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TestDriving CD-ROMS — Reviews of Electronic and CD-ROM products

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Robert Frost: Poems, Life, Legacy
Publisher: Henry Holt & Company, Inc.
115 West 18th St. New York, NY 10011
212-886-9398. ISBN/ISSN: 0-8050-5703-X (disc only); 0-8050-5704-8 (disc plus teacher's manual). Price: \$49.95; \$69.95 (disc plus teacher's manual). System requirements: Macintosh 68030, 25 MHz processor, and OS 7.1 or higher. PC: 486 66 MHz processor, 12 MB RAM, Windows 3.1 or Windows 95, VGA monitor (256 colors minimum), at least a 2X CD-ROM drive, audio capability, and 10 MB of hard disk space.

Reviewed by **Norman Desmarais**

Robert Frost's relationship with Henry Holt and Company lasted almost half a century. When Alfred Harcourt, Frost's editor and only contact with Henry Holt and Company, left to establish Harcourt and Brace, he invited several of his authors, including Frost, to join him. Robert Frost would have accepted willingly, but realized that the move might jeopardize any anticipated publication of his collected works; so he stayed with Henry Holt and Company which held the copyrights on his first three volumes. Fortunate for us because we now have a complete collection of his poetry, accompanied by a multimedia documentary and a library of biographical and critical material.

The main menu of *Robert Frost: Poems, Life, Legacy* displays the three main access points (Documentary, Poetry, Library) in large letters followed by access points to the index, credits, and sources in smaller letters. Moving the cursor over each item shows the contents of each. Making a selection reveals further subdivisions of the topic.

The Documentary follows a photo album metaphor to display video clips and narratives arranged in seven chapters portraying Frost's life and his trials as a man and artist. It consists of hundreds of photographs and manuscript excerpts, over 60 minutes of video, and over 40 minutes of audio of Frost in lectures and interviews. All but the last chapter include a section of "Featured Poems" which highlight the relationship of the poet's life and work.

The Poetry section contains Frost's collected poetry arranged in the order of the

authoritative 1949 edition of his collected poems. It also includes an audio anthology of the poet reading seventy of his finest works. Students can follow the text on screen as the poet reads. A button bar in the upper right corner lets them play or pause the reading, adjust the volume, and select whether or not to display a place marker that moves as the reading progresses from line to line. Unfamiliar words appear in blue. Clicking on them pops up a brief definition or explanation.

The Library presents a wealth of additional information, including selections of Frost's prose (lectures and essays) and letters arranged chronologically. A section entitled "Young Readers" presents a biography of the poet written for younger audiences by Natalie S. Bober and Frost's selection of poems for young people. The Critical Reception section contains contemporary reviews written between 1913 and 1962 while the Criticism section contains more recent essays and interpretations. The final entry, Biography, contains the poet's official biography (*Robert Frost: A Biography* by Lawrance Thompson and R. H. Winnick) and three essays. All the documents and articles are easy to read with black print on a simulated parchment background.

Robert Frost: Poems, Life, Legacy contains a very powerful index. It includes options to search the poems, audio/video clips, the documentary, prose, letters, critical reception, criticism, biography, or commentary. Each of these features provides multiple ways to view the contents. For example, the poems can be viewed in alphabetical order, book order, by subject/theme, or form. Selecting an option, such as subject/theme, opens another window showing the variety of subjects and themes the poems cover. Picking a subject will reveal the titles of the poems that deal with that topic. It is often difficult to remember which book contains a particular poem; so the index can often provide the quickest access to material that may be "buried" in various parts of this collection.

Readers have the option to view the document either in page view which displays at a fixed point on the screen or in a floating window which overlays other elements on the screen and can be moved around. Using the two-display features in combination can serve to place one poem aside of another for comparison.

In addition to the excellent index, *Robert Frost: Poems, Life, Legacy* contains excellent navigational tools. Following the photo album metaphor, just as the tabs on the left of the screen provide access to the content, the tabs on the right provide the navigational and utility tools. The first one accesses any links connected to the current page. If the page has no links, the tab is "grayed out." The second tab provides utilities to search, create personal notes, copy text, view a notebook of personal ideas or quotes, create bookmarks, highlight text, or advance or go back through one's search history. The search capabilities support full Boolean searching with the operators NEAR (which acts as AND), OR, and BUT NOT. Each screen, except the title pages, indicates the page number, e. g. 10 of 23, with arrows to move forward or backward. For title pages, one must guess that the right arrow will proceed to the next page. It would be helpful to have a right arrow on this page or some designation on the desktop to indicate how to proceed so novice users don't feel "trapped" on a title page.

The third tab provides access to a Help feature and the Quit button. It also offers the ability to save and load notebooks created with the notebook feature under the second tab. The tab features, like the index, have black text on a blue background, which can make them hard to read on some monitors. Making a selection turns the print to white, rendering it more legible.

Robert Frost: Poems, Life, Legacy is a definitive work on the poet and his work. It is well designed and has excellent presentation and navigation features. It is an essential purchase for poetry collections. It should find a home in most libraries as well as in elementary schools, high schools, and colleges which teach about Robert Frost and his poetry. Teachers can purchase a version of the product that comes with a teacher's guide that is divided into sections for middle school and high school teachers and for college teachers. The product is targeted at middle school to adult levels and is one of very few products that really offers readers at any of these levels something to suit their needs. Highly recommended.