



After
POETRY IN NEW ENGLAND
Frost

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New England Foundation for the Humanities
46 Temple Place, Fourth Floor
Boston, MA 02111
617-482-8030 / fax: 617-482-7994



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A Reading
and Discussion
Series



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Robert Frost has long dominated the public's image of New England poetry. For many, both inside and outside the region, Frost has come to personify the "New England poet." But who are the poets of today? Can we so easily put a face on the myriad voices that continue to expand the poetic tradition of our region? How have evolving conceptions of the self, the community, and the landscape spurred new images and visions? What, if anything, do they have in common? The goal of this program is to share with audiences the variety and vitality of our region's poetry, using the works of Robert Frost as a touchstone for exploration.

After Frost is a library-based reading and discussion program consisting of six group meetings and two poetry readings by visiting New England poets. The discussions are based on a reader created especially for this project, beginning with Frost's work and including the poetry of thirty more recent poets representing a diversity of cultural points of view. The

sessions will be led by scholar-critics of poetry, many of whom are themselves poets. Poetry readings by visiting poets—among them winners of literary awards and grants from state humanities councils—will include discussion and an opportunity to question the poets about their approach to their work.

After Frost is one of a series of New England Foundation for the Humanities programs examining the identity and culture of New England. Participants will explore the ways in which poets create images of the self, the community, and the landscape or cityscape around them. Are these images private, universal, regional—or all three? What can we learn about ourselves as individuals, as members of a community, and as New Englanders by reading poetry? How has the image of New England and its people changed in the decades since Frost? The discussions will also focus on poetry as an art form, again using Frost's work as a starting point for the exploration of poetic form and techniques.

Why talk about poetry?

The reasons for taking part in a discussion of poetry are as manifold as the reasons for opening a book of poems. One reads a poem for the pleasure of hearing the sounds and seeing the images; for the mutual exchange between poem and reader, and the opening of boundaries into common ground; for the recognition of certain truths; and for countless other experiences unanticipated and unnamable. Any worthwhile discussion of a poem should offer more such rewards, enriched, varied, and multiplied by the number of people engaged. For much of the excitement comes from deepening one's own reading of the poem by learning how it lives in the minds of others. The poem thrives accordingly, and so do we. There are sure to be surprises, and anything can happen.

But the most obvious purposes of this series of discussions are to reacquaint the participants with the one poet most widely identified with New England and offer for consideration related poems by thirty other New Englanders who follow him in time. Another purpose is to show that there is life after Frost: that New England poetry grows and moves, and continues to move us. Still another is to provide an occasion for exploring subjects of importance to us all, and to do so by way of poems occurring for the most part in New England landscapes, townscapes, and cities.

The program

The text for the series is a reader with an introduction and four sections of poems. The program will begin with a discussion focusing on Frost, based on the introduction.

Then there will be four sessions corresponding to the four sections of the reader, in each of which are found the same sequence of poets, one poem each, their poems interwoven by a common subject. The poems in the first section, *The Will of the Wind*, illustrate the changing perception of our place in the natural world. Initially we are seen as nature's prey, then eventually as nature's persecutor; and there are various gradations in between. In the second section, *My Own Desert Places*, the poets turn their gaze from the sky, the cosmos, and the visible world to the inner space of the psyche. In *Fences*, poets turn more toward the relationship between the individual and society, a relation they see obstructed by massive difficulties, most of them reducible to the concept of walls. Walls, explicit in a few of the poems and implicit in most, restrict us from becoming a community in any true sense; they are imposed from within and without. In the final section, *The Road There*, we see that poems can offer no cures. But they can diagnose, and they can prophesy a healing by pointing the way.

Discussion during those meetings will most likely concentrate on several poems only, eventually extending to the section as a whole and what the poems as a whole are looking at. Comparisons will be made, and a certain progression from poem to poem may be noted.

The sixth and final session will be devoted to reviewing and reflecting on what has occurred throughout the series, and also in oneself and one's own perceptions, as a result. Participants who have been moved to write their own poems during the series may be invited to share them with the group.

Who are the poets?

The poets in the reader, drawn from the six New England states, appear chronologically by birth date, each section beginning with Frost and moving through the century to Martín Espada. Not all the poets are native, not even Frost himself, who was born in San Francisco in 1874 and lived there until the age of eleven. Nor should they be seen as the only poets of New England. These are only a few among many, past and present, acclaimed or not, who happen to have spent much of their lives here and written poems set in New England places.

So the text is by no means an anthology. Rather it is simply a reader, a selection of poems chosen for clarity and depth and for their relevance to certain subjects. While speaking with very different voices, the poems tend to converse with one another from page to page; we trust we will find more consonance than pandemonium.

As we read the poems together, we discover that each poem lives differently for each of us; and each of us will change and deepen, as poems themselves do, from one reading to the next.

Robert Frost

Wallace Stevens	Galway Kinnell
Archibald MacLeish	Anne Sexton
Robert Francis	Donald Hall
Richard Eberhart	John Hollander
Robert Penn Warren	Derek Walcott
Stanley Kunitz	Sylvia Plath
Constance Carrier	Brendan Galvin
Elizabeth Bishop	Charles Simic
Robert Lowell	Michael S. Harper
William Meredith	Wesley McNair
Hayden Carruth	Linda Gregg
Richard Wilbur	Louise Gluck
Alan Dugan	Margaret Gibson
Maxine Kumin	Jane Kenyon
Philip Booth	Martín Espada

