

Chapter – IV

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THE FROST UNIVERSE: A STUDY IN MAJOR IMAGES AND SYMBOLS

“Pipes in hands”: Early Phase (1913 – 1916)

His (Frost’s) primary artistic achievement, which is an enviable one, in spite of shortcomings, rests on his blending thought and emotion and symbolic imagery within the confines of the lyric. It would seem to be an essential part of both his theory and practice to start with a single image, or to start with an image of action, and then to endow either or both with a figurativeness of meaning, which is not fully understood by the reader until the extensions of meaning are found to transcend the physical.

Thompson, Lawrance. Robert Frost.

Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1959. 38.

... [I]n Frost the symbol, presented quite casually as an image, opens outward upon a vista of meaning. The vista does not have any definite terminus and in the farthest distance fades into vague areas of suggestion.

Lynen, John F. The Pastoral Art of Robert Frost.

New Haven: Yale University Press, 1960. 27.

Frost’s first volume, A Boy’s Will (1913), “the Record of a Phase of Post-adolescence”¹, begins with a sonnet “Into My Own”. It opens up the nexus of Frostian imagery wedded to the dark woods. Since Frost’s poetic being has been shaped and reshaped by the woods, and the woods and the poetic being are almost

inseparable in Frost poetry, the study of this chapter hence begins with our observations on woods imagery:

One of my wishes is that those dark trees,
So old and firm they scarcely show the breeze,
Were not, as't were, the merest mask of gloom,
But stretched away unto the edge of doom. (1 – 4)

While William Cullen Bryant's poem, "Inscription for the Entrance to a Wood" touches on escape from urban perturbations to the placidity of woods, Frost's "Into My Own" recounts yearning for escape into the "vastness" of "dark trees" which are merely the "mask of gloom". Bryant limns his woods romantically; his woods, the "abodes of gladness", can "waft a balm" to the "sick heart"². But Frost's woods, "stretched away unto the edge of doom", savour of "lethal beauty"³. Unlike Bryant's woods Frost's woods are reticularly metaphorical. Frostian dark woods may be recognized as a complex psychical symbol suggesting intricate topography of the poet's psyche. The young poet is immensely concerned with psychical sombreness and wilderness. Of course the quest for poetic psyche is superbly tinged with the consciousness of humanity:

They would not find me changed from him they knew –
Only more sure of all I thought was true.⁴ (13 – 14)

The image of woods is manipulated in the poems "Ghost House", "A Dream Pang", "The Vantage Point", "Mowing", "Going for Water", "Pan with Us", "The Demiurge's Laugh" and "Reluctance". The images: "the woods come back to the mowing field" (p.5), "I had withdrawn in forest" (p.16), "the wood wakes" (p.16), "If I tried of trees I seek again mankind" (p.17), "there was never a sound beside the wood but one" (p.17), "by the brook our woods were there" (p.18), "Pan came out of the woods" (p.123), "I was far in the sameness of the

wood" (p.24), "out through the fields and the woods/ And over the walls I have wended" (p.29) unroll diverse connotations of woods.

"Ghost House" presents menacing woods associated with dilapidated and desolate image of house. The "vanished abode" in which the poet "dwells" exists only in the recess of memory. "A cellar" with the "cellar walls" which exists physically can be taken as a psychological symbol which suggests regression to an earlier stage of emotional development. The "cellar" is a plurivalent symbol. So it may also symbolize rebirth or mutability because from its ruins sprout "the purple-stemmed wild raspberries". "Wild raspberries", which have sweet fruits and the brambles, are suggestive of adolescent gaiety and infelicity. The image of woods which we perceive in this poem turns out to be incursive because "the woods come back to the mowing field"⁵. To Frank Lentricchia Frost endows the woods with antihuman suggestion: "In celebrating the antihuman -time's destructive element and the menacing advance of the woods - Frost celebrates, in a sense, the anticreative"⁶.

In "The Demiurge's Laugh" the image of woods coupled with the image of hideous Demon unmasks Frost's consciousness of evil. "Far in the sameness of the wood" the speaker of the poem pursues Demiurge, "no true god" who may be recognized as the originator of evil. Repugnant and sardonic, the Demon rises "from his wallow", brushes "the dirt from his eye" and laughs a laugh which may indicate that he "utterly couldn't care"⁷. Further, what the speaker suddenly hears in the Demon's laughter is allusive. The Demon reminds us of Silenus, the satyr who laughs and reveals the truth to the King Midas that it is best not to be born, and if born, to die soon.

Like woods, season image is a unique "component structure" of A Boy's Will. Frost's moods of morbidity, despondency and expectancy are divulged through the images of seasons. The images of "dark days of autumn rain" (p.6),

“the love of bare November days” (p.7), “autumn, yes, winter was in the wind” (p.8), “winter wind concerned with ice and snow” (p.10), “the springing of the year” (p.12), “the autumn eve was fair” (p.18) are distinctively connotative.

Frost depicts a desolate autumnal landscape in “My November Guest”. Autumn is personified as a woman who walks “the sodden pasture lane” on rain-drenched “dark days” and loves “the bare, the withered tree”. Since “her pleasure” will not let him “stay”, Frost like Keats wants to explore beauty in the etiolated surroundings of autumn. Charmed by the “temperate sharpness”⁸ of autumn, Keats in “To Autumn” designates it as “season of mists”. Frost also discovers close relationship between autumn and mists:

She’s glad her simple worsted gray
Is silver now with clinging mist⁹. (9-10)

The picture of autumn as silvery grey is indicative of Frost’s colour consciousness. The image of “the stubble plains with rosy hue” which characterizes Keats’s autumn evening reveals also Keatsian sense of colour. But the autumnal landscapes portrayed by the two poets are not identical. Keats’s landscape which is limned with “fruit with ripeness to the core”, “the fume of poppies” and singing of “hedge-crickets”¹⁰ is sensuously and exotically romantic. On the other hand, Frost’s landscape encompassing “desolate, deserted trees,/ The faded earth, the heavy sky”¹¹ is graphically realistic.

The poem “A Late Walk” wherein the poet “courts the autumnal mood”¹² unfurls morbid imagination:

The whirl of sober birds
Up from the tangle of withered weeds
Is sadder than any words. (6-8)

The sadder “whir” is suggestive of the poet’s melancholic spirit; his depression is veritably reflected by the nature itself:

A tree beside the wall stands bare,
 But a leaf that lingered brown,
 Disturbed, I doubt not, by my thought,
 Comes softly rattling down¹³. (9-12)

The poetic depression mirrored in the bleak landscape is not perdurable. In the poem, “October” the poet wants the ubiquitous autumnal desolation to be retarded:

Release one leaf at break of day;
 At noon release another leaf;
 One from our trees, one far away.
 Retard the sun with gentle mist;
 Enchant the land with amethyst¹⁴. (12-16)

Thus the autumn landscape turns out to be the psychical symbol suggesting gradual development of the poetic self.

The images of “tumultuous snow” (p.9), “wintry winds” (p.9), “the cold creeps as the fire dies” (p.10), “winter breeze” (p.10), “the frosty window veil” (p.10) make us acquainted with the wintry landscape suggestive of morbidity and death. A Boy’s Will contains three winter poems: “Wind and Window Flower”, “Stars” and “Storm fear”. In “Wind and Window Flower” the winter wind, “concerned with ice and snow,/ Dead weeds and unmated birds” implies utmost gloom and morbidity. “Stars” presents the image of stars which is associated with “tumultuous snow” flowing “in shapes as tall as trees/ When wintry winds do flow”. The white stars are emblematically analogized with the archetypal image of Minerva – the ancient Roman goddess of wisdom:

And yet with neither love nor hate,
 Those stars like some snow-white
 Minerva's snow-white marble eyes
 Without the gift of sight¹⁵. (9-12)

The stars, characterized neither by "love nor hate" transcends human feelings. It is worth mentioning that whiteness in Frost's poetry is obsessively symbolical. The white stars are equated with "snow-white", lacklustre eyes of Minerva, an artifact. Hence the white stars come to symbolize "cosmic indifference"¹⁶.

"Storm Fear" provides the image of "the wind" suggesting malevolent environment. The stoic speaker immured in his farmhouse views the winter blizzard which "works against us in the dark". The blizzard, held to be analogous to barking beast or dog, "whispers with a sort of stifled bark". This indicates beastly increasing malignity of the storm for which "the fire dies" and "cold creeps"¹⁷. The speaker plunges into the darkness of incertitude; amidst family members he upsets himself with stinging awareness of isolation. Thus the winter image which does not represent a flicker of hope makes the poetic persona dubious about his existence in the world.

The image of spring is conspicuous in two pieces: "To the Thawing Wind" and "A Prayer in Spring". As the poet wants to get rid of disappointment courted by him, a "change through the violence of the elements"¹⁸ is called on in "To the Thawing Wind". He invokes the "loud Southwester" to "give the buried flower a dream;/ Make the settled snowbank steam", "Scatter poems on the floor" and "Turn the poet out of door"¹⁹. The poet aspires to merge himself in nature's current of creative life. Hence "Southwester" can be taken as a natural symbol suggesting poetic inspiration or creative ecstasy as opposed to dull inertia. "A Prayer in Spring" formulates a pattern of prayer which is significant for its

impressive components of images. The speaker of this poem prays to "keep us here/ All simply in the springing of the year". Evidently the poem not only touches on spring but "the springing of the year", a blissful period which essentially embodies the blithesome activity of the bees "dilating round the perfect trees" and of the bird which "thrusts in with needle bill" into a blossom. Presumably these images suggest "the greatness of love" for they help establish deeper Frostian conviction: "this is love and nothing else is love,/ The which it is reserved for God above". The mode of the prayer, the speaker moulds, is nonetheless significatory. Instead of personal pronoun "me" he makes use of "us" while articulating his feeling in prayer-images: "give us pleasure in the flowers today", "make us happy in the happy bees", and "make us happy in the darting birds"²⁰. "Us" is cryptically employed as a personal pronoun. Frost may suggest that it is "springing" which exists in "us" in two senses; first in the man and woman who lovingly preserve creation by "putting in the seed" and watching for birth; and second, in the poets who have sustained such poetic convictions which help "keep" us in "the springing of the year" wherein is to be perceived the renewal of the body and innocence which is necessary for a renewal of the soul²¹.

Like the warm days of spring, summer ushers in various types of flowers which are a recurrent motif in Frost's poetry. Flowers hold a great appeal for Frost. "I like flowers you know", he writes to Sidney Cox, "but I like em wild, and I am rather the exception than the rule in an American village"²². The poem, "Rose Pogonias" which deals with beautiful wild flowers, epitomizes Frost's indulgence in "the ritualism of nature"²³. Pogonia orchises are the rare flowers for which the "saturated meadow" assumes a gnomic configuration - "a circle scarcely wider/ Than the trees around were tall". The annularity, quiescence and aroma of the flowers create "a temple of the heat" where the poetic persona takes an active part in "the sun's right worship". The impressionist image of the landscape "Seemed tipped with wings of color/ That tinged the atmosphere"²⁴. This reminds

us of the identical landscape of the later poem "Atmosphere (Inscription for a garden wall)" wherein "moisture and color and odor thicken" and "the hours of daylight gather atmosphere"²⁵. Nevertheless, "A Prayer in Spring" and "Rose Pogonias" provide the poet with incandescent and worshipful mood. Hence, "rose pogonias" or "orchises" can be taken as spiritual symbol suggesting paradisiacal beauty and spiritual wisdom.

A few poems of A Boy's Will are stamped with Frostian signature of maturity. Like the later poems, "Two Tramps in Mud Time" or "Putting in the Seed", "Mowing" may be considered as a mature labour poem replete with cloying images and inherently signifying symbols. In a sequestered grassland "beside the wood" the poet mows grass with his "long scythe whispering to the ground". The whispering swish which pervades the poem is cryptic. The poet coyly articulates: "what was it— it whispered? I knew not well myself". The whispering is neither day-dreaming nor "easy gold at the hand of fay or elf". It is "something" which is "perhaps" about "the heat of the sun" or "the lack of sound"²⁶. It is worth noting that the whispering is not an independent swooshing sound. It is the effect of interaction between scythe and "swale". "Swale" represents nature. Scythe which is treated anthropomorphically is an intimate symbol suggesting the mower-poet. Nature divulges its truth to the solitary kind of person who makes creative effort. Hence, "whispering" of the scythe may symbolize the truth of nature. "Mowing" is nevertheless a synecdochal image, suggestive of writing poetry. Sidney Cox contends, "a poem is a fact, factum, a thing done or made"²⁷. "Mowing" or making hay is the factum; what "labour" knows is "the fact" which is "the sweetest dream" of the mower-poet. The symbolic landscape of the poem "Mowing" resembles the dramatic scene of "The Tuft of Flowers". It is a work poem wherein the lonesome poetic persona relishes entering the human community. Structurally it is held to be analogous to William Cullen Bryant's poem, "To a Waterfowl" but philosophically both the poems are

different; Frost's realistic vision bears no resemblance to Bryant's spiritual insight. A spiritual "Power" which guides the solitary flight of Bryant's waterfowl "through the boundless sky" to enable it finding "a summer home" leads the speaker's "steps aright" through the "long way" he must "tread alone"²⁸. On the other hand the creature which leads the eye of Frostian speaker "to look/ At a tall tuft of flowers" or "a leaping tongue of bloom" beside a brook is simply a butterfly which conveys the message of humanity. "A leaping tongue of bloom" is the central image which reminds us of Thoreau's orchis limned as leaping flame and tongue of colour in his Journal. This can also be taken as a magnificent natural symbol which suggests fraternity or communication. It strikingly occasions "a message from the dawn", because the first mower's signs of accomplished work and love of nature have precisely been communicated to the speaker through this symbol. It aptly arouses the speaker's community spirit: "henceforth I worked no more alone"²⁹.

The iterative images of A Boy's Will are "woods", "tree", "season", "bird", "flower", "butterfly", "colour", "scythe" "mowing field" and "pasture". Psychical, Psychological, natural, spiritual, intimate and colour symbols are preponderantly manipulated in this volume.

Frost's second volume North of Boston (1914) which is viewed as being "unaffectedly expressive of New England life"³⁰ transcends regionalism through its indelible images and symbols. This volume begins with "Mending Wall", an exceedingly symbolical dramatic monologue which according to Frost, simply contrasts two types of people.³¹ The speaker of the poem fosters "the latent imaginative power within himself"³² while his hidebound neighbour clings to mere shibboleth. The speaker's uncanny imagination finds expression at the outset of the poem :

Something there is that doesn't love a wall,
 That sends the frozen-ground-swell under it
 And spills the upper boulders in the sun,
 And makes gaps even two can pass abreast.³³(1-4)

“Wall” is the central image in this poem. But the indefinite pronoun “something” is manipulated here most cryptically. “Something” is treated anthropomorphically; it is invested with human feeling “love” and concerned with the active verbs “send”, “spill” and “make”. To Elaine Barry “something” is suggestive of “some principle of order in nature”³⁴ and Samuel Coale attempts to identify it with “other frost”³⁵ which does not love a wall. But we would endeavour to show that it does not merely symbolize nature. In this poem we perceive that the hunters crash through the wall to “have the rabbit out of hiding”. “Something” encompasses not only “frozen-ground-swell” but the “hunters” who tear down the wall. The hunters may obviously personify the speaker who characteristically frowns upon the existence of wall. Frost’s manipulation of “elf” image can be taken as a tell-tale clue to the untried symbolical implication of “something”. “Something” which “doesn’t love a wall” is “not elves exactly”(1.37). Presumably Frost here refers to light-elves (not black-elves) which represent music, dance, art or love. Thus “something” is meaningfully linked with “elf” image. This significant linkage makes us inclined to air our views that “something” is a psychological symbol representing a superbly artistic or culturally imaginative mind. The image of “wall” can be treated as a plurivalent symbol. An “unliberated life”³⁶ which the stolid neighbour lives may precisely be equated with Dickinsonian “Existence with a wall”³⁷. “Wall”, thus, symbolizes psychical or spiritual incarceration. The neighbour’s reliance on the adage, “Good fences make good neighbours” makes him a troglodyte, “an old-stone savage” (1.40). “Wall” may further imply individual privacy and the progress of civilized society as opposed to atavistic one.

In "Home Burial" and "A Servant to Servants" Frost strikingly employs house or incarceration image. The images of "I must get out of here. I must get air" (p.52) "the darkened parlor" (p.54), "one is alone, and he dies more alone"(p.54), "But the world's evil"(p.54), "I must go— Somewhere out of this house" (p.54-55), "a sort of cage, / Or room within a room"(p.66) unmask severe psychological desolation of Frost's paranoiac poetic personae.

Baudelaire envisages human being to be doomed under the "couverture noir de la grande marmite"³⁸. The earth looms up as a dark prison for a man in Baudelaire. In "Home Burial" home is reduced to a desolate prison for the obsessively overwrought housewife who feels estranged from her husband whom she considers to be insensitive for he powerfully digs the grave of their child

I saw you from that very window there,
 Making the gravel leap and leap in air,
 Leap up, like that, like that, and land so lightly
 And roll back down the mound beside the hole.³⁹ (74-77)

Here the window symbolizes contracted viewpoint of the psychotic woman. The repetitious expression of "leap and leap in air, / Leap up, like that, like that" indicates her hysteria in which she melancholily heightens the contrast between the inanimate thing "the gravel" which gains momentary motion and the animate being, the child that remains eternally motionless⁴⁰. The spade, a grave-digging tool which the husband stands "up against the wall" in the entryway can be taken as a plurivalent symbol. It suggests inexorable reality of human life. The spade also symbolizes masculinity and sexuality. According to Randall Jarrell it has "a sexual force, a sexual meaning... when the plowman digs his plow into the earth, Mother Earth, to make her bear, this does not have a sexual appropriateness only in the dreams of neurotic patients — it is something that we all understand"⁴¹. The overwhelmed wife, however, finds her sacred grief profaned by "everyday

concerns” of her husband. When her husband talks about danger of weather, she reacts :

Think of it, talk like that at such a time!

What had how long it takes a birch to rot

To do with what was in the darkened parlor?⁴² (94-96)

Here “birch” symbolizes the dead child and “the darkened parlor” euphemistically suggests the family vault where the child is buried. In “Home Burial” “little grave” or home burial which remains at the core of Frost’s symbolistic strategy, may be considered as a psychological symbol for it not only signifies the burial of a child that unhinges the housewife’s mind but also “the burial of relationship” between husband and wife and “the way a woman buries herself a little bit everyday in the domestic setting”⁴³

The speaker of the eclogue “A Servant to Servants” is a woman whose postmarital life is blighted by the displeasing domestic drudgery and unbenignity of her husband. The tedium of house-keeping — cooking and cleaning for a clump of persons hired by her flint-hearted husband makes her psychologically indisposed. So the house she lives in reminds one of an inescapable prison. The climatic portion of this eclogue delineates a story about the insanity of the woman’s uncle who was engaged in a wooden “room within a room” in the garret :

He’d shout and shout

Until the strength was shouted out of him,

And his voice died down slowly from exhaustion.

He’d pull his bars apart like bow and bowstring,

And let them go and make them twang, until

His hands had worn them smooth as any oxbow⁴⁴.

(131-136)

The account of the insane uncle's plight is strikingly suggestive. The insane uncle's confinement represents the psychological predicament of the drudge herself. The image of the "bow and bowstring" symbolizes lethal intention of the psychotic woman to whom life is turned into unendurable burden and love into derangement. Like the witch in Frost's dialogue-narrative "The Witch of Coös" or the wife in "Home Burial" the memory of the drudge in "A Servant to Servants" encompasses "a set of images which are potentially fatal to mental balance if not expelled or suppressed"⁴⁵

A shift in the connotation of home image is well-marked in the dramatic eclogue "The Death of the Hired Man" in which Silas, a shiftless, infirm hired hand returns to Mary and Warren, his old employers, at a time when veritably "His working days are done". The two definitions of home that we find in this poem, emblematically characterize Frostian "sentence sound". Warren defines home derisively as "the place where, when you have to go there,/ They have to take you in." Conversely Mary defines it as "something that you somehow haven't to deserve". The suggestive images of the poem can well be construed allegorically. Hence, "home" may be considered as a spiritual symbol suggesting divine blessing. It is worth noting that Warren represents the retributive figure of God dowered with the attribute of reason and justice while Mary stands for benign figure of God endowed with the attribute of charity and mercy. "Illogical kindness — that is mercy"⁴⁶, Frost wrote to Wilbert Snow in 1938. Frost's notion of mercy which moderates justice is dexterously elucidated in this poem. Silas who represents mankind repeatedly failed to keep promises of life before yielding to death. So his soul should justifiably be damned to perdition: But it is mercy for which he is ensconced at home. Like his death the death scene of the hired man is equally symbolic:

“ ... I'll sit and see if that small sailing cloud
Will hit or miss the moon.”

It hit the moon.

Then there were three there, making a dim row,
The moon, the little silver cloud, and she.⁴⁷ (160-164)

Frost, like a chiaroscuroist manipulates his symbolic imagery very superbly. “The moon” that symbolizes the light of Silas’s life can better be taken as an example of the “clarus”(clear or light) image and “small sailing cloud” suggesting the agent of death that “hit the moon” can better be considered as an example of the “obscurus” (dark) image. The hired man’s death symbolizes the salvation of human soul.

The image of woods is reiterative in ^{the} Frost poetry. Like A Boy’s Will The North of Boston deals with woods or tree image probing intricate world of varied experience. The images of tree, woods, shrub and clematis are predominantly manipulated in the poems “The Mountain”, “Blueberries”, “After Apple-Picking” and “The Wood-Pile.” The images of “there was a wall of trees with trunks” (p.41), “ladders sticking through a tree / Toward heaven still” (p.68), “two or three / Apples I didn’t pick upon some bough” (p.68), “The view was all in lines / Straight up and down of tall slim trees” (p.101), “The wood was gray and the bark warping off it” (p.102), “Clematis / Had wound strings round and round it like a bundle” (p.102) are characteristically connotative.

The image of tree associated with the ascending image of ladder is adroitly wielded in “Frost’s masterpiece”,⁴⁸ “After Apple-Picking”. Its wider symbolical properties induced Cleanth Brooks to consider it “a symbolist poem”⁴⁹. From the outset of the poem symbolistic intricacy occurs in metaphoric imagery :

My long two-pointed ladder’s sticking through a tree
Toward heaven still,

And there's a barrel there that I didn't fill
 Beside it, and there may be two or three
 Apples I didn't pick upon some bough.⁵⁰ (1-5)

Metaphor is the wellspring of all thinking for Frost. In the essay "Education by Poetry" Frost employs the image of ladder as metaphor which has covert meaning than its literal one. "We still ask boys in college to think, as in the nineties, but we seldom tell them what thinking means; we seldom tell them it is just putting this and that together; it is just saying one thing in terms of another. To tell them is to set their feet on the first rung of a ladder the top of which sticks through the sky."⁵¹

In this poem the vertical "two-pointed" ladder is expressly metaphorical. Dennis Vail discerns the "ladder" as male and the "barrel" as female symbol which conjointly suggest "a human completeness in the nature of the effort"⁵². Mordecai Marcus explores psychosexual imagery in "After Apple-Picking". To Marcus the image of pointed and sticking ladder is "overwhelmingly phallic"⁵³. Nevertheless, critics like George Monteiro and Dorothy Judd Hall endeavour to perceive religious dimension in this poem. Monteiro considers the poem as "an elaboration of Genesis"⁵⁴. To Hall the apple-picker represents a "fallen man" or "a latter-day Adam" who "symbolically perpetuates the Genesis legacy of mankind's first act of disobedience. He is tired from physical labor and weary, too, of the burden of original sin." According to her "two or three/Apples" which the apple-picker "didn't pick upon some bough" symbolize "the human lot", Frost often observed as "unfinished business"⁵⁵. We find that the symbols of this poems are exceedingly plurivalent. The solitary apple-picker devoting himself to his tough pursuits may also represent an artist; the apple-picking suggests near perfectionism in art or in an artistic life. "A tree" is suggestive of creative life of an artist. Art is monumental but life is fleeting. The poet ventriloquizes the truth that it is humanly or artistically inconceivable to procure all the gems of life. Hence "two or three / Apples" are kept unplucked and "a barrel" is left unfilled.

The "long two-pointed ladder" left sticking "Toward heaven still" symbolizes an artist's aspiration for immortality through creative achievement.

Drifting into the "Essence of winter sleep" the lonely apple-picker views a strange world "through a pane of glass" skimmed from the "drinking trough". This symbolic imagery indicates an artist's entrance into the world of chimerical dreams in which the contents of imagination appear to be magnificently larger than those of factual world :

And I could tell
 What form my dreaming was about to take.
 Magnified apples appear and disappear,
 Stem end and blossom end,
 And every fleck of russet showing clear.⁵⁶(16-20)

The dream of "Magnified apples" suggests the recollections of creative achievement of a contemplative artist.

In "After Apple-Picking" Frost quaintly makes use of afterimagery. We have already touched on the nature of afterimagery of this poem in the previous chapter. The apple-picker's "sight" experienced "through a pane of glass" shapes visual afterimage while "There were ten thousand thousand fruit to touch" moulds a tactile afterimage. The colloquialism, "ten thousand thousand" typically characterizes Frost's "sentence sound".

We could experience a complex imbrication of dream and reality, earth and heaven, day and night, sleep and awakening in the textural make-up of this verse. This imbrication of antithetical elements may suggest the cyclical mobility of life. The apple-picker appears to be discomposed as to ascertain the lineaments of sleep: "one can see what will trouble/This sleep of mine, whatever sleep it is." The image of woodchuck throws light on sleep. Woodchuck's hibernation or "long sleep" is dreamless. So it can never be analogous to human sleep. "This

sleep of mine" is nothing but "just some human sleep" which is full of dream or mental activity. The "long sleep" or hibernation resembling "the little imitation of death" that terminates in springtime, aptly suggests "resurrection" and "just some human sleep" suggests reawakening.⁵⁷

The image of woods coupled with the image of bird and wood-pile is employed significantly in "The Wood-Pile", a "Symbolist work"⁵⁸. "Out walking in the frozen swamp" the peripatetic poetic persona senses the precariousness of the landscape where the "hard snow" holds him. He is virtually lost in the sylvan swamp :

The view was all in lines
 Straight up and down of tall slim trees
 To much alike to mark or name a place by
 So as to say for certain I was here
 Or somewhere else: I was just far from home.⁵⁹ (5-9)

The "place" is desolate and unnamed because the "tall slim trees" are "too much alike to mark or name a place by." The linear wood is as sequestered as the earlier one portrayed in the poem "Mowing"; it is "far from home." According to Roger Gilbert the wood does not resemble the "selva oscura" of the *Inferno*; it turns out to be the antithesis of "home"⁶⁰. The wood is a very intricate symbol in the Frost canon. In this poem the wood may equivocally be considered as a psychological symbol suggestive of ecology nurturing human creativity.

As the poetic persona strolls through the gelid countryside, a "small bird" flies before him. It is a timorous creature to which human attributes and sensations are imputed :

He thought that I was after him for a feather –
 The white one in his tail; like one who takes
 Everything said as personal to himself.⁶¹ (14-16)

Through the image "one who takes/Everything said as personal to himself" the poet "turns the bird into a homely human type"⁶². The bird leads the poetic persona to discover and appraise a magnificent "handiwork" — "a cord of maple, cut and split / And piled — and measured, four by four by eight." Hence, the bird signified poetic avidity for discovery.

The "wood-pile" is the predominant symbol in this poem. The "rugged" and "hoary Pile" which we find in Wordsworth's poem, "Elegiac Stanzas" is not identical to Frostian wood-pile. The portrayal of "rugged Pile" against the background of the "sea in anger" and "dismal shore"⁶³ fills Wordsworth with foreboding. On the other hand, "a pile of wood" left in the "frozen swamp" opens Frost's eyes to the majesty of human craftsmanship. Hence the wood-pile may be considered as an intimate symbol indicating human creativity or craftsmanship. Further, the wood-pile can precisely be treated as a plurivalent symbol. The abandoned wood-pile may seem like offscourings for it is denied a proper consummation on the hearth. But the wood-pile, which reminds us of Hawthorne's "heap of mossy fuel"⁶⁴ in The Blithedale Romance, is left "To warm the frozen swamp as best it could/With the slow smokeless burning of decay". Here the mouldering wood-pile is depicted to be disintegrated into fecund soil from where new life will pullulate.⁶⁵ Thus the wood-pile is also suggestive of resurrection. It is indeed a Symbolist symbol in Frost's poetry.

The reiterative images of North of Boston are "wall", "house", "moon", "darkness", "woods", "tree", "ladder", "apple" and "sleep". The types of symbols predominantly wielded in this volume are psychological, sexual, spiritual and intimate.

Frost's third volume Mountain Interval (1916) opens with a mellifluous lyric "The Road Not Taken" which like the first sonnet of A Boy's Will presents

wood imagery. The image of wood depicted in "The Road Not Taken" is substantially coupled with the image of road:

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,
 And sorry I could not travel both
 And be one traveler, long I stood
 And looked down one as far as I could
 To where it bent in the undergrowth;⁶⁶ (1-5)

This wood imagery wedded to road image echoes Emily Dickinson's "forest" and "road" imagery employed in one of her poems wherein the poetic persona comes to the "odd fork in Being's road" and apprehends that his "pace took sudden awe" for "Before were cities, but between, / The forest of the dead."⁶⁷ The images Dickinson makes use of are tinged with religious orthodoxy while Frost's secular images are characterized by psychological intricacy. What Frost wrote to Susan Hayes Ward on February 10, 1912, sheds light on the outstanding suggestivity of "The Road Not Taken" :

Two lonely cross-roads that themselves cross each other I have walked several times... [T]he other evening as I came down one to see a man, who to my own unfamiliar eyes and in the dusk looked for all the world like myself, coming down the other, his approach to the point where our paths must intersect being so timed that unless one of us pulled up we must inevitably collide. I felt as if I was going to meet my own image in a slanting mirror. Or say I felt as we slowly converged on the same point with the same noiseless yet laborious strides as if we were two images about to float together with the uncrossing of someone's eyes. I verily expected to take up or absorb this other self and feel the stronger by the addition for the three-mile journey home.⁶⁸

In this letter Frost delineates how he ran across an image of another self the other evening. The context of confrontation with one's "other self" at the

convergence of roads is distinctly related to the context of "The Road Not Taken" in which the poet detached himself from one approachable self at a divergence of roads.⁶⁹ Hence, "road" may be considered as a psychical symbol suggesting an image of self or a pattern of life. Road-symbol underscores duple limitations of human life. To begin with man cannot traverse two roads at the same time; he has to make a decision to take one road or to choose one pattern of life from a number of alternatives and, secondly no man can envisage the pellucid chart of his future, for futurity is always unpredictable. So, when a man makes a decision to embrace a pattern of life, he feels perturbed about the consequence of life-pattern chosen :

I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence :
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I —
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.⁷⁰ (16-20)

Woods can be considered as a psychical symbol suggesting involute topography of human psyche entangled in "the problem of choice". The road "less traveled by" resembling "the way we took in the poem "In Neglect" of A Boy's Will may aptly suggest the image of poetic self which the poet absorbed with a sense of perturbation.

The other poems of Mountain Interval in which the image of woods is chiefly wielded are "The Oven Bird", "Birches", "The Hill Wife", "The Bonfire", "The Line-Gang" and "The Sound of Trees". The images: "a mid-wood bird, / Who makes the solid tree trunks sound again"(p.119), "the lines of straighter darker trees"(p.121), "trunks arching in the woods"(p.121), "life is too much like a pathless wood"(p.122), "He's watching from the woods"(p.127), "the dark pine that kept / Forever trying the window latch / Of the room"(p.128), "dark converging paths between the pines"(p.129), "the dim trees stand back in wider

circle — ” (p.130), “the fire / Died not without a noise of crackling wood —” (p.131), “They throw a forest down less cut than broken” (p.141), “I wonder about the trees”(p.156), “my heads sways to my shoulder / Sometimes when I watch trees sway” (p.156) have outstanding connotations.

The poem “Birches” provides the image of birch trees against the backdrop “straighter darker trees” resembling the “dark trees” which “scarcely show the breeze” in “Into My Own” :

When I see birches bend to left and right
 Across the lines of straighter darker trees,
 I like to think some boy’s been swinging them.
 But swinging doesn’t bend them down to say
 As ice storms do.⁷¹ (1-5)

The birches are bent to earth in “ice storm” but the poet should “prefer to have some boy bend them.” The swinging of birches is a highly metaphorical image. George Monteiro explores “pubescent sexuality”⁷² in the swinging of birches. Birches “trailing their leaves on the ground” emerge as “girls on hands and knees that throw their hair/Before them over their heads to dry in the sun”. That the boy “subdued” the girl-like birches by “riding them down over and over again” until “not one but hung limp, not one was left/For him to conquer” can be taken as a pattern of psychosexual imagery. Nevertheless Monteiro discovers sexual imagery in the closing lines of the poem as the poet thinks to be catapulted and set back again on earth by the flexing birch :

I’d like to go by climbing a birch tree
 And climb black branches up a snow-white trunk
 Toward heaven, till the tree could bear no more,
 But dipped its top and set me down again.

That would be good both going and coming back,
 One could do worse than be a swinger of birches.⁷³ (54-59)

The act of going up and "coming back" may imply sexual activity or "tumescence and detumescence".⁷⁴ The swinging of birches is an excellent instance of plurivalent symbol. "Earth" which is "the right place for love" fascinates the poet tremendously. But terrestrial life can never bring him incessant felicity. When he is "weary of considerations", life turns out to be "a pathless wood" where "face burns and tickles with the cobwebs". In such situation he momentarily contemplates the grace of Heaven, but he ultimately clings to the real world of love and tribulation. This oscillating experience of real and spiritual world is exquisitely suggested by the "birches" which can be considered as an intimate symbol; it lets the poet like Zaccheus in the later poem "Sycamore" "climb black branches up a snow-white trunk / *Toward* heaven" and come back "Clear to the ground."

The "ballad-lyric" "The Hill Wife" presents the imagery of woods and tree together with house image. The image of woods that we notice here is as menacing as the woods portrayed in "Ghost House". The young hill wife who sustains paranoid fears in her psyche, gets abnormally tensed up for the "smile" appeared on the face of the tramp whom she propitiates with "bread". She interprets the smile as dreadfully mocking and feels the tramp "watching from the woods as like as not". The tramp, however, can be taken to be a portent of the hill wife's unnatural disappearance at the end of the poem. "The lonely house" in which the young woman lives with her husband appears to be sexually or maritally sterile for there is "no child" in the house. Her "oft-repeated dream" may be recognized as a projection of her psychosexual complication. She is plagued with the image of "the dark pine that kept / Forever trying the window latch/Of the room where they slept." "The dark pine" and "the room" may be

recognized as psychosexual symbols suggesting phallus and "female genitals"⁷⁵ respectively. The "oft-repeated dream" aggravates her paranoiac plight. She strays into the woods "With a song to herself / On her lips," breaks frenziedly "a bough / Of black alder" and disappears into "the fern" presumably to be engorged by the woods resembling the hungry tramp who has a derisive "vision" of the couple "old and dead." Hence, the woods can be considered as a psychological symbol indicating decimation of human psyche.

Like woods death imagery is adroitly manipulated in Mountain Interval. The images of "The log that shifted with a jolt / Once in the stove, disturbed him and he shifted, / And eased his heavy breathing, but still slept" (p.108), "The doctor put him in the dark of ether" (P.137), "He lay and puffed his lips out with his breath" (p.137), "the watcher at his pulse took fright" (p.137), "The water in desperate straits like frantic fish" (p.142), "he showed John the wheel pit all right" (p.142) typically illuminate Frost's vision of death.

In the poem "An Old Man's Winter Night" we find death and dark imagery coupled with light imagery. Like "Storm Fear" that portrays bestial winter blizzard working "against us in the dark" this poem presents nature as an antagonistic force to its old protagonist: "All out-of-doors looked darkly in at him." Roberts W. French rightly identifies this nature as a "malevolent voyeur."⁷⁶ Against the backdrop of a deadly "winter night" the lonely, senile man wanders in a claustrophobic "creaking room" with "the lamp tilted" in his hand. Light is a preponderant symbol in this poem. "The lamp tilted" suggesting subdued life-flame foreshadows impending death of the protagonist who suffers from amnesia:

What kept him from remembering what it was
That brought him to that creaking room was age.(6-7)

The protagonist is succumbed to psychological and physical inertia. The "light" that he bears in him cannot be a stimulus. His life has dwindled away to almost

nothing: "A light he was to no one but himself." The terrestrial life inevitably comes to an end like the "log" that burns to cinder in the "stove":

The log that shifted with a jolt
Once in the stove, disturbed him and he shifted,
And eased his heavy breathing, but still slept.⁷⁷ (23-25)

Frost's vision of death turns out to be philosophically fascinating in this poem. That the protagonist consigns to the "moon" his "snow" and "icicles" seems ostensibly to be spiritual submission to the force of nature or the triumph of death over life. But death cannot actually eclipse life or its rhythm. Because cosmic life is eternal. Thus, the "moon" a symbol of eternal life takes over as the keeper of the house when the protagonist dies or fails to "keep" the same.

The poem "Out, Out —" provides the lethal image of "buzz saw" that "snarled and rattled in the yard" of a family farm. Valerie Rosendorff and William Freedman scrupulously consider the religious implication of this poem. To them "the boy" who saws wood at the "buzz saw" reminds one of Jesus who assisted Joseph to cut wood in the carpenter's shop. The boy's death caused by the saw echoes crucifixion.⁷⁸ The image of "those that lifted eyes could count/Five mountain ranges" is biblically allusive for it alludes to the opening lines of Psalm 121: "I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help. My help cometh from the Lord, which made heaven and earth." Hence "five mountain ranges" can be considered as a religious symbol suggesting grace of Godhead. "Five mountain ranges" is certainly a plurivalent symbol. William S. Doxey contends that these sun-rouged mountain ranges are suggestive of the bloodstained teeth of the "buzz saw".⁷⁹ The snarling "buzz saw" is symbolically significant. It may symbolize mechanical life or industrialized civilization which strangles simplicity and humanity in homo sapiens. The young sawyer "Doing a man's work, though a child at heart" finds "all spoiled." His doom symbolizes the

illimitable probability of humanity which has been nipped in the bud. The abrupt amputation of his hand suggests the utmost incertitude in industrialized civilization. The doctor, of course, "put him in the dark of ether", but "the watcher at his pulse took fright." The tentacles of industrialized civilization prove to be so fatal that the imperiled persons cannot be rescued from them; their doom inevitably takes place.

The death imagery that we notice in the verse "The Vanishing Red" is more horrific than that of "Out, Out —." Industrialized civilization chokes off blossoming life in "Out, Out—" but in "The Vanishing Red" the so-called civilized White, out of his instinctive ferocity, murders the Red Indian with the help of machinery. That the industrialized civilization can never enlighten the inner world of so-called civilized persons is well suggested in this poem. "Wheel pit" is a central symbol in "The Vanishing Red". It can be considered as an intimate symbol suggesting clandestine murder or death. Disgusted at the Red Indian, John's "guttural exclamation of surprise" about "the great big thumping, shuffling millstone" the White Miller unhasitatingly shows him the "wheel pit" into the mill :

He took him down below a cramping rafter,
And showed him, through a manhole in the floor,
The water in desperate straits like frantic fish,
Salmon and Sturgeon, lashing with their tails.⁸⁰ (20-23)

This symbolic imagery suggests the grisly scene of John's last moments. The horror a human spirit experiences while confronting unnatural death is startlingly symbolized by "frantic fish".

The recurrent images of Mountain Interval are "woods", "tree", "road", "path", "house", "room", "light", "moon", "darkness", "death" and "mill"

(machinery). Psychical, psychosexual, religious and intimate symbols have been tellingly employed in this volume.

This present study in major images and symbols occurring in the early phase of the Frost poetry shows that Frostian images are drawn from ecological and societal phenomena; Frost's major symbols embody subtle experience resulting from weird and wonderful interplay of phenomenal world and poetic psyche.

“Toward the source”: Middle Phase (1923 –1942)

The middle phase of the Frost poetry distinctively signalizes dazzling poetic maturity. A novel set of philosophicopsychological values which Frost sets forth during this phase are exquisitely embodied in images and symbols of his poetry. Frost's fourth volume New Hampshire (1923) "marks so great an advance over his previous work that it should be hailed with any amount of hand-shaking and cheers".⁸¹ In this volume Frost's penchant for astronomical imagery takes a glorious turn. Star image is strikingly employed in the poems "A Star in a Stoneboat", "The Star- Splitter", "I Will Sing You One – O" and "Looking for a Sunset Bird in Winter". The images of "Never tell me that not one star of all / That slip from heaven at night and softly fall" (p. 172), "He looked an old stoneboat with the star" (p.173), "You know Orion always comes up sideways. / Throwing a leg up over our fence of mountains" (p.176), "In that grave word / Uttered alone / The utmost star / Trembled and stirred" (p.219), "From north to south across the blue; / A piercing little star was through" (p. 233) are substantially implicative.

In "A Star in a Stoneboat" the image of star is wielded in an involuted manner. The highly imaginative speaker of this poem intends to manipulate the star or fallen meteorite more dignifiedly than to utilize it "to build a wall". He rails at the labourer of being unimaginative. The labourer who unconcernedly drags the star "through the plowed ground" singularly fails to recognize in it "The one thing palpable besides the soul / To penetrate the air in which we roll". The star has strange characteristics. It cannot be compared to the "resorts of life as Mars and Earth". Although it is not associated with the idea of "death", "birth" and "sin", it is astoundingly invested with "worldly nature" for it can "chafe and shuffle" in "calloused palm". Thus "the star becomes little more than a toy"⁸² as the poem

draws to its close. The star can however be recognized as a psychological symbol suggesting fertility of poetic mind.

"The Star-Splitter" deals with the image of star coupled with the images of house and telescope. Brad McLaughlin, a farmer who mingles "reckless talk / Of heavenly stars with hugger-mugger farming" burns down his house for "the fire insurance" with which he buys a star-splitting telescope to "satisfy a lifelong curiosity / About our place among the infinities". Hence the arsonist turns out to be a visionary. He discards the terrestrial life represented by the "house" and renounces contracted vision signified by the "smoky lantern". He is concerned with "not plants / As on a farm, but planets, evening stars / That varied in their hue from red to green". Star is the cardinal symbol in this poem. Unlike the star in "A Star in a Stoneboat" it can be treated as a spiritual symbol suggesting enlightened, extramundane life.

Like astronomical imagery, colour image is adroitly handled in New Hampshire. The poems wherein colour image is conspicuous are "Fragmentary Blue", "Dust of Snow", "Nothing Gold Can Stay" "For Once, Then, Something", "Blue-Butterfly Day" and "A Hillside Thaw". The images: "fragmentary blue", "heaven presents in sheets the solid hue" (p. 220), "a crow", "dust of snow" "a hemlock tree" (p.221), "Nature's first green is gold, / Her hardest hue to hold" (p.222), "what was that whiteness? / Truth? A pebble of quartz? For once, then, something", "It is blue-butterfly day here in spring" (p.225) "the sun lets go / Ten million silver lizards out of snow" are replete with symbolic overtones.

"Fragmentary Blue" furnishes the image of blue colour. In Thoreau's system blue is a significant colour symbol. In Walden "Walden water", "Walden ice" and the unclouded sky are "beautifully blue". Thoreauvian blue symbolizes spiritual purity. A "savant" like Thoreau would make "earth include the sky" (1.6). But Frost's blue "so far above us" is "fragmentary" and it falls toward earth to

become "bird", "butterfly", "flower", "wearing-stone" or "open eye". Frostian blue which "gives our wish for blue a whet" may signify Frost's yearning to "attain the ultimate real through the particular".⁸³

In the compact lyric "Dust of Snow" interrelated images of evergreen hemlock tree, white snow and black crow are employed picturesquely. "The way" in which "a crow" shakes down "the dust of snow / From a hemlock tree" is exceedingly symbolic. As snow-dust falls on the poet "A change of mood" comes up to be celebrated. The action of the crow saving "some part / Of a day" the poet "rued" indicates retrieval of poetic spirit. Laurence Perrine incisively explicates the symbolic significance of this lyric. Crow, snow and hemlock tree have a "pleasing effect" on the poet and "his response to them is an upsurge of joy".⁸⁴ Crow stands for the herald of life in a wintry landscape. The evergreen hemlock suggests youthful freshness and beauty; the sparkling dust of snow is indicative of momentary spiritual bliss.

"For Once, Then, Something" provides "well" image associated with the image of water and white colour. Peering down into a well metaphorically points to delving into the mystery of nature. But it is difficult to plumb it for a gazer whom presumably mystics or Christians "taunt" as egocentric "with having knelt at well-curbs / Always wrong to the light". Instead of fathoming truth the gazer perceives his own "godlike" reflection in water which reminds us of "The wetter ground" that reflects "a standing gull" in the later poem "Neither Out Far Nor in Deep". "Beyond" and "through" his "shining surface picture" what the spectator discerns is "a something white, uncertain, / Something more of the depths". The philosophical character of "the depths" remains enigmatically "blurred" in this poem. When the straining well-gazer almost probes "the depths", "Water came to rebuke the too clear water". To observe the confounding design of nature a droplet of dew from "a fern" ripples the water to blot the deified reflection and the

“whiteness” of something out. Unlike Wordsworthian nature Frostian nature precludes the gazer from exploring “whiteness” or “Truth” hidden in nature. In this poem, “well” can be recognized as an intimate symbol suggesting psychical speculum which may reflect subjective truth of the world.

“Snow” is one of the major images in New Hampshire. Besides “Dust of Snow” and “A Hillside Thaw” snow occurs in the poems “An Empty Threat”, “Fire and Ice”, “Stopping by Words on a Snowy Evening”, “The Onset”, and “Looking for a Sunset Bird in Winter”. The images of “The seal yelp / On an ice cake” (p.211), “Some say the world will end in fire. / Some say in ice” (p.220), “woods fill up with snow”, “downy flake” (p.224), “the gathered snow lets down as white / as may be dark woods” (p.226), “a crystal chill / Was only adding frost to snow” (p.233) are symbolically significant.

In the epigram “Fire and Ice” Frost psychologically resolves the disputation over planetary apocalypse: “Some say the world will end in fire, / ... for destruction ice / Is also great / And would suffice”. Frost prognosticates that the two antipodal extremes love (“desire”) and “hate” can equally destroy “the world” or human race. In the later poem “Beyond Words” “icicles” are typically associated with “hate” : “That row of icicles along the gutter / Feels like my armory of hate”.⁸⁵ Likewise in “Fire and Ice” “ice” which can be recognized as an intimate symbol suggests hatred. The other catastrophic passion, “love” is symbolized by “fire”.

One of Frost’s most popular poems “Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening” provides interrelated images of woods, animal and snow laden with uncanny symbolical implications. In the “darkest evening of the year” the traveller of this poem stops his buggy somewhere between “the woods and frozen lake” to “watch” the woods “fill up with snow”. The “little horse” remonstratively jangles its “harness bells” which infuse a new life of awareness into the aesthetically

charm-struck traveller. In this poem the “darkest evening of the year” may suggest the winter solstice. The murky winter landscape with its snowfall has tremendously baffled the commentators. John Ciardi discerns “death wish” in the symbols of “the dark and the snowfall”.⁸⁶ But it is our contention that no symbol of this poem insinuates death-wish. The “snow”, “downy flake” or dark landscape may indicate threat of death but the “harness bells” suggesting consciousness leads the traveller to overpower this threat. Life-urge is so potent in this poem that ultimately the traveller can neither slough off his personal nor social responsibilities; he realizes that he has “promises to keep” and “miles to go” before he sleeps. The image of “lovely, dark and deep” woods is extremely suggestive. Allen Tate fittingly compares the woods with a temptress who is “cold, mysterious (dark), and unfathomable”.⁸⁷ Hence woods can be treated as the psychological symbol suggesting temptation in the ways of unending life-journey. One must not succumb to this temptation; everybody should feel impelled to move on by the realization of obligations before yielding to death.

The reiterative images of New Hampshire are “star”, “snow”, “water”, “animal”, “tree”, “woods” and “colour”. The types of symbols predominant in this volume are psychological, spiritual, colour and intimate.

West-Running Brook (1928), Frost’s fifth book of poems, begins with a highly enigmatic lyric “Spring pools” which presents the image of pools coupled with woods, season and flower imagery. In the deciduous woods, the spring pools with “snow that melted only yesterday” mirror the “total sky almost without defect”; they are hemmed in by ravishing flowers but the transience of floral beauty yields a sense of regret. The pools will be sucked up by “roots” and “flowery waters and these watery flowers” will be blotted out and swept away by the trees to “darken nature” and make “summer woods”. This destructive woods which adumbrate psychical sombreness of the poet can be recognized as a

psychical symbol. The "summer woods" canopied with "dark foliage" remind us of the later poem "Leaves Compared with Flowers" wherein Frost enunciates: "Petals I may have once pursued. / Leaves are all my darker mood".⁸⁸

The images of woods, trees, leaves and flowers are dexterously wielded in the poems "On Going Unnoticed", "Acceptance", "Tree at My Window", "A Winter Eden", "The Last Mowing" and "The Birth Place". The images of "And still the woods sweep leafily on, / Not even missing the coralroot flower" (p. 247), "Hurrying low above the grove, some waif / Swoops just in time to his remembered tree" (p.249), "Vague dream-head lifted out of the ground" (p.251), "Not all your light tongues talking aloud / Could be profound" (p.252), "wild apple-tree's young tender bark" (254), "The trees are all I'm afraid of, / That flowers can't bloom in the shade of" (p.264), "The mountain pushed us off her knees. / And now her lap is full of trees" (p.265) are markedly suggestive.

"The Last Mowing" provides the image of flowers threatened by "trees" resembling "summer woods" in "Spring Pools". The wild and ephemeral beauty of "tumultuous flowers" reminds us of stunning landscape of the earlier poem "Rose Pogonias" wherein wild "orchises" luxuriate in "saturated meadow". In "season" the colourful flowers which "can't stand mowers and plowers" may thrive transiently in "Faraway Meadow" for

... trees, seeing the opening,
 March into a shadowy claim.
 The trees are all I'm afraid of,
 That flowers can't bloom in the shade of;⁸⁹ (9-12)

The engulfing shadow and appalling aggression of the trees, which hasten the demise of beautiful flowers, may signify spiritual desiccation. The flowers symbolize paradisiacal beauty and evanescent spiritual wisdom. "The Birthplace" unfurls portentous relationship between mountain and woods. Like the portraiture

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of “woods /That end all”⁹⁰ in the earlier poem “In the Home Stretch” or “woods” in “Spring Pools” and “The Last Mowing” the mountain “pushed us off her knees. / And now her lap is full of trees”.

“Tree at My Window” presents the image of anthropomorphic “window tree” appearing figuratively as “Vague dream-head lifted out of the ground”. Between the tree and the psychical being of the imaginative speaker a bond of sympathy is explored in this poem. The “sash is lowered when night comes on” but the “curtain” is kept always undrawn to make them watch each other’s condition. The speaker discerns the tree to be “taken and tossed” by the wind; the tree marks the speaker to be “taken and swept” by his dreams. The tree is concerned with “outer” weather; its “light tongues” which can only gabble insinuate miserably incoherent expression of the dreamer-speaker who is tremendously disquieted by “inner weather”.

Like woods and its concomitant imagery, the images of water, wave, brook and ocean are masterfully manipulated in West-Running Brook. The suggestive images : “The shattered water made a misty din” (p.250), “Great waves looked over others coming in, / And thought of doing something to the shore” (p.250), “There would be more than ocean-water broken / Before God’s last *Put out the Light* was spoken” (p.250), “It must be the brook / Can trust itself to go by contraries”, “We’ll both be married to the brook”, “The black stream, catching on a sunken rock, / Flung backward on itself in one white wave, / And the white water rode the black forever” (p.258), “It is from that in water we were from” (p.259), “The brook runs down in sending up our life. / The sun runs down in sending up the brook” (p.260), “Sea waves are green and wet, / But up from where they die / Rise others vaster yet; / And those are brown and dry” (p.260) encompass Frost’s recurrent moods and attitudes.

The poem "Once by the Pacific" presents interlinked images of ocean-water and cloud which typically embody Frostian vision of cataclysm. Frost metaphorically portrays an Othello-like malevolent God who flares up to "Put out the Light" instead of dividing it from darkness. "The shattered water" which makes a "misty din" turns out to be a foretaste of disaster to happen. Menacing stormy "waves" are depicted to do "something to the shore / That water never did to land before". The "dark intent" and "rage" of malicious God are manifested not only in water and wave but also in cloud image: "The clouds were low and hairy in the skies, / Like locks blown forward in the gleam of eyes". To C. Hines Edwards, Jr. this hirsute cloud-being may be treated as a reversal of William Blake's well-known representation of bearded God "stretching his dividers downward through a hole in the clouds into darkness".⁹¹ Blakean God is concerned with light, order and creation while Frostian God in this poem is concerned with darkness, chaos and overhanging destruction. Briam Barbour thinks that the images of this poem are not apocalyptic; they are blasphemous for Frostian vision of destruction does not encompass the notion of salvation.⁹² It is our contention that Frost should not be charged with sacrilege for he follows the "tradition of combining pagan and Judaeo-Christian allusion in his poetry — a combination which flourished particularly during the baroque period".⁹³

Frost makes use of wave and brook imagery perceptively in his philosophical dialogue "West-Running Brook" wherein a newlywed couple views a topographically curious brook which occasions philosophical conception of life. Unlike "all the other country brooks" flowing east, this brook which has the westerly motion may suggest reconciliatory contrariety for the bride observes: "It must be the brook / Can trust itself to go by contraries / The way I can with you — and you with me —". She senses that they would "both be married to the brook"; to her the brook is "an annunciation", "its waving to us with a wave / To let us know it hears me". The brook emerges as a gregarious figure; all the "three"

figures are inseparably united by heavenly love. Fred, the husband considers this wave philosophically. To him the "white wave" rising against the current of the brook on a "sunken rock" resembles an image of striving bird "whose breast / Flecked the dark stream and flecked the darken pool / Below the point". For the husband the "white wave" may symbolize intractable human will to transcend mortality. The west-running brook which runs away "seriously" and "sadly" to "fill the abyss's void with emptiness" is indicative of flow of existence. This existence is imaged as "the stream of everything that runs away" which piquantly reminds us of the phrase "To go with the drift of things"⁹⁴ in "Reluctance", one of Frost's earlier poems. Frostian images and symbols are considerably influenced by Bergsonian imagery and notion of *élan vital*⁹⁵: "Life as a whole", maintains Henri Bergson in Creative Evolution, "from the initial impulsion that thrust it into the world, will appear as a wave which rises, and which is opposed by the descending movement of matter".⁹⁶ The image what Bergson manipulates here is similar to Frost's image of stream with "some strange resistance". "Life sways perilously", writes Frost to Robert P. Tristram Coffin in 1938, "at the confluence of opposing forces"⁹⁷: Frost's remark on "opposites" illuminates his poetic "trust ... to go by contraries":

It is this backward motion toward the source,
 Against the stream, that most we see ourselves in,
 The tribute of the current to the source.
 It is from this in nature we are from.
 It is most us.⁹⁸ (68-72)

The image of "backward motion toward the source, / Against the stream" reminds us of the image of "you can climb / ... back through history up the stream of time" depicted in the later poem "The Master Speed" which manifests Frost's recurrent interest in Bergsonian idea of *élan vital*. It is worth noting that the "backward

motion toward the source, / Against the stream" signifies not only Frost's belief in existence with the tension of opposite forces but also in spiritual unity. Hence the "west-running brook" can be recognized as a spiritual symbol suggesting inmost aspiration for a return to divine origin.

Like woods and water imagery, luminary and astronomical images play a major role in West-Running Brook especially in the pieces of "The Freedom of The Moon", "Fireflies in the Garden", "The Peaceful Shepherd", "Acquainted with the Night", "Canis Major" and "On Looking up by Chance at the Constellations". The images "I've tried the new moon tilted in the air", "one first-water star" (p.245), "Here comes real stars to fill the upper skies", "they were never really stars at heart" (p.246) "I leaned to line the figures in / Between the dotted stars" (p.252), "And further still at an unearthly height / One luminary clock against the sky" (p.255), "the great Overdog, / That heavenly beast / With a star in one eye, / Gives a leap in the east" (p.261) "The sun and moon get crossed, but they never touch", "And look elsewhere than to stars and moon and sun / For the shocks and changes we need to keep us sane" (p.268) are distinctively meaningful.

Frost's treatment of astronomical imagery in "On Looking up by Chance at the Constellations" is amusing. In outer space "beyond the floats of cloud" "nothing even happens". The heavenly bodies are well systematized "in heaven". To observe spatial design "The sun and moon get crossed, but they never touch". They neither "strike out fire from each other, nor crash out loud". The poet humorously tells us that we have to "look elsewhere than to stars and moon and sun / For the shocks and changes we need to keep us sane". Like the white stars portrayed in the earlier poem "Stars" the stars of this poem symbolize cosmic indifference.

“Acquainted with the Night” which establishes Frost’s “kinship with Baudelaire”⁹⁹ provides the involuted image of “luminary clock” against the backcloth of “night” image. The imagistic strategy of this poem resembles the earlier poem “Good Hours” wherein the evening straggler who wandered around “the slumbering village street” “saw no window but that was black”.¹⁰⁰ Likewise the protagonist of “Acquainted with the Night” acquainted himself with sombre “night” while walking “out in rain — and back in rain” and looking down “the saddest city lane”. Of course the night stroll in “Acquainted with the Night” is symbolically more pregnant than that of “Good Hours”. The aural image of “an interrupted cry” coming over “houses from another street” neither called the protagonist of “Acquainted with the Night” “back” nor said “good-bye”. The night that encompasses “saddest city lane” and “an interrupted cry” can be recognized as a plurivalent symbol indicating both vacuity of modern city life and unendurable psychical desolation. The crux of the poem is concerned with the image of “One luminary clock against the sky / Proclaimed the time was neither wrong nor right”. Nina Baym in her article “An Approach to Robert Frost’s Nature Poetry” recognizes the “luminary clock” as the moon.¹⁰¹ Nat Henry also argues that the “luminary clock” which does not proclaim “a fact” but proclaim “an opinion” about “the time” can only be the moon.¹⁰² To Frank Lentricchia the “luminary clock” may both be clock tower or the moon suggestive of “indifference of time” that neither “guides nor judges” the “journey” of the protagonist.¹⁰³ But we think that Laurence Perrine’s observation is perceptively fitting. To him “luminary clock” refers to “a tower clock with a lighted dial, not to the moon”.¹⁰⁴ He supports Dorothy Tyler’s views on this issue. Tyler tells us that Frost himself admitted that the “luminary clock” was in Ann Arbor. She further insists: “It may well have been, for the big illuminated clock on the Michigan Central Station ... was just around the corner from the house on Pontiac Road where the Frost family lived in 1925, down the hill and over the railroad bridge he

must have crossed many times".¹⁰⁵ Thus it could well be perceived that "luminary clock" is a very complex symbol. It may be regarded as an intimate symbol suggesting the spirit of desolate modern human being not regulated by moral values.

The recurrent images of West-Running Brook are "tree", "woods", "flower", "water", "wave", "brook", "star", "sun", "moon", "night" and "darkness". Psychological, spiritual and intimate symbols are preponderantly manipulated in this volume.

Frost's sixth volume, A Further Range (1936) wherein Frost "lifts up his eyes to other than the customary hills"¹⁰⁶ adumbrates his symbolistic maturity. Frost's imagistic strategy also signally takes a remarkable turn in this volume; the earlier volumes predominantly deal with woods imagery whereas A Further Range prodigiously focuses on animal imagery. Animal image stands out in the poems "The White-Tailed Hornet", "A Blue Ribbon at Amesbury", "Departmental", "Desert Places", "Neither Out Far Nor in Deep", "Design" and "On a Bird Singing in Its Sleep". The images of "The white-tailed hornet lives in a balloon" (p.277), "He's after the domesticated fly / To feed his thumping grubs as big as he is", "And the fly circled round him in derision" (p.278), "Such a fine pullet ought to go / All coiffured to a winter-show" (p.279), "An ant on the table cloth / Ran into a dormant moth / Of many times his size" (p.287), "All animals are smothered in their lairs" (p.296), "The wetter ground like glass / Reflects a standing gull" (p.301), "I found a dimpled spider, fat and white, / On a white heal-all, holding up a moth", "A bird half wakened in the lunar noon / Sang halfway through its little inborn tune" (p.302) are expressively weighty.

In "The White-Tailed Hornet" the wasp image is wielded ludicrously. The "balloon", in which the white-tailed hornet lives, "floats against the ceiling of the woodshed". The balloon is further imaged as "Japanese crepe-paper globe". The

hornet rushes to sting the speaker for it fallaciously thinks that he intends to hang the "balloon" over "a bookcase". B.J.Sokol contends that Frost's "The White-Tailed Hornet" echoes the intricate instincts of the hymenopteran insects described in Henri Bergson's Creative Evolution.¹⁰⁷ The hornet which ridiculously would "stab" the speaker in "the sneeze-nerve of a nostril" reminds us of the "nerve-stinging surgeon-wasps" as delineated by Fabre and Bergson. The hornet chases after "the domesticated fly" to feed his young which are depicted as "thumping grubs as big as he is". It mistakes "a nailhead" and "a little huckleberry" for flies and finally tries to pounce on "a fly" which "circled round him in derision". The bungling endeavour of the hornet makes the speaker question:

Won't this whole instinct matter bear revision?

Won't almost any theory bear revision?

To err is human, not to, animal.¹⁰⁸ (50-52)

Frost scoffs at those modern theorists who place too much reliance on the infallibility of instinct. Radcliffe Squires points out that Frost's powers of observations tell the poet that "instinctive behaviour can be mean or faulty".¹⁰⁹ Frost believes that only human beings can transcend animality or instinctive behaviour and fulfil their potential to feel exalted. However, white colour emerges as a major symbol in "The White-Tailed Hornet". Sokol tells us that white-tailed hawk and white-headed hornet exist in North America but there is "no species of wasp or hornet called white-tailed".¹¹⁰ Like "white heal-all" in "Design", white-tailed hornet occurs only in the Frost universe. Unlike Thoreauvian whiteness Frostian whiteness insinuates ominous force. The whiteness of hornet's tail containing poisonous sting suggests a lack of "divine order" and "real scale of value".

“Design” which is called by Frost “a set little sonnet”¹¹¹ deals with spider image schematically associated with the imagery of moth and heal-all, “a subverted cosmic flower”.¹¹² The original version of “Design” entitling “In White” (1912) distinctly discloses that whiteness is one of the core symbols of this sonnet. In fact the symbol of white colour in this sonnet is treated more enigmatically and appallingly than the whiteness in “The White-Tailed Hornet”. The triadic collocation of albinic spider, moth and heal-all (*prunella vulgaris*) dramatises the “design of darkness” in “Design”. The “dented spider” of “In white” emerges as “dimpled” “fat and white” one simulating an inculpable infant “holding up a moth / Like a white piece of rigid satin cloth” on “a white heal-all” in the octet of “Design”. Unlike the “orchises” representing beauty and spirituality in the earlier poem “Rose Pogonias” or “a leaping tongue of bloom” suggesting fraternity in the earlier piece “The Tuft of Flowers” the “white” heal-all, which loses its natural blueness insinuates gothic horror. The simile “Like a white piece of rigid satin cloth” is terrifyingly implicative. In “In White” Frost uses “lifeless satin cloth” instead of the image of “rigid satin cloth” which is expressive of rigor mortis or the lining of a coffin.¹¹³ Hence the trio — spider, moth and heal-all grows into “Assorted characters of death and blight”. (l.4). These characters like “the ingredients of a witches’ broth” are ironically unlimbered “to begin the morning right”, an intricate image implying a grisly morning “rite” or funeral or “danse macabré”. The simile “Like the ingredients of a witches’ broth” which echoes mephitic components of the witches’ cauldron in *Macbeth* suggests the macabre interplay of evil forces. As the octet reaches its close, the “beady spider” of “In White” turns into “snow-drop spider” indicating the ironic innocuousness of the insect, for the white flower, snow-drop (*Galanthus nivalis*) which generally represents innocence is “like a froth” that is tacitly linked up with the poisonous “broth” of the witches; the image of moth-wings resembling “a paper kite” indicates cadaverous stiffness.

In the sestet Frost unconventionally phrases his three cogitative questions. The first question, "What had that flower to do with being white, / The wayside blue and innocent heal-all?" points up the enigmatic "albino catastrophe" imaged in the first and second line of the octet. The second question, "What brought the kindred spider to that height, / Then steered the white moth thither in the night?" accentuates plausible conniving force in nature. The third question, "What but design of darkness to appall?" presumably suggests the fact that freaky whiteness sets the stage for a macabre play. The word "appall" which means "to grow pale" (apalir) or "pale" (pallidus) in its root sense is superbly linked up with the image of whiteness. The "small" tragic tableau deviously determined by "design" points to a maleficent deity whose ubiquitous existence in the universe can never be impugned. Thus the whiteness of spider, moth and heal-all can be recognized as an intimate symbol suggesting sinister force active in cosmic life.

"Neither Out Far Nor in Deep" furnishes interrelated images of sea-bird, sea and ship. This cryptic lyric begins with the "people" on the strand gazing seaward "all day" in pursuit of "the truth". While gazing they catch sight of an offshore ship "raising its hull" and the nearby reflection of "a standing gull" in the glassy "wetter ground". Due to their limitation of human vision the "people" can never watch beyond the horizon and beneath the opaque surface of the sea: "They cannot look out far. / They cannot look in deep". "A standing gull" emerges as the most suggestive image of this lyric. Peter D. Poland discovers a close resemblance between the "people" and "a standing gull". The people who "have cut themselves off from the land world and all that it represents ... have become isolates, like the solitary gull that they resemble".¹¹⁴ Unlike the speaker of "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening" the gull-like "people" negate the "land world" and slough off their social "promises" and responsibilities. Like the well-gazer of "For Once, Then, Something" the poetic personae of "Neither Out Far Nor in Deep" want to experience the complete truth of nature but nature does not divulge her secrets to

them. Here, the sea can be considered as a conventional symbol indicating the truth of the nature.

In A Further Range Frost branches out into the profound implication of snow image besides animal imagery. Snow image is conspicuous in the poems "Two Tramps in Mud Time", "Desert Places" and "Afterflakes". The images of "don't forget / The lurking frost in the earth beneath" (p.276), "Snow falling and night falling fast, oh, fast / In a field I looked into going past", "A blanker whiteness of benighted snow" (p.296), "In the thick of a teeming snowfall / I saw my shadow on snow", "the thick flakes floating at a pause / Were but frost knots on an airy gauze" (p.303) are emblematically outstanding.

"Desert Places" deals with snow image associated with the image of darkness, whiteness and loneliness. Like the traveller watching the "woods fill up with snow" in "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening" the speaker of "Desert Places" observes "Snow falling and night falling fast, oh, fast / In a field". But the connotations of the symbolic image, "snow" in these two pieces are not identical. In "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening" snow suggests momentary threat of death while in "Desert Places" it symbolizes execrable spiritual desolation. Like the "shadowy claim" of woods which hastens the demise of flowers in "The Last Mowing", the dark and lonely woods of "Desert places" present a dying world where all "animals are smothered in their lairs". Nevertheless this lifeless world reflects the spiritual desolation of the speaker himself: "I am too absent-spirited to count; / The loneliness includes me unawares". The blankness of the snowy landscape, chromatically characterized by "A blanker whiteness of benighted snow", signifies spiritual or creative vacuity of the speaker who confronts existence "With no expression, nothing to express". The speaker's inmost "desert places" are so terrifying that they transcend the state of "empty spaces / Between stars — on stars where no human race is". It is worth noting that in "Desert

Places" the symbol of whiteness assumes exceptional dimensions. Unlike the symbol of whiteness in "The White-Tailed Hornet" or "Design" whiteness in "Desert Places" symbolizes illimitable and appalling sterility of human spirit.

The snow image which "Afterflakes" deals with is highly symbolical. "In the thick of teeming snowfall" the speaker of this poem views his "shadow on snow". This shadow indicates his inward darkness or murky mood. The inward or psychological landscape is further mirrored by the image of weather: "That shadow of mine should show in form / Against the shapeless shadow of storm". But psychological shadowy storm is not perdurable. As the poem reaches to its close, the image of thick snow is exposed as "frost knots on an airy gauze" through which "the sun" shines. In "Desert Places" the image of snow which is "benighted" embodies Frost's dark vision. But in "Afterflakes" snow, a psychological symbol, encompasses Frost's duple vision — dark and lucent.

The iterative images of A Further Range are "animal", "nature", "flower", "snow", "whiteness" and "darkness". The dominant types of symbols occurring in this volume are psychological, spiritual, conventional, intimate and colour.

Frost's seventh book of poetry, A Witness Tree (1942) is poignantly lyrical. "The Silken Tent", "Never Again Would Bird's Song Be the Same", "The Subverted Flower" are wonderful lyrics dealing with the images of love, beauty, femininity, sexuality and eroticism. The images of "She is as in a field a silken tent" (p.331), "supporting central cedar pole", "countless silken ties of love and thought ((p.332), "the birds there in all the garden round / From having heard the daylong voice of Eve / Had added to their own an oversound" (p.338), "He flicked and flung the flower" (p.339), "His lips were sucked and blown / And the effort made him choke / Like a tiger at the bone", "She dared not stir a foot, / Lest movement should provoke / The demon of pursuit / That slumbers in a brute",

"She looked and saw the shame: / A hand hung like a paw, / An arm worked like a saw" (p.340) are signally significant.

"The silken Tent" is a one-sentence lyrical sonnet wherein the beauty and maturity of a woman is suggested by the image of silken tent. The images of "midday" and "sunny summer" in the second line not only suggest diurnal and seasonal maturity but also entrancing nubility of the woman. The tent metaphor exquisitely reveals the psychological topography of the woman. The tent which "gently sways at ease" due to relenting "ropes" is supported by a "central cedar pole" — the "pinnacle to heavenward" signifying "the sureness of the soul". The "cedar pole" can be recognized as a plurivalent symbol. Richard Poirier insists that it has a sexual implication.¹¹⁵ Katherine Kearns also considers this to be a phallic symbol. Here the femininity is observed to be fulfilled by masculinity. "Without the pole the tent would be "silk" or "cloth" but not serviceable".¹¹⁶ Nevertheless the "cedar pole" also maintains spiritual implication. The images of "cedar pole" and "sureness of the soul" reminds us of Psalm 92 wherein the "cedar in Lebanon" represents virtuousness and spirituality. The feminine nature which we find in this sonnet is paradoxical. The tent-like woman is "loosely bound / By countless silken ties of love and thought". She enjoys freedom while she is love-bound. The "capriciousness of summer air" which assays her "bondage" symbolizes "the paradoxical contrast between the established pattern of the woman's virtuous life and the unexpectedly impulsive response to a gust of passionate desire".¹¹⁷

"The Subverted Flower" provides sexually involute flower image associated with the image of beast in human being. According to Stearns Morse this lyric is "quite unFrostian" for it explicitly deals with "love's sexual root".¹¹⁸ Written in earlier period the lyric could have been incorporated in A Boy's Will but perhaps its crude sexuality made Frost's strait-laced wife disallow to publish it

in her life time. In "The Subverted Flower" we find that the unmuzzled sexual drive of a man transforms him into a dog-like beast with "muzzle". The man "smiled" for the frigid or "willfully unkind" woman and "flicked and flung the flower". "[A]nother sort of smile" indicating licentiousness cracks his "ragged muzzle" while he discovers her "standing to the waist / In goldenrod and brake, / Her shining hair displaced". Terrified by the surge of sexuality of the man resembling "a tiger at bone" the virgin dares not to change her position "Lest movement should provoke / The demon of pursuit / That slumbers in a brute". It is worth noting that the woman apprehensively discovers canine, tigerish and demonic nature in the man. When she hears her "mother's call / From inside the garden wall" the man undergoes another uncomely metamorphosis; with a "snout" he looks like a pig to be easily subjugated. He runs away in fear and she "heard him bark outright". She feels that "the tender-headed flower" is "base and fetid". Frost tells us that "frigidity in woman" is the gist of "The Subverted Flower"¹¹⁹ Frigidity is not glorified in this lyric. Negating warm emotion the woman herself grows into a beast. As she hears the man "bark", she hysterically spits "bitter words" just like a cat spitting at a dog. Her mother wipes "the foam / From her chin" and draws her like a domestic animal "backward home".

Flower is the predominant symbol in "The Subverted Flower". Unlike the flowers in the earlier pieces, "Rose Pogonias", "Mowing", "The Tuft of Flowers" or "A Prayer in Spring", the flower in "The Subverted Flower" is wielded in an uncanny fashion. It can be recognized as a plurivalent symbol. To begin with the flower has sexual implication; to Jay Parini it indicates "a thinly disguised phallus"¹²⁰ and secondly, the flower has also psychological implication; the flower which appears to be malodorous or "fetid" to the women, signifies her unusual anaphrodisia and psychological abnormality. The woman considers that the flower "marred" the man. But ironically she herself "marred" her flowery heart. Hence the flower symbolizes the dismal topography of the woman's psyche.

Like sexual or erotic images the image of nature with its indifference and sombreness stands out in the poems notably "The Most Of It", "To a Moth Seen in Winter" and "Come In". The images: "For all the voice in answer he could wake / Was but the mocking echo of his own", "He would cry out on life, that what it wants / Is not its own love back in copy speech, / But counter love, original response", "As a great buck it powerfully appeared, / Pushing the crumpled water up ahead, / ... And forced the underbrush — and that was all" (p.338), "And now pray tell what lured you with false hope / To make the venture of eternity / And seek the love of kind in wintertime" (p.356), "I cannot touch your life, much less can save, / Who am tasked to save my own a little while" (p.357), "Now if it was dusk outside, / Inside it was dark", "Too dark in the woods for a bird / By sleight of wing / To better its perch for the night", "Far in the pillared dark / Thrush music went — Almost like a call to come in" (p.334), emblematically divulgate the identity of Frostian nature.

"The Most of It" provides the image of nature coupled with beast image. The protagonist of this lyric ironically thinks that he keeps "the universe alone". He, of course, deplorably emerges as an isolate figure to hear only the "echo of his own". In the earlier poems, "Storm Fear" or "An Old Man's Winter Night" nature is depicted to be malevolent while in "The Most of It" the cosmos is portrayed to be extremely indifferent; it is void of "counter-love, original response". What the protagonist cries "out on life" is embodied in cacophonous sounds. A great buck crashing about "the cliff's talus", "Pushing the crumpled water up ahead", landing "like a waterfall" and stumbling "through the rocks with horny tread" "powerfully" appears to force its way through "the underbrush". The forceful and callous movement of the buck is highly symbolical. The buck can be recognized as a cosmic symbol suggesting the indifference and callosity of the universe.

"Come In" furnishes images of nature or woods, bird and star. As the speaker of this lyric at "dusk" comes to the edge of dark woods wherein a thrush can never "better its perch for the night" by "sleight of wing", he listens to thrush "music" lamenting over the "last of the light of the sun / That had died in the west". Frost's thrush contrasts sharply with Hardy's thrush which pours its "illimited" joy "to fling his soul / Upon the growing gloom".¹²¹ Unlike Keats's nightingale Frost's thrush is concerned with death and darkness. Like the buck identified with utter indifference of the universe in "The Most of It", the thrush is unified with the dismaying darkness of nature. The threnodic thrush "music" lures the speaker into "the pillared dark" to "lament". But unlike Keats who wants to fly to the "immortal" nightingale "on the viewless wings of Poesy",¹²² Frostian speaker declines approaching the thrush to lament. The phrase "pillared dark" harks back to Baudelaire's "Correspondances" wherein "piliers" are manipulated to symbolize trees. Thus "pillared dark" suggests large trees existing in the darkening woods. To Marie Borroff it also implies "a monumental high-cultural edifice belonging to a past era, such as a temple or a cathedral".¹²³ The speaker averts his attention from the "pillared dark" for a lucent destination:

But no, I was out for stars:
I would not come in.
I meant not even if asked,
And I hadn't been.¹²⁴ (17-20)

The traveller in "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening" turns his back on the seductive woods to bear human responsibilities while the speaker in "Come In" forsakes the death-dealing darkness of the woods for the superior starry world of immortal life. It is worth mentioning that the connotation of the star image in the early piece "Stars" does not correspond with the implication of star image in

“Come In”. Star in “Come In” can be recognized as a spiritual symbol suggesting immortality, intellectuality and spirituality.

The images which recur in A Witness Tree are “summer”, “flower”, “woods”, “nature”, “animal”, “darkness”, “sun”, “light” and “star”. Sexual, psychological, cosmic and spiritual symbols play a major role in this volume.

Our examination of major images and symbols evolved in the middle phase of the Frost poetry reveals that Frostian images are simultaneously derived from organic world and luminary universe; Frost’s temperamental insight into human psyche and philosophical response to cosmic phenomena reinforce intricacy of his symbolistic strategy.

“A line of shadowy tracks”: Final Phase (1945 – 1962)

The Final phase of the Frost poetry spectacularly vivifies Frostian vision of life. The late poetry, which has a philosophicoreligious twist in its artistic structure, is a testimony to Frost's finer sensibility and deeper wisdom. The philosophical and spiritual overtones Frost transmits to his late works are inevitably embodied in his major images and symbols. As Yeats in his early sixties sails to “the holy city of Byzantium” — the world of art and spirituality, so Frost in his early seventies sets forth in quest of “Something Byzantine”. Frost's eighth volume A Masque of Reason (1945) is a one-act play after the fashion of seventeenth century masque. But unlike the traditional masque, this play probes philosophicoreligious problems. The septuagenarian poet strikingly ponders on “sun-bathed” imagery and spiritual symbols in this drama. Through the suggestive images of “A fair oasis in the purest desert”, “the incense tree's on fire”, “Burning Bush”, “The strangest light”, “There's a strange light on everything today”, “The birds, seem all on fire with Paradise”, “The enameled nightingales / Are singing”, “The Tree is troubled. / Someone's caught in the branches” (p.473) “My forte is truth” (p. 480), “turn the gold enameled artificial birds on” (p.490) Frost sets out his spiritual idea and philosophical profundity.

The play is set in a sun-bathed “ fair oasis in the purest desert” and its dramatis personae are the Old Testament God, Job, Satan and Job's wife, a petulant feminist. Job “sits leaning back against a palm” and his wife Thyatira “lies by him looking at the sky”. The image of “fair oasis in the purest desert” is suggestive of the hereafter or “Judgment Day” for the modifiers “fair “ and “purest-“ transcend the literal meaning of “oasis” and “desert”. The image of “a palm” is also highly symbolical. A “palm”, the only tree which never sheds its leaves may symbolize eternity. Judgment Day is characteristically irradiated with

divine illumination: "There's a strange light on everything today". Job and Thyatira perceive God entangled in "Byzantine" "Burning Bush" or the "Christmas Tree" from which He makes Himself free by quite gradually. The image of God in the poem "Once by the Pacific" does not correspond to the figure of the Godhead in A Masque of Reason. The God "Once by the Pacific" represents is a reversal of Blakean God while the portrayal of God in A Masque of Reason is quite identical to Blake's drawing of the Deity. Thyatira recognizes God easily for she knows him "by Blake's picture anywhere". God is depicted anthropomorphically in this play. He pitches His "prefabricated" plywood throne and pulls it lightly upright on its hinges. This collapsible "prefabricated" throne presumably points to some weakness in God. God speaks equivocally and apologetically in this play. The problem Job and Thyatira discuss with God is "great pains of life on earth". This problem is perceived to be irreconcilable with divine wisdom. Reginald L. Cook appropriately observes: "Just as the ambiguity of Plinlimmon's horologicals and chronomeicals interested Melville in Pierre, so the inability to reconcile human affliction with heavenly wisdom fascinated Frost¹²⁵". Job, "the great injured man" stands for humankind. The ordeal which human being has to go through can never be rationally explained. God tells Job, "There's no connection man can reason out / Between his just deserts and what he gets". God does not readily divulge the secrets of the trial on which He puts Job. Thyatira who provokes God to spell Job's suffering out, contends, "Of course, in the abstract high singular / There isn't any universal reason". God, nevertheless, admits that "the discipline" what man needs most is to learn his "submission to unreason". God apologetically makes a confession that in tormenting Job He was "just showing off to the Devil". Job looks puzzled; he symbolically and despondently associates whiteness with equivocality and dissipation: "Though I hold rays deteriorate to nothing: / First white, then red, then ultrared, then out". It is worth mentioning that the depiction of the Devil as "God's best inspiration"

remarkably signifies Frost's consciousness of evil. Frost senses that Satanic activities are impregnable on earth. He implies that no human being can escape from the Devil's clutches. The role the Devil plays in this drama is symbolical. The Devil manifests himself "like a sapphire wasp" with flickering "mica wings". He is diaphanous for "Church neglect / And figurative use" have attenuated him to "a shadow of himself". His waspish appearance reminds us of the poem "The White-Tailed Hornet" wherein the wasp image suggest divine disorderliness. That the Devil reluctantly speaks and scarcely stays on stage presumably indicates that he is busy to bedevil human beings surrepticiously.

Frost considers his two masques A Masque of Reason and A Masque of Mercy to be the "major achievements".¹²⁶ But unfortunately A Masque of Reason often fails to provoke serious critical attention. A Masque of Reason presents an argumentation "which ends in the paradox that, though man's self-referential identity lies in seeking reason, the irrational remains supreme to mock his efforts".¹²⁷

The recurrent images of A Masque of Reason are "light", "tree", "bird" and "picture". Spiritual and colour symbols are particularly employed in this play.

Steeple Bush (1947), Frost's ninth volume of poetry manifests "no diminution of poetic power".¹²⁸ In fact, the philosophical and spiritual subjects of this volume on which Frost waxes eloquent "attest the ripeness of the poet's wisdom".¹²⁹ In Steeple Bush Frost orchestrates his images and symbols with astounding skill. The poems "A Young Birch", "Something for Hope", "Directive", "An Unstamped Letter in Our Rural Letter Box", "The Middleness of the Road" deal with the recurrent imagery of trees and weeds laden with exceptionally added significance. The images of "The birch begins to crack its outer sheath / Of baby green and show the white beneath" (p. 375), "the meadow sweet / And steeple bush, not good to eat, / Will have crowded out the edible

grass" (pp. 375-376), "the trees put on their wooden rings", "long-sleeved branches", "lovely blooming but wasteful weed" (p. 376), "A few old pecker-fretted apple trees" (p. 378), "There, pointed like the pip of spade, / The young spruce made a suite of glades", "There I elected to demur / Beneath a low-slung juniper" (p. 380) have diverse layers of meanings.

"A Young Birch", the opening poem in Steeple Bush provides the image of birch tree coupled with the image of whiteness. Frost tells us that "a glimmer of white" which he sights in the birch by his cabin is the principal point of the piece.¹³⁰ Unlike the image of birches which suggest oscillating experience of real and spiritual world in the earlier poem "Birches", the young "birch" that "begins to crack its outer sheath / Of baby green and show the white beneath" indicates natural mutability or the progression from immaturity to maturity. Unlike the enigmatic whiteness in "For Once, Then, Something" or appalling whiteness in "Design", the whiteness in "A Young Birch" can be recognized as a conventional symbol suggesting experience as opposed to innocence. The young birch, which can be regarded as a natural symbol, points to intensified perception of ineffable beauty: "It was a thing of beauty and was sent / To live its life out as an ornament".

The image of steeple bush which comes up in "Something for Hope" provides the title to this book of poetry. Like the incursive woods that "come back to ^{the} mowing field" in the earlier poem "Ghost House" or the aggressive "trees" which precipitate the demise of ravishing flowers in "The Last Mowing", steeple bush, a "lovely blooming but wasteful weed", "Will have crowded out the edible grass". The steeple bush is indicative of antagonistic force to life. To make the "pristine earth" free from steeple bush and "ready again for the grass to own", the poet exhorts us to raise trees and cut down them "when lumber grown".

Like trees and weeds, the image of house standing out in the poems "Directive", "The Night Light", "In the Long Night" and "A Steeple on the House" plays a very significant role in Steeple Bush. The images of "There is a house that is no more a house" (p. 377), "there's the children's house of make-believe", "that is no more a house, / But only a belilaced cellar hole, / Now slowly closing like a dent in dough", "This was no playhouse but a house in earnest", "Your destination and your destiny's / A brook that was the water of the house" (p. 378), "I stole the goblet from the children's playhouse" (p. 379), "She always had to burn a light / Beside her attic bed at night" (p. 382), "I would build my house of crystal, / With a solitary friend" (p. 384), "What if it should turn out eternity / Was but the steeple on our house of life / That made our house of life a house of worship", "A spire and belfry coming on the roof / Means that a soul is coming on the flesh" (386) emblematically divulgate Frostian vision of life.

The interrelated images of house and brook are extraordinarily manipulated in "Directive" which is, to Morrison, "One of the most moving poems Frost or anyone has written".¹³¹ The appealing motif of this poem is journey. The "guide", who may represent the inner self of the poet, asks the poet-narrator to make a journey to "a house that is no more a house / Upon a farm that is no more a farm / And in a town that is no more a town". The image of this defunct house reminds us of the image of "vanished abode" that "left no trace but the cellar walls" in the earlier poem "Ghost House". The road, which the poet-narrator climbs along seems like "a quarry" or the "chisel work of an enormous Glacier / That braced his feet against the Arctic Pole". Thus the journey turns out to be "the serial ordeal" but the guide urges the narrator not to "mind" this. As they pass through the woods "light rustle" rushes to the leaves. But the "wood's excitement" does not attest to the sentience of the landscape. The landscape is of course exanimate for the symbolic image of a "few old pecker-fretted apple trees" insinuate irretrievable loss of life. Nevertheless, the image of the "only field /

Now left's no bigger than a harness gall" is also suggestive of the uncomeliness of the landscape as well as the agonies of human life. The poetic personae pass by "the children's house of make-believe" to reach the "house in earnest". "They retrace the line of growth", Ronald Bieganowski insists "from adulthood to childhood back to infancy when the child is confined to the house and nursery".¹³² Their backward movement aptly resembles the image of "backward motion toward the source / Against the stream" in "West-Running Brook". The "house in earnest" is imaged as "a belilaced cellar hole, / Now slowly closing like a dent in dough". This image of the lilac - enshrouded insentient cellar hole characteristically resembles Eliotic image of "Lilacs out of the dead land" in the "Waste Land".¹³³ At this point, it is perspicuous that the "house in earnest" does not turn out to be the ultimate destination of the narrator. His "destination" and "destiny" is a "brook that was the water of the house, / Cold as a spring as yet so near its source, / Two lofty and original to rage". Frost informs Hyde Cox that "the key word in the whole poem is source".¹³⁴ The brook-water or "the water of the house" which is suggestive of the source of spiritual life, can only be quaffed from "the Grail" a metaphor for "living faith".¹³⁵ Like the poet, a true quester can be blessed with the sense of coveted wholeness by exploring the redemptive "waters" and "watering place": "Here are your waters and your watering place. / Drink and be whole again beyond confusion".

Frost broadens the scope of house image in "A Steeple on the House". In "Home Burial" and "A Servant to Servants" house image is concerned with incarceration, in "The Death of the Hired Man" it is allegorically related to divine blessing, and in "Directive" house image is predominantly linked up with the remnants of human suffering and defeat. In "A Steeple on the House" this image of course is identified with the emergence of soul. Frost lavishes attention on spirit-earth or soul-flesh relationship in this poem. The vertical "spire" or "steeple" of the "house of life" is expressive of soul or spirit. The "house of life"

may indicate earth or fleshy human body. Though we do not utilize the steeple “to sleep” or “to live” the close connection between “the steeple” and the “flesh” can never be impugned: “A spire and belfry coming on the roof / Means that a soul is coming on the flesh”.

The astronomical imagery is preponderantly evident in Steeple Bush besides the images of trees-weeds and house. The sharp images of the sun, moon and star are obsessively employed in the poems “One Step Backward Taken”, “An Unstamped Letter in Our Rural Letter Box”, “Were I in Trouble”, “On Making Certain Anything Has Happened”, “Skeptic”, “Two leading Lights”, “It Bids Pretty Fair”, “Why Wait for Science” and “The Broken Drought”. The images of “the sun came out to dry me” (p. 377), “The largest fire drop ever formed / From two stars’ having coalesced / Went streaking molten down the west” (p. 381), “a star fresh fallen out of the sky” (p. 383), “I should justly hesitate / To frighten church or state / By announcing a star down” (p. 384), “Far star that tickles for me my sensitive plate / And fires a couple of ebon atoms white”, “I put no faith in the seeming facts of light” (p. 389), “The sun is ... / a power of light / And could in one burst overwhelm / And dayify the darkest realm / By right of eminent domain” (p. 390), “The only thing I worry about is the sun” (p. 392), “Will she be asked to show / Us how by rocket we may hope to steer / To some star off there” (p. 395), “Earth would soon / Be uninhabitable as the moon” (p. 400) symbolically illuminate the imaginative universe of Frost.

Frost treats astronomical imagery quaintly in “Skeptic”. His astronomical image in the late verse is not the replica of what he portrayed in the early or middle phase of his poetic career. Fascinated by the starry world of spiritual or immortal life, the speaker in “Come In” is “out for stars” while the speaker in “Skeptic” is altogether sceptical about “the seeming facts of light” of far “star that

tickles" his "sensitive plate". It is the star for which the speaker's sensitivity to the universe takes an unendurable turn:

The universe may or may not be very immense.
As a matter of fact there are times when I am apt
To feel it close in tight against my sense
Like a caul in which I was born and still am wrapped¹³⁶

(9-12)

To the speaker, the universe appears to be an excruciating "caul" harking back to the claustrophobic cosmos symbolized by "creaking room" in which the senile protagonist of "An Old Man's Winter Night" wanders.

"An Unstamped Letter in Our Rural Letter Box" is a significant verse wherein Frost employs, in his own inimitable way, the image of star which bears unusual weight and value. In this poem Frost draws an analogy between outward astral world and illuminated inner world. The poetic persona watches "The largest firedrop ever formed / From two stars' having coalesced / Went streaking molten down the west" which thrusts an image of creative or spiritual experience, for, this symbolic imagery is amazingly analogous with the image of "Inside the brain / Two memories that long had lain / Now quivered toward each other, lipped / Together, and together slipped". According to Mario L.D'Avanzo this rare experience is "at once visionary and creative".¹³⁷ The connotations of star symbols in "Skeptic" and "An Unstamped Letter" are not identical. In "Skeptic" the star is suggestive of skeptical mood while in "An Unstamped Letter" the star is expressive of spiritual realization or creative inspiration.

Star image is, further, dexterously deployed in the piece "Take Something Like a Star" (originally "Choose Something Like a Star") incorporated in An Afterword (1949) — a type of coda to Steeple Bush. In "Skeptic" Frost puts "no faith in the seeming facts of light" of the star while in "Take Something Like a

Star" he grants the "loftiness" of the star perceived as "the fairest one in sight". Unlike the cosmically indifferent stars analogized with "Minerva's snow-white marble eyes" in the earlier poem "Stars", the star, "steadfast as Keats' Eremite", is psychologically linked up with human life in "Take Something Like a Star". Frost's poem refers to Keats's sonnet "Bright Star" wherein "steadfast", bright star is held to be analogous to "nature's patient, sleepless Eremite".¹³⁸ Frost's star, contravening its taciturnity, says "I burn". Kearns discovers an implicit "sexual heat" in the star's feeling. To her the eremite or the religious recluse is also a lover who likes to remain "still steadfast, still unchangeable, / Pillowed upon my fair love's ripening breast, / To feel forever its soft fall and swell" ("Bright Star").¹³⁹ But it would possibly be profitable to explicate the star's sensation in spiritual sense. The star with its sympathetic and eremitic feeling watches human life in the wide world. It endeavours to find "a certain height" for the elevation of humankind and it symbolically leads us to the world of spirituality:

It asks of us a certain height,
So when at times the mob is swayed
To carry praise or blame to far,
We may take something like a star
To stay our minds on and be staid.¹⁴⁰ (21 - 25)

The reiterative images of Steeple Bush are "trees", "weeds", "house", "water", "sun", "moon" and "star". Natural, conventional, spiritual and colour symbols are substantially wielded in this volume.

A Masque of Mercy (1947), companion piece to A Masque of Reason is Frost's tenth volume wherein the poet wonderfully dwells on spiritual salvation. Unlike the "sun-bathed imagery" of A Masque of Reason, A Masque of Mercy predominantly focuses on "murky" images. But the images of this second play are not tinged with "the murkiness of hell. It is the murkiness of incapable human

reason, which finally surrendering, finds the self-obliterating darkness that 'there will be a light'. Not the light of reason, which enlightens little, but of truth and mercy, not from man but from God".¹⁴¹ The images of "A bookstore late at night" (p. 493), "I have been sent / To prophesy against the city evil" (p. 495), "The world's sick" (p. 500), "A fracture in the rocks beneath New York" (p. 502), "God comes on me to doom a city for Him" (p. 505), "The city is admittedly an evil" (p. 506), "Your exit door's become a cellar door", "The door here opens darkly of itself" (p. 514), "all this talk of slaying down in cellars", "Just an oubliette, / Where you must lie in self-forgetfulness" (p. 516), "every time I fade (p. 518), "We send our wicked enemies to Hell, / Our wicked friends we send to Purgatory" (p. 519) point to a seemingly lightless, awful life which ultimately turns to a life of spiritual realization and salvation.

The setting of the play is a "bookstore late at night"; the characters are Jonah (also called Jonas Dove), Keeper, Jesse Bel (Keeper's wife) and Paul (an exegete or apostle). Jonah, a senile fugitive from God, having lost his "faith in God to carry out / The threats He makes against the city evil" enters the bookstore administered by Keeper and Jesse Bel. The bookstore does not prove to be a snug "sanctuary" for Jonah, a "prophet with the Bible for credentials". The bookstore seems like a prison from which Jonah cannot break away. But its significance transcends the conventional connotation of incarceration. When Jonah takes refuge in the bookstore, a "mighty storm" blows up outside the coverture. It is the predestinating God who clogs Jonah's way to the stormy world. Here, the "storm" represents tumultuous terrestrial life. The bookstore is a place where Jonah is redeemed by God but his redemption is not "easy gold at the hand of fay". "His way to light is through the darkness of purgatorial pit, his way to glory through prostration, his way to life through death".¹⁴² Hence, "bookstore" can be recognized as a spiritual symbol suggesting spiritual salvation. It is worth mentioning that the nature of spiritual salvation in *A Masque of Mercy* reveals the

character of Frostian God. Sidney Cox tells us that Frostian God is “that which a man is sure cares, and will save him, no matter how many times or how completely he has failed”.¹⁴³ As regards the second masque Frost himself categorically contends, “Jonah is told to go and prophesy against the city — and he *knows* God will let him down. He can’t trust God to be unmerciful. You can trust God to be anything but unmerciful. So he ran away— and got into a whale. That’s the point of that and nobody notices it”.¹⁴⁴

In A Masque of Reason no apostle or exegete is introduced to assist or guide afflicted Job while in A Masque of Mercy Paul is portrayed as apostle or exegete to enlighten the life of frustrated Jonas Dove. It is Paul who fittingly gives Jonas Dove his Biblical appellation: “You are the universal fugitive — / Escapist, as we say”. Making an allusion to the story of Evangelist in Pilgrim’s Progress, when Jonas Dove tells to Paul: “You ask if I see yonder shining gate, / And I reply I almost think I do, / Beyond this great door you have locked against me, / Beyond the storm, beyond the universe”, Paul instantly discovers a quester of God in Jonas Dove and replies : “Yes, Pilgrim now instead of runaway, / Your fugitive escape become a quest”. Hence Darrel Abel appropriately remarks: “From being an escapist Jonah has become a pursuitist”.¹⁴⁵ Paul determines the spiritual journey to be made by the new “Pilgrim”. At this point the image of light becomes prominent amid darkness. Jonas Dove is told to make his descent into an “oubliette” or “cellar” where he must “lie in self-forgetfulness / On the wet flags before a crucifix ... painted on the cellar wall”. Into the dark cellar “There will be a light” and Jonas Dove must “Contemplate Truth until it burns your eyes out”. Accordingly, he contemplates and “fades” away. Jonah’s sacrificial death which indicate eternal life or spiritual salvation has also philosophicopsychological impication. On April 22, 1947 Frost writes to G.R. Elliott: “My fear of God has settled down into a deep inward fear that my best offering may not prove acceptable in his sight”.¹⁴⁶ This idea is vocalized in A Masque of Mercy. Paul

pronounces: "We have to stay afraid deep in our souls/ Our sacrifice ... / may not / Be found acceptable in Heaven's sight". Jonah's best sacrifice has also an indelible "conversionary effect" on keeper, erstwhile pagan and Marxist whose final speech captures the quintessence of the play:

My failure is no different from Jonah's.
 We both have lacked the courage in the heart
 To overcome the fear within the soul
 And go ahead to any accomplishment
 Nothing can make injustice just but mercy.¹⁴⁷

(726-730, 738)

The dominating images which occur in A Masque of Mercy are "door", "bookstore", "city", "storm", "darkness" and "cellar". Spiritual symbol is appealingly manipulated in this play.

Frost's final volume In the Clearing (1962), which encompasses monumental achievements in verse, phenomenally clarifies and concretizes Frostian vision of life. The images and symbols evolved in this volume bear witness to the strikingly novel imagination of the poet. The poems "Pod of the Milkweed", "A Cabin in the Clearing", "Closed for Good", "The Draft Horse", "Peril of Hope" and "In Winter in the Woods ..." exquisitely provide the suggestive images of plants, trees and woods. The images of "The milkweed brings up to my very door / ... And yes, although it is flower that flows / With milk and honey, it is bitter milk, / And any one whoever broke its stem / And dared to taste the wound a little knows" (p. 411), "They've been here long enough / To push the woods back from around the house / And part them in the middle with a path" (p. 414), "They leave the road to me / To walk in saying naught / Perhaps but to a tree / Inaudibly in thought, / From you the road receives / A priming coat of leaves" (pp. 415 - 416), "With a lantern that wouldn't burn / In

too frail a buggy we drove / Behind too heavy a horse / Through a pitch-dark limitless grove" (p. 443) "And a man came out of the trees / And took our horse by the head/ And reaching back to his ribs/ Deliberately stabbed him dead", "the night drew through the trees/ In one long invidious draft" (p.444), "It is right in there / Betwixt and between/ The orchard bare/ And the orchard green" (p. 445), "In winter in the woods alone/ Against the trees I go./ I mark a maple for my own/ And lay the maple low", "I see for Nature no defeat / In one tree's overthrow/ Or for myself in my retreat/ For yet another blow" (p. 470) perfectly convey outstanding ideas of Frost, still spry at eighty-eight.

"Pod of the Milkweed" which deals with the images of plant, flower and insect is reminiscent of the earlier piece "The Tuft of Flowers". Of course the images of flower and butterfly that come up in "Pod of the Milkweed" are symbolically more complex than the images of the "leaping tongue of bloom" and "bewildered butterfly" in "The Tuft of Flowers". The flower of the milkweed is depicted wonderfully for it "flows/ With milk and honey, it is bitter milk,/ As anyone who ever broke its stem/ And dared to taste the wound a little knows". The "distilled honey" of this flower is "so sweet" that it makes "the butterflies intemperate". The theme of "wanton waste" pops up in this poem. The butterflies "passionately" tread all the flowers to leave a "restless dream" to be inherited by "their posterity". The butterfly in this poem may signify spirit while the milkweed plant with its flower may indicate matter or the earth.

"The Draft Horse", one of the most significant poems in In the Clearing focuses on dark woods and animal imagery. Like "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening" it develops a journey motif; but the journey delineated in this poem is more perilous than the earlier one. A pair of travellers drives a buggy "too frail" with a horse "too heavy" through "a pitch-dark limitless grove" which has no "lovely" features of sylvan landscape depicted in "Stopping by Woods". The

"lantern" the pair carry with them cannot light their murky path. Precipitously they confront a nauseous act of malice: "And a man came out of the trees/ And took our horse by the head/ And reaching back to his ribs/ Deliberately stabbed him dead". The assailant ("a man") who represents frightening evil force in nature, endeavours to hobble the journey of life. "Something hates us", Frost writes to Lincoln MacVeagh in 1923, "and likes to spoil our fair beginnings".¹⁴⁸

Frost's pair in "The Draft Horse" are so "unquestioning" that they neither cry out to the callous cosmos, as depicted in "The Most of It", for answers nor combat the evil force. They simply accept "fate" which like Hardy's "vengeful god" may voice: "thy sorrow is my ecstasy ... thy love's loss is my hate's profiting".¹⁴⁹ The last stanza of "The Draft Horse" symbolically echoes the concluding quatrain of "Stopping by Woods". The couple fight shy of identifying "the man" or "someone", if any, "he had to obey" and like the traveller in "Stopping by Woods" they feel impelled to move on. To "walk the rest of the way" is their mission that reminds one of "miles to go".

The obsessive image of dark woods pops up in the lyric "In Winter in the Woods ...". The dark woods of this lyric remind us of the earlier poem "Into My Own" wherein the lonesome speaker wishes to "steal away" into the "vastness" of the "dark trees". The dim woods in "Into My Own" are summer woods whereas the snow-mantled woods in "In Winter in the Woods ..." which characteristically resemble the woods in "Stopping by Woods" are winter woods.

The poetic persona "alone/ Against the trees" moves to "mark" an maple tree in order to "lay" it "low". In the bleakly "afterglow" he links "a line of shadowy tracks/ Across the tinted snow". The psychical symbol of "shadowy tracks" does not imply Frost's submission to nature but his ultimate wrestle with the force in nature. It is significantly clear that a stand-off between homo sapiens and nature is symbolically sketched in this poem:

I see for Nature no defeat
 In one tree's overthrow
 Or for myself in my retreat
 For yet another blow.¹⁵⁰ (9 – 12)

Nature is not vanquished "In one tree's overthrow". Similarly man is not worsted in his "retreat/ For yet another blow". That neither nature nor man wins or loses is the quintessence of Frost's resolute conviction. Samuel Coale penetratingly observes that both nature and man "exist to encounter each other anew, and all that Frost would ask of us is 'You come too'."¹⁵¹

Like plants and woods, the images of death-rebirth and incarnation are preponderantly conspicuous in In the Clearing. The images of "And I may return/ If dissatisfied/ With what I learn/ From having died" (p. 413), "I might even claim, he was Sirius/ (Think of presuming to call him Gus)/ The star itself — Heaven's greatest star,/ Not a meteorite, but an avatar — / Who had made an overnight descent/ To show by deeds he didn't resent" (p. 421), "It was in a state/ Of atomic One./ Matter was begun — / And in fact complete,/ One and yet discrete/ To conflict and pair./ Everything was there,/ Every single thing/ Waiting was to bring,/ Clear from hydrogen/ All the way to men" (p. 426), "But God's own descent/ Into flesh was meant/ As a demonstration/ That the supreme merit/ Lay in risking spirit/ In substantiation" (p. 435) which stand out in the poems "Away!", "One More Brevity", "A Never Naught Song" and "Kitty Hawk" are suggestive of Frost's intimate experience of spirituality or greater life.

"Away!" presents the images of death and rebirth vividly. Frost says, "This is a real death poem".¹⁵² But it is also a poem which impressively discloses Frost's vital love for life and earth. In the earlier poem "Birches" Frost wants to "get away from earth awhile/ And then come back to it and begin over" for he firmly believes "Earth's the right place for love:/ I don't know where it's likely to

go better". Most of Frost's late images and symbols are sharper than the early ones. In "Away!" he suggests to forget the myth of Adam and Eve "Put out of the Park" and acquaints us with his unique imagination: "And I may return/ If dissatisfied/ With what I learn/ From having died". Though Richard Eberhart finally recognizes this poem as "a fantasy, a myth" he has the idea that Frost "arrogates to himself power usually accorded to God. He thinks he is God and gives himself the audacity to determine life or death".¹⁵³ But it would be fair to construe the meaning of the verse metaphorically. Frost's idea of returning from death if he is dissatisfied with what he learns from having died should not presumably be analogized with the Christian belief of resurrection. Frost who "burns with the appetites of life", fervidly wants to live amid human beings and hence he metaphorically verbalizes his outstanding idea to conquer death. Frost's perception of returning from death to life may also indicate rebirth of the soul which a Hindu believes in.

"Kitty Hawk", the most central and longest poem (471 lines) in In the Clearing is, according to John Holmes, "a summation" of Frost's thinking.¹⁵⁴ Frost says, "It's a good deal about flight".¹⁵⁵ But in fact this poem provides flight or ascent image as well as descent image. The descent image is strikingly concerned with the idea of incarnation while the ascent image is related to the creative energy of human being.

As a "documentary piece" "Kitty Hawk" relates the poet's experiences of two visits to the Outer Banks of North Carolina. Being failed to conquer the heart of his fiancée, Elinor White, Frost despondently made his first trip to the rural area of Kitty Hawk and "Nag's Head" in the late autumn of 1894; this poetic or emotive flight "Into the unknown" which is analogized with the Wright brothers' staggering space adventure turns out to be the theme of "Part One" — the first section of "Kitty Hawk":

It was on my tongue
 To have up and sung
 The initial flight
 I can see now might—
 Should have been — my own
 Into the unknown,
 Into the sublime
 Off these sands of Time
 Time had seen amass
 From his hourglass.¹⁵⁶ (40-49)

Frost revisits Kitty Hawk in 1953 on the fiftieth anniversary of the Wright brothers' epoch-making flight which is emblematically delineated in "Part Two". In this section the poet celebrates the soaring mechanical enterprise of human being. He no more thinks that science is inimical to poetry. It is the scientific advancement which significantly signalizes the twists and turns in Frost's imagistic and symbolistic strategy. The Wright brothers' "leap in air" may be recognized as a plurivalent symbol. This symbol of flight uniquely unifies the aeronaut and the poet. It not only symbolizes modern civilization but the spiritually soaring imagination of the poet. Like the flight metaphor, the descent metaphor is significantly wielded in "Kitty Hawk". It does not symbolically resemble the fall of snow in "Stopping by Woods" and "Desert Places" or the fall of apple in "After Apple-Picking" and "The Cow in Apple Time". The descent of spirit in "Kitty Hawk" which makes us able to plunge into the "hugeness of space" is concerned with the notion of the Incarnation:

But God's own descent
 Into flesh was meant
 As a demonstration

That the supreme merit
 Lay in risking spirit
 In substantiation.¹⁵⁷ (219 – 224)

This descent image of spirit echoes the image of “And from a cliff top is proclaimed/ The gathering of the souls for birth” depicted in the earlier poem “The Trial by Existence”. Nevertheless Frost’s descent image is reminiscent of Emerson’s image of “There seems to be a necessity in spirit to manifest itself in material forms” pictured in “Nature”.¹⁵⁸ To Frost “Our instinctive venture/ Into .../ The material” (ll. 214 – 216) is never reprehensible. Speaking of “Kitty Hawk” Frost says: “all ... the great enterprise of life, of the world, ... of our race, is our penetration into matter, deeper and deeper: carrying the spirit deeper into matter. And though it looks like something different out into space, that’s just deeper into matter Put it that way. And that is our destiny— that is why science is our greatness”.¹⁵⁹ Since Frost attaches great importance to science he typically renders thanks to the “God of machine/ Peregrine machine”. (ll. 462 – 463).

At his poetic career’s end, Frost simultaneously glorifies the uniqueness of “substantiation” and the sublimity of “spirit” or mind without which the universe becomes insentient. “Like a kitchen spoon/ Of a size Titanic” spirit “keep[s] all things stirred”. Due to boundless power of mind “We have made a pass/ At the infinite, / Made it, as it were,/ Rationally ours”. (ll. 362 – 365). The poet remains sanguine about the intellectual sovereignty of homo sapiens. The “ray” which we “dart” from our “head” and “heart”, scientifically and poetically orders the universe and gives it “wholeness”.

The images which recurrently occur in In the Clearing are “trees”, “woods”, “animal”, “rebirth”, “spirit”, “flight”, “substantiation” and

“incarnation”. Material, psychical and spiritual symbols loom large in this volume.

Our analysis of major images and symbols in the final phase of Frost’s poetry evinces that Frostian images are substantially gleaned from both material world and *spiritual universe*. Frost’s subtle experience of human life and intimate wisdom of eternity singularly heighten his symbolistic strategy.

Images and symbols which are inseparable in Frostian Poetic world, are “Too lofty and original to rage”. In our thesis we have made an honest attempt to fathom those, so diverse and myriad in meanings. Since Frost always enthuses his readers with “miles to go” and “promises to keep”, future researchers will come forward with new promises to illumine some provinces of Frostian poetry, lying unexplored and untrodden.

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