

An unlikely combination: The art and science of Robert Frost

"Study the science of art. Study the art of science. Develop your senses – especially learn to see. Realize that everything connects to everything else." – Leonardo da Vinci

Though it is not always apparent how art and science inform each other, it is dramatically apparent if you look at the notebooks of Leonardo da Vinci. Viewing one discipline through the lens of another can turn up interesting finds.

A lunar rainbow or a ring around the moon? A meteor; a telescope; fire and ice; wassailing; and mending wall? Robert Frost and science? The



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unlikely combination is not so unlikely after all, according to a new book, "A Science Companion to Robert Frost" (Clemson University Press, 2018) by Virginia F. Smith.

Smith, a professor of chemistry at the U.S.

Naval Academy, earned her A.B. in physics and chemistry from Mount Holyoke, served five years on active duty in the U.S. Air Force and worked in industry before getting her Ph.D. in biochemistry from Washington State University. She lives in Annapolis, Maryland.

In December 2001, as professor Smith walked out her door to administer her semester-end final chemistry exam, she grabbed her husband's copy of Frost, so she would have, as she recalled, "something non-scientific" to read during the three-hour exam. While she sought a temporary respite from

science in Frost, she was surprised to discover the opposite.

Smith recalled: "I could not help but notice scientific language (microscopic, telescopic, Fahrenheit, Centigrade) and scientific concepts based on evolution, quantum mechanics, cosmology in the poetry. It was exciting and unexpected."

The next month, Smith shared her thoughts with her colleague, USNA English professor Tim O'Brien, who invited her to participate in a poetry conference a month later. Smith gave her first "Frost Talk" on the science she found in a handful of Frost poems. In 2008, Smith, granted a

sabbatical, extended her research and wrote her first paper published in The Robert Frost Review.

In the process, Smith adapted her scientific training to literary analysis, conducting extensive research across divergent disciplines, delving into the primary papers of Frost – personal letters to family and friends; his published notebooks; Lesley Frost's childhood journal entries; newspaper and magazine articles; and personal visits to Frost residences including visiting the West Country of England where the Frosts lived in 1914-1915.