Foundations of American Literature

ROBERT KLUTTZ

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The Twentieth Century

(Part Seven)

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ROBERT FROST: REFLECTIONS ON HIS PHILOSOPHY

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Frost the Unique

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During the course of our thoughts on Frost the man and his unique role as bard extraordinary among twentieth century American writers, we have taken note of the fact that, because of his bulldog-tenacity of character and purpose, his "solemn wishes never learned to stray" far from the foundation stones of life laid down in early years by a devout Scottish Presbyterian immigrant mother[1] and by a not-so-devout American pioneer father of Danish extraction.[2] We may safely conclude of "Robert the Poet-Philosopher" that he was a man who maintained his integrity throughout life; and in the midst of the most difficult of circumstances,

> Far from the madding crowd's ignoble strife...
> Along the cool sequestered vale of life
> [He] kept the noiseless tenor of [his] way.[3]

Frost could hardly be described as one who dwelt "along the cool sequestered vale of life" except in terms of the metaphysical, where a calm equanimity of spirit did prevail. Otherwise, the apt description by Gray pertains in detail—not only with regard to his accomplishments in the field of letters, but also in connection with those special tenets centering about his person and character as an individual. It is our

1 Lawrance Thompson, *Robert Frost: The Early Years*, p. 499.

2 "Just when or from what place [the name Frost] came to England is not clear. It may have been brought over by the Danes under Canute. It may earlier have been a part and parcel of the baggage of Henghist and Horsa, thriving under the Ethel kings, in which case it may originally have been spelled "Forst"... Whatever may have been its status in the *Domesday Book*, or beyond, ...the first of the line was one Nicholas...an unlettered Devonshire man, who was the first to pull up roots and transplant the stock of the family to the New World." (Louis Mertins, *Robert Frost: Life and Talks-Walking*, p. 29)

3 Thomas Gray (1716–71), "Elegy in a Country Churchyard" (with modifications).

purpose in the present paper to expand upon these questions at issue, with comments from Frost's own lips, and as seen through the eyes of his contemporary critics as well as those of his disciples.

What, then, are the distinctives that set Frost apart from his contemporaries in the field of letters? What is the secret of his success, and of his wide appeal—both to the critics and to the general reading public alike? Some clues can doubtless be gleaned from his own confessions, such as the one identifying Frost the man with a rugged American individualism, wherein he admits never having committed himself to any but "God, the Home, and the State."[1]

HOW OTHERS FELT ABOUT FROST

Another is to be found so deftly interwoven in his poems: the language of the common man that had captivated English hearts by the time Frost went to England to receive honorary degrees from Oxford and Cambridge in 1957—degrees never since Lowell and Longfellow given to one person. Elizabeth Shepley Sergeant says, "The English have always loved their Americans free, unsubservient, and vernacular-spoken."[2]

Mark Van Doren once remarked: "Frost's poetry is a person."[3] And that person, of course, was Frost himself. Frank S. Flint well stated the fact when he wrote: "Mr. Robert Frost's poetry is so much a part of his life that to tell his life would be to explain his poetry....behind all [his works] is the heart and life of a man, and the more you ponder his poems the more convinced you become that the heart is pure and the life not lived in vain."[4] But one must never allow himself to be deceived by the disarming simplicity of the poet, or of his language, or of his style. Lydia Lyon Phelps, curator of the Robert Frost records in the Poetry Room of the Harvard College Library, stated: "His very simplicity is complex, his clarity is deep."[5]

Lynen makes the following astute observation:

> On the surface, his work has a disarming simplicity which sets it apart. We are accustomed to certain obscurities of style in modern poetry—fragmentary sentences, irregular verse forms, abrupt shifts from subject to subject, and an elliptical mode of reference. Frost's sentences are always clear, his verse forms traditional, his language close to everyday speech—no obscurity here, no oblique glances at Dante and the Book of Revelation, no esoteric learning or thickets of private symbolism. Because he demands less erudition in the reader, his poetry may seem to lack the complexity of thought one finds at the center of the best modern verse... The illusion of simplicity is so strong that it is hard to place Frost in the present century, and one is therefore tempted to assume that he is

1 Sidney Cox, *A Swinger of Birches*, p. 156.
2 Elizabeth Shepley Sergeant, *Robert Frost: The Trial by Existence*, p. 410.
3 Ibid., p. 400.
4 Lawrance Thompson, *Robert Frost: The Early Years*, pp. 425-6.
5 Sergeant, op. cit., p. 400.

> a belated Victorian writing in a manner so familiar and well-understood that there is no need to examine his methods as a poet. The simplicity, however, is only apparent...Frost's poems appear to be less complex than they really are.[1]

The Huntington Library has on file six of the first letters from Robert Frost to his editors, from which letters—studied carefully—the following lifelong characteristics emerge:

1. Humor with a Puritan twist,
2. An inflexible determination to go his own way and take his time about it, and
3. "Afterthoughts" as in his high-school valedictory address.

Sergeant rightly concludes that his whole body of poetry derives from afterthoughts about concrete observations of nature and man's nature.[2] A quotation from Radcliffe Squires informs us that in Robert Frost's poetry, "the concern with man and nature is an extension of the concern with self and nature."[3] Presumably, Frost's own self is meant, for it is not the least bit difficult to read into his works extensions of the man himself—his own unique personality and thought patterns. It is by no means begging the question to assert that to know Frost the man is to know his poetry, or vice versa.[4]

North of Boston[5] proved to be one of Frost's greatest successes and was probably the single most influential volume in establishing his career as a major poet.[6] It catapulted him to fame and success. When he returned to the United States from England in 1915, he was all but mobbed by editors and publishers begging him for poems to publish—the very men who had spurned his works such a short time before. Frost himself tells how editors now snatched for the opportunity to print the poems which previously for many years had been vainly offered to their magazines.[7] Untermeyer also reports that early in 1915

> ...seven months after the outbreak of the First World War, Robert Frost returned to America. He came back to find himself suddenly and unexpectedly famous. His two books were on sale everywhere in the United States, published by a New York publisher, Henry Holt and Company. The man who had left America an unknown writer came back to be hailed a leader of "the new era in American poetry."[8]

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1 John F. Lynen, *The Pastoral Art of Robert Frost*, p. 2.
2 Ibid., p. 37.
3 Radcliffe Squires, *The Major Themes of Robert Frost*, p. 66.
4 See Flint quotation, p. 2.
5 Compiled and published in England, 1914.
6 Philip L. Gerber, *Robert Frost*, p. 28.
7 Gorham B. Munson, *A Study in Sensibility and Good Sense*, p. 81.
8 Louis Untermeyer, *The Letters of Robert Frost to Louis Untermeyer*, p. xxii.

Although Frost's sales to date have not proved to be quite so large as were those of Longfellow (the future has yet to be seen), he is still "the most read American poet after James Whitcomb Riley."[1]

ON INDIVIDUAL HUMAN WORTH

Doyle observes that the most significant single piece of evidence which can be used to prove Robert Frost's belief in individual human worth is to be found in the development of the characters in *North of Boston*,[2] but Frost's concern for everything that happens to people as individuals continued without abating throughout his long and interesting life span.

Frost was possessed of a benevolent heart. Webster defines *philanthropy* as "a bestowal of property (as in a will), or benevolence, upon another, or upon others." Like Chaucer and Shakespeare, Frost loved people. On completing *North of Boston*, he dubbed it "a book of people." Human beings simply going about their business of being human beings never ceased to attract him. With his great love for people and their talk, it was only natural that he show early interest in the dramatic approach to poetry, which made its debut in his "book of people." The dramatic narrative was thus begun and thence sustained for the rest of his life. Doyle places Frost in a category with "many of the finest poets of the English tradition, poets so separated in time and diverse in nature as Chaucer, Donne, Blake, and Yeats."[3]

FROST ON POETRY AND MORALS

"One of the real American poets of yesterday," he once said, "was Longfellow. No, I am not being sarcastic. I mean it. It is the fashion nowadays to make fun of him. I come across this pose and attitude with people I meet socially, with men and women I meet in the classrooms of colleges where I teach. They laugh at his gentleness, at his lack of worldliness, at his detachment from the world and the meaning thereof.

"When and where has it been written that a poet must be a clubswinging warrior, a teller of barroom tales, a participant of unspeakable experiences? That, today, apparently is the stamp of poetic integrity. I hear people speak of men who are writing today, and their eyes light up with a deep glow of satisfaction when they can mention some putrid bit of gossip about them. 'He writes such lovely things,' they say, and in the next breath add, half worshipfully, 'He lives such a terrible life.'

"I can't see it. I can't see that a man must needs have his feet plowing through unhealthy mud in order to appreciate more fully the glowing splendor of the clouds. I can't see that a man must fill his soul with sick and miserable experiences, self-

1 Sergeant, op. cit., p. 401.
2 John Robert Doyle, Jr., *The Poetry of Robert Frost*, p. 202.
3 Ibid., p. 52.

imposed and self-inflicted, and greatly enjoyed, before he can sit down and write a lyric of strange and compelling beauty. Inspiration doesn't lie in the mud; it lies in the clean and wholesome life of the ordinary man."[1]

In an interview with Roger Kahn appearing in the *Saturday Evening Post* of November 16, 1960, Frost quipped:

> This is a time when beatniks, masquerading as poets, recite their work at you, pinning you to the ground first, when necessary.[2]

One of Frost's outstanding students at Amherst and author-poet in his own right, E. Merrill Root, writing on "Taste and the Sane Mind," reflects his highly esteemed mentor's attitude with regard to poetry when he states that "modern literature takes insanity as its center."[3] He expands on this premise:

> One almost despairs of a common axiom or shared premise from which to begin a discussion of this subject. The modern mind is too often like Caliban as Browning saw him, who "Will sprawl, now that the heat of day is best, / Flat on his belly in the pit's much mire...." Caliban so pervades and dominates modern literature and art that one sometimes forgets that there is something beyond "the pit's much mire," or the "rank tongue" that sows the *weeds of speech*. And since Caliban is incapable of the intuition of reality that establishes a premise, or the logic that fulfills the destiny implicit in a premise, how can you lead him to wisdom? Your best pearls are nuggets of nothing when cast before Caliban! ...[4]
>
> The difficulty of discussing taste today is that we have no taste to speak of any more. Colleges have very little. Most college courses in literature and art today are a roll in the mud with Caliban, and a tape-recording of the rank tongue that blossoms from "the pit's much mire..."[5]
>
> Recently the head of the English Department in a Midwest university wrote a letter to a friend of mine in which he cited Langston Hughes as a great poet. I know a college in Indiana where the drama department believes that Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman* is great tragedy—— they don't even know that you cannot write tragedy about the writhings of an amoeba thrusting out agonized pseudopodia in a drop of acid! The amoeba is, of course, *pathetic;* but tragedy demands a protagonist who can greatly *struggle* and *grandly* suffer. I have a copy of the "literary" magazine of the University of Oregon that is crammed with "poetry" so flatulent-dull that it would put a damned soul to sleep as the demons turned him on his fiery grid, and that makes its pornography as sleep-inducing as a carton of barbiturates. The stuff that passes for "literature" in most college magazines today would incite Molière to write a new *Les Précieuses Ridicules*. In colleges, which should be islands of light in

1 Edward Connery Lathem, *Interviews with Robert Frost*, p. 47.
2 Ibid., p. 246.
3 E. Merrill Root, *America's Steadfast Dream*, p. 276.
4 Ibid., p. 93.
5 Idem.

the salt seas of worldly darkness, tastelessness and the "academic freedom" to ballyhoo it, are rampant and pervasive. If such is the debacle of the ivory towers of Academe, what can you expect of the literary assembly lines of the marketplace? ...[1]

Edgar Allan Poe is one of the supreme critics of American life and literature. He wrote in his résumé of the end of the world in his "Colloquy of Monos and Una":

> But now it appears that we had worked out our own destruction in the perversion of our *taste*, or rather in the blind neglect of its culture in our schools. For, in truth, it was at this crisis that taste alone—that faculty which, holding a middle position between the pure intellect and the moral sense, could never safely have been disregarded—it was now that taste alone could have led us gently back to Beauty, to Nature, and to Life.

It seems that, with exact anticipatory prevision, Poe saw "our own destruction in the perversion of our taste." Today we are full-seas-under what he saw far off as a new Flood....[2]

Vincent van Gogh, in his terrible, magnificent "The Night Café," painted evil. But he knew that it was evil—and abhorred it. He wrote of the picture: "I have tried to express the terrible passions of humanity by means of red and green....I have tried to express the idea that the café is a place where one can ruin oneself, run mad, or commit a crime. So I have tried to express as it were the powers of darkness in a low drink shop...and all this in an atmosphere like a devil's furnace, of pale sulphur." The modern "artists" of the brothel and the back seat, on the other hand, choose their subjects as neutral "facts" of existence, in terms of the fashionable modern prurient itch to be perverse and merely to exploit the manias of the hour. Also let us remember that van Gogh spent *most* of his painting not on areas of evil and ugliness but on areas of beauty and good....[3]

The worst of such lack of taste is that it destroys reality....[4]

Without taste, we narrow the many-splendored universe into a descending sphere of ever-closing walls...which is exactly what Dante saw as Hell....[5]

...if you destroy taste, you subvert the strength of the soul and soften man for the easy kill.[6]

Thus, Frost's faithful disciple echoes back to us something of the poetic philosophy of the old master himself when we are faced with questions such as "What is art? What is literature? What is poetry?" and "How do we distinguish between the true and the false?" Jean Gould states that Frost's aim was song, not "the *noise* of publicized schools of poetry."[7]

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1 Root, op. cit., p. 94.
2 Idem.
3 Ibid., p. 96.
4 Ibid., p. 98.
5 Ibid., p. 99.
6 Ibid., p. 93.
7 Jean Gould, *Robert Frost: The Aim Was Song*, p. 108.

SENSE OF SOUND

William Stanley Braithwaite, writing for the *Boston Evening Transcript* of May 18, 1915, states:

> The poet was in his twentieth year when he realized that the speech of books and the speech of life were far more fundamentally different than was supposed. His models up to this period, as with all youthful poets and writers, had been literary models. But he found quite by accident that real artistic speech was only to be copied from life. On his New Hampshire farm he discovered this in the character of a man with whom he used to drive along the country roads. Having discovered this speech he set about copying it in poetry, getting the principles down by rigorous observation and reproduction through the long years which intervened to the publication of his books.
>
> He also discovered that where English poetry was greatest it was by virtue of this same method in the poet, and, ...in his talk with me he illustrated it in Shakespeare, Shelley, Wordsworth, and Emerson.[1]

Frost summarized his own concept about the images of sound as follows:

> What we do get in life and miss so often in literature is the sentence sounds that underlie the words. Words in themselves do not convey meaning, and to [...prove] this, which may seem entirely unreasonable to any one who does not understand the psychology of sound, let us take the example of two people who are talking on the other side of a closed door, whose voices can be heard but whose words cannot be distinguished. Even though the words do not carry, the sound of them does, and the listener can catch the meaning of the conversation. This is because every meaning has a particular sound-posture; or, to put it in another way, the sense of every meaning has a particular sound which each individual is instinctively familiar with and without at all being conscious of the exact words that are being used is able to understand the thought, idea, or emotion that is being conveyed.
>
> What I am most interested in emphasizing in the application of this belief to art is the sentence of sound, because to me a sentence is not interesting merely in conveying a meaning of words. It must do something more; it must convey a meaning by sound.[2]

WORDSWORTH AND SOUND

When Wordsworth said, "Write with your eye on the object," or (in another sense) it was important to visualize, he really meant something more. That something carries out what I mean by writing with your ear to the voice. This is what Wordsworth did himself in all his best poetry, proving that there can be no creative imagination unless there is a summoning up of experience, fresh from life, which has not hitherto been evoked. The power, however, to do this does not last very long in the

1 Lathem, op. cit., p. 4.

2 Ibid., p. 6.

life of a poet. After ten years Wordsworth had very nearly exhausted his, giving us only flashes of it now and then. As language only really exists in the mouths of men, here again Wordsworth was right in trying to reproduce in his poetry not only the words—and in their limited range, too, actually used in common speech—but their sound.[1]

CONVERSATIONAL TONES OF VOICE

Sidney Cox, writing in *A Swinger of Birches*, says:

> Good dramatists and story writers, verse or prose, have usually had an ear for speech meaning. Robert Frost goes further. He says the only live sentence is one with the living voice somehow caught in the syllables.
>
> I suppose it serves him right that many highly educated people don't know how to read his poems. They are terrified of anything a fool might mistake for exhibitionism. Their own talk is as flat and noncommittal as they can make it. And they uncritically assume that scientific findings have displaced and discredited emotional realizations. Anything unstatistical is too vague and relative to be trusted. And so some ears are paralyzed for poetry—especially the poetry of Robert Frost. Many apparently don't hear the way people talk. When they try to read aloud they monotonize. And the identification with another person that accompanies fitting our throats and tongues to his emotions can't take place.
>
> Robert Frost early detected this tendency and opposed it. He enjoys reproducing the tones and inflections he heard people use before he was ten years old. He has, ever since, satisfied his curiosity about people by listening to their give-away speech. He has remembered shades of difference.
>
> "I first heard the voice from a printed page," he once said, "in a Virgilian eclogue and from Hamlet." From that time his writing has consisted of "images to the ear." In 1935 he was saying: "Poetry has to do something to you with sound. I do not care about meaning except as I use it to get meaning out of tones of voice..."[2]

A good poem, then, is something of a performance, not only by the writer but by the reader also. The reader must assume what Frost liked to call the right "sound posture" or "vocal gesture" in order to understand the poem fully; he must assume the role of the poem's persona. For this reason the tone must be something within his own experience, Frost claimed. And for millions who heard him giving those famous readings of his own poetry, he was absolutely right. Nobody—but nobody—could ever approach the reading of Frost's poems like Robert Frost. Roger Kahn, writing for the *Saturday Evening Post:*

> He speaks his poetry surely, clearly, with perfect command of the cadences. It is poetry written to be heard aloud, and when you hear it in Frost's voice you feel that somehow it reaches its final measure of

1 Lathem, op. cit., p. 7.
2 Cox, op. cit., p. 81.

beauty in these fine New England tones.[1]

Cox gives us a summary of the problem in Frost's own words:

> The living part of a poem is the intonation entangled somehow in the syntax idiom and meaning of a sentence. It is only there for those who have heard it previously in conversation.... It is not for us in any Greek or Latin poem because our ears have not been filled with the tones of Greek and Roman talk. It is the most volatile and at the same time important part of poetry. It goes and the language becomes dead language, the poetry dead poetry. With it go the accents, the stresses, the delays that are not the property of vowels and syllables but that are shifted at will with the sense. Vowels have length there is no denying. But the accent of sense supersedes all other accent, over-rides it and sweeps it away. I will find you the word 'come' variously used in various passages, a whole, half, third, fourth, fifth, and sixth note. It is as long as the sense makes it. When men no longer know the intonations on which we string our words they will fall back on what I may call the absolute length of our syllables, which is the length we would give them in passages that meant nothing.... I say you can't read a single good sentence with the salt in it unless you have previously heard it spoken. Neither can you with the help of all the characters and diacritical marks pronounce a single word unless you have previously heard it actually pronounced. Words exist in the mouth—not books.[2] (January 14, 1914.)

Immediately following his eighty-fifth birthday in 1959, Frost took part in a discussion with contemporary poets Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren centering upon the technical aspects of verse. Commenting on Vachel Lindsay's marginal directions as to proper tones of voice, he remarked:

> You ought not to have to say that in the margin...[it] ought to be in the meaning. This is why you have to have a meaning, 'cause you don't know what to do with anything if you don't have a meaning. It makes you act up; you've got to act up.
>
> "What sayest thou, old barrelful of lies?" Chaucer says. What d'you say, "old barrelful of lies"? And you can hear it talk just the same today—and all of it. That's why it exists. It's beautiful, anywhere you look into Chaucer:
>
> Since I from love escaped am so fat,
> I never think to have been in his prison lean;
> Since I am free, I count him not a bean.
>
> This is Chaucer talking too. It's just the same now. I hear the country people talking, England and here, with these same ways of acting up. Put it that way—call it "acting up."
>
> You act up when you talk. Some do more than others. Some little children do: some just seem to be rather straight line, but some switch their whole body when they talk—switch their skirts. *Expressiveness*

1 Lathem, op. cit., p. 246.
2 Cox, op. cit., p. 82.

comes over them. Words aren't enough.[1]

Frost's ears never failed him. He heard in his mind's ear every word of every poem he ever wrote.[2] He created a new blank verse rhythm, wedded firmly to "the sound of sense" and capturing with accuracy and flexibility the sounds of the speaking voice. He gave to poetry a new dimension, taking it as close to drama as it could possibly go. "And in that Browningesque mold he created a range of characters and moods, a depth of psychological insight, and a technical mastery that no other poet has equaled. Not even Browning."[3]

For Frost, real poetry had to combine the tones of natural speech *and* be metrical. But his success and style can never be explained in terms of verbal mechanics alone. This is implicit in Robert S. Newdick's remark that "Frost has addressed himself for forty-odd years primarily to the fundamental problems involved in capturing in poetry the full range of tones in the speech of living men and women." Mark Van Doren writes in the same vein: "His strangeness (here a term of praise) consisted, and still consists, in the conversational tone he builds into his verse."[4] Cox says: "Mechanisms always threaten to choke off the breath of man. But no one can avoid necessity. We cannot do without machines and organizations. And so anything entertaining or artistic that doesn't come to terms with the necessary is frivolous. It begs life's main question: How can we participate in a world we did not design, and still not sell out?"[5]

Robert Frost had to face squarely, and take this dilemma by the horns, but he never sold out. He was true to principle, true to himself, and true to his art; hence, he "oozed genuineness" to others.

> This above all: to thine own self be true,
> And it must follow, as the night the day,
> Thou canst not then be false to any man.[6]

BELIEF (OR THE LACK OF IT) AND CHARACTER, BEHAVIOR, DESTINY

The shaping of our thought processes, behavior patterns, and final destiny depends largely on the premise we start out with. In "The Trial by Existence," Frost maintains that we are individually responsible for selecting our own several destinies:

> And none are taken but who will,
> Having first heard the life read out
> That opens earthward, good and ill,
> Beyond the shadow of a doubt;

1 Lathem, op. cit., p. 201.
2 Sergeant, op. cit., p. 38.
3 Elaine Barry, *Robert Frost*, p. 78.
4 Lynen, op. cit., p. 81.
5 Cox, op. cit., p. 87.
6 *Hamlet:* I. iii. 78–80.

And very beautifully God limns,
    And tenderly, life's little dream,
But naught extenuates or dims,
    Setting the thing that is supreme.

*

And so the choice must be again,
    But the last choice is still the same;
And the awe passes wonder then,
    And a hush falls for all acclaim.

*

'Tis the essence of life here,
    Though we choose greatly, still to lack
The lasting memory at all clear,
    That life has for us on the wrack
Nothing but what we somehow chose:
    Thus are we wholly stripped of pride
In the pain that has but one close,
    Bearing it crushed and mystified.

In "Reluctance," Frost argues that it is treason to jettison principle and merely float downstream with the flotsam and jetsam:

The heart is still aching to seek,
    But the feet question "Whither?"
Ah, when to the heart of man
    Was it ever less than a treason
To go with the drift of things,
    To yield with a grace to reason,
And bow and accept the end
    Of a love or a season?

This final stanza of the poem makes a rather general and wise observation which displays a thorough understanding of the universal perversity resident in the heart of that "animal"[1] called man. It is man's rebelliousness that creates the drama (above); he is portrayed in the act of rebellion against the end of the autumn season. The world has nothing more to offer, but he does not want to accept that verdict. What, finally, the poem turns out to be is a very quiet dramatization of man's unwillingness to accept reality. He would much rather live amidst fantasy.[2]

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1 Man is *not* an animal in any sense of the word, nor did he derive from one. That he shares some of the same basic characteristics with other creatures of God in the universe (design, character, and certain structural similarities with the Creator, the angels, animals, plants, and minerals) by no means indicates that he "evolved" from a lower form of life as the Darwinian theory postulates. He was *created* by the Supreme Life-giver, and has since that time degenerated to his present fallen state. Root does not equivocate on this point: "...having severed himself from God, man is obviously dying and often already dead—a corpse ambulant, a shadow that no longer even points to the sun." (Root, op. cit., p. 105).

2 Doyle, op. cit., p. 60.

Life had already dealt Frost too little equanimity,[1] however, to allow for fantasizing. He was forced into investigating the basic themes of life in order to arrive at something better than "a momentary stay against confusion."[2] Poetry's four classic themes, for Frost, resolved themselves quite naturally under the following categories: the individual's relationship

(1) to himself,
(2) to his fellow man,
(3) to his world, and
(4) to his God.

These literary imperatives had compelled a definite purpose upon the writer, and—"like blinders on a horse, inevitably [they narrowed the] possessor's point of view."[3] Nitchie states that there is little of the fanatic in Frost, but that there is a good deal of mistrust in mere intelligence.[4] In "The White-Tailed Hornet," Frost deplores the tendency toward downward comparisons that see our images reflected in the mud and even dust—that is, the attempt to place man in a context of mere physical and biological categories.[5] Root totally agrees with this. "The reality of life is never material; it is always spiritual,"[6] he says.

Frost, in "The White-Tailed Hornet,"[7] purposely misquotes a well-known proverb in order to give emphasis to truth:

Won't this whole instinct matter bear revision?
Won't almost any *theory* bear revision?[8]
To err is human, not to, *animal*.[8]

But that is *not* the aphorism at all! It should read: "To err is human; to forgive, divine." What superb sarcasm! If mankind is in reality evolved from the animal kingdom, according to the *theory* of Darwin et. al., then they (the animals) are our progenitors by mere chance and through processes of spontaneous generation—a scientific absurdity to begin with. But there are multiple other problems and contradictions in the "theory" besides. The noble animals have never fallen in sin from their first estate, as mankind has. They have never warred, raped, plundered, lied, cheated, deceived, stolen, or murdered. Surely they are on a far higher moral plane than their "brothers" the human beings. Writing on the topic "In Search of a Real Man,"

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1 See *Culture and Language*, September 1979, pp. 25ff on "The Job-like Trials of Robert Frost".
2 From the 1500-word preface to Frost's *Collected poems* (Holt, 1930)—"The Figure a Poem Makes".
3 Cox, op. cit., p. 23.
4 George W. Nitchie, *Human Values in the Poetry of Robert Frost*, p. 56.
5 Ibid., p. 86.
6 Root, op. cit., p. 225.
7 Edward Connery Lathem (ed.), *The Poetry of Robert Frost*, p. 279.
8 Emphasis added.

Root reflects Frost when he says:

WHAT IS MAN?[1]

> And man, if he is truly man, surpasses yet includes the qualities of all the living creatures—vegetable and animal—that share with him creation and the earth...[2]
>
> The assorted libelers of man—the existentialists, pragmatists, relativists, nihilists, social-democrats—seek to deflate man by calling him an "animal." Thus they compensate themselves for their own impotence to be a man. But they know not what they do, for they know animals as dimly as they know man...or they would be more cautious. Knowing neither man nor animal, the modern destroyers try to make the captive audiences of the schoolroom share their ignorance...[3]
>
> Man, of course, shares earth with the animals. But today's wreckers mean, by claiming man as "only an animal," that man is only blind, irrational, brutal, a-moral, lustful, violent, bestial... for which libels our friends the animals should bring suit. If man is an animal, he has vital instincts: noble courage, joy in living, artistry (like the beaver and the bird), a sense of property and of right and wrong, wisdom, cleanliness. One wishes that social-democrats, and better-Red-than-dead degenerates, and Beatniks, *were* animals—for then they would be better men! ...[4]
>
> Animals have a vital will-to-be that contemporary man too often has lost. Animals have courage against all odds; they will battle to the last gasp for their God-given *I am*. Mink or muskrat, woodchuck or wolf, caught in a trap, gnaws through the plastic fetter of a paw, saying in effect: "Liberty—even on three feet!"...[5]

"How splendid the animals!" emphasizes Root. "In spite of all temptations to belong to other species, a tiger burns bright from the anvil of God; a rabbit keeps a tryst under the moon with his little cobweb tuft of tail pert and gay; the thoroughbred spends his heart to win the race; the partridge lures the fox away from her young with pretense of a broken wing; the bird fashions a sheen of plume and lilt of song, affirming the spectrum and the tonal scale. Man is more than these, much as we love them; but man cannot be less than these...."[6] Root would be hard put to have to deny any of the truths he learned at the feet of his beloved teacher. He desires not to deny, however — only to affirm.

A true man does not sneer at man as "only a superior animal"; he says

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1 "O Lord our Lord, how excellent is Thy Name in all the earth! Who hast set Thy Glory above the heavens... When I consider Thy heavens, the work of Thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which Thou hast ordained; *What is man*, that Thou art mindful of him?" (Excerpts from Psalm 8).

2 Root, op. cit., p. 14.

3 Idem.

4 Idem.

5 Idem.

6 Ibid., p. 15.

"I share with you, the animals, all these things. I am a man, so I must go farther than you in consciousness and character; but I will never deny you, pervert you, or betray or abjure the qualities that are yours." The trouble with social-democrats is that they are not good animals; so how can they be men?...[1]

The wisest of books says that God has set man only a little lower than the angels.[2] Man (especially today) may fall lower than the demons, with Lucifer, his chosen lord; but God has set him, in the potential of his essence, only a little lower than the angels; and man, to be man, must know it....[3]

To be man, we must aim higher than man. A man can succeed, being finite in existence but infinite in essence, only by rising to his highest possible failure....[4]

Even in the world of physics we must aim the arrow, or even the high-power rifle, above a distant target if we would hit it. And in the world of metaphysics, in the realm of consciousness and character, it is equally true; we must never forget trajectory, we must aim above our target. To hit anything on this earth we must aim at Heaven....[5]

Man is one who seeks a "sense of what life is for."[6]

And Frost, in the words of his disciple, was just such a man. The whole of his life was spent in seeking a lasting clarification of his beliefs, a clarification of "what life is for." In his last book of poetry[7] particularly, moreso than in any of the eleven volumes that had preceded it, Frost seemed to be grasping toward an enduring philosophy of life rather than a mere "momentary stay against confusion." This climactic work represents and partially reflects the ripe wisdom of his years—especially the many years of solitary loneliness following the multiple tragedies[8] that dogged the heels of this "modern-day Job."

How did Frost do it? How did he bear up under such great adversity? Let us turn to Thompson for a key as to the greatness of the man and his philosophy:

How did Frost ever bear up under the devastating griefs and heart-breaks caused by all those untimely deaths? A good answer was given by a clergyman who, knowing the poet well, called him "a Job in our time." Many of the later letters give new pertinence to that analogy. Like Job, our puritanical poet seemed to find his most bitter sorrows and doubts made bearable by his capacity to accept loss and pain as mysterious trials administered by an inscrutable and yet benevolent deity. Even the most secular of Frost's friends felt that to differ with him concerning this

1 Root, op. cit., p. 15.
2 For explication, see Psalm 8.
3 Root, op. cit., p. 16.
4 Idem.
5 Idem.
6 Ibid., p. 17.
7 *In the Clearing*, published shortly after his eighty-eighth birthday on March 26, 1962.
8 See *Culture and Language*, September 1979, pp. 25ff for clarification.

assumption which gave him consolation desperately needed, would have been an act of cruelty. A deep religious faith had been nurtured in Frost by his mother during his childhood, and although he subjected different aspects of this faith to severe challenge, mockery, and skepticism, he never rejected it for long. Partly from shyness and partly from a desire to express his non-conformist religious independence by uttering heresies, he often encouraged misunderstandings: and strangers cited his apparent blasphemies as evidences that Frost was an atheist. He never was. But his curiously Greek-Roman-Scotch-Yankee temperament responded with sympathetic vigor to the Aeschylean proverb that God helps those who help themselves—particularly in the task of discovering how to survive and how to go on living in this world after each new loss might temporarily injure the desire to survive.[1]

Cook reminds us that in the seventeenth century "the Puritans at Massachusetts Bay adopted in a new land a theology with its sanctions prominently embedded in St. Augustine's doctrine of conversion and Calvin's doctrine of predestination. They struck durable roots in the rugged American coastline, and Frost's two Biblicals—*A Masque of Reason* and *A Masque of Mercy*—are twentieth-century cuttings from the original root stalk at Massachusetts Bay Colony."[2] To study and know these[3] is to study and know the man himself, as Flint has already wisely counseled.[4]

REALIST AND BIBLICIST

The philosophical Frost was not only a realist but a Biblicist as well. His faith in God remained implicit and unquestioning throughout life. To Roger Kahn of the *Saturday Evening Post* he confessed, "There's a good deal of God in everything you do. It's like climbing up a ladder, and the ladder rests on nothing; and you climb higher and higher, and you feel there must be God at the top. *It can't be unsupported up there.*"[5]

In spite of his curiosity and deep apprehension about the discoveries of modern science, Frost did not accept the domination of science in today's world[6] without contradictory and skeptical feelings that are reflected especially in his later poetry. In 1945, he wrote on the flyleaf of a student's book a passage from ...*Reason* in which God is speaking:

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1 As recorded by Hyatt H. Waggoner, *American Poets: From the Puritans to the Present*, pp. 311–2.

2 Reginald L. Cook, *The Dimensions of Robert Frost*, p. 188.

3 See *Culture and Language* (September 1979) for comments on *A Masque of Reason*, and the same publication (March 1980) for thoughts on *A Masque of Mercy*.

4 See p. 2, this thesis.

5 Lathem, op. cit., p. 249.

6 "Something has to be left to God," he repeatedly stated. "There will always be *something* left to know." It behooves the reader to be exacting and demand truly *scientific* answers to problems relating to origins, rather than gullibly gulp down every new speculative theory that comes along. For a clarification of the terms "science" and "scientism," see *Culture and Language*, March 1979 ("Foundations of American Education"), pp. 19ff; and *Culture and Language*, September 1980 ("Frost on Education and Teaching"), p. 10.

My forte is truth,
Or metaphysics, long the world's reproach
For standing still in one place true forever;
While science goes self-superseding on.
Look at how far we've left the current science
Of Genesis behind. The wisdom there, though,
Is just as good as when I uttered it.

Then he added, below:

Really Robert Frost's
though by him ascribed
To Someone higher up.[1]

In "Kitty Hawk," his Biblicist sympathies ring loud and clear in these six lines:

TALK ALOFT
Someone says the Lord
Says our reaching toward
Is its own reward.
One would like to know
Where God says it, though.
We don't like that much.

What Frost is doing here is simply asking for "chapter and verse" in gentlemanly fashion. He rather reminds us of those Berean Christians who were not willing to accept the words of Paul and Silas only, but desired a Scriptural foundation for the confirmation of *any* allegation: "And the brethren immediately sent away Paul and Silas by night unto Berea: who coming thither went into the synagogue of the Jews. These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the Word with all readiness of mind, *and searched the Scriptures daily*, whether those things were so."[2] So *Biblical evidence* is better than gullibly gulping down anything and everything, and this is the foundation upon which Frost's faith was built. Frost was absolutely right to question what "someone" had said, and to weigh it very judiciously by what God's Infallible Word says. Of course no such poppycock is taught in the Bible,[3] and he did not appreciate the fact that any man would be so brazen as to tamper with the Book that was the foundation of his faith.

Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the Scripture is of any private

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1 Sergeant, op. cit., p. 372.

2 Acts 17.10-11.

3 That "the laborer is worthy of his reward" *is* taught ("For the scripture saith, Thou shalt not muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn. And, The laborer is worthy of his reward."— 1 Timothy 5.18), but the mere fact of one's effort being its own reward is nowhere to be found. On the contrary, Leviticus 19.13 explicitly commands: "Thou shalt not defraud thy neighbor, neither rob him: the wages of him that is hired shall not abide with thee all night until the morning." James 5.4 explicates this by saying: "Behold, the hire of the laborers who have reaped down your fields, which is of you kept back by fraud, crieth: and the cries of them are entered into the ears of the Lord of sabaoth." If, therefore, mere men are expected to deal so fairly and justly with one another, how much more shall the Creator of *all* deal in equitably rewarding those who love, obey, and trust Him! This concept is repeatedly found in multiple Scriptures throughout both Old and New Testaments. For a complete listing of all references to "Reward," see *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance*, p. 844.

interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.[1]

For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this Book, If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this Book: And if any man shall take away from the words of the Book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the Book of Life, and out of the Holy City, and from the things which are written in this Book.[2]

Every word of God is pure: He is a shield unto them that put their trust in Him. Add thou not unto His words, lest He reprove thee, and thou be found a liar.[3]

REFORMATION THEOLOGY

Protestant reformer John Calvin based his beliefs strictly on the Bible and briefly classified them into what are now known as "The Five Points of Calvinism":[4]

1. Total Depravity
2. Unconditional Election
3. Limited Atonement
4. Irresistable Grace
5. Perseverance of the Saints

Frost's Puritan upbringing would never allow him to divorce his thoughts from these tenets, or from the doctrine of "the fortunate fall."[5] He fully accepted the fact that to live under the curse as an outcast from Eden is the condition not only of man, but that all things are merely temporal, and that "the very earth itself is liable to the fate of meaninglessly being broken off." In "The Lesson for Today,"[6] Frost clearly identifies with Reformation theology:

We're either nothing or a God's regret...[7]

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1 2 Peter 1. 20–21.
2 Revelation 22. 18–19.
3 Proverbs 30. 5–6.
4 See also *Culture and Language*, September 1978, p. 8.
5 See Alfred R. Ferguson on "Frost and the Paradox of the Fortunate Fall," in *Frost: Centennial Essays*, pp. 427ff.
6 Lathem (ed.), op. cit., p. 350.
7 Any closely observant reader of Frost knows that the poet is not a little skeptical about "ultimate answers." He objected to, and recoiled from, being forced into a corner over matters of choice and decision-making on problems involving metaphysical speculation (See, for example, "The Strong Are Saying Nothing"), but in the first line (quoted above) his logical conclusion as to man's existence would indicate that he allowed himself to be driven—inevitably—into an unavoidable cul-de-sac:

1. Man as "nothing," or
2. Man as a "God's regret."

If we ascribe verity to the first, it means that man becomes a mindless blob of protoplasm floating on an endless sea of happenstance: no reason for existence, no purpose to life, nothing after death, no need for moral code or conduct, and with the logically-resultant "no-God-philosophy" the whole of mankind reverts to the bestial law of the jungle. If, on the other hand, the second is based on facts of creation and natural law established by God the Creator with design, purpose, and reason back of our existence, then the presence of mankind in a reasonable universe and the need for order and moral behavior with ultimate accountability to God assumes new and valid meaning in the light of reality-based experience in a sin-cursed world.

It sent me to the graves the other day.
The only other there was far away
Across the landscape with a watering pot
At his devotions in a special plot.
And he was there resuscitating flowers
(Make no mistake about its being bones);
But I was only there to read the stones
To see what on the whole they had to say
About how long a man may think to live,
Which is becoming my concern of late.
And very wide the choice they seemed to give;
The ages ranging all the way from hours
To months and years and many, many years.
One man had lived one hundred years and eight.
But though we all may be inclined to wait
And follow some development of state,
Or see what comes of science and invention,
There is a limit to our time extension.[1]
We are all doomed to broken-off careers,
And so's the nation, so's the total race.
The earth itself is liable to the fate
Of meaninglessly being broken off.

Not meaninglessly, really. The "breaking off" process was a natural and immediate consequence of earth's rebellion (via the heart of man) against the will and purpose of the Creator. This is Biblically sound theology and Frost, as a realist living in a real world of reality, could hardly deny what the Scriptures clearly set forth: "Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned.... It is appointed unto men once to die, and after this, the Judgment."[2] The point to be stressed is that Frost believed that life was an unending struggle, a grim affair, and that those who have set happiness as their main goal are going to be terribly disappointed.[3] "Tragedy, yes," Robert said. "There is always tragedy. That is what life is."[4] He continually used the Bible as a source book on the subject of man's fate, and expressed his conclusions by saying, "The groundwork of all faith is human woe..."[5]

This basic attitude of coming to grips with the hard, cold facts of life and of recognizing and dealing with them in realistic terms is the characteristic in Frost's nature that separates him from the world of fantasy and places him squarely in the middle of the present world's realistic battles.

"Spring Pools" reveals a melancholy sadness which frequently gripped the poet's heart as he realized with the passing of the years that the fleeting loveliness of

1 Emphasis added.
2 Romans 5.12, Hebrews 9.27.
3 Doyle, op. cit., p. 238.
4 Cox, op. cit., p. 121.
5 Sergeant, op. cit., p. 374.

youth—and indeed all of life—is somehow nothing more than a transitory dream.[1] It was written just after the Frosts through Lesley had received word that Marjorie was being hospitalized for an operation. Elinor departed immediately for Pittsfield,[2] leaving Frost deserted and half-sick with the flu (his regular winter siege). Feeling terribly alone, he built a great fire with black walnut logs and lay on the couch in front of it for three days and three nights brooding over the lines of "a delicate, playful, yet fairly sinister poem."[3] Oblivious to all else, he staggered to his feet when the fire burned low, mustered strength enough to chuck another log onto the dying embers, and then almost helplessly crawled back into his cocoon of creativity. This is the product that emerged:

> These pools that, though in forests, still reflect
> The total sky almost without defect,
> And like the flowers beside them, chill and shiver,
> Will like the flowers beside them soon be gone,
> And yet not out by any brook or river,
> But up by roots to bring dark foliage on.
>
> The trees that have it in their pent-up buds
> To darken nature and be summer woods—
> Let them think twice before they use their powers
> To blot out and drink up and sweep away
> These flowery waters and these watery flowers
> From snow that melted only yesterday.[4]

"Delicate, playful, ... [and] fairly sinister" indeed. What hidden meaning! What magnificent imagery! What splendid metaphysical ramifications! This creation calls to mind another of like hue and specification:

> 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.[5]

In both examples are to be found Frost's basic Biblical and metaphysical philoso-

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1 Gould, op. cit., p. 249.
James also reminds us of this sobering fact with a question: "For what is your life? It is even a vapor, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away." (James 4.14) Peter echoes the same by stating: "For all flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away: But the Word of the Lord endureth forever." (1 Peter 1.24-5)

2 Massachusetts.

3 Gould, op. cit., p. 249.

4 Lathem (ed.), op. cit., p. 245.

5 Ibid., p. 222, "Nothing Gold Can Stay"

phy. He was *not* a brooding pessimist, but neither was he an unqualified optimist. How can any keenly-observant scientific-minded thinker in our universe be anything but...?

The first two lines of "Spring Pools" remind us that man in his essence and being is first of all a reflection of the Creator—at least he *was* in his Edenic state perfect,[1] and we moderns must confess that even the most fallen and depraved of men still reflect to some degree their origin at the hand of God. The phrase "...almost without defect" echoes this. Merrill Root, distraught by what passes for the choicest literature of our day, writes:

> That stormy berserker of literature, Thomas Carlyle, knew the truth: Man, he said, is *Diogenes Teufelsdröckh*...[2] But our modern destroyers deny the *Diogenes* and affirm the *Teufelsdröckh*.[3]

Marion Montgomery, writing on "Robert Frost and His Use of Barriers," states that, according to Frost in "A Considerable Speck," the modern world is being swept by a "tenderer-than-thou collectivistic regimenting love" which reduces man to a numerical and animal problem and reckons him no more than the other creatures who share the world of nature with him. "Our worship, humor, conscientiousness" have long since gone to the dogs under the table, he says in "The White-Tailed Hornet," because we have insisted on instituting downward comparisons. The result, Frost feels, has been to destroy man's proper place in the world. Scientific man has been so bold as to demonstrate the infallibility of natural laws and then has proceeded to measure himself against them. As long as there was man's fallibility, as long as he could bow to natural law, there was some distinction in being man. Frost observes in this poem, however, that even the hornet is fallible—it can't tell the difference between a nailhead and a fly, and when it does strike at a fly it misses. It serves man right, Frost says, to be denied even the distinction of fallibility since he so willingly turned from measuring himself against the angels and God to measure himself against the "dogs under the table."[4]

HUMAN DISTINCTIVES

From a purely rationalistic point of view, it should be plain to the honest soul that the origin of man is *not* himself. Nothing in the universe produces, or has ever produced, itself. Lamarckian pseudo-science and abiogenesis have been tossed out the window of modern scientific thinking for years.[5] Louis Pasteur and others have long

1 Following each of the creation days, God looked upon the work of His hands, and a similar pronouncement is made: "And God saw every thing that He had made, and, behold, it was *very good*." (Genesis 1.31) The last phrase of the verse should be understood as meaning *perfect* in its original state.

2 "God-born Devil's-dung."

3 Root, op. cit., p. 16.

4 James M. Cox (ed.), *Robert Frost: A Collection of Critical Essays*, p. 149.

5 *Ex nihilo nihil fit!* Von nichts kommt nichts! (無から無!) Only life begets life.

since exposed such ideas for the wishful thinking they really are. Darwinian "chance" is hardly the answer. It may be "science fiction," but it will *not* stand the test of true scientific testing and laboratory-induced reproducibility.[1] The origin and destiny of man then becomes the greatest single metaphysical concern of rational philosophy. Man's unique nature, setting him clearly apart from the animals as well as indicating his source in a Creative Power greater than himself, can be seen in the following list of specific human distinctives:

The Unique Nature of Man

1. Tremendous intellectual capacity
2. Delicate emotional makeup
3. Conscience (power of discrimination between right and wrong)
4. Ratiocination (power to think logically and arrive at reasonable conclusions)
5. Will (power of choice and decision-making)
6. Self-consciousness
7. Social-consciousness
8. God-consciousness
9. Character deeply religious and basically moral
10. Dedication to *spiritual* ideals—the great intangibles of life: Truth, Goodness, Beauty, Wisdom, Faith, Hope, Love, Justice, Mercy, Righteousness, Duty, Honor, Character, Integrity, Quality, Worth...
11. Basic longing for freedom and heart satisfaction
12. Basic social unit: The Family
13. Power of verbal communication
14. Power of abstraction and philosophic thought
15. Power of imagination and creativity—the gift of artistry
16. Power of scientific experiment coupled with technological achievement and development
17. Power of, and desire for, progress
18. Transfer of knowledge and information by means of the educational process
19. Faculty for recording history, and for preserving historical records
20. Development and preservation of civilization and culture
21. Unending quest for the origin and meaning of life
22. Concept and sense of Eternity
23. Innate sense of accountability to The Supreme and Final Authority
24. A sense of the meaning and fear of Death, and of Judgment to follow

— EXHIBIT A —

We make no pretension as to the totality or infallibility of such a list; yet only a rough perusal would indicate that the creature called "man" is really something quite special! To these human distinctives the poet evidently alluded in his "...almost without defect" (Hence, Carlyle's use of *Diogenes* as the original pattern of perfection

1 See "Foundations of American Literature," *Culture and Language*, September 1979, p. 11, and "Foundations of American Education," *Culture and Language*, March 1979, pp. 19ff for information on the distinguishing features of *science*—the false and the true.

for man). In the same breath,[1] however, Frost suggests that depravity lies at the root of all man's troubles; the imagery he uses to indicate this being found in the terms "dark" and "darken." These are but shadows cast upon the glory that once reflected "God's image."[2] Likewise, in expressions such as "chill and shiver," "soon be gone," "pent-up buds," "blot out and drink up and sweep away," and "these watery flowers," Frost reveals the essence of a Biblical philosophy reinforcing the fact that man actually did fall and was thence cast out of an ancient paradise[3] from his perfectly-created state, the result of which was death[4] ("soon be gone"). "These watery flowers" speaks to us of the frailty, the fragility, the ethereal nature of our earthly existence, while "blot out and drink up and sweep away" of the cataclysmic judgments upon man as the result of his sin, which some might think incompatible with the concept of God as loving the human race. Let us never forget, however, that God sees not as man sees, and that God knows the *absolute* as to facts of impartial fairness[5] in judgment.[6] The LORD and Creator of the Universe is *perfect* in righteousness, equity, and justice, balanced by perfection in love as well.[7]

Marion Montgomery, in his essay on "Robert Frost and His Use of Barriers,"[8] concludes: "As it has been the human error to read man into nature, so is it the human error to read man into God: and Frost's poem,[9] satirical in its shrewd observation on this human fallibility, is concerned with this problem." God is not man, and man is not God![10] Why should he (man) then try to usurp the prerogatives of God—either in government, in education, in economics, in the family, in religion, or in any other avenue of society?

Nitchie, in his excellent study on *Human Values in the Poetry of Robert Frost*, observes that for Frost, "man can very nearly be defined as a choice-making animal;[11] he fulfills himself in the act of choosing, deliberately and, at his best, with a sense

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1 "Spring Pools," lines 6 and 8.

2 The Genesis record states: "So God created man in His own image, in the image of God created He him; male and female created He them." (Genesis 1.27)

3 When *man removed himself* from the fellowship of God and the warmth of His love through disobedience and rebellion, the most natural outcome was banishment into the "chill and shiver" of a cold and hostile environment.

4 "The soul that sinneth, it shall die." (Ezekiel 18.4)
"The wages of sin is death." (Romans 6.23)
"Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned." (Romans 5.12)

5 Equity and justice.

6 "...for the LORD seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart." (1 Samuel 16.7)

7 Some modern Bible-deniers put a great deal of emphasis on "the love and mercy of God" to the detriment and derogation of the equally-important absolute righteousness and justice of His essential nature and being.

8 Cox (ed.), op. cit., p. 142.

9 *A Masque of Reason.*

10 "God is not a man..." (Numbers 23.19)

11 Man is not an animal, nor did he derive from one. If followed to its logical conclusion, it will be seen that Nitchie's somewhat ironical wit merely draws attention to the truth, and emphasizes it.

of consequences... It is this capacity for conscious choice that principally distinguishes man from the lower forms of life.... Frost's man, then, is essentially a choice-making creature, one that, endowed with something more than a determined and determining set of instincts, possesses the heady but dangerous faculty of making his own choices and thus, to a degree, of consciously selecting his own destiny.... 'What we live by we die by.' What we live by is precisely the capacity to make crucial choices; once that is gone, once we reach the point of having only petty choices to make, we are, to all practical intents and purposes, dead."[1]

TOLERANCE OR BIGOTRY?

Arifin Bey, writing on the subject "Modernism and the Denial of the Mystical" in *Forum for a Better World*, unequivocally states that "the greatest problem of modernization is its defiance of the mystical experience; the worship of science at the temple of reason has developed into a new religion. In fact, reason has begun showing manifestations that it is the most proselytic of religions, and the least tolerant of others."[2] This is exactly what Swanson suggests is happening in American education and to education throughout the world:

> The most basic thing we need to realize is that the "World's Faith"... is the RELIGION of the vast majority of humanity, the first truly world-wide religion! Traditional religions...are slowly giving place to this religion or are becoming reconciled to it. It is generally thought that "religion" was in one realm and the "natural" and "social" sciences in another. But this is not true! As so-called science (or Scientism) makes its pronouncements, a total philosophy of life—the religion of our present age—is being proclaimed and evolution is its chief tenet...[3]
>
> One example of the influence of evolution is in the school classroom. Creation as an explanation of origins is thought of as "religion" while evolution is considered to be "pure science"! Nothing could be farther from the truth, as it takes more "faith" to believe in evolution than creation...Since "religion" cannot be taught by the state school system, only evolution *can* be taught! Actually, what is being taught is the *religion* of our society as all societies throughout history have taught their beliefs [i.e. religion] to the next generation in their educational system. If you want to know what a society believes, go to the classroom and find out!...[4]
>
> Even though government is not supposed to institute or further religion, it supports the religion of evolution by giving millions of dollars for text-books on evolution and in research to further evolution. A recent news-paper article told of the [United States] government refusing a grant for

1 Nitchie, op. cit., p. 164.

2 *Forum for a Better World*, December 1980, p. 47. (Cf. Ralph Swanson, *The Bible and Modern Science*, p. 14)

3 Ralph Swanson, *The Bible and Modern Science*, p. 12.

4 Idem.

> research to a scientist whose purpose was to research a problem from a non-evolutionary point of view. It would have been granted routinely if it could have been to further evolution. Any deviation from the religious point of view of "modern man" would be considered "unscientific" and a grant of money would be unthinkable. Billions of dollars have recently been spent for the moon and mars exploration projects. *The stated purpose of these programs was to search for proofs for evolution.*[1]
>
> Other examples of how evolution has influenced and reshaped the thinking of the world are many... Not only are biology and geology under evolution's control, but the other non-exact "sciences" [as well] — astronomy, anthropology, sociology [even marriage and the family are explained in terms of evolution], education itself, and religion — are studied from the evolutionary perspective. History books have been rewritten to fit the author's belief of what history should have been like according to the *theory* of evolution! PhD degrees have been denied those not bowing or giving lip-service to the "confession of faith" of organized education and science. There are cases where scholarly books from a non-evolutionary viewpoint[2] have not been allowed in university libraries![3]

Is this "tolerance and equality of opportunity for presenting one's own point of view" that has been so highly touted in this "democratic" age and among today's "liberal" educators, or is it intolerance and repression of information reminiscent of the Dark Ages? Such men are "tolerant" of that which agrees with their particular preconceived ideas, but very *intolerant* of those who hold concepts that do not agree with their own. What are they afraid of?[4]

What is there to fear in a society based on freedom of access to information? If the information is false, let it be refuted with *true scientific fact* and thence forever discarded. But if it be truth—Mighty Truth!—[5] then let it not be repressed or suppressed for fear that current philosophies of so-called "scientific" thought might have to be re-vamped, re-written, or chucked out altogether in favor of that which is more reasonably, more logically, more *scientifically*, yes—and more *theologically*, sound! But many "scientists" of the present hour would thereupon find it necessary to jettison a whole lifetime of labor in research which has not been based on demonstrable evidence at all, but on mere speculative theory; and (understandably) they are most reluctant to do this. Others prefer to pigeonhole God and all metaphysical concepts as belonging to "the religious category," thereby dismissing from their minds any

1 Swanson, op. cit., p. 14. (Emphasis added)

2 Henry M. Morris and John C. Whitcomb, Jr., *The Genesis Flood*, for example.

3 Swanson, op. cit., p. 14.

4 For evidence that the modern scene may be shifting slightly in favor of less prejudice and more fairness—by and among educators—for presenting theories on origins, the reader's attention is directed to Exhibit B, p. 37.

5 Edward George Earle Bulwer-Lytton in the nineteenth century wrote: "The pen is mightier than the sword." We do not consider it begging the question by paraphrasing this familiar quotation to read: "*The Truth* is mightier than the sword!"

consideration whatsoever of *possible scientific truths contained even in religious categories*, and supposedly releasing themselves from all responsibility to the Creator—if indeed He does exist at all! How absolutely childish and foolish to imagine that we can dismiss reality so glibly by simply wishing it out of existence; but such are the hearts of modern unbelievers, and such is the height of irresponsibility.[1] It is neither reasonable nor right, and Frost detested such an attitude on the part of modern-day bigots in the world of Scientism. In 1925 he stated: "My motto is that something has to be left to God,"[2] and quite rightly concludes: "There will *always* be something left to know."[3] On the great ideal intangibles in life (truth, faith, hope, love, honor, integrity, worth, etc.), Frost climaxed his years of wisdom by concluding that "Science will never know."[4] And he was absolutely right. In spite of the marvelous scientific and technological progress in our day and age, there are just some things that materialistic man *cannot* and *will not ever be able* to understand. Frost might well have said: "Man will never know—everything about everything." Paul the Apostle reinforces this truth by reminding the Corinthian Christians that

> The natural [materialistic-minded] man receiveth not [does not and cannot understand] the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.... But God hath revealed them unto us by His Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God.[5]

In his poem "The Demiurge's Laugh," Frost created a parable from the raw materials of old myths. Representing himself as having conducted a search for the modern Demiurge called "Evolution" in hopes of learning from him some of the ultimate mysteries of life, Frost was finally rewarded for all his time, energy, and wasted effort by mere "indifference, atheism, and laughter," whereupon he "responded with his own kind of indifference for the modern Demiurge and implicitly returned to the mysterious contemplation and worship of the unknown *First Principle: God.*"[6]

He concluded that "Scientism's evolutionary theory" afforded him nothing in the nature of the absolute, and later confessed that he was very "fond of seeing our [pet] theories knocked into cocked hats."[7] He also affirmed, in "The Lesson for Today," that "Space [science] ails us moderns: we are sick with space,"[8] and that, in the final analysis, "...science and religion really meet"[9] when all evolutionary and unscientific prejudice is laid aside in favor of objective consideration of demonstrable

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1 Frost is reported to have asked "a modern Thomas" whether it was polite for the creature to exist if the Creator didn't——to which he received no reply.
2 Lawrence Thompson, *Robert Frost: The Years of Triumph*, p. 693.
3 Ibid., p. 288.
4 Daniel Smythe, *Robert Frost Speaks*, p. 101.
5 1 Corinthians 2.14, 10.
6 Lawrance Thompson, *Robert Frost: The Early Years*, p. 327.
7 Lawrance Thompson, *Robert Frost: The Years of Triumph*, p. 300.
8 Lathem (ed.), op. cit., p. 352.
9 Ibid., p. 353.

evidence, presumably.

In his excellent little handbook for the layman, Swanson makes it clear that he agrees with Frost's conclusions:

> Our hope is to give facts and principles so that [honest] believers can sift out true fact from propaganda and cope with the barrage of false teaching we have received from the atheistic world or compromising religion. Throughout history in every controversy the Bible has always proven to be right.[1]

God to Job in *A Masque of Reason* sums it up in a satisfying and logical way when he says

> My forte is truth,
> Or metaphysics, long the world's reproach
> For standing still in one place true forever.[2]

So true *science*[3] and true religion never conflict. If they do, then one or the other is in error, and it would be better for all concerned to lay aside preconceptions and prejudices in pursuit of *truth:* the ultimate goal in the educational process (in theory at least). This was Frost's studied conclusion, and it should be ours as well. In future, as in the past, "the only thing that changeth not" will be change itself, the speculations and theories of men among them foremost. Frost's prophetic voice reverberates down the corridors of time like crystal chimes on a wintry morn: "...And Darwin's proved mistaken, not the Bible."[4]

"Pent-up buds" is the only expression not touched upon, but can we not read into this the imagery of *man's unrealized potential* for absolute good in the universe? No man can afford to live in a world of fantasy today. Regardless of the extent to which he allows his head/heart complex to dwell in realms of Utopian dreams, the time inevitably comes when he must get his feet solidly down to rock-bottom at last. It has been well said that "You may sing of 'The Sweet Bye-and-Bye' as long as you wish, but never forget that we are living in 'The Nasty Now-and-Now'!"[5] Who can deny the fact that as long as one is in this world, "...there is always in *everything*[6] potentiality for evil. Again and again horrible corruption has grown up in the church itself. *Nothing*[6] that man touches is free from the danger."[7]

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1 Swanson, op. cit., p. 6.
2 Lathem (ed.), op. cit., p. 480.
3 L. *Scientia:* knowledge; specifically, any body of *demonstrable* evidence or information.
4 Lathem (ed.), op. cit., p. 369.
5 Such homespun and practical philosophy was characteristic of Dr. Bob Jones, Sr., from whom the above quote was taken (c. 1950).
6 Emphasis added.
7 Doyle, op. cit., p. 133.

Frost's letters as well as his poems betray his impatience with the beginning of the welfare state, as introduced and incorporated into American law and life by Franklin D. Roosevelt and his "New Deal." In one of his witty sallies of the 1940's, he stated that Eleanor Roosevelt was "trying to homogenize society so that the cream would never again rise to the top."[1] His honeymoon with the Democratic Party quickly chilled.[2] "What was all this fuss about poor people anyway? He had been writing about poor people for as long as he could remember, only he thought of them as people first, and poor second."[3] "A Considerable Speck" provides a good insight into his attitude. He truly loved humanity, but he was determined not to be *told* who and how to love. What Frost highly objected to here involved fundamental issues of democracy and freedom: *the right to choose* among them foremost.[4]

"To A Thinker" was so biting a satire, and so obviously directed against Roosevelt, that Elinor his wife, a more rabid anti-"New Dealer" than the poet himself, begged him not to print it.[5] This, along with "Build Soil—A Political Pastoral" delivered before the political party conventions at Columbia University on May 31, 1932 and appearing subsequently in *A Further Range*,[6] were challenging attacks on the then contemporary field of official American policy and politics. By contrast, his attitude toward European dictators was astonishingly tolerant; he looked dispassionately upon them until they proved themselves monstrous and depraved.[7]

When World War II came, Frost was determined not to allow himself to be sucked into the maelstrom of war propaganda, and commit the same mistake that Walt Whitman, James Russell Lowell, and others had committed eighty years earlier, when they believed that their sole responsibility was to act as propagandists for the North against the Confederate States. Other poets might, if they chose, squander their powers on propaganda verse, as Edna St. Vincent Millay surely did in "Lidice"; but Frost was Frost. Many of his colleagues (MacLeish, Sandburg, and Untermeyer, for example) had already decided in favor of jumping on the bandwagon and turning their talents into propaganda verse for the Office of War Information. They expected Frost to do likewise (Untermeyer, in particular, almost pressuring him), but the wise old independent bard was determined not to run the risk of profligating himself to *any* "official line of reasoning," and he flatly rejected all approaches that would have

1 Sergeant, op. cit., p. 318.
2 Frost often confessed that he was "a Grover Cleveland Democrat."
3 Gerber, op. cit., p. 81.
4 Man is a creature of free and unfettered will, a choice-making entity. Root says: "You and I are faced with the responsibility of choice, the knife-edge of decision.... Freedom is *not* a freedom from responsibility, but a responsibility for choice." (Root, op. cit., p. 80–1)
5 Gould, op. cit., p. 275.
6 Publication date: 1936.
7 Sergeant, op. cit., p. 320.

enlisted him in hurling his literary talent as weaponry in battle against Japan, Italy, or Nazi Germany. This act of refusal did not make him any less patriotic or American, but—if anything—moreso. In a letter to son-in-law Willard E. Fraser under dateline of September 26, 1924, Frost clarified his position:

> We ... have to get along without the help of crowd psychology. Not that we make no effort to understand the war. Mrs. Homer Noble the older lady than I am who sold me this farm recently read me out of a local paper that our able Governor had been saying it was a Christian war we and the Russians were waging. He made out a perfect case to her mind. I had to confess that if it was a Holy War what made it so for me was what seemed to make it so for Henry Wallace, namely, its promise for the common man all over the world including India, Egypt, Mexico, Abyssinia, Jave, Korea, the Phillipines, Ashantes, Liberia, the Gold Coast, Porto Rico, Devil's Island, Tristan da Cuna and the Andamans. Don't doubt I am aware of the sentimentality this verges on. It is nearer Carl Sandburg than me in philosophy. To get right down to my way of thinking the most I count on from the war is an improvement of our National position with friend and foe. We are a great democracy now. I trust the President's leadership to make us a greater. I should regard it as too bad if we hoped the war would leave us without a foe in the world. Everything has its opposite to furnish it with opposition. There are those in favor of democracy like you and me and there must always be the contrary minded. With us the emphasis is on the answerability of the ruler to those he rules; with our opponents the emphasis is on the answerability of the ruler to the highest in himself and to God. The conflict is a matter of emphasis. Each side has something of both principles in it. It flatters my patriotism to believe our system has both in the happiest proportion. But no victory however complete must make us forget that enmity to our faith is deeply grounded in human nature and will always be there ready to take arms against us...."[1]

Untermeyer repeatedly attempted to enlist Frost's aid in the direct attack upon facism, but to no avail.

Frost despised the Russians for the atheistic unbelief spawned by their communist ideology, and held scant sympathy for his fellow-countrymen who were willing to overlook fundamental ideological differences in favor of maintaining Allied "unity" so-called. To daughter Lesley Francis on October 8, 1942, he wrote: "I have to laugh at the ingenuities of our rulers in making it out that differences with the Russians never existed. I can't admit the differences don't exist..." Such statements provide evidence that Frost deeply mistrusted America's sudden friendship with her wartime allies, particularly with Russia. In a lengthy poem of explanation[2] he said as much:

I'm bad at politics.
I was born blind to faults in those I love,

1 Lawrance Thompson (ed.), *Selected Letters of Robert Frost*, pp. 504-5.
2 Untermeyer, op. cit., p. 336 (unpublished as poetry).

But I refuse to blind myself on purpose
To the faults of my mere confederates.
Great are the communistic Soviets!
If nothing more were asked of me to say
I could pass muster with the State Department.
Hull may be right about their being good
As well as great. He may also be right
About their interests lying close enough
To ours for us to help them run the world.
I'm waiting to see where their interests lie.

He had been even more critical and satirical of the *bolsheviki* attitude toward literary freedom in his title poem to *New Hampshire*, published in 1923:

The glorious bards of Massachusetts seem
To want to make New Hampshire people over.
They taunt the lofty land with little men.
I don't know what to say about the people.
For art's sake one could almost wish them worse
Rather than better. How are we to write
The Russian novel in America
As long as life goes so unterribly?
There is the pinch from which our only outcry
In literature to date is heard to come.
We get what little misery we can
Out of not having cause for misery.
It makes the guild of novel writers sick
To be expected to be Dostoievskis
On nothing worse than too much luck and comfort.
This is not sorrow, though; it's just the vapors,
And recognized as such in Russia itself
Under the new regime, and so forbidden.
If well it is with Russia, then feel free
To say so or be stood against the wall
And shot. It's Pollyanna now or death.
This, then, is the new freedom we hear tell of;
And very sensible. No state can build
A literature that shall at once be sound
And sad on a foundation of well-being.[1]

FROST ON FREEDOM, DISCRIMINATION, INDEPENDENCE

Frost's concept of freedom was less in line with "orthodox" opinion of the day than was commonly supposed. Freedom to him meant Emersonian freedom: sturdy resistance to pressures from mass opinions at home as well as from other nations, and the necessity for fine-gauge discrimination when separating wheat from the chaff that is so indiscriminately scattered abroad by means of the mass news media. Since

1 Lathem (ed.), op. cit., pp. 167–8.

he was well aware that "the war god" fights on both sides at once, he was often blamed for "isolationism," his quips at the British, his dislike of our allies the Russians, and his supposed tolerance of dictators.[1] He showed a disdain for anything that is "collectivistic" or "regimenting" by speaking out even against love—if it should fall into either of these categories.[2] In "Build Soil" (A Political Pastoral), he speaks disparagingly of socialism:

> Is socialism needed, do you think?
> We have it now. For socialism is
> An element in any government.
> There's no such thing as socialism pure—
> Except as an abstraction of the mind.
> There's only democratic socialism,
> Monarchic socialism, oligarchic—
> The last being what they seem to have in Russia.
> You often get it most in monarchy,
> Least in democracy. In practice, pure,
> I don't know what it would be. No one knows.
> I have no doubt like all the loves when
> Philosophized together into one—
> One sickness of the body and the soul.
> Thank God our practice holds the loves apart...[3]
>
> *
>
> Plant, breed, produce,
> But what you raise or grow, why, feed it out,
> Eat it or plow it under where it stands,
> To build the soil. For what is more accursed
> Than an impoverished soil, pale and metallic?
> What cries more to our kind for sympathy?
> I'll make a compact with you, Meliboeus,
> To match you deed for deed and plan for plan.
> Friends crowd around me with their five-year plans
> That Soviet Russia has made fashionable.
> You come to me and I'll unfold to you
> A five-year Plan I call so not because
> It takes ten years or so to carry out,
> Rather because it took five years at least
> To think it out. Come close, let us conspire—
> In self-restraint, if in restraint of trade.
> You will go to your run-out mountain farm
> And do what I command you. I take care
> To command only what you meant to do
> Anyway. That is my style of dictator.
> Build soil.[4]

1 Sergeant, op. cit., p. 376.
2 See "A Considerable Speck," Lathem (ed.), op. cit., p. 357.
3 Lathem (ed.), op. cit., p. 318.
4 Ibid., p. 323.

"Departmental" belittles the bunglings of bureaucracy as well. Things are organized to such an extent as to call up the ghosts of *Gulag, Cancer Ward, Animal Farm,* and *1984*.[1]

...one
Of the hive's enquiry squad
Whose work is to find out God[2]
And the nature of time and space...[3]

*

It couldn't be called ungentle.
But how thoroughly departmental.[4]

In a discussion with Dr. Reginald L. Cook of Middlebury College, broadcast by the British Broadcasting Company on July 16, 1954, Frost is credited with the following astute observation:

> FROST: The opposite of civilization is not barbarism but Utopia. Utopia can let no man be his own worst enemy, take the risk of going uninsured, gamble on the horses or on his own future, go to hell in his own way. It has to concern itself more with the connection of the parts than with the separateness of the parts. It has to know where everyone is; it has to bunch us up to keep track of us. It can't protect us unless it directs us.
>
> COOK: Mr. Frost, are you thinking of Brook Farm when you speak of Utopia like that?
>
> FROST: No, but I should be. There you had exhibited all the tyranny of the commune. But in Thoreau's declaration of independence from the modern pace is where I find most justification for my own propensities. He said he went to the woods to live deliberately.
>
> Come to think of it, that is why I have gone to a number of places: to live deliberately. Give me the speed of a perfectly geared automobile that I can slow down to half a mile an hour, to tell one flower from another. My intolerance has been for the throng who complain of the modern pace yet strive to keep it. There is the widest choice of companions you will fall into step with, be they living or dead. There is no such thing as a prescribed tempo—at any rate, not in civilization.[5]

Frost maintainted his integrity and independence as a thinker above all. Archibald MacLeish's argument that poets must descend from their "ivory towers" and become

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1 Well-known works in political science by Alexander Solzhenitsyn and George Orwell.

2 When the Russians succeeded in putting their first man in orbit (c. 1957), there came on the heels of the news the fact that "Gagarin has circled the earth in space; yet he has not seen God anywhere!" How logical! As if the Creator would condescend to make *special* manifestation of Himself to any mere sinful and unbelieving worm of the dust. When Hamlet said "There is nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so," was he reflecting the present-day existentialist philosophy of rebellious men that would wish God out of existence?

3 See Swanson, op. cit., p. 14 on "Objectives of the American Space Program."

4 Lathem (ed.), op. cit., p. 288–9.

5 Lathem, op. cit., p. 147.

active forces in urging social and economic reform made little sense, he said. He was totally out of sympathy with the attempt "to use poetry as a vehicle of grievances against the un-Utopian state."[1] Sometimes he even professed not to be committed. He was "just a spectator." The only things he had ever committed himself to, he is reported to have confessed, were God, the Home, and the State.[2]

On December 23, 1956, Frost appeared on the National Broadcasting Company's television program "Meet the Press," and was interviewed by Lawrence Spivak, Inez Robb, Clifton Fadiman, David Brinkley, and Ned Brooks. Excerpts from that interview follow:

> SPIVAK: Mr. Frost, few words have had their meaning so distorted as freedom and liberty. It seems to mean different things to different people in different countries. Now will you tell us what freedom means to you, a poet?
>
> FROST: First of all it means the freedom my country gives me and I suppose the freedom that everybody's country gives him. There ought to be, of course, no comparative freedoms, but I like mine best; and I think [...] the reason for it probably is that it's like old clothes or old shoes. Mine fits me, and that's as far as I can go.
>
> SPIVAK: Mr. Frost, do you think there is any relationship between freedom and great poetry, or do you think that a great talent expresses itself regardless of the political climate of a country?
>
> FROST: I don't believe the political state of affairs matters too much. I think that the personal freedom that you get from the country is something you assume. Your real anxiety day by day is your own freedom of your own material, your own condition, your own mental condition and physical condition that gives you command of what you want to think of when you want to think of it. And then I'm more interested in the liberties I take than in the big thing you call freedom or liberty: the little liberties socially, in poetry, art, and little trespasses and excesses and things like that.
>
> FADIMAN: What you are saying perhaps ties down to the question I wanted to ask you.
>
> We hear a good deal these days about economic and political freedom, the kind of freedom guaranteed to us by law. Do you think economic and political freedom in itself is very much good without the kind of freedom that's inside your head? I mean the mental freedom that comes from having enough character and intelligence to make proper choices?
>
> FROST: The economic freedom of course is something.... You're asking me do I think it makes any difference to a poet whether he hears the wolf at the door all the time, and I don't believe it makes too much difference.
>
> If you are talking about poverty and wealth I think sometimes wealth has its bad things and poverty has its bad things and limits to our free-

1 Untermeyer, op. cit., p. 262.

2 Cox, op. cit., p. 156.

dom. Poverty has done so much good in this way in the world that I should hesitate to abolish it.

ROBB: In the world in which we live, Mr. Frost, there is a great yearning for what people think of as security, and that usually means economic security. Do you feel that you would have written any better poetry if you had been endowed from the beginning with an ample income?

FROST: I don't think so, no. You see, I'm on the other side. I know what you're talking about, what you're leading up to. I'm on the side of adversity.

I once drew up a little story about that. It said just how many disadvantages does a person need to get anywhere in the world—disadvantages. And I said here's a man born to too much money, and that's disadvantage number one. Then his mother is a very dominant person, very fond of him. That's disadvantage number two. No father in it; that's disadvantage number three.

He goes to Groton, and that's disadvantage number four. Then he goes to Harvard, and that's disadvantage number five. Then he begins to kick around among the politicians in Albany and Washington. That's disadvantage number six. (Have I got six?)

And then God says, "I'm going to make something of that boy; I set my heart on him." And, "He hasn't amounted to anything yet, but I'm going to give him one more disadvantage." And He gives him polio, and then he sits on top of the world along with Stalin and Churchill![1]

"Some fine people," Frost said, "give up their other desires in exchange for security. They get large new concepts or select new dogmas. They attach themselves to the modern mind, and so have less and less mind. They are so busy with what is being said, thought, and written that they have neither energy nor time to make discoveries. They are among 'the first to be second.'"[2]

"Security should mainly be determined from within. But one of the strongest human propensities is minding other people's business. And the only hope of thwarting it is minding our own."[3]

Frost to Bernard Leavitt of the *Christian Science Monitor* on April 6, 1961 remarked:

"There's too much government getting into our lives...During the last campaign it seemed to me that all the candidates promised to do was to help put the young people into school or the old people into hospitals. People have got to learn to help themselves and take care of their own wherever possible.

"I remember getting a letter from a very wise mother not so long ago. She asked me how she could give to her son the 'hardships' of life which had contributed to making the boy's father a successful man.

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1 Lathem, op. cit., p. 157. The reference, of course, is to Franklin Delano Roosevelt.

2 Cox, op. cit., p. 130.

3 Ibid., p. 137.

"Parents are afraid to give their children some of the hardships of life so vitally necessary in their ripening into maturity of judgment and becoming responsible citizens."[1]

A news release by International News Service for publication December 14, 1949 credits Inez Robb with eliciting from Frost the following:

Mr. Frost readily admitted he would hate a brave new world in which his security were guaranteed from cradle to grave.

"I'm just a natural gambler," he explained. "I like a life of gambling. I'm willing to take a chance. I've never had a cent's worth of life insurance, mainly because I could never afford it when it was needed.

"But if I had a guaranteed fifty-dollar-a-week life, if there was no uncertainty, I'd get into the Irish Sweeps out of sheer desperation! What we want is the largest possible number of citizens who can take care of themselves. *What we need is character.*"[2]

Both "Build Soil" and "Provide, Provide" go hand in hand with the sentiment expressed by Root in "Frontiers of Self-Reliance":

You pay your taxes, of course, and one supposed benefit is civil security. Your great right, as a citizen, is civil security. But you do not get it. When this happened on the Western frontier, the only chance, first of survival and then of civilization, lay in *the man himself, the self-reliant man.* And so today, in an age when we have been lulled by the lie that "Washington can do it!"—or "You can depend on society!"—we again face the eternal fact that, *outside intelligence and courage in the individual soul, there is no security.*[3]

A FRESH START FOR THE HUMAN RACE

"If Americans wanted to hold on to their democratic venture in politics, they could. He knew he would ask nothing better. Politics, he said in 1950, like much besides, is cyclical. A lot of people seem to hope that instead it is a progress. The condition that they assume will last is a disappearance of all government in a state of communism, where everyone gets a full dinner pail and full enjoyment and full opportunity for growing grand. That, they tell themselves, will come after government has helped everyone until it is no longer necessary. But a closer look reveals that the next stage to our democracy is one-man rule once more. You have to admit that history contains the series: one-man rule, rule of few men, limited monarchy with privileges wider spread, republic with a still larger few keeping control, and democracy. Then one-man rule again.

"There is plenty wrong with the working of democracy. But it is the best in the cycle. And if we wanted to, enough of us, we could arrest the cycle there. It requires a clear and incorrigible purpose to arrest a cycle. It will swing on. But Robert Frost

1 Lathem, op. cit., p. 260.
2 Ibid., p. 128 (emphasis added).
3 Root, op. cit., p. 2 (emphasis added).

would do what he could to arrest it about where it is... It is a good bet, he said with a quick solicitation, for those who care enough."[1]

Six lines from "America Is Hard to See"[2] elucidate the above:

> Had but Columbus known enough
> He might have boldly made the bluff
> That better than da Gama's gold
> He had been given to behold
> The race's future trial place,
> A fresh start for the human race.

"Every time Robert Frost comes to town the Washington Monument stands up a little straighter," wrote James Reston, reporting in the *New York Times* of October 27, 1957 on a visit to Washington by the old bard. Frost, deeply patriotic and genuinely concerned to promote what may be called the cultural integrity of the United States, criticized the neglect of the arts by the American government and repeatedly sought the creation of a government academy of the arts. But he wrote special lines for the Kennedy Inauguration, saluting President Kennedy for giving the arts a place at the Inaugural.[3] If to hope and desire that the United States should display a positive energy of mind and spirit equivalent to its physical energy is narrowly nationalistic, then Frost is guilty of narrow nationalism along with every other well-wisher of this country...[4]

James Reston paints a candid portrait of Frost as a being of unique and benign irascibility, in whom the qualities of perception are remarkably outstanding:

> He is against everything and everybody that want people to rely on somebody else. He is against the United Nations.[5] He is against the welfare state. He is against conformity and easy slogans and Madison Avenue, and he hasn't seen a President he liked since Grover Cleveland.
>
> "I keep reading about old Grover, and after sixty years I have to admit there were one or two things that could be said against him; but I concede it reluctantly. As Mencken said, Cleveland got on in politics, not by knuckling to politicians but scorning and defying them. He didn't go around spouting McGuffey Reader slogans or wanting to be liked."
>
> The United Nations, disturbed by Mr. Frost's opposition, suggested to him recently that he might like to write a poem celebrating the ideal of the interdependence of the nations. Sweden had given the U. N. a huge chunk of solid iron, and somebody thought that this should be built into the U. N. building as a symbol of nature's strength and unity.

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1 Cox, op. cit., p. 113.

2 Lathem (ed.), op. cit., p. 416.

3 For the first time in the history of the United States, a poet had been asked to read at the inauguration of a president, and to Frost was given the honor on January 20, 1961.

4 From remarks by George F. Whicher in *Robert Frost: An Introduction* (Greenberg and Hepburn, eds.), p. 120.

5 "You know I'm not friendly toward things like the U.N.," he stated. "I was the same way with Wilson's League of Nations. A country's got to stand or fall on its own.... Can you trust a nation in the U.N. any better than out?" (Mertins, op. cit., p. 397).

Frost was not interested. Iron, he said, could be used to strengthen the U. N. building, or it could be used for weapons of war. That was the way with nature, he said: always confronting mankind with decisions. So he rejected the invitation with a couplet:

Nature within her inmost self decides[1]
To trouble men with having to take sides.

His pet project at the moment is to band together all men and women who want to stamp out "togetherness." The glory of America, he says, has been its pioneers, who celebrated "separateness" and who were not always seeking protection. "There is," he remarks, "*no protection without direction*"....[2]

His idea, one gathers, is that America should act in the face of the Communist challenge as a great man would act. It should not be dismayed. It should not be boastful. It should be calm and watchful and industrious. It should avoid pretension and sham. It should say clearly and calmly what it means and do what it says it will do.

"The question for every man and every nation," he says, "is to be clear about where the first answerability lies. Are we as individuals to be answerable first only to others or to ourselves and some ideal beyond ourselves? Is the United States to be answerable first to the United Nations or to its own concept of what is right?"[3]

Years before, both Lowell and Longfellow had already presaged the vision and message of the seer yet to come:

Once to every man and nation
Comes the moment to decide
In the strife of Truth with Falsehood,
For the good or evil side.[4]

*

Life is real! Life is earnest!
And the grave is not the goal;
Dust thou art, to dust returnest,
Was not spoken of the soul....

Lives of great men all remind us
We can make our lives sublime,
And, departing, leave behind us
Footprints on the sands of time...[5]

Frost has left his mark on the literary scene, and on what might be termed a philosophy of American thought as well. The phrase that captures the minds and

1 Lathem claims that the original manuscript reads "decides," but that Frost later changed it to read "divides." (See Lathem, *Interviews with Robert Frost*, pp. 178, 196.)

2 Frost entertained no illusion to the effect that absolute harmony was "either possible or even desirable." He regarded the U. N. concept of unity as "arbitrary, artificial, and hypocritical."

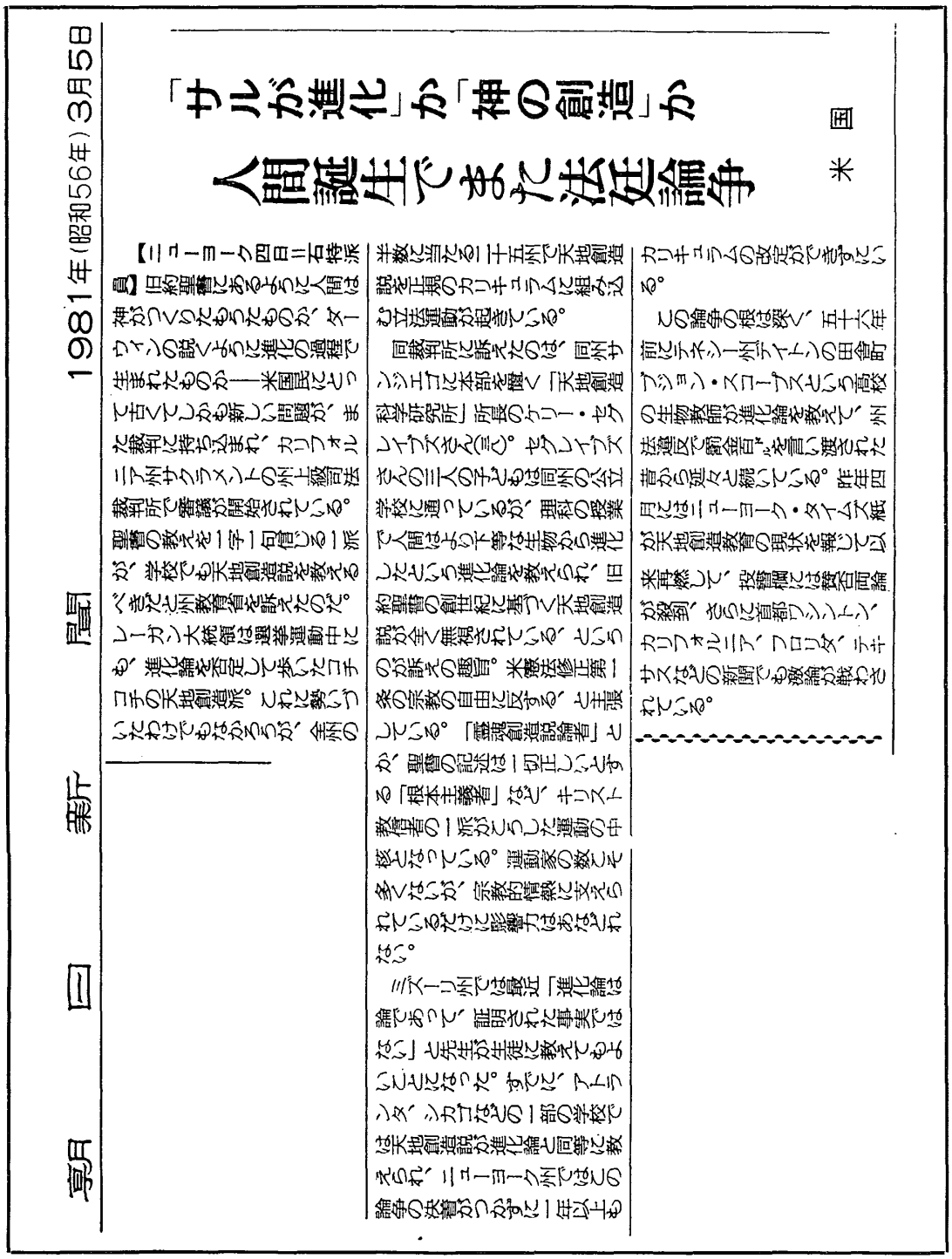
3 Lathem, op. cit., pp. 178-9.

4 James Russell Lowell, "The Present Crisis"

5 Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, "A Psalm of Life"

captivates the hearts of his readers over and over again is simply stated in few words: *America's Steadfast Dream*——as visualized, as cherished, as advocated and advanced in and through the life and works of Robert Lee Frost (1874–1963).

Next: "The Figure A Poem Makes"
(Thoughts on the Poet and His Craftsmanship)



米国

「サルが進化」か「神の創造」か
人間誕生でまた法廷論争

【ニューヨーク四日＝石特派員】旧約聖書にあるように人間は神がつくったものだろうか、ダーウィンの説くように進化の過程で生まれたものか――米国民にとって古くてしかも新しい問題が、また裁判に持ち込まれ、カリフォルニア州サクラメントの州上級司法裁判所で審議が開始されている。聖書の教えを一字一句信じる一派が、学校でも天地創造説を教えるべきだと州教育省を訴えたのだ。レーガン大統領は選挙運動中にも、進化論を否定して歩いたコチコチの天地創造派。これに勢いづいたわけでもなかろうが、全米の半数に当たる二十五州で天地創造説を正規のカリキュラムに組み込む立法運動が起きている。

同裁判所に訴えたのは、同州サンジェゴに本部を置く「天地創造科学研究所」所長のケリー・セグレイブスさん(三)。セグレイブスさんの三人の子どもは同州の公立学校に通っているが、理科の授業で人間はより下等な生物から進化したという進化論を教えられ、旧約聖書の創世紀に基づく天地創造説が全く無視されている、というのが訴えの趣旨。米憲法修正第一条の宗教の自由に反する、と主張している。「霊魂創造説論者」とか、聖書の記述は一切正しいとする「根本主義者」など、キリスト教徒の一派がこうした運動の中核となっている。運動家の数こそ多くないが、宗教的情熱に支えられているだけに影響力はおなどれない。

〃テーリ州では最近「進化論は論であって、証明された事実ではない」と先生が生徒に教えてもよいことになった。すでに、アトランタ、シカゴなどの一部の学校では天地創造説が進化論と同等に教えられ、ニューヨーク州ではこの論争の決着がつかずに二年以上もカリキュラムの改定ができずにいる。

この論争の根は深く、五十六年前にテネシー州デイトンの田舎町ブッシュ・スコープスという高校の生物教師が進化論を教えて、州法違反で罰金百〝を言い渡された昔から延々と続いている。昨年四月にはニューヨーク・タイムズ紙が天地創造教育の現状を報じて以来再燃して、投書欄には賛否両論が殺到、さらに首都ワシントン、カリフォルニア、フロリダ、テキサスなどの新聞でも激論が戦わされている。

— EXHIBIT B —

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