

## ***Chapter – II***

## CHAPTER - II

FROST : INTO HIS OWN

"...the most part listened

While Robert Frost kept on and on and on

In his slow New England fashion for our delight,

Holding us with shrewd turns and racy quips,

And the rare twinkle of his grave blue eyes."

Gibson, Wilfred. "The Golden Room ".

The Atlantic Monthly 137.2(1926): 204-205.

The artist in Frost who "cries out for design",<sup>1</sup> discerns life to be inseparably linked with art. Frost's formidable bulk of poetry is so much "a part of his life that to tell his life would be to explain his poetry."<sup>2</sup> Born in San Francisco on 26 March 1874, Robert Lee Frost was named after Robert E. Lee, the commander of the confederate armies. His father, William Prescott Frost Jr., a New Englander and a graduate of Harvard College, was a journalist on the San Francisco Bulletin; temperamentally he was a "doggedly honest Democrat"<sup>3</sup> and a flinty agnostic who eagerly imbibed Darwinism. Frost's mother Isabelle Moodie, on the other hand, had an intense leaning towards Presbyterianism. She was "fresh a Presbyterian from Scotland". Wordsworth, Bryant, Poe and Emerson were her favourites. It was Emerson who "turned her into a Unitarian. ...Reading on into Emerson, that is into 'Representative Men' until she got to Swedenborg, the

mystic, made her a Swedenborgian".<sup>4</sup> Thus hereditarily Robert Frost came by mixed tendencies. Frost's father died of tuberculosis in San Francisco when the poet was eleven. Isabelle Moodie Frost along with young Frost and his sister Jeanie took the coffin to New England for interment at home. This unanticipated tragedy cast a deep shadow on Frost family. Isabelle who received minimal help from her children's paternal grandparents met various difficulties. But intelligent as she was, she obtained the position of a teacher in a multi-grade school at Salem, New Hampshire. Here Frost along with his sister received formal primary education. Frost claimed that he began to read to himself at thirteen<sup>5</sup>. Frost's mother, to whom Frost was strongly attached, read aloud to him usually from Scotland's history, Robert Burn's poem, Sir Walter Scott's Tales of a Grandfather, the teachings of Swedenborg, Mac Donald's At the Back of the North Wind, W. H. Prescott's Conquest of Peru and Conquest of Mexico<sup>6</sup>. Frost's formative years were potently influenced by his mother who was intensely interested in literature.

Frost's intimate classmate at Salem was Charlie Peabody, an active daredevil who taught him how to subdue a birch that grew by the side of the school yard.<sup>7</sup> Frost's famous poem "Birches" is vividly reminiscent of this incident. Frost spent three years for his schooling at Salem. He then attended Lawrence (Massachusetts) High School where the poet in Frost could bid fair to unfold his creative talent. At age sixteen Frost wrote his first poem "La Noche Triste" which was published in the (Lawrence) High School Bulletin (May 1890). The account of the temporary Indian Victory over Cortez in Mexico City delineated in W.H. Prescott's The Conquest of Mexico stimulated him to compose this poem. The other three poems appeared in the same Bulletin, were "Song of the Wave" (May 1890), "A Dream of Julius Caesar" (April 1891), and "Class Hymn" (June 1892) of which "Class Hymn" was meant to be sung to a Beethoven melody.

Frost distinguished himself by his impressive performance in Lawrence High School. From this school he was graduated in 1892 sharing valedictorian honours with a classmate, Elinor Miriam White who once "bobbed up ... as a rival"<sup>8</sup> to Frost turns out now to be the sweetheart of the young poet. In the fall of 1892 Frost's paternal grandfather who expected him to become a lawyer, sent him to Dartmouth College at Hanover where he stayed less than a semester for he had already developed a strong detestation for academic learning. In the spring, 1893 Frost started teaching in a public school in Methuen, Massachusetts. But from 1894 to 1895 his heart was so agitated that he could not remain steady in a particular job. During these years he sporadically worked as light-trimmer and gate-tender in the Arlington Mill, Lawrence, as teacher in a district school, Salem and as journalist on the Lawrence weekly Sentinel and the Lawrence Daily American. Though Frost led almost a nomadic life with his odd jobs, he did not forget at all to broaden his horizons. He enjoyed reading novels in order to strengthen his "executive faculties."<sup>9</sup> The Polish trilogy With Fire and Sword, The Deluge and Pan Michael attracted him much. He learned a lot from Thomas Hardy and drew his inspiration from the prose of Scott and Stevenson. The specific poems which Frost highly appreciated are Shelley's "Prometheus Unbound", Keats's "The Fall of Hyperion", Tennyson's "The Epic [Morte d' Arthur]" and Browning's "Saul". Francis Palgrave's The Golden Treasury, an anthology of English songs and lyrics held great attraction for him. Apart from these, classics which he absorbed during these period are Shakespeare, Homer and Virgil.

Elinor Miriam White who had kindled irresistible love in Frost, went off to St. Lawrence University in Canton, New York to complete her education. Frost felt very desolate and did his best to persuade his sweetheart to marry him. But as she was strong-willed, she wanted to achieve her degree first, then marriage. However she wanted her future husband holding remunerative position before the bond of matrimony. Circumstances did not prove otherwise. In March, 1894 he

sold his first professional poem "My Butterfly : An Elegy" to a renowned New York periodical, The Independent for fifteen dollars. Elated at this memorable event, he privately printed a slim volume of poetry Twilight (1894) containing five pieces: "Twilight", "My Butterfly", "Summering", "The Falls" and "An Unhistoric Spot". Frost had only two leather bound copies of Twilight, one for Elinor White and the other for himself. He met his fiancée at St. Lawrence and presented the literary gift to her with a view to conquering her heart for ever. Her response was not that overwhelming. Rather she appeared to be having interested in some wooers at St. Lawrence University. Elinor's lukewarm response left Frost very dejected. In a mood of despondency he ripped up his own copy and flung it away. Afterwards he dramatically experienced the bleakness of life and stole away into the wilderness of the Dismal Swamp of Virginia at a considerable risk to himself. The journey to the imaginary forest, which appears as a "mask of gloom" in the poem "Into My Own", might have been connected with the young poet's unusual trip to the Dismal Swamp of Virginia.

The publication of "My Butterfly" in the November 1894 Independent was an exciting event in the poetic career of Frost. Although the poem is characterized by its archaism, some of its lines show originality of the apprentice poet. In the late forties, Frost himself informed Earle J. Bernheimer, "for the eight lines or so beginning 'The gray grass is scarce dappled with snow' which was when I first struck the note that was to be mine".<sup>10</sup> The Indiana poet-critic Maurice Thompson who was asked by the editor of The Independent to advise the young poet, discovered "some secret of genius"<sup>11</sup> in the elegy; and his advice for Frost was to seek a more profitable profession. Reverend Dr. William Hayes Ward, the editor of The Independent who himself wrote religious poetry and greatly admired Sidney Lanier's verses for their moral beauty and truth, suggested Frost to follow the poetic style of Lanier. Frost enthused over Lanier's artistic style but did not

follow it. Nor did he pay heed to the advice of Maurice Thompson. He rather continued to follow his own course to supplicate the Muse.

Every cloud has a silver lining. In the Spring of 1895, Frost started teaching in private school, launched and administered by his mother in Lawrence. Frost, who was depressed, suddenly got a fillip when Elinor joined the staff in the fall of 1895. Impatient as they were now for their union in marriage, they got married on December 19, 1895. Elinor bore the poet a son on September 25, 1896. And they fondly named the boy Elliott.

Now, Frost felt a strong sense of responsibility towards the members of his family. He might have realized that the avocation of writing poetry could hardly be a vocation. So he made his mind up to become a teacher of Greek and Latin in a high school. With this end in view, he entered Harvard College as a special undergraduate in the autumn of 1897 and underwent courses in Greek, Latin and Philosophy. Among the great teachers at Harvard, he was very enthusiastic about William James. Irving Babbit and George Santayana were also held in esteem by him. He listened eagerly to the Latin and Greek of Babbit and the "golden utterance"<sup>12</sup> of Santayana. He particularly liked Virgil's Eclogues and Georgics in his course at Harvard.<sup>13</sup>

The constrained college life turned out to be irksome to him. Frost recounts, "I could not do things because they had to be done. I suppose I have been guided in my life so far by instinct to protect what I was or wanted to be. The most pronounced instance where my life was influenced by this instinct was when I gave up my work at Harvard."<sup>14</sup> At Harvard Frost also became terribly sick; "as if something were very wrong with heart or stomach"<sup>15</sup> and he required to be nursed back to good health in a homely atmosphere. Furthermore, his unintermittent assistance seemed to be inevitable for stepping up the management of his mother's private school at Lawrence. These were the factors that compelled

him to withdraw from Harvard at the end of March, 1899 before completing sophomore class.

The poet was thwarted in his academic aspirations but he, who claimed to "live forever and ever unjaded"<sup>16</sup> with poetry, was buoyed up by the sparkle of his creative faculty. During the late 1890s he wrote and published some distinctive poems. The poems "The Birds Do Thus" (August 20, 1896) "Caesar's Lost Transport Ships" (January 13, 1897) and "Warning" (September 9, 1897) appeared in The Independent. An incidental poem entitled "Greece" (April 30, 1897) was published in the Boston Evening Transcript.

The Frosts were blessed with the second child, a daughter named Lesley in the Spring of 1899. But the joys of parenthood did not last long. The following year the first-born child died of cholera infantum. This premature death told heavily on the parents and consequently affected the relationship between Frost and his wife. The poem "Home Burial" partly informs that.<sup>17</sup>

No sooner had Frost settled down to life in the fall of 1900, on a farm in Derry, New Hampshire, purchased there by his grandfather, William Prescott Frost than his mother died of cancer in a sanatorium. Grieved deeply over the death of his son and mother he somehow began to maintain his family and felt that his muse had never deserted him.

Till the fall of 1909 Frost lived on his farm in Derry. The 9-year period at Derry farm could unmistakably be considered as the "most important in the life of Robert Frost, for both the man and the poet."<sup>18</sup> Frost was mysteriously indisposed but he felt comparatively well in the changed environment of the farm. He had considerably a large family. A son Carol and three daughters Irma, Majorie and Elinor Bettina were born during the Derry period. Among them Bettina died only within two days after her birth. The farming method of the poet was not entirely traditional. The neighbours were staggered by the

o

unconventionality of his farming. They could not countenance some of his methods, for instance, "his milking the cows at ten o'clock at night so as to sleep later in the morning."<sup>19</sup>

However, beset with financial pressure he turned back to teaching chiefly English at Pinkerton Academy in 1906. Meanwhile, he grew tired of stragglng farm life; in 1907 he miraculously recovered from severe pneumonia, he was stricken with. Anyway, he also taught "history, Latin and geometry"<sup>20</sup> at Pinkerton. As a teacher Frost was wonderfully informal. He would contend, "every teacher should have his time arranged to permit freer informal contacts with students"<sup>21</sup>. Students were allowed to come to him at any time outside the class periods. He used to go on a hike with the students after class periods and discussed literature, astronomy, sports with them in his easygoing way. He even used to coach them how to perform such plays as had never been produced at Pinkerton : Marlowe's Dr. Faustus, Milton's Camus, Sheridan's The Rivals and Yeats's The Land of Heart's Desire and Cathleen ni hooliban<sup>22</sup>. Shaw's Arms and the Man and Synge's The Playboy of the Western World were Frost's favourite modern plays from which he used to read to some of the students in the evenings at his farm house.

In 1909 he retired from Derry farm to live in a rented apartment in Derry Village. Again in 1911 he moved with his family to Plymouth where he joined the staff of the New Hampshire State Normal School to teach psychology. He also taught there some significant works such as Plato's Republic and Rousseau's Emile. But he seemed to be keen to devote all his efforts to his poetic pursuits.

It is worth noting that Derry years were poetically prolific. The sequestered countryside with its stretch of woods, verdured valleys, wooded hills, reedy brooks, upper pastures, pale orchises; little farmhouses, barns, hay-loads and the unfurbished lifestyle of the rural Yankees whetted his creative faculties. In the 1900s Frost succeeded in publishing the poems "The Trial by Existence"



(October 11, 1906) in The Independent, "The Tuft of Flowers" (March 9, 1906) in the Derry Enterprise, "Ghost House" (March 1906), "The Flower-boat" (May 20, 1909) in the Youth's Companion, "A Line-storm Song" (October 1907) and "Into My Own" (May 1909) in the New England Magazine. In fact, he was equipped with the stuff of several volumes to be published. The importance of Derry period could precisely be construed from the poet's own account, "I might say the core of all my writing was probably the five free years I had there on the farm down the road a mile or two from Derry Village toward Lawrence"<sup>23</sup>.

Frost was impatiently itching to live in seclusion with a view to devoting all his energies to poetry which could promote his career as a poet. Accordingly the Frosts thought of Vancouver where they could live unobtrusively. But as it was very expensive, they decided to sojourn in England, a "freer field of poetical composition"<sup>24</sup>.

Frost reached London in 1912, found a little cottage in Beaconsfield for his family and began writing which he had "in mind to do for a long time"<sup>25</sup>. In a sense England was his "mother country" where his "career as a poet had its real beginnings"<sup>26</sup>. If the New England landscape stimulated him and provided him with the material of poetry, which was "native to the grain of his talent"<sup>27</sup>, the intellectual climate of England brought him public recognition for which he had been waiting for twenty years with bated breath. He took his manuscript of A Boy's Will to the offices of David Nutt and Company in London and was amazed to have his manuscript accepted for publication. A Boy's Will which appeared in April, 1913 unheralded, won applause from the commentators and this promptly led to pleasant contacts in London's world of literature. In Harold Monro's Poetry Bookshop he conversed with F. S. Flint who was interested in the French Symbolist movement and its relation to the new-fashioned Imagist movement in England. Flint played the initial role to put Frost in touch with the recalcitrant

exponent of new poetry, Ezra Pound who wrote a favourable appreciation of A Boy's Will in Harriet Monroe's influential magazine, Poetry : A Magazine of Verse. Pound praised his "swift and bold" images upholding his "good sense to speak naturally and to paint the thing, the thing as he sees it"<sup>28</sup>.

When North of Boston, Frost's second volume of dramatic narrative poems, was brought out in May, 1914, it was acclaimed by the authoritative critics. Pound in his review published in the Poetry (December 1914) christened Frost's poems "modern Georgics". Frost, of course, made the acquaintance of the "Georgian" poets notably Wilfred W. Gibson and Lascelles Abercrombie but he did not in fact belong to the Georgians. Pound who believed that Frost had the "seeds of grace"<sup>29</sup> wanted him in his Imagist soirée. But as a serious artist Frost temperamentally shunned the Imagist soirée where Pound, Flint, Aldington and Hilda Doolittle used to "rewrite each other's poems" to "squeeze the water out of them"<sup>30</sup>.

It is worth mentioning that Frost's concept of "sound of sense" has to be considered within the context of his poetic career. In 1913, shortly after publication of A Boy's Will Frost put forth his concept of prosody or "sound of sense" (which he elsewhere called "sentence sounds") in a letter to his former student John T Bartlett :

To be perfectly frank with you I am one of the notable of my time... I am possibly the only person going who works on any but a worn out theory (principle I had better to say) of versification. I alone of English writers have consciously set myself to make music out of what I may call the sound of sense<sup>31</sup>.

Obviously Frost grew interested in the sense or the meaning which is conveyed by the sound. "Every meaning" he said "has a particular sound-posture". He, of course, made clarification to his sound-posturing poetic artistry : "What I am most interested in emphasizing in the application of this belief to art is the

sentence of sound, because to me a sentence is not interesting merely in conveying a meaning of words; it must do something more; it must convey a meaning by sound."<sup>32</sup>

According to Lawrance Thompson Frost "was working in a direction which took him beyond the Imagistes, beyond the Georgians, when he developed what he meant by the "sound of sense"<sup>33</sup>. Thus the sound-symbolic feature of Frost's poetic language essentially marks off his own domain, quite distinct from the Imagists' or Georgians'.

Of all the friends Frost made in England, the "warmest" one was Edward Thomas. Thomas learned "how to write about nature without prettification"<sup>34</sup> from Frost. He was initially a prose writer. Frost inspired him to write poems. He (Frost) recounted, "He (Thomas) did not write poetry until he started war and that had something to do with my life with him"<sup>35</sup>. When Thomas died on a French battlefield in 1917, Frost wrote to Thomas's widow "... he is all yours. But you must let me cry my cry for him as if he were almost all mine too"<sup>36</sup>. Frost's sense of deep-seated grief over the death of his friend also found expression in his elegy, "To E. T." In August 1914, in the wake of the first World War, Frost's literary fortunes in England inevitably got contracted. Against this inauspicious socio-political environment, Frost found his further stay in England quite inhospitable for him. So the Frosts set sail for America on February 13, 1915 together with Mervyn Thomas, son of Edward Thomas.

Robert Frost returned home on George Washington's birthday in 1915 to find himself "on the eve of his American fame"<sup>37</sup>. Shortly after his landing in New York, he simply wondered to find Amy Lowell's appreciation of North of Boston in The New Republic, the latest magazine which he had never seen before. To his astonishment, an American publisher Henry Holt and Company had already planned for printing American editions of North of Boston and A Boy's Will. As a

matter of fact North of Boston and A Boy's Will were brought out in February and April, 1915 respectively by Henry Holt and Company.

From now on Frost's poems began to appear steadily in the illustrious periodicals without a hitch. The Atlantic Monthly which once refused his poems to publish now brought out "Birches", "The Road Not Taken" in its August (1915) issue.

Frost's life was completely consecrated to his career. This time he tried to win over Louis Untermeyer to his literary thoughts and subsequently Untermeyer became the "conduit of Frost's critical ideas"<sup>38</sup>. Enchanted with the Franconia region of the White Mountains, Frost settled his family almost surreptitiously on a small farm in Franconia, New Hampshire and buckled down to poetic practice. Joseph Warren Beach who had called on Frost at this period, found him to be "full of the English poets of the time, whom he had known personally, and whose work he discussed with fine appreciation, but also with cool objective discrimination and detachment".

As regards the English classics he was not keen on Milton, for he could not hear "the sound of the human voice in his rolling lines." But he was quite enthusiastic about Chaucer, Shakespeare, Wordsworth and Browning because he discovered "the inflections of the speaking voice"<sup>39</sup> in their verse. Frost's idea of speaking tone of voice was fully developed in his essay "The Figure a Poem Makes" (1939) where he tells us that "the possibilities for tune from the dramatic tones of meaning struck across the rigidity of a limited meter are endless"<sup>40</sup>.

Frost became flamboyant in the literary arena of America. As a wider audience had been prepared for him he began delivering public lectures and readings. In June, 1916 he read his eclogue "The Bonfire" on Phi Beta Kappa Day at Harvard. Now there was pressure on him from his publisher. This prompted him to publish his third volume of poetry. In November, 1916 was brought out

Mountain Interval representing so sincere impressions of life that those cannot "affect us as false fires"<sup>41</sup>.

Now Frost had to earn a living from farming and poetry. To ameliorate his financial position, in spite of his growing cynicism about academic life, in January 1917, he joined the faculty of Amherst College where he taught until May 1920. The year 1917 was not at all prolific so far as Frost's literary output was concerned; only three of his poems were published in the periodicals.

Frost sold his Franconia farm in the summer of 1920 and bought a farmhouse in South Shaftsbury, Vermont where he moved with his family. During the period 1920-1923 Frost published thirty-seven poems in several periodicals. He accumulated most of them as "notes and grace-notes" in New Hampshire which was brought out on November 15, 1923. New Hampshire, "the fruit of his (Frost's) ripest powers"<sup>42</sup> won the poet his first Pulitzer Prize in May 1924. From now on, he was adorned with awards and honours. During these years Amherst and Michigan had simultaneously been claiming the radiant company of the poet. Frost, however, favoured Amherst, served as Professor of English in Amherst College and remained there until 1938. Frost was demanded to teach three months in a year and to quote Elinor Frost, "his obligations here are really not tiring him at all"<sup>43</sup>. As a poet-teacher he taught with profound sensitivity and genial countenance. He acted as an energizer and let the students arouse the power inherent in them. During this period the sonnets and brief lyrical poems which he wrote in influential periodicals stamped him as a frugal poet. "Content with the frugal fare at the banquet of the muses"<sup>44</sup> he, on November 19, 1928, brought out his fifth volume, West-Running Brook where "beneath the graceful image" and "wisp of metaphor" "speaks a greatness of soul"<sup>45</sup>. The poems "A Peck of Gold" and "Once by the Pacific" contained in this volume are "reminiscent of my ten years as a child" said Frost "in San Francisco"<sup>46</sup>.

While Frost the poet won his spurs Frost the man grew to be "acquainted with the night". On November 1, 1930 Frost published his Collected Poems which challenged the commentators to re-define the reputation, Frost enjoyed as one of the clearest voices of "Our Singing Strength"<sup>47</sup>. It won second Pulitzer Prize in 1931. Just after the publication of Collected Poems Frost was elected to the membership in the American Academy of Arts and Letters. In 1936, he was appointed Charles Eliot Norton Professor of Poetry at Harvard. It was indeed quite an enviable position for a poet in America.

Frost's sister, Jeanie Florence who was mentally ill, died on September 7, 1929. This misfortune augured more dire tragedies in Frost's private life. Frost's loving daughter Marjorie who found a brief period of happiness with her husband Willard Edward Fraser, died of septicaemia on May 2, 1934. But the most desolating of all catastrophes in Frost's life was the death of his wife Elinor Frost of whom Frost said "the unspoken half of everything."<sup>48</sup> As Elinor Frost died of heart attack on March 20, 1938 in Gainesville, Florida, the poet's strength went out of him "to the last drop" and he felt "as a tree that has lost its whole surrounding forest by bad forestry"<sup>49</sup>. "It was hard for Robert Frost to maintain his balance", Louis Untermeyer poignantly recounts : "after Elinor's death. He sold the Amherst house where he and Elinor had lived; he resigned from the college; he talked recklessly, and for the first time in his life the man whose favourite tippie was ginger ale accepted any drink that was offered. He committed himself to a long and wearying lecture trip. He was elected to the Board of Overseers of Harvard University, but there was a long black period before he found anything resembling peace"<sup>50</sup>. Nevertheless his recklessness could not mask his inward maelstrom; his old resentment concerning Twilight intractably flared up again. He almost impulsively sold the only existing copy of Twilight to Earle J. Bernheimer for \$4,000.

Frost's friends and benefactors notably David McCord, Theodore Morrison and his wife Kathleen Morrison helped the poet immensely to avert a complete collapse. Cathleen Morrison served the poet as his dedicated secretary. At one time Frost erratically asked her to marry him but she was astute and gracious enough to rebuff him while remained his tried and true friend.

Tragedy struck Frost again in the fall of 1940. The poet was extremely overwhelmed by the sense of grief over the loss of his only living son, Carol, who had "an increasing variety of nervous psychic aberrations" from his boyhood. Carol wanted to be a poet like his father but he utterly "failed in poetry". As a father Frost also failed to trick or argue Carol into "believing he was the least successful". Despondent as he was "he killed himself with a deer-hunting rifle in his own home"<sup>51</sup>.

Thus like Job Frost went through terrible ordeals. In the later years of his life he was advertently engrossed in the Bible so as to unearth the deeper meaning sheathed in ordeals. Frost's personal catastrophes, however, never turned him away from the domain of poetry. On May 20, 1936 appeared A Further Range, "a thoroughly satisfactory collection"<sup>52</sup> of poetry with a "wider reach for his imagery"<sup>53</sup>. This won the poet the Book-of-the-Month-Club award (1936) and the third Pulitzer Prize (1937). On February 16, 1939 Frost brought out an enlarged edition of Collected Poems prefixed with a compact essay entitled "The Figure a Poem Makes" which embodies Frost's poetic theories.

Now Frost was sixty-five years of age, – an age of retirement. At this stage human beings normally begin to lose physical and mental strength. But the case with Frost is quite different; he drew prowess from the resplendent reservoir of his inmost strength in order to go trekking in poetic territory. In less than ten years he brought out four volumes : A Witness Tree (April 23, 1942), which has a "lyric force and intensity that shows how a mind may know age without losing youth"<sup>54</sup>,

o

fetched the poet his fourth Pulitzer Prize in 1943; A Masque of Reason (March 26, 1945), a poetic playlet which claims to be the forty-third chapter of the "Book of Job"; Steeple Bush (May 28, 1947) which symbolically presents "possible bad roads, possible good roads, sympathetic insight into fears ... flashes of hope lighting the way, even though they come in fiery fusion of stars or lightning of storm"<sup>55</sup>; and A Masque of Mercy (September 16, 1947) wherein the poet postulates "a retributive God, withholding all certainty, whose "justice" seems so severe and cruel as to amount to injustice"<sup>56</sup>.

From the ostensibly simple lyrics of A Boy's Will to the wry metaphysics of A Masque of Mercy Frost endowed imagery with the symbolic meaning so stupendous that he was quite confident about the indestructibility of the bulk of his poetry. He took it for granted that his poetry would be "a series of revelations" for the readers. So the poems which he wanted to save, were accumulated and the volume of Complete Poems bulging with resonance was brought out in April, 1949, as he celebrated his seventy-fifth birthday.

On the event of his so-called seventy-fifth birthday<sup>57</sup>, the United States Senate adopted a resolution in his honour extending the "felicitations of the Nation which he has served so well"<sup>58</sup>.

During the 1950s Frost perhaps was at the height of his popularity when honours and degrees once again were bestowed upon him at home and abroad. When he was basking in the glow of his glory in America, he had been invited to visit South America, Israel, England, Ireland, Greece and Russia. In 1954 he went to Brazil as a delegate to the World Congress of Writers and impressively took on there statesmanly tasks; in 1957 he made a trip to England on a "good-will mission" under the auspices of the U.S. Department of State. In London, at a splendid dinner given in honour of Frost, T. S. Eliot spoke of Frost's stature in glowing terms. Eliot said, "Mr. Frost is one of the good poets, and I might say,



o

perhaps the most eminent, the most distinguished, I must call it, Anglo-American poet now living"<sup>59</sup> which moved Frost nearly to tears. This time Frost received honorary degrees from Oxford, Cambridge, Ohio State University and National University of Ireland. He was appointed Consultant in poetry to the Library of Congress for the term from 1958 to 1959. In 1961 he brilliantly served as "ambassador of good will" in Israel and Greece.

Frost reached the apex of his poetic career when he was invited to read a poem in the inauguration ceremonies for President John F. Kennedy on January 20, 1961. It was a cold blowy day with the sun glaring mercilessly from the sky. The virulent weather prevented the octogenerian poet reading his newly-composed poem "The Preface" but doughtily he recited "The Gift Outright" from memory. On his eighty-eighth birthday, he was awarded the Congressional Medal at the White House on March 26, 1962, by President Kennedy. On the same day Frost brought out his culminating volume In the Clearing with a "frontispiece" enunciating "God's own descent/ Into flesh". Frost's uncanny spiritual awareness made his poetry symbolically delectable. He was disenchanted with progress and mistrustful of "science which has taken man deeper and deeper into the matter, further into space, and further away from the spirit"<sup>60</sup>. But at the tail-end of his poetic career, Frost however reconciled himself to the strides of science. The mystical mantra of this "good Greek out of New England" was "know thyself". Like W. B. Yeats he heard the soul-soothing music of "The Lake Isle of Innisfree" "in the deep heart's core." It is important to note that two of his favourite books were "Robinson Crusoe, the self-sustaining cast-away, and Walden, the document of a man who cast himself away to find himself"<sup>61</sup>.

Frost became one of the "unacknowledged legislators of the world". In August, 1962 he made a trip to the Soviet Union on a "good-will mission" under the aegis of the U.S. Department of State. He was visited there by Premier

Krushchev. "One of my greatest experiences" said Frost "was to talk to Krushchev."<sup>62</sup> At a literary concourse in Moscow Frost recited "Mending Wall", a symbolical poem which begins "Something there is that doesn't love a wall,/ That wants it down". Presumably the symbolical import of the poem was not precisely communicated to the Soviets for Frost read it in English. However, this was Frost's last grand public performance.

"Robert Frost was a primal energy". Old age could never quell the "volcano of passion" in him; it "burned to his last day"<sup>63</sup>. Coming back from Soviet Union he fell ill but still clung tenaciously to life. He entered Peter Bent Brigham Hospital, Boston on December 3, 1962, underwent prostate operation on December 10th and exposed a spirit of inexorable tenacity. He seemed to recuperate his health. But on December 23rd he suffered a severe heart attack which he amazingly recovered from. Then twice in a fortnight's period he suffered pulmonary embolism. In a letter to his old friends G. Roy and Mrs. Alma Elliot, dictated on January 12, 1963, he said, "If I only get well ... I'll go deeper into my life with you than I ever have before"<sup>64</sup>. But alas! the "grim ferryman" made frantic attempt to approach the poet. On January 29, 1963, Frost suffered the third embolism and he died still "going deeper into life". "And what better mourns a poet" wrote John Ciardi "than the act of reading him again so to be stored and restored by him? ... His genius, wild and ardent, remains to us in his poems ... He was our best"<sup>65</sup>.

## Works Cited

1. Frost, Robert. "A Masque of Reason." The poetry of Robert Frost. Ed. Edward Connery Lathem. New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1969. 482.
2. Flint, F. S. Review of "A Boy's Will". Robert Frost: The Critical Reception. Ed. Linda W. Wagner. Michigan State University: Burt Franklin & Co., Inc., 1977. 3.
3. Untermeyer, Louis, ed. The Letters of Robert Frost. London: Jonathan Cape, 1964. 376.
4. Frost, Robert. Selected Prose of Robert Frost. Ed. Hyde Cox and Edward Connery Lathem. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1966. 112.
5. Frost. The Letters of Robert Frost. Ed. Untermeyer. 61.
6. Frost, Lesley. Introduction. Contours of Belief. By- Dorothy Judd Hall. Athens: Ohio University Press, 1984. xii.
7. Thompson, Lawrance, ed. Selected Letters of Robert Frost. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1964. 15.
8. Sergeant, Elizabeth Shepley. Robert Frost: The Trial by Existence. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1960. 23.
9. Frost. Letter to Miss Ward. Selected Letters. Ed. Thompson. 20.
10. Frost. Letter to Earle J. Bernheimer. Selected Letters. Ed. Thompson. 526 - 527.
11. Thompson, Maurice. Letter to William Hayes Ward. Selected Letters. Ed. Thompson. 24.
12. Poirier, Richard. "The Art of Poetry 11: Robert Frost". The Paris Review 6.24 (1960): 108.
13. Beach, Joseph Warren. "Robert Frost". The Yale Review XLIII.2 (1953): 206.

14. Frost, Robert. Interview with Morris P. Tilley. "Notes from Conversations."  
Interviews with Robert Frost. Ed. Edward Connery Lathem. New York:  
Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1966. 24.
15. Sergeant 54.
16. Frost, Robert. Robert Frost: Poetry and Prose. Ed. Edward Connery Lathem and  
Lawrance Thompson. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1972. 358.
17. Barry, Elaine. Robert Frost. New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1973. 6.
18. Thompson, ed. Selected Letters 31.
19. Beach 206.
20. Frost. Letter to Robert Chase. Selected Letters: Ed. Thompson. 552.
21. Frost, Robert. "Education by Presence". An Interview by Janet Mabie. Robert  
Frost: Poetry and Prose. Ed. Lathem & Thompson. 303.
22. Newdick, Robert S. "Pinkerton Academy, Derry, New Hampshire".  
Recognition of Robert Frost. Ed. Richard Thornton. New York: Henry  
Holt and Company, 1937. 81.
23. Frost. Letter to Robert Chase. Selected Letters. Ed. Thompson. 552.
24. Browne, George H. "Robert Frost, A Poet of Speech". Robert Frost : The  
Critical Reception. Ed. Wagner. 37.
25. Frost, Elinor M. Letter to Margaret Lynch. Selected Letters. Ed. Thompson. 54.
26. Poirier, Richard. "Robert Frost". Voices and Visions: The Poet in America.  
1987. Ed. Helen Vendler. New Delhi: Tata McGraw-Hill Publishing  
Company Limited, 1989. 93.
27. Thompson, ed. Selected Letters 50.

28. Pound, Ezra. Review of "A Boy's Will". Robert Frost: The Critical Reception. Ed. Wagner. 1 - 2.
29. Quoted by Sergeant in Trial by Existence. 103.
30. Poirier, "The Art of Poetry II" 96.
31. Thompson, ed. Selected Letters 79.
32. Frost, Robert. Interview with William Stanley Braithwaite. "Robert Frost, New American Poet". Interviews with Robert Frost. Ed. Lathem. 6.
33. Thompson, Lawrence. Robert Frost: The Early Years, 1874 - 1915. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1966. 418.
34. Squires, Radcliffe. The Major Themes of Robert Frost. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1963. 13.
35. Poirier, "The Art of Poetry II". 95.
36. Frost. Letter to Helen Thomas. Selected Letters. Ed. Thompson. 216.
37. Lentricchia, Frank. Modernist Quartet. Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 1994. 102.
38. Lentricchia 87.
39. Beach 208 - 209.
40. Frost. Robert Frost: Poetry and Prose. Ed. Lathem & Thompson. 394.
41. Cox, Sidney. "The Sincerity of Robert Frost." Robert Frost: The Critical Reception. Ed. Wagner. 50.
42. Farrar, John. "The Poet of New England's Hill-men." Robert Frost: The Critical Reception. Ed. Wagner. 58.
43. Frost, Elinor M. Letter to Edith H. Fobes. Selected Letters. Ed. Thompson. 340.

44. Monroe, Harriet. "A Frugal Master." Robert Frost: The Critical Reception. Ed. Wagner. 78.
45. Untermeyer, Louis. "Still Robert Frost." Robert Frost: The Critical Reception. Ed. Wagner. 72.
46. Frost. Letter to Whit Burnett. Selected Letters. Ed. Thompson. 500.
47. Carpenter, Frederick I. "The Collected Poems of Robert Frost." Robert Frost: The Critical Reception. Ed. Wagner. 110.
48. Frost. The Letters of Robert Frost. Ed. Untermeyer. 296.
49. Frost. The Letters of Robert Frost. Ed. Untermeyer. 308.
50. Untermeyer, ed. The Letters of Robert Frost. 307.
51. Thompson, ed. Selected Letters. 491 - 492.
52. Jennings, Elizabeth. Frost. Edinburgh : Oliver and Boyd, 1964. 54.
53. Holmes, John. "In 'A Further Range' Robert Frost Advances." Robert Frost: The Critical Reception. Ed. Wagner. 115.
54. Benét, Stephen Vincent. "Frost at Sixty-Seven." Robert Frost: The Critical Reception. Ed. Wagner. 169.
55. Campbell, Gladys. "A World Torn Loose Went By Me." Robert Frost: The Critical Reception. Ed. Wagner. 217.
56. Kearns, Katherine. Robert Frost and a Poetics of Appetite. Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 1994. 17.
57. The Year of Frost's birth was erroneously accepted as 1975. The U. S. Senate declared poet's 75th birthday celebration in 1950. But a letter written by Frost's father from San Francisco, dated 25 October 1874, the Second Report of the Secretary of the Harvard Class of 1872, published in June

1875 and other documents precisely proclaim Frost's birth in 1874. See Thompson, ed. Selected Letters. xlvii.

58. Untermeyer, ed. The Letters of Robert Frost 362.
59. Thompson, Lawrence and R. H. Winnick, Robert Frost : The Later Years, 1938 - 1963. New York : Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1976. 243.
60. Untermeyer, ed. The Letters of Robert Frost. 378.
61. Untermeyer, ed. The Letters of Robert Frost. 378.
62. Frost. Robert Frost : Poetry and Prose. Ed. Lathem & Thompson. 446.
63. Ciardi, John. "Robert Frost : To Earthward". Saturday Review 23 Feb. 1963 : 24.
64. Frost. Selected Letters. Ed. Thompson. 596.
65. Ciardi 24.