

## ***Chapter – III***

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## IMAGES AND SYMBOLS: A STUDY IN THEORY AND PRACTICE

Imagery and after-imagery are about all  
there is to poetry. Synecdoche and  
Synecdoche. — My motto is that something  
must be left to God.

Frost, Robert. Quoted by J.Mc Bride Dabbs.

"Robert Frost and the Dark Woods".

Yale Review 23.3 (1934): 514-515.

How anyone can fail to see  
Where perfectly in form and tint  
The metaphor, the symbol lies!  
Why will I not analogize?  
(I do too much in some men's eyes.)

Frost, Robert. "A Missive Missile"

The Poetry of Robert Frost.

Ed. Edward Connery Lathem. New York:

Henry Holt and Company, 1969. 327.

The poetic landscape of Frost's universe is uniquely characterized by the proliferation of images and symbols. These are the "component structures" of poetry through which Frost's sensory and extrasensory experiences of phenomenal and noumenal cosmos are strikingly divulged. Frost's poetic career may be divided

into three phases: early phase (1913-1916), middle phase (1923-1942) and the final phase (1945-1962).

Before embarking on the discussion of major images and symbols which have come up during the respective phases of Frost's evolution as a poet, we would like to analyse the functions of images and symbols in literature in general and poetry in particular. Hence, this study of images and symbols.

The word "image" originates from "imago" and "imitary" (to imitate) revealing the truth that the imitation of sense-experience shapes an image. Accordingly an image may be visual, auditory, olfactory, gustatory or tactile. In fact the term "image" or "imagery" has diverse meanings and connotations. Imagery, in general, covers the use of language to represent objects, actions, feelings, ideas, thoughts, states of mind and sensory or extrasensory experiences. Critics are of different views on imagery. Some of them constrict its scope to rhetorical figures while others widen its application. Caroline F. E. Spurgeon uses the term "image" to subsume "every kind of simile" as well as "every kind of metaphor" which she recognizes as "compressed simile"<sup>1</sup>. Her definition of an image has been confined to "the little word-picture used by a poet or prose writer to illustrate, illuminate and embellish his thought"<sup>2</sup>. She thinks of image as "connoting any and every imaginative picture or other experience, drawn in every kind of way, which may have come to the poet, not only through any of his senses, but through his mind and emotions as well, and which he uses, in the forms of simile and metaphor in their widest sense, for purposes of analogy"<sup>3</sup>. Miss Spurgeon does not discriminate an image from a figure of speech. The analogy between two objects or ideas which simile and metaphor as figures of speech suggest is the precursory purpose of an image. Hence an image might be held to be analogous to a figure of speech. But a subtle distinction between an image and a figure of speech is quite discernible. A simile can exclusively be



Moreover, the stanza can also be looked upon as a literal imagery because the literal objects are here not interlaced figuratively. In the fifth stanza the two lovers, who enter the autumnal woods in search of water are depicted in an exhilarated mood while hearing the brook:

Each laid on other a staying hand  
                     To listen ere we dared to look,  
 And in the hush we joined to make  
                     We heard, we knew we heard the brook.

Here, the "staying hand" which "each laid on other" manifests deep-seated love; and unlike literal imagery it turns out to be a figurative image.

Image is the soul of poetry. It is the integral part of poetic imagination. Simply a word of a poem can well be termed as an image if it be a fusion of experience, consciousness and imagination. Similarly, a group of such words which establish "emotional logic" can precisely be recognized as an image.

From an earlier period of literature the poets have been making use of the imagery as an important poetical instrument. The significance of the use of image has distinctly been recognized by the great minds in all ages. To Aristotle "image" was an unconceivable term but he was quite aware of the signification of metaphor in poetry. He identified metaphor as "the process of transferring a word from one object of reference to another. Metaphor consists in applying to a thing a word that belongs to something else; the transference being either from genus to species or from species to genus or from species to species or on grounds of analogy"<sup>8</sup>. What Aristotle said about metaphor is exclusively germane to the tenor of image. In the eighteenth century the scope of poetic image was utterly circumscribed. The Romantic and numerous Victorian poets used to believe that there were images which were essentially poetical and similarly others which

were quite unpoetical. The Imagist movement is a land mark in the history of literature. In the autumn of 1912 Ezra Pound published at the end of his book Ripostes, five poems of T. E. Hulme; Pound, for the first time introduced the term "Imagiste" in the prefatory note to Hulme's poetical works. Again, in the November 1912 issue of Poetry (Chicago) he categorized Richard Aldington as an "Imagiste". Pound advocated the modernist technique for a "direct treatment of the thing" and stamped his axiom with the French spelling "Imagisme" to designate the aesthetic of "Les Imagistes." Frost described the Imagist movement as "the new Movement" and he identified Ezra Pound as "the Prime Mover in the Movement"<sup>9</sup>. But T. E. Hulme may precisely be called the "father of Imagism" because he was the first aesthetic philosopher-poet to ruminate over Imagist poetry. He considered imagery to be predominantly visual. In the volume, Speculations he held the view that poetry "is not a counter language, but a visual concrete one. It is a compromise for a language of intuition which would hand over sensations bodily. ...Visual meanings can only be transferred by the new bowl of metaphor; prose is an old pot that lets them leak out. Images in verse are not mere decoration, but the very essence of an intuitive language"<sup>10</sup>. Pound's conception of "image" was also quite remarkable. He defined it as "that which presents an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time". He laconically averred that "it is better to present one Image in a life time than to produce voluminous works"<sup>11</sup>. All these intellectual jottings helped to formulate the Imagist credo. To the 1915 anthology of Some Imagist Poets was attached an unsigned preface which was prepared by Richard Aldington and was infinitesimally redacted by Amy Lowell<sup>12</sup>. In this preface the Imagist credo was enunciated.

The first point of imagist credo was "to use the language of common speech, but to employ always the exact word, not the nearly-exact, nor the merely decorative word." Pound and Flint had exhorted the poets to avert metronomic

regularity. To this end the second point called for the creation of "new rhythms" but the professed Imagists did not insist upon free verse as the only means to that end: "we do not insist upon 'free-verse' as the only method of writing poetry. We fight for it as for a principle of liberty. We believe that the individuality of a poet may often be better expressed in free-verse than in conventional forms. In poetry, a new cadence means a new idea". The third point proclaimed "absolute freedom in the choice of subject". "We believe passionately in the artistic value of modern life, but we wish to point out that there is nothing so uninspiring nor so old-fashioned as an aeroplane in the year 1911". It is worth noting that the Imagists hinted at an effective distinction between universals and particulars. "To present an image ..." reads the fourth point, "we are not a school of painters, but we believe that poetry should render particulars exactly and not deal in vague generalities, however magnificent and sonorous." The fifth point put stress on production of poetry which is "hard and clear, never blurred nor indefinite." Finally, the Imagists urged the poets to master the style of laconism in poetical composition: "... most of us believe that concentration is of the very essence of poetry..."<sup>13</sup>.

The Imagists claimed that the imagist principles are the essentials of all great poetry. Of course it would not be onerous to explore all these imagist virtues in the Frost canon save the novelty of cadence arising from free verse. This is veritably what the Imagists accomplished. F. S. Flint in his review of A Boy's Will mentions that what is "most characteristic" of Frost's poetry is "direct observation of the object and immediate correlation with the emotion"<sup>14</sup>. Pound eulogizes Frost's power of manipulating visual images<sup>15</sup>. In his review of North of Boston Pound insists that "Mr. Frost holds up a mirror to nature, not an oleograph". He appreciates Frost for his circumvention of "stilted pseudo-literary language, with all sorts of floridities and worn-out ornaments"<sup>16</sup>. Like Pound Amy Lowell describes numerous imagist elements in Frost's work. In her review of North of Boston she contends that "Frost's imagination is bounded by what he has seen";

hence his work is "almost photographic". She admires Frost for his words which are "simple, straightforward, direct." She wants to suggest that Frost is keen on creating new rhythms. "The poems are written for the most part in blank verse" which is, to her, "halting and maimed, like the life it portrays"<sup>17</sup>. Again, in her book Tendencies in Modern American Poetry Amy Lowell commends "poetic realism"<sup>18</sup> of Frost who is extolled as an "intuitive poet"<sup>19</sup>. The pictorial images of Frost's poetry hold a great attraction for her. She finds the poem "The Mountain" to be "every bit of genre painting"<sup>20</sup>. To her the two-pointed ladder sticking through a tree in "After Apple-Picking" appears to be "exceedingly clean and bright as a picture"<sup>21</sup>. She extracts the opening passage from "The Black Cottage" where Frost deftly draws a pictorial background:

We chanced in-passing by that afternoon  
 To catch it in a sort of special picture  
 Among tar-banded ancient cherry trees,  
 Set well back from the road in rank lodged grass,  
 The little cottage we were speaking of,  
 A front with just a door between two windows,  
 Fresh painted by the shower a velvet black.

"Mr. Frost writes down exactly", she tells, "what he sees"<sup>22</sup>. "What he does not portray is simply what he does not see"<sup>23</sup>.

The professed Imagists consider imagery as predominantly visual which is misleading. Frost was well aware of the limitation of an Imagist. "An Imagist is simply one", Frost says, "who insists on clearer sharper less muddled half realised images (chiefly eye images) than the common run of small poets ... . Strange with all their modernity and psychology they didn't have more to say about ear images and other images — even kinesthetic"<sup>24</sup>. Frost became impatient with the pyrotechnics of the Imagists. Amy Lowell's tendency to pervert his work to the



Imagist credo could well constrict his poetic stature. In fact we could draw a distinction between Frost's imagism and the imagism of the professed Imagists. To Frost Lowell's imagism "lay chiefly in images to the eyes"<sup>25</sup>. Ezra Pound's imagism is also based on pictorial images<sup>26</sup>. But the imagism which Frost argues for is the imagism of the ear<sup>27</sup>. "I cultivate ... the hearing imagination" Frost writes to John Cournos, "rather than the seeing imagination though I should not want to be without the latter"<sup>28</sup>. It is conspicuously palpable that the images of sound are given greater importance than those of sight. Frost again in 1914 writes to Sidney Cox "we value the seeing eye already. Time we said something about the hearing ear — the ear that calls up vivid sentence forms"<sup>29</sup>. Frost's sentence sound which can easily be correlated with metrical regularity distinguishes him from the Imagists. Sentence sounds are "gathered by the ear from vernacular" and only the most original writer "catches them fresh from talk, when they grow spontaneously". Sentence sounds are "definite entities"<sup>30</sup> and they are "as definitely things as any image of sight"<sup>31</sup>. Recognizability is a great virtue concerned with Frostian images or sentence sounds. To illustrate this virtue Frost's poem "A Patch of Old Snow" could be examined.

There's a patch of old snow in a corner,  
     That I should have guessed  
 Was a blow-away paper the rain  
     Had brought to rest.

It is speckled with grime as if  
     Small print overspread it,  
 The news of a day I've forgotten —  
     If I ever read it.

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The poet depicts a patch of old snow like a blow-away newspaper which was brought to a corner of the wall by the rain to rest. It is grimy as with the print and news of a day the poet have forgotten, if he ever read it. The poem is replete with commonplace images to be easily recognized. Frost does not provide his readers "something they don't know". He endeavours "to tell them something ... they know and hadn't thought of saying. It must be something they recognize"<sup>32</sup>. The images of a "patch of old snow in a corner", "blow-away paper", snow "speckled with grime" and "the news of a day" what people read in newspapers are precisely recognizable. The images are starkly "common in experience". The principium which Frost upholds to explicate his poetics is "common in experience — uncommon in writing". The "common in experience" encompasses not only subject matter, words and image but mood and tone<sup>33</sup>. The image of "the news of a day I've forgotten" which indicates forgetfulness is neither "bookish" nor "invented". It is "caught fresh from the mouths of the people"<sup>34</sup>. The effectiveness of this image lies largely on "special tone"<sup>35</sup>. This image characterizes sentence sound which is the vital component of Frost's poetry. "A man is a marked writer", Frost says, "if his words are largely strung on the more striking sentence sounds"<sup>36</sup>. According to him sentence sounds cannot be created. "What we feel as creation", he says, "is only selection and grouping"<sup>37</sup>. What Frost states here, we think, underscores the creative power of imagery in general. In this connection R. H. Fogle's observation concerning the function of imagery arrests our attention. "The essential quality and function of imagery", Fogle says "is a kind of creation; by the bringing-together of diverse objects, states of mind, or concepts new relationships are discovered"<sup>38</sup>. Thus "a patch of old snow" and "a blow-away paper" which ostensibly turn out to be disparate from each other are brought together for they possess analogous features of being blown in the wind on a rainy day. Hence, the trenchant comparison between the two images figures an unprecedented structure of thought.

Good imagery is imposingly imaginal. It does not merely order the common experience; sometimes it unfolds and sets out complex psychical topography. Frost insists "imagery and after-imagery are about all there is to poetry"<sup>39</sup>. After-image is a psychological term denoting an image or sensation which persists or recurs after the external stimulus has been withdrawn. Perfect examples of after-images could be cited from Frost's "After Apple-Picking". As the apple picker falls into a slumber due to enervating exertion of apple-picking, he experiences the vision of "magnified apples" appearing and disappearing, keeps hearing their "rumbling sound" going into the cellar bin and feels "the ache" in his "instep arch" that "keeps the pressure of a ladder-round". Here the "magnified apples" characterize visual after-image while "rumbling sound" of the apples and "the ache" in the "instep arch" represent auditory and kinaesthetic after-images respectively. Frost remarks "sight and insight makes poetry"<sup>40</sup>. Sight is concerned with physical image but insight is associated with mental after-imagery. Thus Frost's imagistic technique assumes "a dynamic interaction between the sensory faculties and the intellectual-emotional-psychic"<sup>41</sup>.

The poetic imagery is the basis of the symbolic strategy of a poet. A symbol is a compact communicative component intended to represent or stand for a person, an object or idea. Usually each of the images cannot be transmuted into symbol. Symbol can be interchangeably used with image on certain occasions. It is unitive like image. By uniting the diverse stuff "it can organize experience into a kind of order and revealing the complex relationships among seemingly divided things"<sup>42</sup>. Jung also identifies symbol as reconciler; to him it unites the unconscious with the conscious. Further, when an image works suggestively it can never be distinguished from a symbol. The images of the Symbolist poets are essentially symbolic. Stéphane Mallarmé and his myrmidons made use of visible images to convey "supernatural experience"<sup>43</sup>. Almost every word of their poetry is a symbol. William Blake's and W. B. Yeats's poems are replete with symbolic

imagery. Northrop Frye in his study of Yeats's language of symbolism insists "... the imagery of poetry is a set of symbolic conventions"<sup>44</sup>. According to Cleanth Brooks Yeats's symbols are "concrete and meaningful images"<sup>45</sup>. Thus we see that the Symbolist symbol is simply an image imbued with suggestive or mysterious import. Frost's symbolic strategy is also almost analogous to that of a Symbolist. Frost selects an image to make it "a symbol of something else which is larger or deeper than itself"<sup>46</sup>.

Before focusing precisely on Frostian symbolism it would not be impertinent to descry the evolution of symbolism. The word "symbol" is derived from the Greek etymon "symbolon" indicating "a preconcerted secret sign by which friends, married couples, kin or members of a society recognized each other"<sup>47</sup>. But symbol was not treated simply as a sign or token of recognition. It was also considered to have a numinous character which is to be discerned in Christianity with the sacraments. In the Eucharist "wine" and "bread" represent the "blood" and "body" of Christ.

Poetry of all ages is in essence symbolic. But during the nineteenth century symbolism in poetry formally gained momentum in France. In the 1860's a group of French poets, labelling them as the Parnassians, protested against Romanticism. During the period 1866 - 1876, they brought out three volumes of Le Parnasse Contemporain wherein Stéphane Mallarmé, Paul Verlaine, José-Maria de Hérédia, Leconte de Lisle, Sully Prudhomme, Villiers de l'Isle Adam, Catulle Mendès and François Coppée contributed their poems which were characterized by objectivity and conformity to form. Their adherence to materialistic values led them to follow descriptive style. In addition, they excluded subjective elements from their poems.

But a few Parnassians notably Verlaine and Mallarmé, who had a mystical bent, could not approve of objective ideal in poetry. Hence they inevitably emerged as the leading exponents of the Symbolist Movement. Verlaine and

Mallarmé were the disciples of Charles Baudelaire who was "the first to exalt the value of symbols"<sup>48</sup>. Thus Baudelaire is precisely called the "father of Symbolism" : "ni Verlaine, ni Mallarmé, ni Rimbaud", Valéry remarks in "Situation de Baudelaire", "n'eussent été ce qu'ils furent sans la lecture qu'ils firent des Fleurs du mal à l'âge décisif"<sup>49</sup>.

Baudelaire's Les Fleurs du Mal was brought out in 1857. It struck a deeply symbolic note which was signally illustrated in his sonnet "Correspondances":

La Nature est un temple où de vivants piliers  
Laissent parfois sortir de confuses paroles;  
L'homme y passe à travers des forêts de symboles  
Qui l'observent avec des regards familiers:

Comme de longs échos qui de loin se confondent  
Dans une ténébreuse et profonde unité,  
Vaste comme la nuit et comme la clarté,  
Les parfums, les couleurs et les sons se répondent...<sup>50</sup>.

The predominant images of this sonnet are pillars and temple which are profoundly symbolical. Nature, the depository of symbols, is represented by temple. According to Hazard Adams temple suggests "the rites of imagination to be performed by the poet-priest"<sup>51</sup>. The pillars symbolize the trees. "Forests of symbols" at times yield perplexing messages through various senses — sounds, scents and colours. A mystically talented poet can grasp these messages. Baudelaire wants to suggest that the diverse sensory or extrasensory experiences are not themselves discordant. It is the synaesthetic symbol that correlates them. The synaesthetic symbolism of this sonnet is also indicative of "the order of harmony in the other world"<sup>52</sup>.

Edger Allan Poe was an influential precursor of the Symbolists. In the mid nineteenth century Poe, Hawthorne, Melville, Whitman and even Emerson endeavoured to sustain symbolism in America. It is worth noting that Baudelaire felt exhilarated when he first read Poe in 1847. Subsequently he translated Poe in French and brought out a volume of Poe's tales in 1852. His critical writings rectified romantic looseness and pared down romantic extravagance<sup>53</sup>. All the French Symbolists considered "The Philosophy of Composition" and "The Poetic Principle" almost as gospel. According to Poe the indefiniteness of music should characterize the soul of poetry. "It is in Music, perhaps", he writes, "that the soul most nearly attains ... the creation of Supernal Beauty"<sup>54</sup>. Baudelaire was intensely influenced by Poe's doctrine — so much so that he considered poetry as a composition which should strive for capturing an indefiniteness of effect. Both Baudelaire and Mallarmé eulogized Poe's occult aestheticism.

Symbolism may be characterized by mysticism. Unlike the Realists the Symbolists would exploit word as a mystical link between everyday world and ideal world. Mallarmé made use of mystically evocative symbols by which the readers were inducted into an ideal world. Almost like a Yeatsian rose, the flower which Mallarmé limns in his verse "Prose pour des Esseintes" does not resemble a real flower, for it is infused with ideal beauty. It absolutely transcends the temporal character of any flower. Hence C. M. Bowra precisely remarks, "symbolism ... was a mystical form of Aestheticism"<sup>55</sup>.

Music is a quintessential component of Symbolist poetry. The Symbolists were immensely swayed by the sonority of Wagner's music. They strained every nerve to bring poetry to the condition of music. Mallarmé and Verlaine attached stupendous importance to it. In his poem "Art Poétique" Verlaine proclaimed,

De la musique avant toute chose;

De la musique encore et toujours.

Suggestivity is an essential element of symbolism. The symbolists learnt systematical exploitation of suggestivity from their "great master" Edgar Allan Poe. Baudelaire identified suggestivity with magic and strangeness integrated with beauty. He aired his views that this strangeness was in fact the effect of combination of subject and object. "What is the modern conception of pure art? It is the creation of a suggestive magic", he tells, "containing both the object and the subject, the world outside the artist and the artist himself"<sup>56</sup>. For Mallarmé suggestivity is fundamentally linguistic. His words do not describe or name the objects; but they suggest and evoke "the aroma, the air"<sup>57</sup> of the objects. Arthur Symons reminds us of Mallarmé's principle: "to name is to destroy, to suggest is to create"<sup>58</sup>. Moreover, Mallarmé's conception of suggestivity correlates poetic language with dream and music.

At times Symbolist poetry emerges as an esoteric study of interior phases of the poet's mind. Mallarmé's "Hérodiade" is an instance of esoteric poem which exquisitely exhibits hermetic and narcissistic ideals.

Nonetheless, the characteristic manipulation of plurivalent symbols is a distinctive feature of symbolism. A Symbolist symbol "acts as a turn-table" which can provide "several possible meanings". Apart from the covert meaning for the poet, a symbol may have an array of meanings, "some of which the poet may not have thought of"<sup>59</sup>.

Arthur Symons who introduced the theory of symbolism into England, dedicated his book Symbolist Movement in Literature (1899) to Yeats. Symons identified symbolism as "a literature in which the visible world is no longer a reality, and the unseen world no longer a dream"<sup>60</sup>. Symons could not hide his extra predilection for mysticism. This was of course, dispraised by the French critic Henri Peyre<sup>61</sup>. Hoever, what Yeats learnt of the philosophy of symbolism from Symons was pretty flimsy. Yeats had original conception about symbolism.

He recognized two types of symbols — the emotional and the intellectual. Emotional symbols "evoke emotions alone" while the intellectual symbols "evoke ideas alone, or ideas mingled with emotions"<sup>62</sup>. That the symbols could either be evocative of emotions or ideas was quite alien to Mallarmé<sup>63</sup>. Mallarmean symbol was mere a vehicle for aesthetically mystic experience. Further, there is a distinction between Mallarmean and Yeatsian mysticism. Yeatsian mysticism is not "aesthetic rapture ... but a belief in powers behind the visible world, powers that are evoked from dream and trance"<sup>64</sup>. Moreover, like Goethe, Schelling or Coleridge, Yeats differentiated symbol from allegory. But what we find in the Symbolists specially in Baudelaire is quite antithetical to Yeatsian view. Like Winckelmann, Lessing or Herder Baudelaire does not distinguish between symbol and allegory. Baudelairean symbol can interchangeably be used with allegory. To Yeats allegory derives from fancy. Yeats who is "for the most part bored by allegory" identifies it as the function of what Blake called the "daughters of memory"<sup>65</sup>. But symbol, "the only possible expression of some invisible essence, a transparent lamp about a spiritual flame"<sup>66</sup>, is an architecture of imagination. Yeatsian notion of symbol-allegory antithesis tones up the spiritual character of the symbol. Yeats's symbols such as the sun, the moon, the rose, the sea, the directions of the compass and numerous geometrical designs aptly conjure up invisible spiritual essence.

Frost's symbolism, like that of Yeats, is thought-provoking and intricate. Mark Van Doren insists, "Mr. Frost is as skilful a Symbolist as anyone ..."<sup>67</sup>. Nevertheless, an ideological distinction could be drawn between Frostian and Symbolist symbolism. In an interview with Rose C. Feld, Frost declares, "I was brought up a Swedenborgian. I am not a Swedenborgian now. But there's a good deal of it that's left with me. I am a mystic. I believe in symbols. I believe in change and in changing symbols. Yet that doesn't take me away from the kindly contact of human beings. No, it brings me closer to them."<sup>68</sup> Hence, we could



easily apprehend that as a Symbolist Frost is less mystical than Mallarmé or Yeats. He is at heart a contemplative spectator of "the earth and the ways of man on the earth".<sup>69</sup>

Unlike Mallarmé, Verlaine or Laforgue, Frost employs commonplace images and exoteric symbols in his poetry. Frost proclaims, "I don't think a thing ought to be obvious before it is said, but it ought to be obvious when it is said"<sup>70</sup>. Certainly he attaches greater importance to communication than "unique expression"<sup>71</sup>. Frost's language is not esoteric but "his meanings often plumb fathomless depth"<sup>72</sup>. He never orchestrates obscure word or arcane phrase. What he endeavours is to renew word to make them symbolically meaningful. "The whole function of poetry", he says "is the renewal of words, is the making of words mean again what they meant".<sup>73</sup>

Like a Symbolist symbol Frostian symbol is precisely plurivalent. It resembles a many-sided crystal sparkling with shades of meaning. "The thing I'm saying", Frost maintains, "has got another behind it — all sorts of analogies. It's a symbol of many things".<sup>74</sup>

Frost's symbolism is characterized by musicality. Verlaine wanted his verse to be purely musical. Valéry's poems which resemble songs are mostly lyrical. Similarly Frost's lyrics are intensely musical. To Frost the entire poem, which is ordered in the metric frame is a symbol. "Every single poem", Frost says, "written regular is a symbol, small or great".<sup>75</sup> It is worth noting that the French Symbolists renounced the oratorical tradition of the French alexandrine, and in some cases, they absolutely abjured rhyme. Gustave Kahn is usually accredited with having invented free verse which 'outlasted the Symbolist Movement'.<sup>76</sup> But Frost deliberately averts his thoughts from free verse. Rather, he thinks that "regular verse springs from the strain of rhythm" and from this strain "comes the expression strains of music"<sup>77</sup>. Frost developed a distinctive kind of symbolism

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which is marked by "the indirect and subtly suggestive quality"<sup>78</sup>. Frost's notion of suggestivity could easily be grasped for he claims, "we like to talk in parables and in hints and in indirections — whether from diffidence or some other instinct"<sup>79</sup>. Of course like the Symbolist Frost never describes any object or scene in his poem. Frost's symbolism stems from his predilection for implication rather than distinct depiction. He never spells the scene out; he employs it as the medium through which the reality or the psychological reality could be discerned.<sup>80</sup>

Metaphor is above all the bedrock of Frost's symbolism. Edmund Wilson defines symbolism "as an attempt by carefully studied means — a complicated association of ideas represented by a medley of metaphors ..."<sup>81</sup>. Frost's complicated ideas and emotions are also communicated through his metaphors to which he attaches great importance. To Frost, "poetry begins in trivial metaphors, pretty metaphors, 'grace' metaphors, and goes on to the profoundest thinking that we have. Poetry provides the one permissible way of saying one thing and meaning another"<sup>82</sup>. The objective Frost wants to achieve through metaphor is "the pleasure of ulteriority". Each of the poem turns out to be "a new metaphor inside or it is nothing"<sup>83</sup>. Frostian metaphor which is essentially suggestive assumes the character of the symbol.

Frost gives much importance to metaphorical education. "Unless you have had your proper poetical education in the metaphor", Frost insists, "you are not save anywhere. Because you are not at ease with figurative values: you don't know the metaphor in its strength and its weakness. You don't know how far you may expect to ride it and when it may break down with you"<sup>84</sup>. That one can ride metaphor reminds us of Frost's definition of a poem: "A poem is a little voyage of discovery"<sup>85</sup>. Todd M. Lieber appropriately suggests that metaphor should be construed not only as a suggestion of similitude but as an instrument by which the poet embarks on a "voyage of discovery"<sup>86</sup>. But the fact is that metaphor is not

infallible; it can be played to a point beyond which it breaks down. Frost identifies metaphor as a "living thing". So "the beauty of it" lies in its fallibility. Metaphor is the vital spark of poetry. It is "the height of poetry ... the height of all poetic thinking"<sup>87</sup>. Of course, metaphor has not simply been circumscribed by poetic thinking. It is recognized as "the whole of thinking"<sup>88</sup>. Thus enormous significance is attached to metaphor. In Frost a symbol could interchangeably be used with metaphor. Because almost all the metaphors which spring from the vertex of Frostian thought tend to be cryptically significant. Hence Frost's symbolistic strategy seems to tally with Yeats's : "Metaphors are not profound enough to be moving, when they are not symbols ... poetry moves us because of its symbolism"<sup>89</sup>.

Now to exemplify the symbolistic strategy of Frost "The Pasture" could be studied :

I'm going out to clean the pasture spring;  
 I'll only stop to rake the leaves away  
 (And wait to watch the water clear, I may):  
 I shan't be gone long. — You come too.

I'm going out to fetch the little calf  
 That's standing by the mother. It's so young  
 It totters when she licks it with her tongue.  
 I shan't be gone long. — You come too.

The two austere quatrains are charged with unusually hidden meanings so much so that they appear as a prelude to numerous volumes of Frost. The lyric, "The Pasture" may be considered as the poet's manifesto and it serves as a prologue to his Complete Poems (1949). However, unlike Mallarmé or Eliot, Frost employs

commonplace images in this lyric. The bucolic and domestic images, which he manipulates here, are highly symbolic but penetrable.

The first quatrain deals with the poet's sortie into the pasture where he would "clean the pasture spring" by raking the leaves away and would wait to "watch the water clear". Obviously, the act of cleansing nature emerges as a primary task of the poet. Almost like Arnold, Frost wants to clarify life in his poetry. To him, a poem "begins in delight ... ends in a clarification of life ... not necessarily a great clarification ...but in a momentary stay against confusion"<sup>90</sup>. Thus the images of cleaning "the pasture spring" and watching "the water clear" hint at the poet's theory of "clarification of life". "Pasture spring" is also a symbol predominant in the first quatrain. It suggests the graceful life that is craved for. One cannot achieve the graceful life unless the adverse environment is conquered. "The leaves" suggest adverse environment that confuses the order of graceful life. So the poet wants to rake the leaves and thereby achieve a momentary stay against confusion.

The second quatrain touches on the act of fetching the new-born calf standing by its dam. Frank Lentricchia suggests that the act of fetching should be metaphorically apprehended, because it is "an act of preservation, for the sense of danger is genuine — the calf is not capable of staying out"<sup>91</sup> for a long period. Nevertheless, the "calf" could be identified as a symbol — a plurivalent symbol for it represents not only "protective tenderness", "natural innocence" and purity but the beauty and simplicity of Frostian poetry. The dam's licking of the calf has also to be construed metaphorically. Licking is a cleansing process of the animal; it indicates that nature cleans herself in her own way. The ubiquity of cleaning image reveals that the poet wants to clarify the mystery of life and nature.

The lyric is musical. The rhyme and the repeated w's in the third line serve as a reminder that the aim is song.<sup>92</sup> The twice-repeated refrain, "you come too" is

also musical. Lentricchia discovers sex implication in the refrain. To him, "the poem's twice-repeated refrain is an expression of an urge to redeem the painful separateness of self"<sup>93</sup>. Since Frost's symbol or locution has layers of meaning, we could explicate the refrain with a difference. The journey motif which pervades the lyric is profoundly suggestive. The poet's sortie into the pasture may symbolize the peregrination of life. The poet does not think it appropriate to go ahead alone in the ways of life. He earnestly muses, "you come too". Here the pronoun "you" stands for life-companion. Hence the poet wants to uphold his conviction that the peregrination of life can only be significantly pleasant when a person associates himself or herself with a fellow-peregrinator.

Frost, unlike Eliot or Ezra Pound, derives his images and symbols from natural phenomena and unexceptional objects. Austin Warren has the idea that Frost employs "natural symbolism" in his poetry. In the language of "natural symbolism" sleep or snow suggests death, darkness represents evil, woods indicate perilous enchantment and so forth. To illustrate his point Warren mentions that "sleep" is used to imply death in the poem "Stopping by the Woods on a Snowy Evening"<sup>94</sup>. But the symbolic and oblique import of a natural symbol is never static. In the poem "After Apple-Picking" "human sleep", in contrast with woodchuck's hibernation, suggests reawakening or creative consciousness, not death. So the views Warren airs could not entirely be entertained.

The texture of Frostian imagery and symbol is distinctively variegated. Generally, nature, seasons, snow, star, woods, trees, flowers, leaves, domestic objects, farm tools, animals, insects and colour constitute the constellation of Frostian imagery. The recurrent images such as woods, star, wall, snow which bulk large in Frost's poetry, have diverse connotations and various shades of meaning. Frost for the most part makes use of natural, psychological, sexual, religious, conventional, archetypal, and intimate symbols. Frostian images and

symbols are indeed lofty channels through which the poet dexterously divulges his experienced truth and vision of life.

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