

PREFACE

An original voice, Robert Frost (1874-1963) is one of the most talented and distinguished oligarchs of the twentieth century American poetry. He felt to find his avocational “vocation” in a period when there was no authoritative “singing strength” in the literary arena of America. When the literary journal, The Independent brought out his first professional poem “My Butterfly: An Elegy” in 1894, Ezra Pound (1885-1972) and T.S. Eliot (1888-1965) could not yet get the scent of secrets of genius in them. Frost found his true metier at thirty-nine and stayed with it for the rest of his long life. The magic of his “new-world song” which immensely hinges on cloying images and signifying symbols wins much critical acclaim for him all over the world.

The distinctive characteristic of Frostian images and symbols which strikes one is the surface simplicity beneath which “lies a *selva oscura*”.¹ But like Eliot Frost does not manipulate recondite or impenetrable images and symbols. Of course, like the Symbolist poets he dexterously deploys plurivalent symbols in his entire corpus. Considering Yeatsian image and symbol T. R. Henn intelligently discerns symbol “as a many-sided crystal”.² And this is immaculately germane to the tenor of Frostian symbol which sheds shades of meaning or angles of vision.

There has been a spate of books on Frost and the Frost canon but critical literature has not paid adequate attention to Frost’s imagistic and symbolistic repertory. Hence, I deliberate whether I could buckle down to my PhD dissertation on Frost’s major images and symbols. I discussed my plan with my supervisor Dr Benoy Kumar Banerjee whose perspicacious directive, steady encouragement and profound affection infused me with unflagging confidence to prosecute the project and prepare this dissertation. To him I owe my foremost debt of gratitude.

It is noteworthy that this study is concerned with the major images and symbols evolved only in the Frost poetry. As a matter of fact we would not examine the images and symbols wielded in Frost's prose contributions— plays, short stories or sketches notably "A Way Out", "Old Stick-in-the-Mud", "The Wise Men", "A Just Judge", "Old Welch Goes to the Show", "Dalkin's Little Indulgence" and so forth. It won't be impertinent to specify that we used the expression "major images and symbols" to signify dominating and recurring images and symbols in Frost. Though Frost has never belonged to Symbolist or Imagist movement he spectacularly employs imagistic and symbolistic method of communication in his poetry. Frostian images and symbols are simultaneously dredged from phenomenal and spiritual world.

Our study in the Frostian major images and symbols is intended for tracing poetic evolution and exploring novelty of Frost's imagistic and symbolistic strategy. The entire project comprises four chapters. The first chapter, A Survey of Frost Criticism focuses on favourable and adverse criticism devoted to Frost's poetry. This, of course, seeks to justify the relevance of this dissertation. The second chapter, Frost: into His Own reviews Frost, the man and illumines his poetry wherein autobiographical lithographs scintillate. The third chapter, Images and Symbols: A Study in Theory and Practice deals with the scopes and functions of images and symbols particularly in poetry. Frost's imagistic and symbolistic credo and practice are also spotlighted in this chapter. The fourth chapter, The Frost Universe: A Study in Major Images and Symbols classifies and discusses predominant images and symbols evolved in the Frost poetry in an attempt to define the structural pattern of Frost's imaginative world. To trace the strategical development in Frost's imagistic and symbolistic artistry this chapter has been divided into three sections. The opening section, "Pipes in hands"; Early Phase (1913 - 1916) examines major images and symbols manipulated in three volumes—A Boys Will (1913), North of Boston (1914) and Mountain Interval

(1916). In the early phase of the Frost poetry the images of “woods”, “bird”, “flower”, “colour”, “wall”, “house”, “road”, “light”, “moon”, “death”, “darkness” bulk large. Psychical, psychological, natural, intimate, colour, sexual, psychosexual, spiritual and religious symbols preponderantly wielded in this phase. The second section, “Toward the source”: Middle Phase (1923-1942) considers the dominating images and symbols deployed in the four volumes—New Hampshire (1923), West-Running Brook (1928), A Further Range (1936) and A Witness Tree (1942). In these volumes the images which loom large are “star”, “snow”, “water”, “animal”, “woods”, “wave”, “brook”, “sun”, “moon” and “whiteness”. The types of symbols which play a major role in middle phase are psychological, psychical, sexual, colour, conventional, cosmic and spiritual. The concluding section, “A line of shadowy tracks”: Final Phase (1945 – 1962) delves deep into the major images and symbols employed in four volumes—A Masque of Reason (1945), Steeple Bush (1947), A Masque of Mercy (1947) and In the Clearing (1962). The key images which occur in these volume are “light”, “tree”, “bird”, “weeds”, “house”, “water”, “sun”, “moon”, “star”, “storm”, “animal”, “death”, “rebirth”, “spirit”, “flight”, “substantiation” and “incarnation”. Natural, colour, conventional, psychical, material and spiritual symbols are adroitly handled in the final phase of Frost’s poetic career.

It is worth mentioning that for textual references, I depended on The Poetry of Robert Frost edited by Edward Connery Lathem (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1969). The research guidelines drawn up in MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers by Joseph Gibaldi (New Delhi: Affiliated East-West Press Pvt. Ltd., 1996) have been strictly adhered to while preparing this dissertation.

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Works Cited

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