A CORRESPONDENCE RULE IN FROST'S POETRY AND ITS SIGNIFICANCE FOR METRICAL THEORY

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ROBERT FROST IS KNOWN for his respect of meter. Certainly, however, his poetry is not sing-songy. Given that the abstract metrical patterns he employs are no more immediately apparent to the ear than those of many other poets, the question arises as to why he has the reputation of being a strict metricist. One possibility is that Frost's poetry is recognizable as belonging to a poetic tradition familiar to his readers' ears. In following up on this idea, I will show that metrical theories developed to account for poets of the English tradition can reasonably be applied to Frost.

There are repeated instances in Frost's poetry of what at first look like violations of conventions in the metrical theories I consider here. Within one theory, however, most of these apparent violations disappear when we realize that Frost makes use of a correspondence rule that, while not commonly employed today, has a long history, going back to Chaucer. The evidence from Frost allows one to argue that any adequate theory of metrics for the particular poetic tradition of the poets mentioned in this article must somehow incorporate the effects of the stress maximum principle.

DEMONSTRATION OF THE VIOLATIONS

There are numerous competing modern theories of metrics for the poetic tradition of interest in this paper. Here I consider four of the more fecund ones. I give only a brief and partial sketch of each theory, just enough to allow the demonstration of an unmetrical line in the Frost corpus. I refer the reader to the original articles for details.

In the demonstration of the problems, I take as a given no correspondence
Correspondence Rule in Peer Reading

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LANGUAGE AND STYLE

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(1) 

Pecound's June 17

S S S S S S

M 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

(1) You may see their striking effects in the woods

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An unnessary, or woefully excessive number of unnecessary syllables...
Conclusions for a Theory of Measures

I conclude that it is the MCR and not the resolution that's the problem.

(time 24)

S M S M S M S M

And you're two months back in the middle of March.

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A sequence of short syllables may come as one syllable if all are unstressed.

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The two Trops in this time "and here" is a long syllable.

(ready these) Short syllables may come as one syllable if all are unstressed.

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Although position is not a stress maximizer, there's no reason to treat the syllables of the word as a maximizer. In fact, the stress syllables of the word are the maximizers. The stress syllables are the maximizers of the word. If there are stress syllables in the word, they are the maximizers of the word. If there are stress syllables in the word, they are the maximizers of the word.

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