Chapter -5

Being-in-the-World Versus Being-in-the-Universe

As in the case of the ancient mythmakers, the cycle of the life is not limited to the prospect of Being-in-the-world. Being-in-the-Universe, in spite of the fact that it appears to be a mere consequence of being-in-the-world, needs a great leap of imagination in order to feel as to how it looks like being-in-the-Universe. Universe is an unlimited phenomenon. Man in order to take a leap into the sense of being-in-the-Universe, has to temperamentally evolve for himself an imaginative set of mind that can give the needful spiritual and aesthetic fulfilment. This, according to Robert Frost, is the final gist and meaning of life in the world of existence.

There are two poems of Frost’s early age in which he painfully regrets the total bygone-ness and eclipse of the ages of myths and legends. The two poems are “Auspex” and “Once by the Pacific.” In his “Auspex,” quite in the manner of a brave child boasting to his parents, Robert Frost tells how he was not taken away by the eagle. The entire poem is worth quoting. The poem is not there in Complete Poems of Robert Frost. It is included in Elizabeth Shepley Sergeant’s Robert Frost: The Trial by Existence. The poem is as follows:

Once in a Californian Sierra

I was swooped down upon when I was small

And measured but not taken after all

By a great eagle bird in all his terror.

Such auspices are very hard to read

My parents when I ran to them averted

I’d been rejected by the royal bird
As one who would not make a Ganymede.

Not find a barkeep to the gods in me?

I have resented ever since that day

When any but myself presumed to say

That there was anything I couldn't be. (10 - 11)

After quoting the above poem at full length, Elizabeth Shepley Sergeant comments, "As he grew older, the problem of make-believe stirred Rob's thinking and his conscience. He used to say to himself with remarkably adult insight that he would be happy if he could have one single day when he did not lie or pretend to himself. It was all right if he knew he lied" (11). Needless to say, as one grows up, one starts sticking to Plato's formula of Reason-Analysis-Logic (logo-centric)-Knowledge. It is unfortunate that one blissfully forgets the formula of Socrates which originally initiates a child into autistic imagination. Socrates' formula as against Plato goes like this: Intuition-Aberration (autism)-Silence (antinominalism)-Wisdom. Child's way of thinking for Robert Frost, as it is for Socrates, is an opening into the world of mythmaking.

Plato's formula lands one into the practical world of existence. This may be called being-in-the-world. As against this, Socrates' formula of wisdom lands one into the state of being-in-the-universe. The ancient mythmakers always approximated their thoughts and imaginations to a state of being-in-the-universe, even when such being-in-the-universe is absurd in itself. The ancient myths may be absurd but they are not unreal to life. In some manner or the other it can be stated that practical life of man measures squarely with the Socratian formula of Intuition-Aberration-Silence-Wisdom.
The eagle in Frost's poem is a 'bird in all his terror,' and not that bold heroic emblem bird of Ancient Rome. He is telling here in quite a childlike manner as to how the Roman royal bird was 'in all his terror' and not in its age-old royal gait of courage and bravery. He is symbolically deploring the sad bygone-ness of the heroic age of the Greco-Roman myths and legends. In the same regretting vein he also writes: "There would be more than ocean-water broken / Before God's last Put out the Light was spoken" ("Once by the Pacific" CP 314).

The negative suggestive reference to the Biblical "Let there be Light" (Gen. 1:3) is obvious. The above lines are reminiscent of his utter hopeless mood on realising that all the assurances in the world are illusory and false. While the 'great eagle bird in all his terror' suggests at the eclipse of the Greco-Roman age of myths and legends, 'God's last Put out the Light' draws a final curtain on the Judaeo-Christian spiritual age of myths and legends. In short, what Frost says in the above two instances is that, both the most fulfilling and hopeful ages of Rome and Christianity are gone; and in their place we have the most placid and unenthusiastic modern age where there is neither adventure nor thrill of being-in-the-world.

For the childlike perception of Robert Frost, the loss of the Greco-Roman and the Judaeo-Christian myths and legends amounts to very death and devastation of dreams and vision, which are permanently gone. And in this loss the whole humanity was thrown into a painful hopeless modern age. Paul Goodman refers to an anecdote in which Frost as a child, in a pure childlike manner, told his mother and father as to how an eagle came near him with its claws open in a fearful attempt of lifting him away into clouds; but at the instance he bravely scared the bird and saved himself. This childlike imaginative bravery on the part of Robert Frost is mainly responsible for his imagination tilting
towards myths and mythmaking. Even the most realistic poems like “Two Tramps in Mud Time” and “The Black Cottage” are conceived in the mytho-poetic imagination. The real beauty and charm of these poems is in their nearness to the mythical than the real.

**A. The Universe and the Created World as a Revelation**

Robert Frost contends that everything in the universe is a revelation and not a matter of rational, intellectual and logical perception. In this context the Greek word *Apocalypse* ‘revelation’ expresses the idea that God through His created text (that is, Nature) unveils the secrets about things as they are. Frost in his poem “All Revelation” tells exactly the same thing: The ‘things the mind has pondered on,’ what the ‘head thrusts’ or intuition penetrates by that ‘cyb’laean avenue’ (that is the presented or envisioned in the flora and the plants of the region) reveals or apocalyptises the entirety and totality of ‘the impervious geode,’ that is the impenetrable earth, in its total spatio-temporal expansion which includes the pre-historic times also. What all that perspired is that intuitive ‘moment,’ which may be a ‘strange apparition of the mind,’ has ‘gone’ or vanished. It proves that all the personal rapports and interactions with things are fleetingly held in vanishing moments. But it ultimately culminates into a consistent vision not through rational and intellectual associations of mind but through intuitive apprehensions.

Frost uses the word ‘geode’ (‘the impervious geode’) in its etymological sense that is Geo=Earth; Eidde=Form (Greek). In spite of the fact that it is impervious, that is impenetrable or not easily influenced by ideas, its inner crust or its hidden reality glowed at every point and facet like ‘crystals’ on being exposed to ‘a ray cathode.’
This 'A head thrusts in as for the view' is Frost's individual style of poetic imagination as an alternative to facing chaotic riddle of experiencing things. The launched projects of the head, that is intuitions, are invariably encountered by the same kind of head thrusts returned by the 'impervious geode' because this impervious geode is given to us just as we are ourselves given to ourselves. The impervious geode gives itself to us when we can give ourselves to it. Hence we and the earth are mutual givers to each other. 'So none need be afraid of size.' When we realize this, all fears vanish. The existential fears automatically turn into dependable faith.

In a way it all happens like a myth or a miracle experienced intuitively. This intuitive initiation or what Frost calls 'head thrust' is sufficient. We have

Eyes seeking the response of eyes
Bring out the stars, bring out the flowers,
Thus concentrating earth and skies
So none need be afraid of size.

All revelation has been ours. (CP 444)

This 'revelation' being 'ours' has two simultaneous connotations. It is dearly owned because it is ours and in a more profound way it is created out of ourselves, by ourselves as the 'being-in-the-world' fondly encountered the 'being-in-the-universe.' The anthropomorphic metaphor of the eyes ('Eyes seeking the response of eyes') is an apt symbol.

Ever since Plato rigidly formulated the triple principle of reason, intellect and logic as the rational parameters of thought, the Socratian formula of intuition, faith and inspired fecundity were thrown out as insubstantial tools of knowing and understanding the immensity of the created world. The ancient Greco-Roman mythmakers as well as
the Biblical prophets laid a greater trust on intuition, faith, and fecundity in order to slip into the mystery of the universe and comprehend the same as a revealed knowledge, in the moments of dependence on concentration, with the help of which arises knowledge and vision of things as they are. But this knowledge and vision of things, in spite of the fact that it has foundation of the immensity of the present circumstances of visionary, offers the most requisite satisfaction and fulfilment. Myth, therefore, is an aesthetic experience.

The anthropomorphic personal manner in which the 'impervious geode' offers an insight into the reality of its crust 'of crystals with a ray cathode' is comparable to the Israelite conception of the reality of God, that is the personal character of Jehovah. This insight into the divine reality was attributed by the Israelites to revelation. It is all a matter of personal encounter with the God who spoke to them.

1. Fear of Deluge

In a passing reference to the poem "Once by the Pacific," Harold Bloom says as follows:

Frost's religion, as a poet, was the American religion that Emerson founded. A latecomer exegete of that religion, I once offered its credo as everything that can be broken should be broken, a Gnostic motto that eminently suits Frost's poetry, where God, whether in "A Masque of Reason," "A Masque of Mercy" or in "Once by the Pacific," is clearly animated neither by reason nor mercy but by the blind necessities of being the Demiurge. (4)

There is a slight misplaced emphasis when Bloom states about 'the American religion that Emerson founded.' In fact Emerson himself is an inspired blend of the Greco-
Roman and the Judaeo-Christian religious grandeur. Bloom is quite correct in stating that
"A Masque of Reason," "A Masque of Mercy," and "Once by the Pacific" are clearly animated neither by reason nor by mercy but by the blind necessities of being the Demiurge. It is a fact that 'Demiurge' is overpowered by intuition and aberration concerning the weak prospects for the humanity on earth. This intuitive phenomenon is evidently a fall out of the ancient Greek and modern Christian traditions of thought and action.

"Once by the Pacific" is one of the most important small poems of Robert Frost, which envisages the profound mythmaking potential of the poem in transposing consolidated felt experience of the fears of death into a profound mythology. But the profundity of poetic truth lies in the sharply reflected Christian mythological parameters. At the same time, the expression 'the clouds were low and hairy in the skies' is a possible reflection at the pagan Bacchanalian revels. The fear complex assumes schizophrenic dimensions when he says 'Like locks blown forward in the gleam of eyes.' A symbolic suggestive manner is the evidence of Frost's poetic imagining which is quite unassumingly archetypal and unintentionally mythical.

Norman H. Holland is partly right when he says, "I think this poem had at the core of its creation a widespread and well known childhood fear" (16). But the autistic imaginative manner of this 'childhood fear' is not what Holland adds in the very next page: "I find yet another tendency, once that works along with vagueness, namely personification. Frost gives the whole scene human attributes" (17).

The poem can be considered as an archetypal self-inculcated mythic body-cross; a child with night fears tries to chase away that most fearful something that stares and scares the child’s very being. The imagined picture as an objective artefact in its turn
becomes a matter of painful experience. There is that fear of the impending Judaeo-Christian deluge. Quite ironically, the presence of the 'Pacific' (the peaceful) conceives a fearful threatening mytho-poetic picture.

The violence in the vision of the sea is obvious. The images like 'rage,' 'din,' and the nerve chiselling 'dark intent' are evidences. 'A night of dark intent was coming' and this intimation is presented in the sea whose waves are about to do 'something to the shore / that water never did to land before.' It is as though the final Biblical Deluge is imminent, as he says 'There would be more than ocean water broken.' The danger being imminent – that is what even the ever peaceful Pacific, as an elemental (water) fact of nature, intimates in its awfully restless movements.

The awful restlessness of the sea is the infelt experience of the poet because the impending danger is not merely the emergence of 'a night of dark intent,' it is of total annihilation of the age. Therefore, the final determination is 'someone had better be prepared for rage' that too 'Before God's last Put out the Light was spoken.' The antithetical flutter that Frost creates in the anti-analogy of the Biblical 'Let there be Light' is an evidence that Frost was soaked in the Bible as said by Lawrance Thompson. Holland further confirms the Biblical influence when he says, "And finally, the poem, having begun with the storm, ends with God and the last judgement, a final doubling, a bigness bigger than even waves and continent, an immensity of words called forth by words" (17). The last line being in the form of mystical witch-like incantation of invoking final destruction, has all the total shiver. Therefore Holland further adds, "Frost would drop into a deep voice for God's words at the end" (17).

'God's last Put out the Light' has the tragic force of the Othello's speech before killing Desdemona, in William Shakespeare's Othello:
Yet I'll not shed her blood,
Nor scar that whiter skin of hers than snow,
And smooth as monumental alabaster.
Yet she must die, else she'll betray more men.

Put out the light, and then put out the light. (5.2. 3-7)

Writing about the last line of the poem, Harold Bloom says, “A God who echoes Othello at his most murderous is himself crazed by jealousy. Frost’s celebrated negativity is a secularised negative theology almost derived from Emerson, in so far as it was purely temperamental” (3). In so far as the Christian theology is concerned, everything is personally ‘temperamental’ in Robert Frost. His metaphysical rebellion can be likened to the Puritanical Milton. Emerson too resembles Milton in this context. As Frost writes in his “Two Tramps in Mud Time,”

... but don’t forget
The lurking frost in the earth beneath
That will steal forth after the sun is set
And show on the water its crystal teeth. (CP 358)

Stanley Burnshaw, Robert Frost’s famous Biographer remarked that ‘Something’ is the most significant single word in his poems. This is Frost’s poetic manner of finding something wild, and in this context, ominous. Accordingly, the use of the word ‘someone’ (‘Someone had better be prepared for rage’) is a direct threat and a precaution. This kind of objective third person manner of mystical revelations has a direct shattering psychological effect on the readers.

The incantative import of the last line obviously has something more dangerous than the impending darkness. It forecasts the final Deluge. The story of the deluge or the
flood is a revision of a foreign myth, probably Mesopotamian myth of natural catastrophes accompanied by random destruction. In this context the words of John L. McKenzie, in his “Aspects of Old Testament Thought” are worth quoting. Says McKenzie:

It attributes them to the capricious anger of the Gods; for divine anger, like human anger, can be irrational and human beings can do nothing except to submit to superior power. To the Israelites this was an erroneous conception of the deity. This error was corrected not by eliminating the story but by rewriting it in such a way that the anger of Yahweh is intelligibly motivated by human wickedness. In natural catastrophe the Israelites saw the righteous judgement of God on sin and they expressed this insight by retelling an existing story. This is mytho-poetic thinking and, again, the transforming element in the conception of God. (77:28)

In poetically rewriting the story, Frost has an immediate human purpose. In giving human attributes to the abnormal natural phenomenon, Frost appears to be poetically capturing the entire mythic grandeur of the situation. Moreover, the use of personification (like ‘the sea looked’ and ‘thought,’ the night has an ‘intent,’ and the shore was ‘lucky’) has a special mytho-poetic purpose. Unlike the Old Testament myths Frost’s myths are essentially polytheistic. Personification of elemental forces is essentially a pagan formula.

Expressions like clouds being ‘hairy in the sky,’ and their looking like ‘locks blown forward in the gleam of eyes,’ night of ‘dark intent’ are the finest examples of using pagan imagery for a Christian purpose. Here the British Romantics more particularly P. B. Shelley and John Keats are the influencing forces on Frost.
2. Fear of Loneliness

Robert Frost's mythmaking techniques are eclectic and extremely tenuous in being sensitive. As Robert Pack writes in his "Frost's Enigmatical Reserve: The Poet as Teacher and Preacher," the core principle of his mythmaking is 'enigmatic' available for a serious 'indirection' on the part of the reader also.

In his "The Most of It" Frost invents for himself a comforting myth, after having feared that he was lonely and unprotected in this universe. Conscious awareness of being alone in the world is the most troubling experience. The poem starts in this most seeming optimistic note: "He thought he kept the universe alone." This false optimism came to him because, "For all the voice in answer he could wake / Was but the mocking echo of his own / From some tree-hidden cliff across the lake" (CP 451). But what all he wanted was "... counter love, original response" (CP 451). Nothing of that happened until he had the following apocalyptic vision that comforts him:

    And nothing ever came of what he cried
    Unless it was the embodiment that crashed
    In the cliff's talus on the other side,
    And then in the far distant water splashed.
    But after a time allowed for it to swim,
    Instead of proving human when it neared
    And someone else additional to him,
    As a great buck it powerfully appeared,
    Pushing the crumpled water up ahead,
    And landed pouring like a waterfall,
    And stumbled through the rocks with horny tread,
And forced the underbrush—and that was all. (CP 451)

The expressions like “As a great buck,” ‘like a waterfall,’ and ‘with horny tread’ do not fail to draw our attention to the great Greek God Pan. He did not appear to the poet as another ‘human’ companion. But it is something much more satisfying. In forming ‘the underbrush’ it cleansed and cleared all the doubts that entrenched themselves at the bottom of his heart. The vision that nature offered as a comforting comparison ‘was all’ that he wanted; and the same was supplied by Pan and his doings on earth. What more is required when ‘that was all’ what he wanted? Frost appears to say that loss of Christological Heaven need not bother us; pagan Pan is there to stand by us on earth.

It is all, as Robert Pack confirms “As if man has witnessed divine casualty unfolding in a visionary instant” (14). Before he had this ‘visionary instant’ he experienced some startling happenings as fearful and arresting portents of what was to come as a comforting ‘visionary instant.’ This is the design of nature or the manner in which Pan manifests himself, ‘... it was the embodiment that crashed / In the cliff’s talus...’ There are three possibilities that culminated into this myth of a vision. It is an incarnation; it is a revelation; and it is an evolutionary physical phenomenon.

But it is not certainly a mere physical event. It is something more. ‘As a great buck it powerfully appeared.’ It also pushed ‘the crumpled water ahead.’ It is such a ‘crumpled water’ that could otherwise have submerged the whole earth in a deluge. The ‘crumpled water’ was mysteriously metamorphosed into a comforting ‘waterfall.’ All this is the doing of the ‘great buck’ walking ‘through the rocks with horny tread.’ The Greek God Pan is goat footed. In Frost, he is buck footed. The final stands of Frost are
like this. What if the Christian God made man lost and lonely, the great Greek God Pan is there to comfort us on the earth.

Frost goes to the extent of making the Christian God place this ‘apology’ to Job in “A Masque of Reason”:

Too long I’ve owed you this apology
For the apparently unmeaning sorrow
You were afflicted with in those old days,
But it was of the essence of the trial
You shouldn’t understand it at the time
It had to seem unmeaning to have meaning. (CP 589)

This is out and out a pagan manner of persuading that after due troubles and trials only, meaning comes to man. ‘Tragedy’ according to the ancient Greeks is a fallout of *Hubris* ‘self-pride,’ the self-pride of the sort with which the poem “The Most of It” starts, ‘He thought he kept the universe alone.’ This pride in him has to be removed. Pan creates such necessary events wherewith man comprehends the real meaning of life that it is nothing but a mutual interdependency of man and nature as comfortable companions. In the heart of nature man is never lonely. He is in a comforting company. This is one more comforting myth of Robert Frost that results in strategically inter-fusing the ancient Greco-Roman and Judaeo-Christian mythical particulars as poetic symbols.

Robert Pack arrives at a slightly misplaced conclusion in stating that “The buck, thought not what the man expected, may be regarded as an embodiment of God’s presence in nature—an embodiment that at least for Adam led to the creation of Eve” (15). The ‘embodiment of God’s presence in nature’ is a pantheistic formula. The Christological God just created the universe and permanently distanced Himself from the
universe He created. His son had to bear the responsibility of looking after the universe He created and left for itself. But the Greek God Pan permanently took the charge of looking after nature which includes man. If the title “The Most of It” contains the Christological feel of insufficiency, the pagan ‘that was all’ as a concluding remark provides the needful comfort, through intimate companionship to man in this world.

Frostian tonal irony is implicit in concluding the poem with ‘that was all.’ Such an ironic gesture of defeatism and melancholy is the final gist of John Keats also in all his poetry. Both of them prominently point out the human limitations as a knowing agent. As in “Ode to a Grecian Urn,” Keats writes, “… that is all / Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know” (49-50).

3. Fear of Inevitability of Death

There are some clear death poems in Frost. For him death in all probability is an elusive concept ever challenging man’s rational comprehension. The only way to know its magnum is through mythmaking, not through reasoning, not even through intuition. Death for all is an inevitable certainty. But through metaphysical approach, its intensity of fear and anxiety can be minimised. That is what Frost does in his poems. He postulates certain aphoristic statements and aims at perceiving the intensity of death.

His poem “Nothing Gold Can Stay” celebrates the death theme by obliquely suggesting at the mortality or impermanence of life. Frost provides hints mythologically and leaves for us the understanding of his concept of mortality. It is one of the beautiful small poems of Frost and the entire poem, being so small, can be quoted here:

Nature’s first green is gold,

Her hardest hue to hold.

Her early leaf’s a flower;
But only so an hour.

Then leaf subsides to leaf.

So Eden sank to grief,

So dawn goes down to day.

Nothing gold can stay. (CP 272)

In stating ‘Nature’s first green is gold’ there is that suggestion of Garden of Eden before sinning, which was highly precious. But it could not be held long. ‘Her early leaf is a flower’ only for a moment. Thereafter, (that is after Eve sinning) ‘Eden sank to grief’ as Adam and Eve fell to the earth. Thus the eternal dawn gives way to the day and all other consecutions thereafter like evening, night, and finally death itself. All these changes are there only on the earth. In the Garden of Eden everything was static, just as in the Heaven.

The whole poem depicts the pre and the post sinning phases of Eve in the Garden of Eden. There is a mild humour also in his ‘then leaf subsides to leaf’ which refers to Eve covering herself with leaves due to shame after sinning. Earlier it was all green leaves of the Garden, and then ‘leaf subsided to leaf.’

Gold in the sense of something very precious stands for life itself. The susceptibility of life for the human fate ultimately through ageing brings death. Charles Berger is not justified in arriving at the conclusion, “The last line goes down in order to come up again, like the sun. Echoing the title it takes on the force of a refrain, a daily dirge rather than an epitaph . . . . Art itself is synecdochal, an hour to a day, but an hour that is guaranteed, even as it cannot be prolonged” (155).

Berger fails to read the inevitable pathos in the delicately but surely maintained tonal connotative urgencies of the poem. The poem is figuratively about Mortio ‘death
instinct; approaching death; and, therefore, an ‘epitaph.’ It is certainly not a song celebrating hope that always lurks in the human minds. But, on the other hand, it reminds, in a flock singsong manner of the dirges, about the inevitability of death at the end. So ‘Nothing gold can stay.’

Fear of death may be true. But death itself had never been true in one’s personal experience. Mortio ‘death instinct’ has always two different connotations: The death of the self and the death of the others. The certainty of death as an idea comes to man from the death of others. Death of the self is continually postponed to the future. In his poem “In a Disused Graveyard,” Frost asks a question: “What is it men are shrinking from?” and concludes:

It would be easy to be clever
And tell the stones: Men hate to die
And have stopped dying now forever.
I think they would believe the lie. (CP 269)

‘Lie’ here is life, and so men would not believe death, that is truth. Thus men have stopped dying now forever. About the future they are not certain. Hence life in the present is a disused graveyard. In his “Dust of Snow,” Frost again writes of death with a pagan optimism:

The way a crow
Shook down on me
The dust of snow
From a hemlock tree.

Has given my heart
A change of mood
And saved some part
Of a day I had rued. (CP 270)

If a crow could shake down the dust of snow (cognate with fear of death), why not man? That is how life always fights death. Thus, if a man is forbidden by the structurally institutionalised world, he rebels and takes an imaginative rehabilitation in the world of myths, by way of engaging himself in the invocation of myths in whatever cultures and traditions they are found. Thus, we have the modern man of action; creative writer being the prime example of man of action, partaking his energies in the tendentious manner of mythmaking, myth-recreating and myth-de-creating. As William Righter rightly points out: "... whatever his purpose, point of view, or whatever his historical source, for any writer his myth is inevitably chosen in response to the spiritual condition of modern man, to the very fact of existence in a post-mythological age" (37-38).

A particular myth might have died a natural death in being pre-dated and outdated in its historical sense. But in its effective sense its conspicuous fundamental elements are in the permanent heritage of man. Moreover, the practical social and cultural circumstances that went to create the particular myth in a particular age are universally present in any age as the moral and ethical explanations and reasons. Since these explanations and reasons are permanently present in one form or the other universally, the created myth of the times permanently lives in the social consciousness, to use Jung's logic, and emerges as a poetic or fictional reflection whenever it finds the times propitious.
Robert Frost’s humour and irony on all such pundits who always talk of the end of the world and put the people’s minds in dread is obvious in his “Fire and Ice.” ‘Fire and Water’ are not the only possible elemental end point terminals. There are ‘air’ and ‘earth’ also. The composite balance of these elements never prompts the final doom or end. The universe with all its grim ironic incomprehensibility always gives a hope of permanent survival. That at least is the ancient Greek wisdom of existence, which Ovid characterized in his Metamorphosis. Like the ancient Greek pagans, Frost is an optimist. Life opens up eternal prospects for him. So ‘how’ or ‘why’ or ‘where’ of impending death should not trouble the mind in the present. Such troubled psychological state forecloses life. Greek spirit would not admit it. “Readiness is all” (5.2. 210) is said by Hamlet in William Shakespeare’s Hamlet. A courage-to-be comes with the ancient Greek spirit and not through the Christian temper or temperament which constantly reminds of the impending death.

B. Refuge in the World of Thought and Imagination

In his “The Culture of India as Envisioned by Sri Aurobindo,” C. C. Dutt writes about the transcendence of “. . . imperfect mental man into a perfect supermental Gnostic being” (12). This ‘imperfect mental man’ is a crusader into the mundane practicalities of life in the context of which he perceives a prospect for ‘supermental Gnostic being’ in the cross-confabulation of the ancient myths. This confabulation takes place quite instinctively and instantaneously in a ‘Gnostic’ moment; and it forms itself into a symbolic whole obliquely and suggestively envisaging and elevating into a heightened state of experience that takes a unique aesthetic form. This aesthetic form causes a heightening of one’s consciousness to a transcended state of pure happiness, wherewith it
becomes knowledgeable for the person that there is a world of thought and imagination, much superior and much more agreeable for man's state of mind in its elevated context.

This world of imagination is confectioned out of the contradictory ideas and images (symbols) from the divergently opposed mythological particulars of Greco-Roman and Judaeo-Christian myths in the poetry of Robert Frost. These myths themselves are abundantly illustrative of a unified world order, Gnostic presence of which becomes enchanting as a parallel perfect world order in comparison to the world which we inhabit.

This Gnostic act of imagination quite esoterically, even mystically proposes a concrete vision of life, which is simple, yet abundantly human, forwarding a rare poetic assurance to man in this segregated context of life in the modern times, which holds no hope and no assurance to his safety and security. What all Frost wants to suggest through ephemeral symbolism is that even for self-destructive and self-negating modern existential man, there is an abundant hope of dignified survival, if he diverts and directs his imagination and thought to the ancient life-giving legends and myths.

Modern man, who is scared of the present day world order that threatens his very existence and survival, can live in peace and harmony by way of developing a faith on himself through what John Keats called 'Negative Capability,' a capability to remain unshattered even in the presence of 'doubts,' difficulties,' and 'mysteries.' Such 'Negative Capability' for Frost comes through the chance particulars of ancient myths. These mythic particulars seem to be contrary and contradictory as envisioned by the prehistoric people in their most afeared context of facing this unassuring and threatening nature of life.
Robert Frost has been able to bring to his poetry a freshness and ease which develops from imaginatively and poetically compromised interdependent mythic particulars along with the appropriate mythological references. All these adorn his poetic themes with touches of igniting originality and beauty.

1. The Myth of Far-Away Meadow

Robert Frost, like Milton, as a true Puritan that he is, never reconciled with the Catholic tyrannical Jehovah. He is not even ready to compromise, leave aside adjustment, with the theology that berates man and his due dignity of being. Man being callously distanced from his nativity, that is the garden of Eden, out of his metaphysical rebellion, Robert Frost considers it as a sadistic design of a vengeful God.

The oral transmission manner of telling a painful story of the past is evident in the poem "The Last Mowing." The initiation itself is in the manner of recollecting something about the teller's unforgettable past:

There's a place called Far-away Meadow

We never shall mow in again,

Or such is the talk at the farmhouse:

The meadow is finished with men. (CP 338)

The use of initial capitals in the expression 'Far-away Meadow' is significant. It suggests something special about the 'Meadow.' According to the Genesis story of the Bible, God took the man and settled him in the Garden of Eden to cultivate it and take care of it: "And the Lord God took the man, and put him into the Garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it" (Gen. 2:15). After the fall, the Garden of Eden certainly became a "Far-away Meadow." 'Meadow' is Frost's metaphor for the Garden of Eden. It is not being cultivated and taken care of by man because after the fall, man is not there to take care of
it. Also, there is no hope for man to go back to the Garden of Eden. Hence the painful reflection, 'we never shall mow again.' In the "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening," we are already told that the omniscient owner of the woods has a house in the village. This house in the village is nothing but the Church that God maintains in every village. The same poetic sentiments are expressed in stating 'Or such is the talk at the farmhouse.'

Since it is only a talk at the farmhouse, there is a lurking hope of return in the inner most mind of the poet. That may be a mere rumour; there is a strong intuition that it should be only rumour. However, the hopeless state of man in the present as it stands today is, 'The meadow is finished with men.'

The poet expresses a strong passionate desire that at least flowers should grow there. He says that 'now is the chance for the flowers' to grow there, but only wild flowers, since there is no man to cultivate and take care of the meadow. This is the season for all flowers to grow there. As Greek mythology puts it, Persephone, with all her flowers, visits the garden in her appointed season after temporarily slipping out from Hades and the clutches of Pluto.

But then, there is another danger for the flowers. The trees finding place penetrable ('seeing the opening') may grow there and render it into a 'shadowy clime.' The poet is afraid of the trees for two important reasons: In the shades of the trees flowers cannot grow, and the Biblical God had forbidden him from eating the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. The real problem for man in his pre-fall Adamic state of survival was that he had no way of perceiving and distinguishing the tree of knowledge from all the rest which are, by implication, the trees of ignorance. It is only "... in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good
and evil" (Gen. 3:5). Therefore, Frost says, ‘the trees are all I’m afraid of.’ The immediate present reason is ‘that flowers can’t bloom in the shade of trees. The unfortunate state is in the fact that ‘The meadow is done with the tame.’ Only the untamed trees grow there because man is no more there to cultivate it. The growth of these trees in their own unruly fashion is an imminent obstruction for Persephone’s arrival. For the flowers, if at all they have to grow there, this is the proper time (‘season’) as the trees have not yet established their presence there. He bitterly envies the wild trees as they are going to occupy the place vacated by him in the Garden of Eden. So, in the meantime, he invokes the flowers in the following lines:

    The place for the moment is ours
    For you, oh tumultuous flowers,
    To go to waste and go wild in,
    All shapes and colours of flowers,
    I needn’t call you by name (CP 338)

About the last lines of the poem, Herbert Mark says that they are “The most poignant lines Frost ever wrote” (131).

    The meadow itself is placed on the verge of extinction. Thus the myth of the meadow being momentary, expresses the serious concerns for the transitoriness of everything mortal in human world. It is very difficult to say whether the meadow is beautiful because it offers a pleasant vision or its preciousness lies in its being destined for devastation. There is an echo of Wallace Stevens’ theory in his poem “Sunday Morning” that “Death is the mother of beauty” (88). Therefore, Mark further states: “The last two lines are an unusual instance of what Richard Potter called ‘negative
The expression ‘negative designation’ is a mere re-wording of Keats’ ‘Negative Capability.’ Again, for the flowers, which are destined ‘to go to waste and go wild in,’ giving names is a useless act. If giving names is the first act of poetising (for giving names is a fond act of feeling intense love for the particulars; in the present context flowers) the agony of impending ‘to go to waste and go wild’ forbids the poet from seeking attachment and love of owning. The Genesis informs us that the first act of Adam, as a cognising agent, is naming “And Adam gave names to all cattle, and to the fowl of the air, and to every beast of the field” (Gen. 2:20). But the initial impulse of naming in order to love becomes a pale act of regret after comprehending that whatever is named is destined to destruction and loss. This ‘negative designation’ is in itself a palpable myth, a counter or contrary myth if one so desires to call it.

In stating ‘the moment is ours’ the poet is identifying himself with the flowers. Invoking the fellowship of the flowers, he transposes all his violence and anger to the flowers. This precisely is the angst of de-homing. Therefore, he wants the flowers to conduct the rebellion on his behalf. Frost appears to be establishing a wild trade union along with the flowers as its other members. Here, as well as in “Mending Wall,” there is an expression of helpless fury at the sadistic design of a vengeful God who autocratically distanced man from the Garden of Eden just for the sin of braving to eat the forbidden fruit. Thus, as a fallout of eating the fruit of knowledge (a forbidden fruit), man developed a contradiction instead of showing a humble obedience to God.

2. Rise from the Great Fall

Forgive, O’ Lord my little jokes on Thee
And I'll forgive Thy great big one on me

- Robert Frost

Robert Pack confirms, "Frost had his own games to play with the game life demanded he play" (10). Just like all other games, mythopoesis as a game, for that is the spirit in which he creates his poems, requires two rival parties. Both the parties that is the self and the other are equal partners in this game, with final choice and victory being reserved to the human side, that is his own side. This ferocious distinction and difference between the self and the other is in itself a convenient metaphysical myth that hastens the rivalry, and thus the ultimate myth of his own poetry.

In his "The Oven Bird" we have a pragmatic echo to the defeatist sense of fall from the Heaven that is our original home in the Garden of Eden. Very often it is the angst of this de-homing that houses in Frost an uncontrollable tribal fury. In such furious moments we have a painful echo-re-creation of the myth of fall as a certain empirical fact which he painfully re-echoes in "The Oven Bird":

He says the early petal-fall is past

When pear and cherry bloom went down in showers
On sunny days a moment overcast;
And comes that other fall we name the fall.

He says the highway dust is over all
The bird would cease and be as other birds
But that he knows in singing not to sing
The question that he frames in all but words
Is what to make of a diminished thing. (CP 150)
After ‘the fall,’ man is certainly ‘a diminished thing.’ Robert Pack rightly summates the poem, ‘The season of fall is linked in ‘The Oven Bird’ with the fall from the Garden of Eden by the poetic act of naming: ‘And comes that other fall we name the fall.’ The poet has merged his voice with the oven bird, as Adam, in the Book of Genesis, names the animals” (11).

Ovenbird is a name for various birds that build oven-shaped nests, especially the South American genus Furnarius. The ‘early petal fall’ is unbearable for the bird, as its nest too falls down along with the autumn leaves. For the bird ‘the early petal fall is past,’ and for the poet the original home is lost. Both have a common predicament to share. After the petal fall that is finished early and after the loss of the original home in the Garden of Eden, both the bird and the poet have turned to diminished things (that is the new leaves are just growing). The defeatist tone is surely there. But what is obvious and explicit here is that after the winter, summer sets in and the ‘mid-wood bird’ can make “the solid tree trunks sound again” (CP 150). So there is a hope for the bird in the mystery of the seasonal changes. But for man such a favourable change in his fortune is not there. He ever remains ‘a diminished thing.’ He only knows naming; and in the act of naming he makes the ‘necessary angel’ (to borrow the favourite phrase of Wallace Stevens), that is, his imagination weaves the most needful myth around himself in order to protect himself.

Thus, ‘the diminished thing’ that is the poet has a question how to make his own fight, as diminished as he is. In a way, the very purpose of the myths that man makes is his way of protecting himself through the pleasant fictions (myths) in this harsh and uncongenial world, knowing fully well that the world, as well as nature as such, is not a friend and well wisher of man. In naming man, including the poet himself, ‘a diminished
thing' he shows his courage to fight out his case successfully, even if it were to be the case of Heaven.

Robert Frost's poetry evinces a strategic imaginative relapse to the Garden of Eden before Adam and Eve ate the fruit of knowledge. But quite ironically he wants to do it with the help of the same knowledge and insight that brought damnable predicament to man and his race. If so, it is a fervent plea to adopt for himself a myth of being-in-the-world with the help of his myth evoking poetic imagination. In a way, Robert Frost conducts a rebellion through his myths replete with fundamental doubts.

With such surging rebellious temper Frost makes his secular enigmatic myths. In the bird, as well as the poet, there is the echo of Greek Orpheus, the stricken God of the Mount Parnassus. In the 'Oven-bird' there is a veiled suggestion through undeclared pun for the bird that is woven by the poet. So we have the created bird myth and its 'early petal fall.' Here the first line of the poem is quite intriguing and important. Frost conditions the response of his readers by stating, 'There is a singer everyone has heard.' Even when we have not honestly heard the singer, the mid-wood bird myth gets realized if we accept this tricky mythmaking ways of Frost.

a. The Movement into Transcendence

Robert Frost's "Birches" celebrates the human need of aspiring to go back to Heaven after 'the fall.' The naturalist imagery of the poem is pleasantly deceptive. Under the spell of the verdure imagery lies hidden that serene human spiritual purpose of aspiring 'toward heaven.' The characteristic manner in which Frost echoes the Christological myth of the certainty of there-ness of the Heaven and the need of man to aspire to go there ultimately after innumerable trials, is just like birches that would bend down to the earth only to take a swing and leap 'toward heaven.'
Frost makes a sincere reportage concerning the intentionality of the ‘Birches’ as against “the straighter darker trees” (CP 152). The poem’s witchery is in the agitated tonal vibrations of the ‘voice’ in the manner of a musical instrument creating a harmony. But the symphonic harmony with the Christian spiritual vibration, towards the conclusion, is just the mytho-poetic manner of Frost pointing at the Christian canonical mythic precepts.

The Biblical boy (The Son of God) coming to the earth with a mission, his failing in the first attempt, and his way of reassuring himself and his disciples about his certain ‘Second Coming’ constitutes the major theme of the poem. Frank Lentricchia says, “In ‘Birches’ Frost begins to probe the power of his redemptive imagination as it moves from the playful phase toward the brink of dangerous transcendence. The movement into transcendence is a movement into a realm of radical imaginative freedom” (29).

In his “A Passing Glimpse,” Frost says, “Heaven gives its glimpses only to those / Not in position to look too close” (CP 311).

The cosmological distances like heaven above and hell below with the earth in between, is the most satisfying metaphysical idea. This kind of arrangement is necessary for spiritual yearning and adventure of ideas. The whole grandeur of heaven is in its being permanently put at an unapproachable distance. This distance, if closed down, the heaven is not heaven at all. Imaginative availability of heaven is a mytho-poetical idea. But practical unavailability and imaginative availability makes it permanently wonderful.

b. Faith in Resurrection

However contradictory and unconvincing may it be the good-Adam-myth is a haunting passion for Robert Frost, every generation out of its over-enthusiasm for
variation in the name of progress ultimately contributes for what 'she' in "The Black Cottage" disgustedly considers as 'descended into Hades.' The poem itself is a rueful reminiscence of the thoughts of the protagonist (the poet) incidentally visiting the deserted black cottage (black or dark because it is deserted), along with a church personage 'the minister.' While conversing with 'the minister' the poet brings back to his mind and utters passionately about the manner in which a happy family inhabited the cottage in the past and how the civil war brought forth the wreck on it when “the lives / That had gone out of it, the father first / Then the two sons, till she was left alone” (CP 75).

The cosy state of the house with all its harmony was a 'mark' or a conspicuous moment to measure the passage of time. The poet says, “It always seems to me a sort of mark / To measure how far fifty years have brought us” (CP 75). The cottage was once a living heaven. Setting of the Black cottage is important for its past glory in being an ideal human habitation. The poem symbolically brings out the warm and affectionate past with its inmates. It is an archaic picture. It can be called history cottage with its bygone glory.

It is a poem that records an emotional mythical picture of a deserted cottage, as all its inmates, except the lady of the house, went and died in the civil war. The black cottage in the sense of a neglected and forgotten cottage refers to the warm and affectionate house once it was. Frost always fondly cherished for a life-style undisturbed by the so-called progressive onslaughts. Every generation in its unfounded over-enthusiasm for doing something great ultimately contributes for a wild unw withstandable alteration which is nothing short of 'descended into Hades.' Hades is the Greek
mythological hell where all the bygone souls get tormented for reasons unknown and incomprehensive for human understanding.

The whole poem is more or less a deserted Gothic habitation. It is important not because of its architectural beauty, nor is it important for its hauntedness, but it is evocatively reminiscent of the humble folks that lived there. But time outdates everything mercilessly.

For, dear me, why abandon a belief
Merely because it ceases to be true.
Cling to it long enough, and not a doubt
It will turn true again, for so it goes
Most of the change we think we see in life
Is due to truths being in and out of favour. (CP 77)

Frost contends that man's belief in old truth should not be disowned. In the phenomenal evolution of the universe many truths may go out of fashion just like the black cottage. There is always a hope that it may come to life again. In the desert presently,

Sand dunes held loosely in tamarisk
Blown over and over themselves in idleness,
Sand grains should sugar in the natal dew
The babe born to the desert, the sand storm
Retard mid-waste my cowering caravans. (CP 77)

'The babe born to the desert' is clear enough suggestion at the nativity of Jesus. The indication of budding life is there to see, "There are bees in this wall. He struck the clapboards, / Fierce heads locked out; small bodies pivoted." (CP 77)
Beliefs and faiths are permanent in nature. They never die. They may go out of favour temporarily. We have to believe in the possibility of eternal life. Frost confirms the same when he says, “the long bead chain of repeated birth” (qtd. in Jarrell 94).

Therefore, our faith in the incarnation and resurrection need not be left out. The miracle may happen yet as asserted by St. Matthew: “Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your lord doth come” (Matt. 24:42). Hence our eternal faith should be in what Jesus said “Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. A’-men” (Matt. 28:20).

C. Courage-to-be in the World

In handling the mytho-poetic technique Robert Frost foreshadows R. Bultimann’s theory that the use of imagery is to express the otherworldly in terms of this worldly and vice-versa. But it should not be misconstrued that Frost literally believed in the literal possibility of the other world. The other world is just a metaphor poetically created and used as a comparable relative. The other world metaphor is a poetically created trope, confectioned to offer a direction to develop what Paul Tillich calls ‘necessary courage-to-be’ in the world of anomalous contradictions inherent in the forced creaturely survival and the hoped-for secular existential heights.

The profoundly pastoral intention of Robert Frost in creating his own poetic New England is in his call for demythologising, that is for interpreting life in realistic existentialist terms. By demythologising, Robert Frost does not mean a reduction of life into expressionistic logo-centric equations. It is a way of vibrantly expressing the message that life in our unfortunate times also has the same kind of intensity and joy as it had in the mythic past.
Robert Frost adored his native forests, pastures and fields, not in the Wordsworthian 'egotistical sublime' (to borrow John Keats' phrase) but as an agent trapped in the heart of a large metropolitan constraint, where he lost his sense of spiritual freedom available in the lost 'Garden of Eden.' He intensely felt in his heart of hearts that his native forests, fields, pastures and meadows are obliviously insensible to this painful loss, in a state, again what John Keats conceived in the formula of 'happy insensibility.' This happy insensibility which naturally comes to the forests, fields, pastures and meadows becomes a sympathetically acquired personal property in the people of his mythically imagined New England. But, however, they are quite unknowingly, deeply steeped in the life of trenchantly evil-fed and remorseless, agony-filled dimensions of the human conditions in their state of conscious awareness of the loss of the Garden of Eden.

The loss of the Garden of Eden is not the canonical or religious loss. On the other hand it is a practical feel of the loss of some inexplicable component of serenity and balance. This does not mean that he pleads for the revival of the self-confounded imagined loss of the historical golden age. Frost simply means to imply that, man, even in these industrialized and technocratized days of advancement, holds in the interiority of his heart a dear place for the innocence and pristine joy of the primaeval man intent upon discovering, and thus standing in arrest, for himself his own world of happiness, which constantly eludes him like a chimera, a mirage or a dream and provides him a necessary courage-to-be in the world.

1. The Entanglement of Love

Being-in-the-world needs a concern, a commitment and devotion, being-in-the-universe requires what Robert Frost calls 'Onward Impulse' through intuition. The poem
"Two look at Two" is actually communicating Frost’s theory of being-in-the-world versus being-in-the-universe.

The poem starts on an ecstatic Romantic note of ‘Love and Forgetting’ on the well-founded imaginary stand that love contributes for an oblivious state of ‘forgetting’ all the cares of life. The argument sounds excellent because it is quite flattering. But the turn is that in our real state of creaturely survival, only the gregarious togetherness provides the most needful state of sustaining ourselves as exclusive interdependent beings. Loneliness is a fearful state of existence. It can be avoided in the togetherness.

He and she, in the poem, were carried “A little further” by ‘love and forgetting.’ They were about to halt to take a decision of returning because they found ‘night so near.’ ‘They were halted by a tumbled wall with barbed wire binding.’ This tumbled wall is the same wall that separates and distances the living creatures and forbids them the needful transcendence. Beyond the wall there is ‘the way they must not go.’ This is a ‘failing path.’ But ‘it moved itself; No footstep moved it’ ‘This is all’ what they felt in the enveloping ‘night so near.’ They stood facing the wall totally thoughtless, startled and exhausted ‘Spending what onward impulse they still had,’ that is, the intuitive aspiration for transcendence. ‘No footstep moved it,’ yet there is that ‘stone or earthslide moved at night.’ This stone or earthslide is the same traditional Christian ‘rock’ which stands for firm faith in the name of Jesus.

They thought ‘This is all’ and sighed “Good night to woods.” But beyond the woodliness and darkening night there is certainly something more. That perspires as an archetypal vision of doe and buck from the other side of the ‘wall’: He and his love on this side of the wall and the doe and the buck on the other side. The doe and buck episode confirms the truth of our creaturely nature of survival in the chaos of the world.
‘The tumbled wall with barbed wire binding’ explains the kind of ultimate barrier which we encounter in life. It is a stumbling block on the threshold of ‘onward impulse.’ All existence is a crisis and so absurd that prospect of staying above can be offered in the gregarious one to one togetherness only. That is the point of the doe and ‘antlered buck of dusty nostril’ story.

To start with there is doe alone ‘across the wall.’ He and she, as well as the doe, were utterly afeared and stood still as ‘some up-ended boulder split in two.’ After this arresting state of creaturely unrest playing its havoc there emerges the buck into the scene, whereon the doe becomes consoled and fearless. It is not ‘the same doe come back in her place,’ clarifies the point that it is not the original afeared doe. It is the altered doe metamorphosed into security and comfort. So are he and she.

To be born at all is a great favour according to the pagan spirit. The doe and the buck accept the blue print of nature and signify themselves as privacy seekers for union and bliss. Such is their need of the instinctive urge. Incidentally the instinctive purposes of both the pairs are the same. They look at each other and implicitly understand the essential purpose of life of the needful togetherness.

Both the pairs on encountering each other got so arrested and stood still as though they were lifeless blocks. The stretch of a ‘proffering hand’ by the human pair gave the doe and the buck an assurance of harmlessness. There ‘a spell-breaking’ happened. The doe and the buck episode is in the nature of a medieval didactic genre in prose or verse in which the behaviour of animals (used as symbolic types) points a moral. The moral here is that, creaturely survival in gregarious comfort is better than the existence with fears and dreads. We are under a necessity of reassuring each other by extending the gestures of acceptance. What all that is needed in this chaotic state of existence or being-in-the-
world is a ‘proffering hand,’ that is to offer a gesture of acceptance. Anything other than this is a matter of dread.

The male and the female principles are vital for the entire creativeness, that is the preservation of the self and the preservation of the race is exclusively dependent on these two leading lights. Frost’s poem “Two Leading Lights” is worth mentioning here. It is a very common occurrence, especially in spring, that the sun and the moon are visible together in the Western sky. Out of this casual occurrence, Robert Frost builds his own proffered myth of the moon cherishing a passionate anthropomorphic desire of getting united with the sun. He calls the sun an ‘irresponsible divinity’ attributing to him the flirting qualities of Zeus in Greek mythology. Moreover, if the sun and the moon stand for male and female principle, they can be taken as two leading lights without any third to think of. In stating, “The moon for all her light and grace / Has never learned to know her place” (CP 550), Robert Frost maintains that the female principle in nature has always that creaturely passion or creature-like disposition of seeking sublimation in being together with the male principle. It is an impossible instinctive passion and it knows no moral or ethical restriction. This is what Bergson calls *elan vital* ‘life force’ on which the very creative principle in nature depends, and this makes evolution possible. In stating that even the celestial bodies like the sun and the moon are not free from this instinctive compulsive acts of desiring for lusty togetherness, the humans need not feel ashamed of it, nor the Christian or any other religious cult is justified in declaring the interpersonal entanglements as sin.

It is the same in Frost’s “Two Look at Two.” There he confirms the truth that only in the impassioned interpersonal moments all creatures, including humans, gain that unique sublime state of being-in-the-universe, without any conscious or unconscious
awareness of fear or dread that usually goes with being-in-the-world, that is with the ennerv ing awareness of the mariboundness of life. In the passionate moments of ‘Love and Forgetting’ one experiences being-in-the-universe, that is only the entanglement of love can transpose us into a state of forgetfulness of being-in-the-world.

Therefore, the impassioned moments are the real moments of existence in the otherwise creaturely set of all the living beings. That is one fearless moment even when life is literally on the verge of total collapse and extinction. This necessary courage-to-be in the world is what he and she acquired from the doe and the buck in their passionate entanglement. Even the presence of the humans (the hunters and killers of does and bucks) does not create any fear in them. He and she too acquire for themselves a rare reassurance of being-in-the-universe without fear. This is the kind of faith that Robert Frost cherishes in living. His is a theistic existentialism.

2. The Nature as Mother Principle

In the strict Biblical traditions there is no prominent place for mother in the act of creation. Mother-presence of Mary, with all her sacrosanct heights as the mother of Jesus, is always there, but only as a passive principle and a suffering agent. But in the ancient Greek mythology, as well as in the naturalistic context of birth, growth, and death process, it is evident that the mother-principle is prominent and active. In “The Death of a Hired Man” she is introduced as an active humanistic mother as the contending counterpart of the landlord. The par excellent primary concern of the mother that ‘life is better than death’ is the bone of contention.

In the poem “The Birth Place” Frost attributes the mother-principle to the mountain. The mountain, symbolically represented as mother, actively creates the necessary individuality and withstandability in her children. It is all in the image of the
mountain itself as a mother-principle. Thus, Frost attributes motherhood to nature, symbolically represented as mother-mountain just like a Romantic Pantheist. But Frost’s method of attributing motherhood credentials to the mountain cannot be called Romantic in operation. He is offering a spacious mythological leaning of the Greco-Roman sort where the divine motherhood is a principle of actively participating in the human affairs in order to create the necessary ‘courage-to-be’ in the world, which is otherwise discordant and unconcerned for the human good and human security. Quite ironically the father figure is unconcerned to the human lot of his own children. Obviously he is a prototype of the Biblical Jehovah as he says, “My father built, enclosed a spring, / Strung chains of wall round everything” (CP 339). As though his children should not have an access to the things around. This is what can be called the divine predicament through separation of man from the Garden of Eden (The Fall). There is a great metaphysical rebellion. There are innumerable sufferers of the so-called Biblical wrath of God. “A dozen girls and boys we were” (CP 339) is a clear indication of forming a democratic union of all, the co-deprived and co-sufferers. They are in a unified manner exacting for a place of honour and dignity in the created universe. Therefore, it is the myth of democratic fight, which is also a complex metaphysical rebellion.

The mountain which is a mere rock sympathises with the unfortunate state of humans. It consents to support their ‘stir’, “The mountain seemed to like the stir” (CP 339). She gave us the necessary courage-to-be because it ‘made of us a little while / With always something in her smile.’ Her eternal smile is in her stubbornness. For a while she gave her children her strength of stubbornness. In a finite analysis we can say that this piece contains that democratic passion of Whitman. Therefore, the poem is a myth of democracy. But the democratic principle, after formulating the masses into a unified lot,
refuses to know or recognize the individuals. They are what Whitman called 'en-masse,' and their strength and forbearance lies in their unity. "Today she wouldn't know our name" (CP 339), that is she refuses their place as individuals after pushing their own fight. But the girls, that is the feminine principle needs and demands for an individual status and recognition. Even in the par excellent democratic state, feminine principle as a creative principle stands unique and particular. "The mountain pushed us off her knees" (CP 339).

After creating the due individuality and all that, nature stands unconcerned to the human lot. But then 'her lap is full of trees,' and those trees in their turn support the humans in their helpless state of existence, for the simple reason that they are the twins of the humans. Thus, they share our predicament in being the forgotten folks left as orphans fighting their own fight.

If the modern scientific interdependency of humans and trees is a certain fact, the mountain expresses her fundamental maternal concerns for the humans in re-creating the Garden of Eden of Adam and Eve: 'And now her lap is full of trees.' So, 'further up the mountain slope' there was always a hope of survival in spite of the fact that the divine Father mercilessly 'Strung chains of wall round everything.' In this helpless state of survival, nature as mother principle protects the survival of the humans. The mountain-mother is meant to suggest that there was the hope for humanity 'With always something in her smile.'

According to Mark Richardson, "She (mountain-mother) is enigmatic and only temporarily subject to the mastery" (47-48). In fact there is nothing enigmatic in the smile here. It is the self-assured smile of victory and tolerance. The children, who were thrown out and distanced by the Father, are being protected by the mountain-mother, not
out of any intention of victory over father, but out of compassion and concern for the helpless state of her children. Richardson’s thesis that “the father of this poem is therefore at least provisionally, also ‘a father-poet,’” (47-48) does not hold good. He wants to suggest that in this act of father-poet’s creation, the intention “to bring life to pass and to bring a poem to pass are cognate endeavours” (47-48).

In all probability the father figure in this context suggests at the Christian mythological Father Jehovah who mercilessly distanced his children and left them orphans from his side. There is abundant internal evidence to know that the metaphysical rebellion of Frost is comparable to that of Nietzsche who declared that God is dead and man is left orphan. But the mountain-mother in Frost compassionately protects her children and compensates the harm done to her children. Here it is in the pagan mother-principle. Frost’s ingenious manner of coalescing the Judaeo-Christian and the Greco-Roman mythological particulars for the purpose of creating a hopefully comfortable and dependable place for the humans is evident. The Christian frustration gets compensated by the pagan hope.

D. The Mystery of Being-in-the-World

There is an inscrutable design in the spatio-temporal arrangements in the universe. Our creaturely state as against the spiritual and secular state is a mere accident in the events of the universe. Any amount of rational and empirical questioning does not solve the riddle. The same old metaphysical rebellious question of William Blake, to the ‘Tyger’ in his poem “The Tyger,” “Did He who made the Lamb make thee?” (20) is asked by Robert Frost in his poem “Design.”

The question “What brought the kindred spider to that height” has that limited answer in the free will (CP 396). It is the free will that brought it there. But for what
end? It is not known. We have all the questions with us for whom the design gives no plausible answer. The creaturely state of being-in-the-world has to suffer all this. There is always the problem of contending with the inscrutable design of the mystery of being-in-the-world. But when we take a leap into being-in-the-universe, all the questionings vanish. A faith, a balance, and a security intimate the mind in accepting the mystery just like a kitten in the mouth of the mother-cat changing the places.

All this suggests that living is a mere survival and its potential to operate emerges out of the unknown, which seemingly appears to be irrational. But there is a design, the purpose, and ends of which are not available for comprehension. If so, the mystery of the universe is incomprehensible. Life being a given, we are fated to live on the terms imposed by the mysterious universe. We cannot propose our conditions. Our freedom of will is conditional and restrained in the incapacity.

The design always presupposes a designer. The designer of darkness intends a great message in his work. That makes clear the answer of the Biblical Job about pain and evil. If so, the design itself must become a point of contending with the world. The passionate desire on the part of the poet concerns with the gross antithetical manner in which universe is made, say, white versus black, life versus death and so on. Then Libido 'life instinct' and Mortio 'death instinct' are the designed part and counterpart of His creative activity.

The Eastern metaphysics of Anima Sukta has the answer in stating that all living creatures are food for the others in a way. The "Assorted characters of death and blight" (CP 396) confirms that our questionings are useless in the presence of that great design. The spider and the moth are the 'Assorted characters of death and blight' respectively.
contradictions. 'What brought the kindred spider to that height' to be eaten raw by the moth is the question and a riddle. Moth's need is the spider's lot.

Death itself and its ways are mysterious. Behind the mystery there perspires, quite obliquely and imperceptibly, a design. It is this terrific design that we have in the incarnated life of Jesus. Here the words of Randall Jarrell are worth quoting. Says Jarrell:

... this little albino catastrophe is too whitely catastrophic to be accidental, too impossibly unlikely ever to be a coincidence: accident, chance, statistics, natural selection are helpless to account for such designed terror and heart-break, such an awful symbolic perversion of the innocent being of the world. (89)

Then the design concerns with the merciless manner in which death crushes life. There are some important questions. "What had that flower to do with being white, / The wayside blue, and innocent heal-all?" (CP 396).

It is symbolic of purity, 'being white.' The 'wayside blue' and 'innocent heal-all' as suggestions go to assert the instinctive passion ('blue') and 'heal-all' innocence being state of cure against all the evils. But then, quite ironically, the wicked act of death crushing innocence is appearing on this 'heal-all,' that is in the cognisable presence of Jesus. Jesus who could perform so many miracles could as well have saved Himself from Judas, as well as Roman soldiers. But then He would not. The reasons are many: He is aware that this seeming victory of death is not the end. What Jesus says to Mary Magdalene is important in this context: "Jesus saith unto her, Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to my Father; but go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God" (John 20:17).
The seeming spider (death) and the moth (life) drama has a design. The design is in the very covenant that the Son of God entered into with God. He promised that he would bring men again into Heaven after the Judgement day. Therefore, "Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me" (John 14:6).

If the scripture has to be believed ‘What brought the kindred spider to that height / Then steered the white moth thither in the night?’ need not really be a question, theologically speaking. It is ‘but design of darkness to appal’ – ‘darkness’ symbolizing ignorance and ‘appal’ stand to horrify and cause dismay. Hence the mysterious design ‘govern in a thing so small.’ If so, the ancient sacrifice of Jesus, which stands as a sublime parallel to so small a sacrifice of moth, has to be regarded with awe and splendour.

There are many more symbolic hints in the imagery of the poem to stand as parallel to the pronouncements in Gospel. Say for instance:

... holding up a moth

Like a white piece of rigid satin cloth-
Assorted characters of death and blight
Mixed ready to begin the morning right,
Like the ingredients of a witches’ broth-
A snow-drop spider, a flower like a froth,
And dead wings carried like a pepper kite. (CP 396).

This reminds us of the Biblical imagery:

6. Then cometh Simon Peter following him, and Went into the sepulchre, and seeth the linen clothes lie,
7. And the napkin, that was about his head, not lying with the linen clothes, but wrapped together in a place by itself.

8. Then went in also that other disciple, which came first to the sepulchre, and he saw, and believed. (John 20:6-8)

The 'linen clothes' of the Bible metamorphose into 'a white piece of rigid satin cloth.' ‘The napkin . . . not lying with the linen clothes’ is a parallel to the horrifying manner of the doings of the Seventh Plague. Towards the end of St. John 20, we have that episode of doubting Tom followed by the following message of Jesus: “Jesus saith unto him, Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed” (John 20:29).

Frost is not just restating the Biblical myth; he is finding a solution to the absurd anxieties of being-in-the-world, the horrors of existence being compounded in the feelable dimensions of our hearts. Randall Jarrell confirms these facts in his superb summation in the following words:

... and the innocent is given a peculiar force and life by this context, just as the name heal-all comes to sad, ironic, literal life: it healed all, itself it could not heal. The kindred is very moving in its half-forgiving ambiguity; and the Biblical thither in the night and the conclusive steered (with its careful echoes of “To a Water-Fowl” and a thousand sermons) are very moving and very serious in their condemnation, their awful mystery. (90)

Thus, the mystery of the design is in preparing the human mind to interpret the horror itself as a casual phenomenon of the world and this kind of attitude is possible
only when we take a leap into 'being-in-the-universe.' Everything appears to be getting finished in the universe but nothing is really perishing.

When the very thematic grounds that emerge out of the authoritarian heroic traits are tempered with delicate endowments of involuntary self-sacrifices, the resultant dramatic outcome is always a matter of heightened aesthetic relief of emotional charges. Frost's imagery in his poems, which maintains an ultimate rapport with the pagan sensuous plasticity and the orthodox Christian purity of feelings simultaneously, is the theme of the next chapter.