

## CHAPTER FIVE

### THE STRATEGY OF BINARY OPPOSITES IN FROST'S LATER POETRY

(1936-1962)

By 1936, Frost was successful in achieving his place as one of America's most loved poets. In June, the same year, another collection of his poems was published. It was called, *A Further Range*. "It was taken by the Book-of-the-Month Club as a selection, which meant a sale of fifty thousand copies right on top"<sup>1</sup>, writes Jay Parini. But the poet suffered a jolt when suddenly the book was reviewed negatively by many reviewers in the country<sup>i</sup>. This, however, did not dent Frost's popularity among his readers. He received the Pulitzer Prize, for the same book, the next year in 1937. This was an extraordinary achievement for a poet who was conferred the award for the third time in his poetic career. The book comprises poems which are comparatively stronger and more accurate in terms of images and language. The first poem of the Collection was, "A Lone Striker"<sup>2</sup>, which is cited time and again by critics for the varied perceptions it gives. The poem presents the difference between the life of a person in factory and his life in the woods in general and the difference between man and machine in particular. The poem begins with the description of a workplace where a late comer waits outside the gate, for it to open. "While the radical reader or listener might want to pause here and express an angry condemnation of the kind of heartless capitalism that treated a worker so harshly, Frost quickly goes on to say that the locked out worker knew another place 'a wood' to which he could repair"<sup>3</sup> Inside the factory, yarns of wool are spun by machines but there is still a worker who takes note of the work because the machine may cut the wool accidentally. This shows that though machine has taken the place of man in the modern times but still man's importance cannot be denied. The machine after all is a man-made object and hence can never be independent of its master, the man. The late worker, for whom the gates of the factory remain close, decides to wander about in the woods. He realises the sharp difference between his life in the factory and his life in the woods.

The factory was very fine;

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<sup>i</sup> Newton Arvin, "A Minor Strain," review of *A Further Range*, by Robert Frost, *Partisan Review*, Vol3. No5, June1936

Horace Gregory, "Robert Frost's New Poems", review of *A Further Range*, by Robert Frost, *The New Republic*, June24, 1936 Issue

He wished it all the modern speed.

Yet, after all, 'twas not divine,

That is to say, 'twas not a church.<sup>4</sup>

The difference between life in a factory, and life in the woods is same as the difference between modernity and divinity.

Frost took thirty- nine long years to decide upon his career as a poet, because he was not satisfied with other jobs which life was offering him. He believed in the union of love and work. This is partly evident from his next poem, “Two Tramps in Mud Time”<sup>5</sup> where he plays on the difference between the themes of avocation and vocation. The poet-speaker is busy with his work of chopping wood when he is suddenly interrupted by two tramps. There is a sharp difference in the attitude of the tramps who are aimless and the speaker who has an aim. The tramps judged the speaker in the manner in which he held his axe. But he was not moved by their opinion and disliked their presence. He had been chopping wood because he liked the work, and not because of the money which he made out of his profession. His aim had always been to unite his avocation and vocation so that his work did not appear burdensome. Tim Kendall notes, “By speaking of poetry in an ulterior fashion, through mowing, orchis hunting, tree selling or here, woodcutting, Frost escapes his own distrust of the sedentary trade.”<sup>6</sup> The statement, throws light over the speaker as a poet who took solace in writing poems, but it digresses from the main crux of the poem, the distinction between avocation and vocation or in a way the unification of the two.

In the next poem, “In Times of Cloudburst”<sup>7</sup> the poet compares future and present gains. The poem begins with a speculation about the harmful effects of rain on the soil. The poet optimistically suggests that there is always a better aspect to cloudburst than we may apprehend otherwise. Deidre Fagan opines, “The poem becomes a speculation about present gain versus future harm, but the sort of harm that can be caused is not entirely specified”<sup>8</sup>. Actually the rain is a blessing in disguise. For farmers it brings hope, and they can easily view their present gain in the downpours. However they do not intend to look deeper into the problems which rain may cause in future. The poet though mentions “future harm” but also believes that the harm is negligible.

Frost’s poetry is preoccupied with things which are usually ignored by the normal eye. The subject of his poems usually revolve around abandoned woods, lonely graveyards,

a withered flower and here, a “roadside stand”<sup>9</sup>. “The Roadside stand”, is one of Frost’s most popular poems. Like many other poems this too, deals with a very common day to day occurrence, which usually goes unacknowledged. There is a unique pull in this sheer simplicity which draws our attention to many such sights in our surroundings which need our love or help. The “Roadside Stand” referred in the poem is a symbol of an old world which depends upon the new one for its sustenance. The city is the source of financial stability for the countryside. The owner of the stand belongs to an old world, who has not experienced any change in his lifestyle. He strives for the fulfilment of his basic needs whereas the passers by are rich, born and bred people who strive for perfection. The poem employs binaries right from the very first line when the poet describes, “the little old house”<sup>10</sup> with a “little new shed”<sup>11</sup>. Further, the lives of the people who live in the countryside and the lives of the city dwellers are poles apart. Their basic needs and their outlooks differ vastly. The rich onlookers are too insensitive to pay heed to the basic needs of these roadside stand owners whose economy and financial stability is mocked each time a car passes by their shop.

In, “The Old Barn at the bottom of the Fogs”<sup>12</sup> the poet ridicules modern man’s mentality who pays no attention to his natural surroundings and gets himself busy in hiding his, “treasure under glass”<sup>13</sup>. Modern man is devoid of sensitivity and hence cannot look for beauty in simple things like a barn which is abandoned to grow on its own. He pities them since they value those things which are of less value and can be bought with money and “leave such lovely shafts outdoor to perish”<sup>14</sup>. Soon the barn would become a relic and the trees it supported would be no more there. There is a difference of opinion between a tramp who values the barn and the rich who abandon barns to die a natural death.

In the next poem, “At Woodward’s Garden”<sup>15</sup> a human being’s perception of an animal and an animal’s perception of a human being, is discussed. A young boy chaffed over the ‘foolishness’ of two monkeys who are caged in a garden. He takes a solar lens and pin-points the glass’s rays over their nose. It brought a “puzzled dimness to their eyes”<sup>16</sup> as they “exchanged troubled glances over life”<sup>17</sup>. Perhaps the monkeys too, had a similar perception about humans. One do not care about their point of view because after all they are animals. The poem deals with a duality of thought where a human sneers at the inhuman existence of two monkeys in a cage whereas the monkey’s level of imagination and thought remains undiscovered. They might be more concerned

about things which mattered in their lives rather than thinking of glasses, humans and the sun.

Who said it mattered  
What monkeys did or didn't understand?  
They might not understand a burning-glass.  
They might not understand the sun itself.

It's knowing what to do with things that counts.<sup>18</sup>

In "Lost in Heaven"<sup>19</sup> the poet depicts a lost traveller who has no idea about his whereabouts on a starry stormy night. He questions the universe, "Where, Where in heaven am I?"<sup>20</sup> and the next moment rules out any possibility of an answer and writes, "Let's let my heavenly lostness overwhelm me."<sup>21</sup> The poet's description of an unwelcoming dark night with thick clouds and rain suggests his sense of fear of the unknown or possibly of the unseen future, which appeared dark. But the poem takes a contrary turn at the end when the poet wishes to remain in that "lostness" and wills that it rejoices him. The same darkness which frightened him at the beginning seemed friendly at the end. There is a binary of opinion in the poem since the poet seems disturbed at the beginning and the tone changes in the end when he finds happiness in his solitude.

Alienation and isolation form an integral part of Frost's poetry. There is always a sadness which lurks beneath his poems, sometimes reflecting a pessimistic view on isolation and sometimes embracing the loneliness. The poet as a person was fond of taking long winter walks in the woods. In this connection, "Desert Places"<sup>22</sup> is one of Frost's most popular and thematically obscure poems. Time and again it has been subjected to varied explanations and many critics find it a sister poem of, "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening" because in both poems snow forms a prominent element. But the most important element in the poem is not snow but night. In the very first line the whiteness of snow is contrasted with the darkness of the night. The field though becomes smoother with snow, yet there are a few weeds which hinder the smooth movement. Thus the poem is full of binaries which are present throughout the poem. Winter symbolically suggests death and Snow too, refers to the whiteness of death. But this death is temporary as the plants buried by snow would be reborn in spring. But

man's death is forever. As the poet walks alone on a deserted night he realizes his identity in the wide universe. The desert places inside him were much more terrific than the deserts outside him. Snow pauses life for a moment but the loneliness in his heart had silenced him for years. There was nothing in the universe which could scare him now. The desert places inside him had overcome his fear of loneliness and death :

They cannot scare me with their empty spaces  
Between stars-on stars where no human race is.  
I have it in me so much nearer home  
To scare myself with my own desert places.<sup>23</sup>

The next poem of the series is, "Leaves compared with Flowers"<sup>24</sup>, where the poet compares leaves with flowers and with bark, and bark with roots and days with nights. There is a long list of binary opposite words in the poem. Frost believes that leaves, flowers or trees have their own respective times to bloom. One can see the beauty of a flower during day but it needs a dark windy night to hear the leaves rustle and appreciate their sound. On the other hand, both the leaf and the flower would eventually wither away while the tree would remain intact. The poet as a young person loved flowers because he could not then see the beauty of darkness. With age and experience he started finding happiness and beauty in everything which was around him. He learnt to adapt himself to his circumstances.

The symbol of land versus the sea is not a new one in poetry but in "Neither Out Far Nor in Deep"<sup>25</sup> it is linked with the existential crisis of modern man. Though the poem appears to be a simple comparison between the predictability of sea and unpredictability of land, it has many layers of meaning to it. The poet is full of criticism against the people who turn their back towards land and look towards the sea waves. They are more interested to know, how the sea would change but are not concerned about the land. This refers to the futility of their gaze and hints at the meaningless lives they lead. The poet has deliberately used the word "look" four times in the poem to emphasize the emptiness of this 'looking'. They aimlessly gaze into the sea and not the land because they can make it out from the direction of the wind how the sea waves would move in the near future. They feel that the sea's predictability is more pronounced than the land's.

The land may vary more,  
But wherever the truth may be-  
The water comes ashore,  
And the people look at the sea.<sup>26</sup>

Elaine Barry contemplates whether, “it is a commentary on tragic limitations of man’s perception? Or it goes further than that to postulate a blank and absurd universe that mocks the very attempt to “look”? The ambiguity is unresolved, the poem ends in a question”<sup>27</sup>. The poem echoes with the existential crisis from which modern man suffers. The binary pair of words in the title, “Out/In” hint at the near sightedness of the people who live on land. They can neither look far nor deep. Their sight is devoid of vision. Even while looking towards the sea they had no intention to look far or deep. They exist for the sake of existing.

The next poem in the Volume is, “Voice Ways”<sup>28</sup> in which the poet voices an opinion in the first line and then refutes it throughout the poem. The poem begins with an assurance that, “Some things are never clear”<sup>29</sup> and in the very next line the poet says, “but the weather is clear tonight”<sup>30</sup>. There is, however, no link between the first line of the poem and the lines which follow it. In fact they are binary opposed and contradictory to one another. Though the poet was sure that nothing is clear yet he walks ahead and says that the weather is clear because rain has cleared clouds from the sky, mountains appeared clear and stars shone brighter and thus how can one say that nothing was clear?

Some things are never clear  
But the weather is clear tonight,  
Thanks to a clearing rain.  
The mountains are brought up near,  
The stars are brought out bright.  
Your old sweet-cynical strain  
Would come in like you here  
'So we won't say nothing is clear'<sup>31</sup>

The poem moves in two different directions in the course of a few lines. The poet’s assertion of a fact and his negation of the same , strike a binary note in the verse.

“Ten Mills”<sup>32</sup> is a collection of ten very short poems, each with a different theme and symbol. The first poem, “Precaution”<sup>33</sup> is more of an axiom than a poem as it ends in two lines. The young poet expresses his reluctance to be radical as it can make him conservative when old. The poem echoes with the young neighbour’s opinion in “Mending Wall”<sup>34</sup> who hates boundaries of any kind. On the other hand, the old neighbour is bent on building a wall since he believes in the old saying that, “Good fences make good neighbours”<sup>35</sup>. Similarly the poet in “Precaution”<sup>36</sup> fears being radical because he does not wish to turn conservative in his later life :

I never dared to be radical when young,  
For fear it would make me conservative when old.<sup>37</sup>

Words like ‘Radical’ and ‘Conservative’ throw light over the central theme of the poem, the difference between the young and the old and thus the ultimate binary between radicalism and conservatism.

In the second poem of the series, “The Span of Life”<sup>38</sup> Frost lays bare the difference between an old dog and his earlier self when he was a pup. The dog barks backwards without getting up and this shows his helplessness and lack of strength. Again the poem is a couplet which ends in two lines :

The old dog barks backward without getting up  
I can remember when he was a pup.<sup>39</sup>

The contrast is between the old dog who has left all hopes of survival and the young pup he was once upon a time. Hence he does not bother about getting up or barking, “his bite is now his bark”<sup>40</sup> writes, Deirdre Fagan.

“Pertinax”<sup>41</sup> is another short poem of three lines where the poet mischievously describes the life of a poet. He wishes that the chaos in his mind cause a storm to rise and the storm let the clouds to form a shape. The ‘form’ here may refer to the poet’s verse, which has a shape:

Let chaos storm!  
Let cloud shapes swarm!  
I wait for form.<sup>42</sup>

The poet awaits a form in the midst of chaos. This is the binary opposition in the poem as he talks of storms yet looks forward to form. This perhaps is a hint at the process of thought formation in the mind of a poet, whose mind may be full of turbulent storms but the result is always a masterpiece.

The last poem under, “Ten Mills” is, “In Dive’s Dive”<sup>43</sup> which talks about a game of cards gambled in a bar. The poem begins with the speaker who is losing a game of cards but is “steady and unaccusing”. He is not affected by his loss but is concerned about the game which he may win next. There is a pun in the word Dive which is generally associated with swimming or water bodies, but in this context, it refers to a small club or a low quality bar. The poet’s description of his lost game and his hope for a win in a game yet to be played mark the binary in the poem.

It is late at night and still I am losing,

...

Let’s have a look at another five.<sup>44</sup>

In “The Bearer of Evil Tidings”<sup>45</sup> the bearer stands on crossroads, similar to the crossroads in “The Road not Taken”.

One road led to the throne  
And one went off to the mountains  
And into the wild unknown

The bearer chose the mountains and path of adventure, instead of power. The speaker in both the above mentioned poems faces the same dilemma. The dilemma of choosing any one, out of the two paths. The bearer, like the poet goes for the mountains instead of power and is satisfied with his choice. Both the contrasting paths had their own claims to life, and they present the two binary images in the poem.

“Iris by Night”<sup>46</sup> is one of the concluding poems of the volume and it deals with some strange phenomenon in nature which is experienced by the poet with his friend. Unfortunately his friend does not live long to share his experience with the readers and Frost is the only surviving witness to the miracle. The poem begins with the description of an evening where the poet and his friend are walking down “a Malvern’s side”<sup>47</sup>. Suddenly they spot an ‘Iris’ on the horizon. Iris here refers to a rainbow which unites

the heaven and earth. The binary opposition arises from the fact, that, a rainbow can never be witnessed in the dark. It is caused by the dispersing of sunlight. The juxtaposition of the fact that a rainbow is witnessed in the evening is strange yet contrary to the justification of the phenomenon in nature. The speaker further adds that the rainbow encircles them as if in a ring and it seems as if it wanted them to stay safe from “all division time or foe can bring”<sup>48</sup>. The concept of a rainbow in the night and the unusual interference of nature into man’s life is a contradiction in itself.

Frost’s political career was often targeted by critics because one could see hints of his political inclinations in his poems. The poem “Mending Wall” was considered as a satire on the division of USSR, by many writers. “To a Thinker”<sup>49</sup> is a similar one where Frost talks about the left and right wing political thoughts. He plays with the contraries present around us and invokes the reader as a thinker who would think again and again and change sides likewise.

These binary pair of words lay bare the two extreme thought processes which may prevail in the human mind. Throughout the poem, Frost oscillates between the two perceptions and asks the thinker to shun imagining things and taking sides because one has to repent one day. The poem ends with his proud assertion that the reader should believe in his instincts since he is – “a bard”.

After the publication of, *A Further Range*, till a new collection of his work appeared in 1942, two major events occurred in Frost’s life. His wife and his only son, Carol died unfortunately and left him wavering between depression and hopelessness. It took six long years for him to regain his stability and bring out a full collection of lyrics, *A Witness Tree*, once again to be awarded the Pulitzer Prize for the fourth and the last time in his life. If *North of Boston* was best known for its long narratives, *A Witness Tree* in this regard was a book of lyrics. The short and symbolic lyrics in the Volume underscore Frost’s mastery over the lyric as a form and brevity as an art. It comprises many of his best known and loved poems. The book carried a dedication to K.M, “for her part in it”. It is to be noted that after the death of Frost’s wife, he was fighting with depression and came back to his senses only after his friendship with Kay Morrison who counselled him out of his darkness. Frost was indebted to her for this gesture all his life. <sup>ii</sup>

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<sup>ii</sup> Jay Parini, “Depths Below Depths”, *Robert Frost-A Life*, Holt Paperback, New York, 1999, p315

The first two poems of the book perfectly prepare the readers for the upcoming lyrics. The first poem of the collection, “Beech”<sup>50</sup> deals with the traditional theme of the difference between imagination and reality yet it approaches the subject in a much contemporary way. The poem asserts the fact that a poet’s imagination may be scarred or wounded but it is always committed to ‘memory’. On the other hand, the poet may be confident about his world of imagination yet is always “circumstanced with dark and doubt”<sup>51</sup>. William Pritchard writes :

Frost considered the notion of being “bound” in a less fervently affirmative way. In Beech he bends an imaginary line into woods, stakes out a corner with some rocks, and then directs attention to the beech tree, announcing that:

One tree, by being deeply wounded,  
Has been impressed as Witness Tree  
And made commit to memory.<sup>52</sup>

The poem works at binary levels. In the first few lines he ascertains the power of imagination and as the poem ends, he questions the poet’s ability to live up to that imaginary world. The world of doubt and conformity are juxtaposed in the poem. “Beech” in a way becomes a high altitude place from where the reader views all other poems in the collection.

In “Come In”<sup>53</sup> once again a similar theme of enchantment is referred, where the speaker is allured to come into the woods but he resists the pull. It reminds one of the irresistible desire to set in the strange woods of, “Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening”. The woods in “Come in” echo with the same strangeness as in many other Frost’s lyrics. The reference to Thrush, rings similar bells as Keats’s nightingale or Shelley’s Skylark, but unlike other nature poems the speaker here is not moved by the bird’s song. He has no desire to follow the music in the woods because he has to go somewhere. Thus, the mysterious elements in the woods which prompt the poet to come inside and explore fail to enchant him. The poem again moves on binary levels where the woods, thrush and other mysterious elements in nature stand on the way of the poet but fail to attract him. He stands on the threshold of the woods yet does not step in because he was, “out for stars”. He ends the poem by saying :

But no I was out for stars:

I would not come in.

I meant not even if asked,

And I had'nt been<sup>54</sup>

In, "I could give all to time"<sup>55</sup> reluctance is implicit in the title itself. In the course of the poem it becomes clear that the poet 'could' give all to time but he would not like to give all. This underlines the inherent binaries in the poem. The poem shows time as 'grave' and 'contemplative' which moves slowly with its own pace, irrespective of the changes it causes to the nature. This statement is contrary to the general supposition one has of time as something which waits for none. Frost challenges the stereotypical characteristic one attributes to time and calls it insignificant which can take away only those things which the poet allows. The theme and subject matter points to the Shakespearean sonnets where the poet establishes the immortality of his verse against the ravages of time. Contrary to this universal belief Frost refuses to part with what he "posses". Time is unmoved by the changes it brings to people and their lives and thus becomes irrelevant, but the poet portrays himself as more powerful and relevant than time who would not part with what he "kept".

In "Carpe Diem"<sup>56</sup>, Frost brings about the difference between experiencing the present, imagining the future and contemplating the past. According to him, man cannot enjoy the present because either he is busy thinking about his future or regretting his past:

It lives less in the present  
Than in the future always,  
And less in both together  
Than in the past. The present  
Is too much for the senses,  
Too crowding, too confusing  
Too present to imagine.<sup>57</sup>

Children may be happy and live in their present, but no one can actually seize the day. Thus, the difference between past and present, present and future, form the binary in the poem.

In the next poem, “Wind and the Rain”<sup>58</sup>, the poet hints upon the change of attitude within the same person due to age. He begins by saying that, when he was young he would enjoy walking in the rain and thinking about death in a pensive mood, unaware of the fact that :

The many deaths one must have died  
Before he came to meet his own<sup>59</sup>

Later, age taught him that there are worse things in life than death. The actual suffering is not death but life. In the second part of the poem he points towards those flowers which strive to bloom in a desert. They get little amount of water which sustains their survival, but limit their growth. According to the poet, if he would have got a chance, he would have definitely provided them enough water which would not only help them to survive but bloom.

In the last part of the poem, he says that now when it rains he no longer wishes for death or sadness but the rain reminds him of his tears.

Rain was the tears adopted by my eyes  
That have none left to stay<sup>60</sup>

The poem is not the first of its kind. There are few other poems discussed in the previous chapter which too deal with the binaries within a person, which develop because of age.

In the next poem, “The Most of It”<sup>61</sup> Frost defines a well known phenomenon of science, called, “echo”. The word usually refers to the reverberation of one’s own voice while one shouts from over a cliff or a place of void. But Frost emphasises that, people who shout their names from “some tree-hidden cliffs” expect someone else’s voice in return. In short the poem exposes modern man’s alienation and loneliness in a world and his innate desire for company. It portrays man’s inner self, his expectations from the world and his ultimate acceptance of his fate. The binary in the poem is between man’s inner self, which desires to hear someone else’s voice from the cliff and his portrayal of satisfaction in front of the world, when he hears his own echo:

He thought he kept the universe alone;  
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<sup>62</sup>

In the next poem, “The Quest of the Purple Fringed”<sup>63</sup>, the poet takes a quest walk wherein he is in search of a purple orchid, which may reveal if the weather is about to change or not. The poet does not depend upon the weather forecasts or intuition, but completely depends upon the purple fringed flower. The poem begins in a quest and ends in a discovery. The poet walks for miles but could not locate the orchid, and hence follows a path made by a fox. To his surprise, the path leads him to his destination. The flowers lay there under a tree, pale in colour, thus assuring the fact that summer is on the verge of its end. The poet walks back with confirmation that fall is just round the corner. The poem shows man’s dependability on Nature. Nature may be indifferent to man’s needs but man is dependent on Nature in some way or the other. The binary in the poem is the poet’s quest for an answer, and his confirmation that fall has arrived. The poem thus moves from confusion and confirmation.

In “The Gift Outright”<sup>64</sup> the poet talks about two contrasting approaches- the man’s and the land’s regarding one another. The poem begins with the lines, “The land was our’s before we were the land’s”<sup>65</sup>. This hints at the two main feelings discussed in the poem- the feelings of national integrity and nationhood. According to Reuben. A. Brower, the poem is “better described as poetic definition of an American state of mind, a combat psychological essay on colonialism”<sup>66</sup>. But contrary to this, it comments sarcastically on people’s attitude towards their motherland. It would at once appeal to every colonial country which had been ruled by an empire in the past. The poet says that the land belonged to the people (Americans) but they belonged to the colonists. There is a very apparent binary in the statement, which highlights people’s attitude towards their own freedom and the freedom of their land. People want to be unpossessed, yet remain possessed. They want freedom, yet do not resist being slaves. This contrariness delays the process of freedom and it depresses the poet.

“To a Young Wretch”<sup>67</sup> is all about the spirit of Christmas. It deals with Christmas’s excitement on one hand and the poet’s disheartenment on the chopping off of a Christmas tree on the other hand. He feels sad for the tree which was chopped by a trespasser, but

also feels happy because after all it was Christmas. There is again a binary of approach within his thoughts, though he tries his best to deviate his mind from the tree but ends up lamenting that there were still ways to celebrate without, “keeping my tree at your window bay”<sup>68</sup>. Frost finds it cruel to chop a tree and snatch away its life only to keep it as a show piece on Christmas eve. Though it might sound as a very pessimistic approach to life but it depicts the sensitivity of a poet’s heart and his emotions when his tree is cut by an unknown trespasser for Christmas celebration. The thought appeals to the sensitive reader who realises how cruel it is to chop a tree, to derive some temporary happiness. Thus happiness is contrasted with sadness:

It is your Christmases against my woods.  
But even where thus opposing interests kill,  
They are to be thought of as opposing goods  
Oftener than as conflicting good and ill<sup>69</sup>

The next poem, “A Loose Mountain”<sup>70</sup> describes meteor showers and man’s indifference to nature. The poet gives references from the Bible where stars formed an important part of man’s lives in the past. Frost alludes to Leonid, a cluster of stars which guided three wise men to Bethlehem when Christ was born. But now stars and meteors are rendered useless by people of the modern age. Electricity has replaced natural light and man tends to appreciate artificiality more than nature. Thus, the binary in the poem is the difference between natural and artificial.

The heartless and enormous Outer Black  
Is still withholding in the Zodiac  
But from Irresolution in his back  
About when best to have us in our orbit,  
So we won't simply take it and absorb it.<sup>71</sup>

In 1947, Frost came out with another collection of his poems, *Steeple Bush*. The book is marked by two major poems written by Frost in his career, including “Directive”, and “Too Anxious for Rivers”. “Directive”<sup>72</sup> is one of Frost’s most speculated poems. Soaked in paradoxes and contradictions, the poem is one of the finest examples of binaries. The poet takes us with him in a world of past which is:

Burned, dissolved and broken off  
Like graveyard marble sculpture in the weather<sup>73</sup>

Frost's world is a strange world of make belief, which somehow resembles Eliot's *The Wasteland*. Indeed, this is not a modern wasteland but a wasteland of the relics or reminiscent of the past which do not exist anymore. A quaint feeling of strangeness dominates the poem, as the reader is guided by the poet, who himself is lost and who believes that one must be lost in order to be found. Found not by others, but by his own self:

Both of them are lost  
And if you're lost enough to find yourself  
By now, pull in your ladder road behind you  
And put a sign up CLOSED to all but me  
Then make yourself at home.<sup>74</sup>

He takes us to a place where things exist and do not exist at the same time, creating a binary of images in the description:

There is 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 road there, If you'll let a guide direct you  
Who only has at heart your getting lost<sup>75</sup>

Tim Kendall writes,

The uncertainty befits a poem which journeys through ruined present and pristine past simultaneously, keeping each visible and allowing dominance to neither. The logical contradiction in the "house that is no more a house" exemplifies this dual status: summoned by poetic will, the past both exists and is lost, as the fourfold reiteration of "now" insists on the inescapability of the present.<sup>76</sup>

In the next poem, "The Middleness of the Road"<sup>77</sup>, Frost, like many of his other poems demarcated between the world of man, his limitations and nature's limitlessness. He does this by using the metaphor of a road which ends where the skies begin. It may go

into a wood, or may end into nothingness but it has to end. It cannot go on like nature, like woods, like skies and everything that nature possess. Man in the end stands in the middle of a road and tries to look beyond its length. He cannot go beyond the road, because nature begins where the road ends. His limitations are juxtaposed with the eternity of nature :

The road at the top of the rise  
Seems to come to an end  
And take off into the skies.  
So at the distant bend<sup>78</sup>

The next poem, “Too Anxious for Rivers”<sup>79</sup> states the poet’s curiosity to find the course of a river’s life and final death. Thus, the poem functions on the two metaphors of life and death, beginning and end. The river begins where the mountain ends:

Look down the long valley and there stands a mountain  
That someone has said is the end of the world.  
Then what of this river that having arisen  
Must find where to pour itself into an empty<sup>80</sup>

The poet’s mind runs into ceaseless depths of a river, its origin and end. But it may also be suggestive of man’s course of life. He parodies his philosophical questions with a myth, which says that:

The world as we know is an elephant's howdah,  
The elephant stands on the back of a turtle,  
The turtle in turn on a rock in the ocean.<sup>81</sup>

Thinking about life, its origin and its end is futile because it is something which takes away the essence of living. One must flow like a river, because like a river our lives too would eventually end with a fall in the canyon of death. Thus, the interplay of life and death, beginning and end are the binaries on which the poem works.

The next poem, “Skeptic”<sup>82</sup> like its name, oscillates between belief and disbelief. The poem highlights the binaries from the very first stanza where the poet believes and disbelieves at the same time:

I don't believe I believe you're the last in space<sup>83</sup>

The poet says that he believes in outer space or the universe and contradicts his own statement. He speculates upon the vastness of the universe but could not come to a conclusion and thus wavers between belief and disbelief.

In the next poem, "Two Leading Lights"<sup>84</sup> the two leading lights are the sun and the moon, which have been personified as male and female simultaneously. It is a fact that the sun shines throughout the day and the moon throughout the night, highlights the binaries in the poem. For the Sun, Frost says:

The Sun is satisfied with days  
He never has in any phase  
That I have heard of shone at night  
And yet he is a power of light<sup>85</sup>

These lines depict Sun's power and majesty during the day. Referring to the Moon at night, he writes:

The Moon for all her light and grace  
Has never learned to know her place  
The notedest astronomers  
Have set the dark aside for hers<sup>86</sup>

It is thus very clear that the Sun stands for the light or the day and the Moon stands for the night or the darkness. The Sun is mighty and powerful and knows its worth, whereas the Moon "has never learned to know her place". Both the celestial objects have their own spaces, likes and dislikes, which highlight their contradictions.

After *Steeple Bush*, a volume called *Collected Poems* was published in the year 1949. Frost was slowly entering into the final phase of his poetic career as well as life. In 1962, he came up with his last book of poems, *In the Clearing*. "All that Frost thought was true attained its final refinement in the themes of dualism involving spirit and matter in *In the Clearing*." wrote, Peter.J.Stanlis. He further adds :

There is nothing mechanistic about Frost's extension of his dualistic beliefs, because his eclectic and complex mind was never fixed rigidly upon any one

philosophical system, but was always open to consider and absorb whatever he found valid through his experiences of life. The continuity recognizable in his final volume therefore, is not merely a logical extension of his previous art and thought. It includes fresh developments and intuitional insights in the form, style, techniques and content of his poems and the themes of his beliefs as a dualist... *In the Clearing* provides a continuity and unity that is the fitting climax of his positive beliefs.<sup>87</sup>

“Does No One At All Ever Feel This Way in the Least?,”<sup>88</sup> states a comparison between the old and new America. The poet is concerned about the things which changed over the years. The boats are replaced by motorboats and the sea is slowly being replaced by the buildings. Children no longer know the difference between various kinds of water bodies. The teachers shows them a pool and call it a sea, so that they may know how Sinbad was a sailor. The comparison between the two worlds, old and new marks the binaries in the poem:

So far inland the very name of ocean  
Goes motionless except in baby school  
When teacher’s own experiences fail her  
And she can only give the class a notion  
Of what it is by calling it a pool  
And telling them how Sinbad was a sailor.<sup>89</sup>

“The Objection to being Stepped On”<sup>90</sup> is a small poem which deals about the difference between a weapon and a tool. The poet talks about a “hoe” which although is a tool, but becomes a weapon for the farmer. The poet accidentally steps upon a hoe and gets hurt. The incident compels the poet to speculate upon the usefulness of things and their ability to harm us if one is careless towards them. For the poet, the hoe was a tool, but it became a weapon very soon. The subtle difference between a tool and a weapon are the two contrary elements in the poem.

In a brief poem of two lines, “For Iron”<sup>91</sup>, Frost expresses his attitude towards nature. The reference to nature is perhaps a hint towards human nature as well. According to the poet, man is so complex a being that he forever struggles within his own self. His nature of liking and disliking things compel him to take sides and this becomes the root of all conflicts. The binary oppositions within us makes human survival complicated:

Nature within her inmost self divides  
To trouble men with having to take sides.<sup>92</sup>

The final poem from *In the Clearing* best describes that emblematic encounter with nature which Frost, with the remarkable exception of “Stopping by Woods On a Snowy Evening” took to be the *raison d’être* of his art. As usual he goes “against the trees”, his force pitted against nature’s own, not in a cosmic struggle for supremacy but in a momentary action that outlines both man and nature against that point of active encounter. As he leaves with his maple cut low, “I link a line of shadowy tracks/ Across the tinted snow”. He moves across and through nature, his existence “shadowy” yet somehow a “link” with it, a link to some wider, ultimate encounter. Nature has not been defeated “in one tree’s overthrow”. Nor has man been defeated in his retreat “for yet another blow”. Both exist to encounter each other a new, and all that Frost would ask of us is “You come too”.<sup>93</sup>

The above quotation is a reference to the last poem of Frost’s last book, *In the Clearing*. The poem is called “In Winter in the Woods”<sup>94</sup> and it reminds us of the first poem in his first book, “Into my Own”. It deals with Frost’s fascination with trees, and his desire to live, work and wander in the woods. In the poem, the poet of New England retreats into his inner world and describes an evening where he goes out to chop a branch of a Maple tree. He stands in the wood, amidst tall trees and realises man’s uncertainty and temporal existence as compared to Nature, which is eternal. He finds in them an echo of Nature’s unconquered will, something which can never die. The poet on the other hand waits for the final blow of death:

I see for Nature no defeat  
In one tree’s overthrow  
Or for myself in my retreat  
For yet another blow.<sup>95</sup>

Samuel Coale asserts :

Man and nature exist to confront one another, to encounter each other from each other's own "territorial imperatives". In Frost's affirmation of separateness exists the vague outline of man's "equality" with nature, though man must finally submit to nature's superior power displayed eventually at his desk. Nature remains a permanent "other" impersonally unified beyond man's ability to comprehend it. Man and Nature share some undeclared element of divine force, but each embodies the force independently with as much mutual antagonism as respect. The outcome of such an encounter, though never in doubt since man knows he will die, is never as important as the actual confrontation, the direct action of the encounter itself.<sup>96</sup>

The encounter between man and nature, is not something new. Time and again, it has made its presence felt in the poems of Frost. He perhaps loves to put man amidst nature either to find solace or discover with awe the uncertainty of his life against nature's eternity. Indeed, Frost's poems beginning with *A Boy's Will* (1913) and ending with *In the Clearing* (1962), make a full circle of his life. The poet wavers between confirmation and confusion, belief and disbelief to reach to a conclusion of uniformity. The binaries in his early poems look more prominent whereas the binaries in his later poems appear more promising. The older Frost played more with minds than with paradoxes:

Far in the pillared dark  
Thrush music went-  
Almost like a call to come in  
To the dark and lament.

But no, I was out for stars:  
I would not come in.  
I meant not even if asked,  
And I hadn't been.<sup>97</sup>

And still, the poet refuses to come in. He refuses to be carried away by anything apart from poetry. The woods had been mysterious and the song of the thrush was enchanting,

but the poet still wishes to go on with his journey into the unknown, undisturbed “even if asked”.

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<sup>1</sup> Jay Parini, *Robert Frost- A Life*, (Henry Holt &Co.New York,1999)p305

<sup>2</sup> Robert Frost, “A Lone Striker”, *The Poetry of Robert Frost*, ed. Edward Connery Lathem (St. Martin’s Griffin. New York, 1979),p. 273

<sup>3</sup> The Sadness that Lurks : Robert Frost and the poetry of Poverty, Thomas Duddy, *The Hudson Review*, Autumn2011, 64,3; Pro Quest Research Library, p.449

<sup>4</sup> Robert Frost, “A Lone Striker”, *The Poetry of Robert Frost*, ed. Edward Connery Lathem (St. Martin’s Griffin. New York, 1979), p.273

<sup>5</sup> Robert Frost, “Two Tramps in Mud Time”, *The Poetry of Robert Frost*, ed. Edward Connery Lathem (St. Martin’s Griffin. New York, 1979), p.275

<sup>6</sup> Tim Kendall, *The Art of Robert Frost*, (Yale University Press, New York, 2012), 348

<sup>7</sup> Robert Frost, “In Times of Cloudburst”, *The Poetry of Robert Frost*, ed. Edward Connery Lathem (St. Martin’s Griffin. New York, 1979), p.285

<sup>8</sup> Deidre Fagan, *Critical Companion to Robert Frost*, (Facts on Files, New York) p191

<sup>9</sup> Robert Frost, “The Roadside Stand”, p286.opcit

<sup>10</sup> Ibid

<sup>11</sup> Ibid

<sup>12</sup> Robert Frost, “The Old Barn at the Bottom of the Fogs”, p289, opcit

<sup>13</sup> Ibid

<sup>14</sup> Ibid

<sup>15</sup> Robert Frost, “At Woodward’s garden”, p293.opcit

<sup>16</sup> Ibid

<sup>17</sup> Ibid

<sup>18</sup> Ibid

<sup>19</sup> Robert Frost, “Lost in Heaven”, p295.opcit

<sup>20</sup> Ibid

<sup>21</sup> Ibid

<sup>22</sup> Robert Frost, “Desert Places”, opcit.p296.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid

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- <sup>24</sup> Robert Frost, “Leaves Compared with Flowers” opcit, p296
- <sup>25</sup> Robert Frost, “Neither Out Far Nor in Deep”, opcit, p301.
- <sup>26</sup> Ibid
- <sup>27</sup> Elaine Barry, *Robert Frost*, (Fredrick Ungar Publishing Co. New York, 1973)p.36
- <sup>28</sup> Robert Frost, “Voice Ways”, opcit, p301.
- <sup>29</sup> Ibid
- <sup>30</sup> Ibid
- <sup>31</sup> Ibid
- <sup>32</sup> Robert Frost, “Ten Mills”, *The Poetry of Robert Frost*, ed. Edward Connery Lathem (St. Martin’s Griffin. New York, 1979), p.308
- <sup>33</sup> Robert Frost, “Precaution”, opcit, p29
- <sup>34</sup> Robert Frost, “Mending Wall”, opcit, p33
- <sup>35</sup> Ibid
- <sup>36</sup> Robert Frost, “Precaution”, opcit.p308.
- <sup>37</sup> Ibid
- <sup>38</sup> Robert Frost, “The Span of Life”, opcit. p308.
- <sup>39</sup> Ibid
- <sup>40</sup> Ibid
- <sup>41</sup> Robert Frost, “Petrinax”, opcit. p 308
- <sup>42</sup> Ibid
- <sup>43</sup> Robert Frost, “In Dive’s Dive”, opcit. p310.
- <sup>44</sup> Ibid
- <sup>45</sup> Robert Frost, “The Bearer of Evil Tidings” opcit, p. 313.
- <sup>46</sup> Robert Frost, “Iris By Night”, opcit, p315.
- <sup>47</sup> Ibid
- <sup>48</sup> Ibid
- <sup>49</sup> Robert Frost, “To A Thinker”, opcit, p325.
- <sup>50</sup> Robert Frost, “Beech”, opcit, p331
- <sup>51</sup> Ibid
- <sup>52</sup> William.H.Pritchard, *Frost: A Literary Life Reconsidered* ,Oxford University Press, 1984, p229
- <sup>53</sup> Robert Frost, “Come In”, p334, opcit.
- <sup>54</sup> Ibid

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- <sup>55</sup> Robert Frost, "I Could Give all to Time", p334, opcit
- <sup>56</sup> Robert Frost, "Carpe Diem", opcit. p335
- <sup>57</sup> Ibid
- <sup>58</sup> Robert Frost, "The Wind and the Rain", opcit. p336
- <sup>59</sup> Ibid
- <sup>60</sup> Ibid
- <sup>61</sup> Robert Frost, "The Most of it", opcit. p338
- <sup>62</sup> Ibid
- <sup>63</sup> Robert Frost, "The Quest of the Purple Fringed" opcit. p342
- <sup>64</sup> Robert Frost, "The Gift Outright", p348. opcit
- <sup>65</sup> Ibid
- <sup>66</sup> Reuben. A. Brower, *Poetry of Robert Frost-Constellations of Intention*, (Oxford University Press, New York, 1963) p.202
- <sup>67</sup> Robert Frost, "To A Young Wretch", opcit. p349
- <sup>68</sup> Ibid
- <sup>69</sup> Ibid
- <sup>70</sup> Robert Frost, "A Loose Mountain" opcit, p.360
- <sup>71</sup> Ibid
- <sup>72</sup> Robert Frost, "Directive", opcit. p377
- <sup>73</sup> Ibid
- <sup>74</sup> Ibid
- <sup>75</sup> Ibid
- <sup>76</sup> Tim Kendall, *The Art of Robert Frost*, Yale University Press, 2012, p380
- <sup>77</sup> Robert Frost, "The Middleness of the Road", opcit. p388
- <sup>78</sup> Ibid
- <sup>79</sup> Robert Frost, "Too Anxious for Rivers", opcit. p379
- <sup>80</sup> Ibid
- <sup>81</sup> Ibid
- <sup>82</sup> Robert Frost, "Skeptic", opcit. p389
- <sup>83</sup> Ibid
- <sup>84</sup> Robert Frost, "Two Leading Lights", opcit. p390
- <sup>85</sup> Ibid
- <sup>86</sup> Ibid

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<sup>87</sup> Peter J Stanlis ,*Robert Frost: The Poet as Philosopher*, ISI Books, USA, p289

<sup>88</sup> Does No One At All Ever Feel This Way in the Least” opcit.p.446

<sup>89</sup> Ibid

<sup>90</sup> Robert Frost,“The Objection to being Stepped On” opcit, p450

<sup>91</sup> Robert Frost, “For Iron”, opcit.p468

<sup>92</sup> Ibid

<sup>93</sup> Samuel Coale, “The Emblematic Encounter of Robert Frost” *Frost: Centennial Essays*, University Press of Mississippi, 1974, p106

<sup>94</sup> Robert Frost,“In Winter In the Woods”opcit. p.470

<sup>95</sup> Ibid

<sup>96</sup>Ibid, p94

<sup>97</sup> Robert Frost, “Come In”, opcit. p334