will find Frost’s collected works titled *The Poetry of Robert Frost* that bills itself as “all eleven of his books—complete,” edited by Edward Connery Lathem and published by Holt, Rinehart and Winston in 1972.

*National Holidays
January 20th Martin Luther King’s Birthday
Inauguration Day
February 17th Washington’s Birthday*

Danforth Library News

6208 Vermont Route 12

Mon & Wed 3:00 – 5:00 p.m.

Saturdays 10:00 a.m. to Noon

Closed Monday January 20th in honor of Martin Luther King, Jr. Day



Free Ice Fishing Festival January 25th

11am – 3pm – Silver Lake

Learn more and register at:

vtfishandwildlife.com

In Case You Missed It: Looking for an enjoyable New Year’s resolution with delicious results? Try your hand at African American cooking with Toni Tipton-Martin’s award-winning cookbook--recipes, stories, and techniques.

Jubilee: Recipes from Two Centuries of African American Cooking

Available at Danforth Library

Trustees:

Berna Donlon, Margaret Edwards, Judy Maynes, Susan McNulty, and Susan Salter Reynolds

Phone: 802-234-9408

Email: charlesdanforthlibrary@gmail.com

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/charlesdanforthlibrary/>

BARNARTS EVENTS 2025

Antigone by Sophokles, Translated by Anne Carson, February 14-16 & 20-23, Barnard Town Hall.

Starring:

- Antigone ~ Bridgette Hammond
- Ismene ~ Julianne Borger
- Kreon ~ Kevin Donohue
- Haimon ~ Aaron Michael Hodge
- Eurydike/Chorus ~ Laura Montgomery
- Teiresias/Chorus ~ Kyle Huck
- Guard/Chorus ~ Olivia Piepmeier
- Messenger/Chorus ~ Dory Psomas
- Polyneikes/Chorus ~ Fergus Ryan
- Chorus Lead ~ Chelsea Paige

Crew:

- Erin Bennett ~ Director
- August Doughty ~ Costume Designer & Stage Manager
- Linda Treash ~ Set Designer & Producer
- Corey Doughty ~ Lighting Designer

Masquerade Jazz & Funk, Winter Music Carnival March 1 Barnard Town Hall.

Spring Global Music Residency, w/Pamyua (inuit/soul) May 1-10, Various Schools & a Saturday performance.

Race Around the Lake 5k/10k Fundraiser, May 18, Silver Lake State Park. Registration is open. Visit <https://runsignup.com/Race/VT/Barnard/BarnArtsRaceAroundtheLake> for Early Registration.

Feast & Field Music Series, May 29-Sept. 25, Fable Farm
The Sound of Music by Rogers & Hammerstein, June 20-29, Outdoor Summer Theater.

Roald Dahl's Matilda BarnArts SYT, August 1-3, Barnard Town Hall.

Barnard Street Dance, August 23, Barnard Town Hall.

Haunted Village Theater, Oct. 18, Village of Barnard.

Fall Global Music Residency, tba October/November Various Schools & Venues.

Holiday Cabaret dinner & dance, Wassail Weekend, December 13, Barnard Town Hall.

Winter Carols, December 19, First Universalist Church of Barnard.

Website: <https://barnarts.org/> Email: info@barnarts.org

LOCAL CRYPTOGRAM

A cryptogram is a code in which one letter is substituted for another. For example, the word “Church” could be written BWMSBW. The letter B would be the letter C and would be so throughout the entire message. In this message Z = L. The solution is found by trial and error. The CRYPTOGRAM answer is on the last page.

“G Z F M A G T F E B B K P

T P A D M M D M A F O O P T C E G C S,

V K P M B K P I G S Y F O V D M B P C

Y P P N P M I Z P Y Y G M I M F G N F E M B

F O V D Y B O E Z C P R F Z Z P R B D M A

R G M T C D M A T G R H G M S G D C F O

Y E N N P C, D R G E A K B F M P F O

B K F Y P R F Z I Y V K D R K Z G Y B O F C

B V F I G S Y D M B K P R K D Z I C P M

G M I B V F V P P H Y V D B K N P.

- Y K D C Z P S X G R H Y F M

THE PLANNING COMMISSION meets on the Monday prior to the first Wednesday of every month at 7 PM in the Town Office.

BARNARD CONSERVATION COMMISSION meets the first Monday of the month, 7:00pm, Town Hall.

BEES MEETINGS are held at 6:30pm on the 2nd Thursday of each month in the library at the school.

DANFORTH LIBRARY HOURS: Mondays and Wednesdays 3:00 – 5:00 PM; Saturdays 10:00 AM to Noon. Phone: 802-234-9408. ECFiber Wi-Fi. Email: charlesdanforthlibrary@gmail.com.

SELECTBOARD meets the first and third Wednesday of the month at the Town offices at 7:00pm.

TOWN ADMINISTRATOR,
selectboard@barnardvt.us, 234-9211 x 2. By phone at any time, or by appointment. Office hours coming soon

ZONING ADMINISTRATOR,
zoning@barnardvt.us, 234-9211 x 2. By phone at any time, or by appointment. Office hours coming soon.

TOWN CLERK office hours are Monday and Tuesday, 8:00am—3:30pm. Public access is restricted. Call 234-9211 for an appointment.

THE DEVELOPMENT REVIEW BOARD meets the third Thursday of the month at 7:00pm at the Barnard Town Hall as necessary.

THE BARNARD ENERGY COMMITTEE meets on the 2nd Tuesday of the month, 7:00pm at the Town Hall

BARNARD GENERAL STORE, Monday-Saturday: 7am-7pm, Sundays: 8am-6pm.
<https://www.facebook.com/barnardgeneralstore>

BARNARD LISTSERV: to subscribe please send an email to: barnard-subscribe@lists.vitalcommunities.org

RECYCLING Click [here](#) for Hours and Regulations

THE BARNARD INN is running a "Feeding Neighbors & Sustaining Community" campaign. Purchase an e-Gift Card and in turn the chefs will feed neighbors. Whole chicken dinners (serves 4-6) and individual sized meals to help feed Vermonters in need. Thank you and please stay safe. E-Gift Cards are available at www.barnardinn.com.

ECFIBER Governing Board meets the 2nd Tuesday of the month at 7pm via. Zoom. Contact the clerk of the District. secretary@ecfiber.net, for meeting information or visit <https://www.ecfiber.net/virtual-meetings/>

HISTORICAL SOCIETY Programs to be announced. Questions? Email: historicalbarnard1761@gmail.com

DELECTABLE MOUNTAIN QUILTERS (DMQ) meet the 1st Tuesday of every month at the Bethel Library from 1-3pm. Contact: Mary Croft 802-763-7074

AT ARTISTREE

Artistree is seeking a Programming Director to join our team. This is a leadership role responsible for developing, supporting, and ensuring the effective delivery of a diverse variety of year-round multi-disciplinary adult and children's arts programs.

See the full job description and specific responsibilities at: <https://artistreevt.org/employment>

Artistree Community Arts Center & Gallery
PO Box 158, South Pomfret, VT 05067

Located at: 2095 Pomfret Road, 802.457.3500 ext. 129

<https://artistreecommunityartscenter-bloom.kindful.com/>

Learn more about Artistree at artistreevt.org.

WOODSTOCK NURSERY SCHOOL OPEN HOUSE

ENROLLING CHILDREN AGES 3-5

Come meet our teachers, see our space, and learn more about Woodstock's oldest and only nature based pre-school!

Our open house dates are from 9:30am-11:00am at 54 River Street, Woodstock, on: February 1 and March 8.

Please register for our open house dates at: <https://www.woodstocknurseryschool.org/open-house-dates>

We are enrolling now and accept Act 166 and Child Care Financial Assistance Subsidy, making WNS an affordable, accessible option for all.

<https://www.woodstocknurseryschool.org/>

2025 GLAD RAGS SPRING SALES DATES

Our Spring Sales will be on Friday - Sunday, April 25 – 27, 2025.

The donation collection dates for the Spring sales are the following Saturdays: February 22; March 8; March 29; April 5.

For more information about the sales and what donations we accept, please visit - <http://www.gladrags.org>

For updates please join our Facebook group - <https://www.facebook.com/groups/145529065206/>

The Glad Rags Sale Association, Inc. supports agencies that provide health and welfare services to the greater Woodstock Community.

- The Glad Rags Volunteers

CRYPTOGRAM ANSWER

“Along about the beginning of February, when the days of winter seem endless and no amount of wistful recollecting can bring back any air of summer, I caught one of those colds which last for two days in the children and two weeks with me.”

- Shirley Jackson