

THE DIALECTICAL PATTERN IN ROBERT FROST'S  
DRAMATIC NARRATIVE POETRY,

By

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Bachelor of Arts

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1957

Submitted to the faculty of the Graduate School of  
the Oklahoma State University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of  
MASTER OF ARTS  
August, 1963

JAN 7 1964

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### ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am deeply grateful to Dr. Samuel H. Woods, Jr., for all the help and encouragement he has given me during the time this thesis was being written. I am indebted also to Dr. Mary Rohrberger for her many valuable suggestions. To Miss Helen Donart, Humanities Librarian, I owe a debt of thanks for her assistance in procuring books through inter-library loan; and thanks are due also to the whole staff of the library who were helpful at all times. My deepest gratitude goes to my husband, Dr. William A. Drew, who listened with patience and understanding, who helped me with many problems concerning organization, and who spent hours proofreading the final copy of this thesis. A debt of thanks is also owed our daughter, Denise, and my friends Mrs. E. R. Young, III, Mrs. D. E. Bryan, Mrs. John Lindauer, and the others who put up with me during the time I wrote this thesis.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

In 1950 and 1959 the United States Senate passed resolutions honoring Robert Frost on his birthday. John F. Kennedy invited him to read one of his poems at the inaugural ceremony in 1961. Oxford and Cambridge Universities conferred honorary degrees on him in 1957. There can be no question that Frost is a widely recognized and widely read modern American poet. Unlike other modern poets such as T. S. Eliot, Yeats, and Pound, Frost has been widely read not only by serious students of literature but by a much more general cross section of the reading public. However, while reams of paper have been used to publish critical articles and books dealing with the poetry of Yeats and Eliot, relatively few critics have bothered to give Frost's poetry the critical appraisal I feel it warrants.<sup>1</sup> While a fair number of books have been published on Frost, relatively few of these deal critically with his poetry: Frost has more often been treated biographically and appreciatively than critically, as a literary character than a poet. Frost's poetry generally contains a clear examination of human values and has far less of the syntactical and philosophical obscurities of Yeats, Eliot, and Pound. Unlike these poets, Frost employed few scholarly allusions: he found his main sources in life rather than in literature, a characteristic that did not endear him to the early Twentieth Century avant-garde literary critics. Indeed Frost's very popularity with a wide audience has made him suspect in the eyes of

some literary critics. For these reasons Frost has been, until recently, somewhat overlooked, over-simplified, and often neglected as a major Twentieth Century poet.

Of the sixteen books written about Frost, four are biographical, three are collections of critical articles, and nine are concerned with the body of his work. Sidney Cox's two books on Frost, Robert Frost: The Original "Ordinary Man" (1929) and A Swinger of Birches: A Portrait of Robert Frost (1957), are devoted to anecdotes and conversations of Frost that have more bearing on Frost's personality than on his craftsmanship. Reginald Cook's The Dimensions of Robert Frost (1959) is a book of this nature also: it contains a record of conversations which reveals the man and the poet but which does little to further any direct understanding of the poet's work. Elizabeth Shepley Sergeant's Robert Frost: The Trial by Existence (1960) is a searching critical biography, a comment upon the poet's works as affected by his life. This book, however, while containing much insight into the relationship between Frost's life and his poetry, does not attempt a critical examination of any of his poetry per se.

Of the three volumes of collected essays about Frost, Recognition of Robert Frost: Twenty-fifth Anniversary (1937), edited by Frost's publisher Richard Thornton, presents a collection of early reviews and criticism; the volume tends, however, to be commemorative rather than critical, although it contains criticism representative of Frost's first twenty-five years as a poet. As James M. Cox in the introduction to Robert Frost: A Collection of Critical Essays states, the volume edited by Thornton "showed that during those twenty-five years, though he had been recognized as a poet, his poetry had yet to be appraised."<sup>2</sup> Robert

A. Greenberg and James G. Hepburn's Robert Frost: An Introduction (1961) is an elementary handbook containing poems, explications, reviews, and excerpts from papers. It is of interest only for the beginning student or the general reader. Robert Frost: A Collection of Critical Essays (1962), edited by James M. Cox, is the most recent attempt to place Frost's poetry in critical perspective. Presented in chronological order, the essays chosen by Cox encompass both adverse and favorable views of Frost as a poet, reflecting, as Cox suggests, the stage of Frost criticism shortly before his death--that of "appraisal and acceptance of Frost as a modern poet."<sup>3</sup> The next stage of criticism, according to Cox, is the phase of understanding and full discovery, of attention to form and meaning, upon the threshold of which Frost criticism stands at present.<sup>4</sup>

Extended attempts to appraise and criticize the body of Frost's works have been made in nine volumes. The earliest book, published in 1927, is Gorham B. Munson's Robert Frost: A Study in Sensibility and Good Sense. To a large extent biographical rather than critical, Munson's book nevertheless presents some insight into the over-all nature of Frost's poetry. His examination of the poetry, however, is at best cursory and superficial. In New Poetry of New England: Frost and Robinson (1938), Robert P. Tristram Coffin, a poet himself, writes of the poetry of two fellow New Englanders. Originally presented as a series of lectures at Johns Hopkins University, Coffin's book contains a discussion of the influence of the changing world on the poetry of Frost and Robinson and gives a general survey of their poetry: the subject matter, symbolism, style, and meaning. Coffin does not, however, give a detailed critical analysis of either poet. Lawrence Thompson wrote the first major critical work on Frost, which remains one of the best--Fire and Ice:

The Art and Thought of Robert Frost (1942). James M. Cox describes it in the following manner:

Instead of attitudinizing about how true Frost's poetry was, instead of recording his impressions, he tried to give an extended description of the body of Frost's poetry.<sup>5</sup>

Six recent studies of Frost's poetry form the culmination of the second stage of Frost criticism--that of appraisal and acceptance--and the beginning of the third--attention to form and meaning. The author of Human Values in the Poetry of Robert Frost: A Study of a Poet's Convictions (1960), George W. Nitchie, defines the purpose of his work in the preface:

My primary concern, once more, is not biographical; my primary concern is with the ethical and philosophical convictions implicit in Frost's poems, and I am concerned, not simply with describing those convictions, but judging them, inevitably in terms of my own convictions.<sup>6</sup>

Nitchie judges Frost's poetry and finds it wanting. Contending that Frost creates a simplified rural world--a world of solitary, basically anti-social people, Nitchie argues that there is an ultimate reduction of human values implicit in his poetry. On the other hand, John F. Lynen, author of The Pastoral Art of Robert Frost (1960), finds a coherent myth in Frost's poetry. Arguing that the basic structure of much of Frost's poetry follows the tradition of the pastoral eclogue with its double vision (a comparison of an explicit rural world with an implicit urban one), Lynen contends that Frost's mythic New England forms a symbolic vista, a narrow world that expands to include a much broader one. In Elizabeth Isaacs' words, the purpose of her book, An Introduction to Robert Frost (1962), is "to provide a synthesis of the current basic information that may bring a better understanding of Frost's work."<sup>7</sup> To this end she divides her book into three sections. The first section gives biographical information about Frost. The second discusses his poetic philosophy and



practice: the form, content, mood, and general technique by which Frost created his poems. The third section of the book is devoted to explications of representative poems from the three main genres in which Frost wrote: the lyric, the dramatic narrative, and the satire. John R. Doyle, Jr. in The Poetry of Robert Frost: An Analysis (1962) gives extended analyses of a large number of Frost's poems, many of them dramatic narratives, but attends more to what the poems mean than to the form and method by which Frost conveyed it. At the end of the volume he gives a brief resumé of some of the major philosophical ideas and characteristics of Frost's poetry; but, like most of the critics under discussion, he does not concentrate on the dramatic narrative form. Reuben A. Brower does not present a formal thesis in The Poetry of Robert Frost: Constellations of Intention (1963); his book contains an examination of some of the poetic forms and ideas in Frost's verse explored in terms of other poets and their poetry. Brower does not judge Frost's poetry; he merely comments on it and attempts to bring the reader to a "finer awareness of its position in the Frostian and the larger universes of poetry."<sup>8</sup> Radcliffe Squires' work, The Major Themes of Robert Frost (1963), contains the kind of discussion one would expect from the title--an analysis of those primary themes that recur throughout Frost's poetry. Among the principal motifs Squires examines are the duality between heaven and earth, the contrast and reflection between outer and inner weather, man's relationship to man, and the duality between fact and fancy that often culminates in a philosophic statement.

All of these sixteen critics refer to Frost's dramatic narrative poetry--some at great length, others only briefly. A few of these critics--Doyle, Isaacs--include extended explications of the dramatic narratives

in their books; and others--Nitchie, Squires--frequently refer to these poems to support their arguments. Doyle, for instance, explicates a large number of the dramatic narratives ("Home Burial," "A Servant to Servants," "The Housekeeper," etc.); but he does not give a definition of a dramatic narrative, nor does he attempt to find or discuss any recurrent mode of development inherent in these poems. Nitchie refers frequently and at some length to the dramatic narrative poems, but only to defend and support his thesis that Frost's poetry ultimately ends in a reduction of human values. Only two critics, Thompson and Lynen, include a definition of the dramatic narrative form and give even a brief study of the form and nature of Frost's dramatic narrative poetry.

A search for critical articles dealing obliquely or specifically with the dramatic narratives is almost as unrewarding. Most of the pertinent articles are to be found in Cox's volume, Robert Frost: A Collection of Critical Essays. Out of the nearly two hundred articles, only a few have any direct bearing on this essay. While several critics refer to the poems in question, few attempt a study of the relationship among them beyond asserting that most of the dramatic narratives deal in some manner with the theme of isolation. Those articles containing information relevant to this essay will be discussed in connection with the thesis statement.

Superficially Frost's poetry divides itself into two major categories: the lyric and the dramatic.<sup>9</sup> A poem such as "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening" is obviously lyric; "The Death of the Hired Man" is just as obviously dramatic. Yet there are definitely elements of the dramatic in "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening." The poem is a statement by a single speaker of his thoughts and feelings--"The woods are lovely, dark and deep,"<sup>10</sup> but beyond the obvious lyric elements of the poem lies

the element of choice and a decision made--the stuff of drama.

But I have promises to keep,  
And miles to go before I sleep,  
And miles to go before I sleep.

Similarly there are elements of the lyric in the dramatic poem "The Death of the Hired Man." Mary and Warren sit on the porch attempting to reach a decision amicable to both concerning the fate of Silas.

Part of a moon was falling down the west,  
Dragging the whole sky with it to the hills.  
Its light poured softly in her lap. She saw it  
And spread her apron to it. She put out her hand  
Among the harp-like morning-glory strings,  
Taut with the dew from garden bed to eaves,  
As if she played unheard some tenderness  
That wrought on him beside her in the night.

This poem is dramatic because of the elements common to it and drama: dialogue between characters and immediacy of action. Yet in these lines one feels the presence of an unidentified, unseen observer--the narrator--who comments on the situation unfolding before him in terms of his own thoughts and feelings. Thus it cannot be said that one of the poems is pure lyric and the other pure drama, although both belong to one category more fully than to the other.

If neither of these poems can be rigidly classified, how is one to categorize a poem like "Mending Wall" which incorporates more or less equal elements of both categories? A speaker is present who expresses his thoughts and feelings concerning the wall which he and his "old-stone savage" neighbor are rebuilding, but through dialogue the poem dramatically includes the feelings of both neighbors about the wall.

Thus the categories set up initially break down under even the most superficial examination. It becomes immediately apparent that no sharp distinction between Frost's dramatic and lyric verse exists; the major

distinction is one of degree, not kind. This lack of clear distinction between genres is not characteristic solely of Frost. It is the norm of all poetry since the mid-Eighteenth Century; for poetry, because it is an art rather than a science, does not readily lend itself to categorization. Just as frequently his more dramatic poems will contain definite lyrical passages, so many of Frost's lyrics have elements of the dramatic in them: an implied choice ("The Bear," "Two Tramps in Mud Time"), a decision made ("Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening"), a sense of the presence of an unidentified yet involved second person who is more than the generalized reader ("The Pasture," "Going for Water," "The Runaway"), an immediate as opposed to a recalled or meditative situation ("Two Look at Two," "The Tuft of Flowers"), a discovery made in the act of doing something ("For Once, Then, Something").

Commenting on Frost's dramatic poetry, Lawrance Thompson states:

In Frost, the dramatic lyrics develop nicely into dramatic monologues; yet the monologues develop further into dramatic narratives, and these in turn may be elaborated into dramatic dialogues and one-act plays in miniature. Even as Browning was fond of compressing indirect narratives within a limited compass of dramatic lyrics and monologues, so Frost often compresses indirect narratives within the limit of his dramatic lyrics and monologues. Nevertheless, Frost's compressions often take the form of dramatic incidents which are neither lyrics nor monologues nor narratives, although the incident implies a narrative.<sup>11</sup>

It would seem, then, that the major portion of Frost's work is neither wholly dramatic nor wholly lyric but a fusion of both, a fusion that is effected by the convention of the narrator. The dramatic poems are separate from the lyric poems only when the latter lack an explicit or implied narrator, when the poem is turned inward upon the poet instead of outward to the reader ("Acquainted with the Night" and "Bereft" are examples); frequently the dramatic poems and lyrics are different only

in degree and emphasis. As John F. Lynen states,

The bulk of Frost's dramatic poems, and this includes almost all of the really familiar ones, would be technically disqualified [from the dramatic category], for they are really monologues and dialogues presented within a more or less elaborate narrative framework. This is a fact of some importance; it shows that the best of Frost's drama comes to us through the mediation of a narrator. . . . But whether the dramatic passages are richly augmented with description, as in 'The Death of the Hired Man' or the narrative element is sparse, as in 'The Witch of Coös,' Frost's dependence upon the narrative form indicates that his dramatic works are not far removed from his other poems and have grown out of the same kind of poetic thought.<sup>12</sup>

Frost has written little which could legitimately be termed drama. With the exception of his two plays (The Cow's in the Corn [Gaylordsville, Slide Mountain Press, 1929] and A Way Out [New York, Harbor Press, 1929: a one-act prose play]) and the two Masques (A Masque of Reason and A Masque of Mercy), Frost has confined his dramatic talents mainly to shorter poems which involve dramatic elements but which are not wholly dramatic. These are the dramatic narratives.

The term dramatic narrative means exactly what it says: a story told dramatically. The most frequent pattern found in Frost's dramatic narratives is the frame story, a convention older than Chaucer. The frame story creates a sense of immediacy of action while allowing the poet, through the narrator, to interpose comments on the action; and it allows the poet to include an event from the past in a dramatic framework. In only two dramatic narratives--"A Servant to Servants" and "The Pauper Witch of Grafton"--Frost abandoned the usual frame story in favor of the traditional dramatic monologue. These two somewhat atypical poems still retain the primary characteristic of Frost's more typical dramatic narratives in that the speakers serve both as characters and narrative commentators. In each of Frost's dramatic narratives one will find

elements of both the dramatic and the narrative. In most, two primary characters (sometimes accompanied by secondary ones as in "In the Home Stretch") engage in conversation; while speaking, these characters work out the dramatic situation and reveal themselves in the process. The narrative element is generally less strong than the dramatic, containing primarily a usually unobtrusive narrator who comments on and describes the action, giving background material on and, as it were, stage directions to the principal actors while the actors work out the situation. The narrative portion allows for the lyric element; for the narrator, in commenting upon the dramatic situation, can interpose his own thoughts and feelings concerning it.

With the exception of Lynen and Thompson, no critics have attempted to define Frost's dramatic narrative poetry. In determining whether or not a poem is a dramatic narrative, Lynen finds the source of the lines unimportant--whether they come from the characters or through the narrator. Lynen bases his distinction on

whether or not the portrayal of action (either physical or psychological) is predominant. The only valid way of distinguishing the dramatic poems is by their primary emphasis on action felt to be happening in the present. The difference between narrative and lyric on the one hand and dramatic on the other is the difference between events recollected and events seen in the present. The action in the dramatic poems has immediacy--we seem to see the events acted out before us. Where the action has this immediacy, the narrative elements will be clearly secondary; retrospection will give way to a sense of present experience.<sup>13</sup>

Within the definition that he sets up for dramatic poetry--the "primary emphasis on action felt to be happening in the present"--Lynen can consider only a score of Frost's poems as essentially dramatic.<sup>14</sup> These poems he places in five different and rather rigid categories according to the over-all effect of each poem: 1) the dramatic dialogues in which

action is the main interest (including "The Death of the Hired Man," "Home Burial," "Snow"), 2) the dramatic monologues during which, in the tradition of Browning, the speaker at a moment of psychological crisis either moves toward self-revelation or self-realization ("A Servant to Servants" is the best illustration of this category), 3) the pastoral dialogues, the form of which is dictated by the subject matter and emphasis of the eclogue--namely the unfolding of a socio-philosophical relationship in terms of the contrast between town values and country values ("Blueberries" and "A Hundred Collars"),<sup>15</sup> 4) the philosophic dialogues in which the action dramatizes a philosophic idea rather than a situation ("West-Running Brook" and "A Fountain, A Bottle, A Donkey's Ears and Some Books"), 5) the narrative monologues in which the dramatic action is of little importance, merely forming a vehicle for the narration of earlier dramatic events ("The Housekeeper" and "The Bonfire").<sup>16</sup>

Lynen has not failed to allow in his scheme for poems like "Mending Wall" or "The Hill Wife" which, while they contain less of the dramatic element, can still be considered as falling within the province of the dramatic narrative. While ostensibly including only two poems ("The Housekeeper" and "The Bonfire"), the last category, the narrative monologue, can be broadened to accommodate some of the border line poems--those poems in which the narrative element supersedes and takes over the dramatic, in which the focal dramatic event is recalled from the past rather than witnessed in the present ("The Ax-Helve," "The Star-Splitter," "Paul's Wife," "Out, Out--," "Mending Wall," "The Vanishing Red," etc.). As Lynen points out, the only clear difference between the narrative monologue and the more strict narrative lies

in the matter of speech attribution. The action is of little

importance; at most it merely provides the occasion for the telling of a story.<sup>17</sup>

While Lynen employs essentially the same distinction as Thompson does in separating the dramatic narrative from Frost's lyric works, Thompson does not set up rigid categories. Thompson describes Frost's dramatic narrative method as the

method of concentrating on the soul-in-present-action, if such a phrase may suggest his primary concern for the immediate nuances of development, as contrasted with the nuances of past happenings. To be sure, the past is brought to bear on the present, but always in a secondary sense.<sup>18</sup>

In his chapter on Frost's dramatic narratives, Thompson includes some of the border line poems--those poems which could belong to either genre. "Mending Wall" and "Christmas Trees," for example, Thompson calls "lesser dramatic narratives," since the emphasis in the poems falls not on psychological delineation so much as on the development of a single central idea.<sup>19</sup> Even further removed from a definite dramatic narrative like "The Death of the Hired Man" are poems like "Out, Out--," "The Subverted Flower," and "The Hill Wife" which Thompson designates compressed narratives.<sup>20</sup>

According explicitly to Thompson and implicitly to Lynen, the category of the dramatic narrative can be broadened to include poems like "The Code" and "The Hill Wife," which depart in varying degrees from the form employed by Frost in the unchallengeably dramatic narrative poems like "Home Burial," "The Fear," and "West-Running Brook." The most significant departure occurring in the border line poems is to be found in the time element of the story being recounted. In "The Death of the Hired Man" the focal action of the poem fulfills Lynen's requirement for the dramatic--one feels the action is happening in the present.



In "The Code" the focal incident has already occurred and is being recounted to support the New England farm hand's thesis that hired hands who have pride and a sense of integrity will not tolerate their employer's interference with their work. The event that creates the occasion for the story has occurred before the opening of the poem. However, the situation which leads to the narrative is dramatic: one feels the dialogue between the New England farm hand and the "town-bred farmer" is happening in the present. Thus while the primary emphasis falls not on action happening in the present but on action that has occurred, the poem retains an immediacy. "The Hill Wife" can also be included as a border line poem if one considers it, as Thompson does, an implied dramatic narrative.<sup>21</sup> The poem is constructed out of five short lyric sections which present the situation, clarify it, and bring it to a climax. Two of the sections are designated "Her Word"; in effect, these sections are tiny monologues in which the wife reveals her fears to her husband. The other three sections are narrated by what Thompson calls a chorus voice which perceives the Hill Wife's fears and, in the final section, "The Impulse," describes her ultimate response to them. Unlike most of the dramatic narratives, the drama in "The Hill Wife" is cumulative; it occurs over a relatively long period. Instead of the more characteristic narrator, a chorus voice comments on and furthers the action, but the chorus voice is closely related to the narrative voice that appears in "Home Burial" and "A Hundred Collars." Thus action involving a sense of immediacy is present in both groups of poems although the emphasis in the border line poems is directed more toward past occurrences than present dilemmas.

As I have mentioned in connection with the review of the literature

(p. 6), many critics have noted the central theme of isolation prevalent in much of Frost's work, especially in his dramatic narrative poetry. This theme of isolation is most cogently and extensively discussed by Marion Montgomery in "Robert Frost and His Use of Barriers: Man vs. Nature Toward God." Summed up by James Cox, the burden of Montgomery's essay is that there are barriers everywhere:

between man and God, man and nature, man and man--which each man is constantly discovering, erecting, and destroying for himself. Man thus begins as a stranger to his world, his life, and God; the whole business of living involves a series of accommodations by which man adjusts himself to the barriers on every side of him. Recognition of the barriers is part of the whole principle of sanity leading eventually to respect for man and God.<sup>22</sup>

The theme of isolation is extremely relevant to a study of the dramatic narratives, as I have indicated; for as Montgomery states in regard to the barriers between man and man

It is because of barriers that we understand each other, and far from striving to tear them down as is the modern tendency, Frost insists on recognizing them. He even builds them wherever they seem necessary. The conflict caused by friction of personal barriers, 'human nature in peace and war,' is the subject of his most dramatic poetry.<sup>23</sup>

Langdon Elsbree in "Frost and the Isolation of Man" sees in Frost's dramatic narrative poems from North of Boston an organizational pattern common to six of them.

A paradigm of this organization would run thus: opening with a concise declarative sentence indicating a specific speaker and location, the poem almost immediately names an event or condition which seems ominous because of the speaker's tone, but which cannot be wholly understood because of insufficient detail. Following this sharply focused, laconically portentous beginning, is an accumulation of details, both flashbacks and current happenings, to clarify the ominous opening by revealing how and why it disturbs the speakers. These clarifying details culminate in a generalization which comes usually about a third or half way through the poem, predicts the poem's conclusion, and completes the particularizing of the kind of isolation experienced by the characters. This isolation is then made more compelling by a shift from clarifying detail to an argument carried on among the characters about the

ominous event, until someone proposes a definite course of action. Whatever the nature of the act, the poem's end, coming but a few lines after the proposal of action, is sometimes ironic, usually bleak, and always foreshadowed. Controlled by the prosaic rhythms and unimpeded by an obtrusive interpreting narrator, this organization of the poem results in a powerful demonstration of the immitigable pain and loneliness in life, feelings which dominate the characters of the six poems.<sup>24</sup>

Elizabeth Isaacs notes in An Introduction to Robert Frost

that one basic principle is carried through many different themes: this is Frost's favorite idea of conflict or antithesis. . . . This fact of tension, of antithesis, is observed in man's place in nature, in his work and play, in his loves and fears, in his faith and reason, in his transience and permanence, and in his isolation and communion. The last of these is the most important and indeed the one that gives overtones to all of his poetry.<sup>25</sup>

In "A Momentary Stay Against Confusion" John T. Napier states:

it is feasible to consider the fact that many of Frost's poems do present the semblance of reasoning as the preferred virtual experience.<sup>26</sup>

I maintain that a definite organizational pattern, not just "a semblance of reasoning" exists in Frost's poetry. This structural device is particularly evident in the dramatic narrative and border line poems, and I refer to it as the dialectical pattern. While the dialectical method had been described and utilized by authors as early as Plato and Aristotle, it was first incorporated formally into a philosophic system by the German philosopher George Wilhelm Hegel (1770-1831). On its simplest level, it is the method of question and answer, a new point of view growing out of two opposing view points. In its simplest form, the form to be discussed in this paper, the Hegelian dialectical pattern contains three phases: a "thesis" produces an entity opposed to it, the "anti-thesis"; conflict between the thesis and antithesis results in a "synthesis." The synthesis unites the two opposing entities in a more inclusive statement containing what is significant in both of them.

The synthesis itself then becomes a thesis, setting in motion a new stage of the dialectical pattern.

In his dramatic narrative poetry, Frost confined himself to the first two phases of the dialectical pattern: in most of these poems one of the two characters holds a point of view, the thesis, to which the other character, the antithesis, reacts. Out of the conflict between thesis and antithesis points of view, the characters either achieve or fail to achieve a synthesis. It is the dramatic conflict between the two opposed view points with which Frost was most concerned in his dramatic narrative and border line poems. Thesis and antithesis clash, not as good versus evil but as good versus good; only in one poem ("The Vanishing Red") did Frost create a character that might be termed a villain. As Thompson states, for the most part Frost created dramatic situations in which the characters struggle between opposed aspects of good,<sup>27</sup> the conflicts arising from barriers which separate individual from individual. Frost maintained in much of his poetry, as Montgomery points out (see p. 14 of this study), that barriers are necessary for the security of the individual. Trouble develops only when humans erect unnecessary barriers between themselves and others, when, for one reason or another, they succeed in cutting themselves off entirely from their opponent. In any of the dramatic narrative or border line poems, the barrier may form a complex alienating factor, as in "Home Burial" or "The Witch of Coös," or it may exist as the simple, natural barrier between individual entities as in "The Generations of Men" or "West-Running Brook." When the conflict fails to resolve itself in synthesis, the failure generally belongs to both characters, although one may be more responsible than the other; and it usually occurs as a result of lack of understanding and

perception on the part of one or both characters. When both opponents try to understand and accept the other's point of view, when each is willing to give a little, synthesis generally results. A synthesis grows out of the original view points forming a compromise between thesis and antithesis, which, in its most Hegelian form, unites the conflicting points of view in a higher truth than either of the original views by combining elements of both.

In those poems in which the characters fail to achieve a synthesis, the possibility of synthesis always exists. In many of the poems the resolution of the dramatic situation is implied or explicitly stated, but it does not succeed. In "Home Burial" the husband suggests a compromise measure which the distraught wife refuses even to consider. In order to keep from going permanently insane, the wife in "A Servant to Servants" has attempted a solution--a stay in an asylum--a solution which failed because the routine of her life forces her back once more to the brink of insanity. Because "The Fear" immediately follows "The Housekeeper" in North of Boston and in light of the dialectical pattern under discussion here, the two poems can be considered companion pieces, "The Fear" being the sequel to "The Housekeeper." In "The Housekeeper" the synthesis effected between John and Estelle is no synthesis at all: the implied solution depends on a marriage between John and Estelle, but Estelle elopes instead with another man. This ironic synthesis, the portrayal of which occurs in "The Fear," involves failure also; for fear of her earlier common law husband constitutes a daily part of the lives of the married couple. Failure to achieve synthesis occurs frequently in the border line poems also. The Miller refuses to tolerate the suggestion of John's humanity in "The Vanishing Red" (because John is an Indian), much

less accept him as a human entity. The husband's failure to understand or take seriously the fears of his wife results in the wife's psychotic flight from her home and husband in "The Hill Wife."

In those poems involving a failure of synthesis, the drama ultimately resolves itself into a choice that is no choice. Frost took the factor of choice to its irreducible extreme in poems such as "A Servant to Servants," "Home Burial," "The Hill Wife," "The Housekeeper," (the list is not exhaustive) until finally there is no choice at all. He elucidated this characteristic of his own poetry in the introduction to Edwin Arlington Robinson's King Jasper:

But for me, I don't like grievances [that which is concerned with Chekhovian social misdoings]. I find I gently let them alone wherever published. What I like is griefs and I like them Robinsonianly profound. . . . Grievances are a form of impatience. Griefs are a form of patience. . . .<sup>28</sup>

And there is solid satisfaction in sadness that is not just a fishing for ministrations and consolation. Give us immedicable woes--woes that nothing can be done for--woes flat and final. And then to play. The play's the thing. Play's the thing. All virtue in 'as if.'

'As if the last of days  
Were fading and all wars were done.'  
As if they were. As if, as if!<sup>29</sup>

These comments of Frost throw a good deal of light on those dramatic narrative and border line poems which show the failure of synthesis. These are the poems that deal mainly with griefs, griefs which are reduced to their ultimate factor: they are "woes that nothing can be done for--woes flat and final." These are universal woes, and they are profound and far reaching. While these woes are dramatized in a particular context of particular characters, they permit of--in a sense insist on because of dramatic intensity--universal application. Evidence of Frost's intended universality lies in his insistence on the "as if" quality. First comes

the "immedicable" woe, then the vehicle which symbolizes it--the poem, whose virtue lies in "as if"--the analogical quality of the poem. It is this analogical quality of Frost's poems, the ability to extend the particular situation into other similar situations, that accounts for the universality of his poems. Many of the best of Frost's dramatic narrative and border line poems deal with "immedicable woes" ("The Witch of Coös," "The Hill Wife," "Out, Out--," "The Fear," etc.), for it is in these that Frost attained the greatest measure of universality. For example, as the situation of the husband and wife in "Home Burial" expands to symbolize a universal reaction to the grief for an irremediable loss experienced by many, so in "A Servant to Servants" the woman's lack of power to remedy her situation expands to symbolize all those who for one reason or another are powerless to help themselves. No hope of resolution exists in either poem because of the intensity of the grief and the reactions to it: no synthesis is possible. Although a synthesis is stated or implied in all of the poems that depict the failure of synthesis, the potential resolution, because of its futility, appears either pathetic or ludicrous when seen in relation to the woe which it is intended to remedy.

Frost employed the complete dialectical pattern in some of his poems, although far less frequently than the incomplete pattern because the former does not as easily permit treatment of "immedicable woes." In those dramatic narrative and border line poems in which the characters attain a synthesis, two factors are always present: each of the antagonists possesses tolerance and understanding of the other's view point and personality, and each has a sense of proportion about himself and the dramatic conflict. Only where these two factors exist can the characters

achieve synthesis, and both of these factors depend upon the individuals' pride, integrity, and independence. Frequently one of the two characters possesses more tact and understanding than the other, a greater awareness of the other's view point. When this occurs, the character aids in the movement towards synthesis by refusing to allow his own personal barriers to stand in the way of agreement and by making it easier for his opponent to overcome his, each person maintaining his integrity in the process. In all cases either love and/or respect prevails in the dramatic relationship. In "The Death of the Hired Man" Mary and Warren achieve a compromise in the debate about their responsibility to Silas, and they attain it because of their love for and understanding of each other and because each is willing (Mary at first, Warren later) to put himself in Silas' place. In "The Self-Seeker" the injured man, who has divested himself of the last remnants of false pride, reaches a synthesis between the necessities of life and his physical impairment. In "From Plane to Plane" Dick helps Pike compromise with his point of view, and the two harmonize on a definition of labor.

When one works on a literary problem involving form and technique, there is always a temptation to impose a pattern where no such pattern exists. I hope I have avoided this pitfall and believe I have done so. The dialectical pattern emerges in poem after poem, and one can only assume that Frost so intended it. Further, it may appear at times as if I am attempting to reduce the characters in these poems to the level of abstractions, to thesis, antithesis, or synthesis; this has not been my intention. The characters are real and three-dimensional people and cannot be thought of merely as embodiments of ideas. In his essay "Modern Georgics" Ezra Pound stated his position--and mine--concerning the



hire employees but which do not operate under a governmental appropriation. These workers, paid variously by salary or hourly rate, are paid from the operating revenues of the employing activity. Non-Appropriated Fund Activity employees fill jobs such as sales clerks in the Base Exchange, attendants in the Base Nursery, and life-guards at the Base swimming pool. They thus provide services that are basically non-essential to the mission of the Base. For this reason they are classified separately from Civil Service employees. Throughout the remainder of this study Non-Appropriated Fund Activity employees are referred to as "NAFA employees."

Data on individual employees' earnings were obtained indirectly from the questionnaire. Each Civil Service employee indicated only his civil service classification, grade, and step-in-grade. Each NAFA employee indicated his job title. Salary and wage-rate schedules furnished by the Base Civilian Personnel Officer were used to convert the data on Civil Service employees to annual wages and salaries. The wages of hourly employees were calculated on the basis of no overtime, no shift differentials, and no lost time (2080 hours per year). Salaried personnel normally do not receive additional pay for overtime, nor are they penalized for reasonable lost time. Wage information corresponding to job titles for NAFA employees was provided by the Base Accounting Office or by individual activity directors.

One problem arose in estimating incomes by the above method. Eighteen Civil Service respondents indicated only their class and grade,

## CHAPTER II

### THE INCOMPLETE SYNTHESIS

North of Boston (1914), Frost's second published volume of poetry and the first to include any dramatic narrative poems, contains exactly half of all the dramatic narratives he wrote. Composed of sixteen poems, the volume contains ten dramatic narratives, three border line poems, and three lyrics. Of the three lyrics two are nature poems. The third, "After Apple Picking," has as its subject man, as have all of the dramatic narrative and border line poems. Thus North of Boston is primarily a volume about people. It is, however, more than a haphazard collection of poems concerning people in dramatic situations. It is Frost's representation of the human condition. In one sense its locale is a restricted area somewhere North of Boston; in a broader sense its locale is the world in general, the community of man. While the human beings treated in the poems are on one level individual people, on a deeper level they become human archetypes representing the gamut of human emotion and response, shared by people of all nations, of all social strata, past and present. The subjects of the poems are not so much people as they are the reactions, the feelings, of people in elemental situations. "The Death of the Hired Man," for example, is a chronicle not only of the particular relationship among Mary, Warren, and Silas, but a treatment of

the theme of man's responsibility to man. "Home Burial" is not only a poem about a husband and wife whose love cannot survive the wife's grief for her dead child; it is an examination of human sorrow, of unmitigable grief and an adjustment to it, an examination of man's response to the loss of that which he holds dear. "The Black Cottage" deals with a preacher's recollection of an old lady but touches upon those truths that "we keep coming back and back to." "A Hundred Collars" describes the relationship between Doctor Magoon and Lafe, the barriers that exist between city values and country values, but the poem understood as analogy may also be extended to include all barriers which spring up between man and man as the result of different ideologies and backgrounds. In a somewhat humorous vein "The Housekeeper" dramatically examines the proud rebellion of a woman whose man refuses to accept her as an equal. "A Servant to Servants" treats of a woman's psychological disintegration yet typifies also the unintentional degradation of one human by another and the loneliness and loss of individuality which follows. "The Mountain" deals with one man's curiosity about natural barriers and another's acceptance of them for what they are.

Before the reader can understand the nature of Frost's revelation, however, he must first understand man as an individual: he must be able to separate that which is basic to the individual from that which is extraneous. With its internecine relationships, society unnecessarily complicates the problem of human understanding; therefore, before one can hope to comprehend man, he must first strip away the layers of civilization and complicated social relationships. For this reason, Frost created characters close to the earth from which they gain their sustenance. Instead of creating characters of heroic proportions--kings, dukes,

noblemen--which imply a stratified society, Frost chose to remove man from society and examine him in his most fundamental relationships, As Nitchie has pointed out (although in an argument opposed to this one), Frost's world, his community, is an isolated, frugal one.

There are very few poems indeed in his total output in which individuals are seen as parts of or in relationship with collective units. Even Frost's families tend to be man-and-wife affairs, without dependent relatives or grown children. . . . The implication here, I think, is that for Frost all values, both positive and negative--at least the most important ones--are ultimately defined in terms of relationships of individual to individual (the husband-wife unit) or, to extend the principle, of the individual to himself or to his natural environment, not of the individual to society. Like nature, such relationships make possible a kind of ideal simplification.<sup>1</sup>

Frost's social world, as created in North of Boston and the other volumes, is a most basic, indeed a primitive one. In order to make his characters representative of universal man, Frost chose to extricate them from society and make them interact with themselves and one another on the most elemental plane possible. He reduced humanity to its lowest common denominator, the individual, and the basic human social unit--husband and wife. For his locale he chose an area which he had known both as a child and as an adult, creating from it a mythical region, North of Boston. Isolated and sparsely populated, this area North of Boston serves as a natural locale for unfolding those emotions and situations which are most fundamentally human. As Lynen states, ". . . his rural New England is a world of symbol, and . . . his method as a regional poet is that of exploring the other worlds of experience through this world."<sup>2</sup> In his poetry, especially in the dramatic narrative and border line poems, Frost revealed that which he believed is most basic to human nature.

Suggesting the theme of isolation which permeates the volume,

the title of North of Boston implies a separation from Boston, a separation from the city and its conventionalized perception. Placed by Frost in its initial position to act as a referent for the dramatic narrative and border line poems that follow, "Mending Wall" unfolds the theme of isolation.<sup>3</sup> On the most superficial level, the poem is merely an anecdote describing two neighbors who, each spring, get together to mend the winter damage done to the stone wall between their properties. Confined to the attitudes expressed by the two neighbors, the poem dramatizes their difference of opinion concerning the desirability of the wall. The speaker tries to make his neighbor see that the wall is unnecessary, that it protects neither of them; but the neighbor, a victim of blind tradition, cannot see the speaker's point of view. As they mend the wall, they erect a psychological barrier between them; and the wall becomes a symbol of isolation: it forms a metaphysical as well as a physical barrier between the two men, cutting them off from one another. At the end of the poem the breach in the wall that might have allowed for mutual understanding and rapport has been mended, and the isolation of one individual from another is complete. Frost charged the simple act of mending a wall with ironic implications, and the wall as symbol becomes a metaphor for the rest of the dramatic poems in North of Boston and for many of those in later volumes.

While the wall in "Mending Wall" is first a solid stone wall, on another level of meaning it becomes an unnecessary boundary separating one human from another. The wall as a symbol extends beyond the particular situation treated in the poem to encompass all those barriers erected by man to create willful distinctions. While the wall may be understood in terms of such barriers as nationality, race, creed, sex, political

ideology, etc., it is futile to search for a specific symbolic referent for the wall: it is a broad symbol including many barriers. Lynen refers to Frost's mode of reference exemplified in "Mending Wall" as "generalized symbol."<sup>4</sup> Relating it to the vantage point from which one views a landscape, Lynen states:

Just as the vista delimits the observer's vision, Frost's symbols control the direction of the reader's thoughts; and although the path of reference may contain specific referents as the vista does objects, these are less interesting in themselves than the total view with its depth and the sense it creates of innumerable remote things related to the viewer's point of vantage.<sup>5</sup>

Frost persistently employed the mode of generalized symbol in his poems instead of the more precise imagery used commonly by T. S. Eliot, in whose poetry a symbol most frequently has a more exact and specific referent.<sup>6</sup> As Lynen points out,

By thinking of Frost's symbolic reference as a vista rather than an arrow moving from image to referent, one can recognize specific references and yet see them in their proper perspective as particular meanings within the scope of a more general meaning. In "Mending Wall," for example, the wall does suggest other kinds of barriers, the divisions between nations, classes, economic, racial and religious groups and the like, but no one of these or combination of them all exhausts the symbol's meaning. Nevertheless they fall within the range of reference; to recognize their relevance is not to 'read into' the poem, but to discover some small portion of what is actually there.<sup>7</sup>

The generalized symbol, simply because of its applicability, because it is not tied to a specific referent, becomes an archetypal one. Yet because of the particular context from which it arises, the symbolic extension does not become vague and eventually meaningless from range upon range of application; for the reader must constantly test the extension against the solidity of the original metaphor.

The psychological barrier building in "Mending Wall" emerges in a pattern that Frost employed with variations in many of the dramatic

narrative and border line poems. The theme of isolation presented in "Mending Wall" expands to become the theme of "Home Burial." Developing by means of the dialectical pattern, "Home Burial" presents the dilemma of a husband and wife who react to the death of their child from violently opposed points of view. The poem depicts the total failure of synthesis: the husband, who acts from the thesis viewpoint and the wife, who reacts from the antithesis viewpoint, cannot possibly achieve a reconciliation that will enable them to live again as man and wife.

Told within a narrative framework, "Home Burial" is recounted by a speaker similar to the one who appears in "Mending Wall."<sup>8</sup> Uninvolved in the drama, he perceives and suggests the implications behind the actions of the main characters. As the narrator describes the action, he comments on and interprets the couple's movements and dialogue; but he makes no judgment of either the wife's or the husband's point of view.

The title of the poem gives a clue to the dramatic situation, although as the poem progresses it becomes clear that the title has two meanings, one of which, playing on the other, becomes grimly ironic. The opening lines of the poem make obvious the fact that extreme tension exists between husband and wife, that the nucleus of the tension lies in what the wife perceives and the husband does not.

He saw her from the bottom of the stairs  
 Before she saw him. She was starting down,  
 Looking back over her shoulder at some fear.  
 She took a doubtful step and then undid it  
 To raise herself and look again. He spoke  
 Advancing toward her: 'What is it you see  
 From up there always--for I want to know.'  
 She turned and sank upon her skirts at that,  
 And her face changed from terrified to dull.  
 He said to gain time: 'What is it you see,'  
 Mounting until she cowered under him.  
 'I will find out now--you must tell me, dear.'  
 She, in her place, refused him any help

With the least stiffening of her neck and silence.  
 She let him look, sure that he wouldn't see,  
 Blind creature; and awhile he didn't see.  
 But at last he murmured, 'Oh,' and again, 'Oh.'

The thesis and antithesis become the opposed views of husband and wife; the more conventional point of view, the husband's, forms the thesis to which the wife, holding the antithesis point of view, reacts. The wife's staring from a vantage point on the stairs is not new; it has happened frequently enough for the husband to notice it and question her. Further, it is clear that the wife does not wish to be questioned about her behavior: as she sinks upon the steps, "her face changed from terrified to dull." She fears that her husband will discover the reason-- and she believes that he is not perceptive enough to see the implication behind her act. But he does see:

'The wonder is I didn't see at once.  
                   °     °     °  
                   it is not the stones,  
 But the child's mound--'

'Don't, don't, don't, don't,' she cried.

It is the child's mound that is responsible for the wall between them. The death of their child established the foundation upon which the wall has been built separating them from one another. Thus the first implication of the title appears and the second level of meaning begins to emerge: the poem concerns the child's burial in the family graveyard; yet the grimmer implication emerges that the poem is not wholly about the death of the child--it is also a witness to the burial of a marriage. The wife cannot bear to speak of their dead baby. More specifically she cannot bear to have her husband speak of it.

'Can't a man speak of his own child he's lost?'

'Not you! Oh, where's my hat? Oh, I don't need it!



I must get out of here. I must get air.  
I don't know rightly whether any man can.'

With the generalizations spoken by husband and wife, the poem subtly expands to include not only their particular loss and response to it but other losses and the opposed masculine and feminine responses to them.

The death of their baby has cut the wife off from the husband to whom she can no longer turn for solace. The wife has surrounded herself with a wall of grief which her husband cannot penetrate. Clumsily but patiently he seeks to draw her out, to understand what is troubling her so inconsolably. While the reader begins to realize that the wife in some way, not yet clear, blames her husband for their child's death, he is unaware of this. Without perceiving the cause of the estrangement, the husband recognizes that he and his wife have become antagonists, that they must establish some common ground before they can again live together as man and wife. In order for the husband--acting from the thesis viewpoint--and the wife--acting from the antithesis viewpoint--to exist again as a unit, some compromise, a synthesis, must be effected. Thus, attempting to break through the barrier with a compromise, the husband suggests the synthesis:

'My words are nearly always an offense.  
I don't know how to speak of anything  
So as to please you. But I might be taught  
I should suppose. I can't say I see how.  
A man must partly give up being a man  
With women-folk. We could have some arrangement  
By which I'd bind myself to keep hands off  
Anything special you're a-mind to name.  
Though I don't like such things 'twixt those that love.  
Two that don't love can't live together without them.  
But two that do can't live together with them.'

The way toward understanding is open. The compromise is a solution. While it is far from an ideal solution to their problem--the husband

recognizes the effect it would have on their marriage, he knows that they must reach some agreement so that they can at least co-exist. The compromise, then, is a last resort.

He implores her to unburden herself to him that he might understand; however, her silent withdrawal and unspoken accusation begin to tell on him, and he charges her with partial responsibility for their present situation:

'I do think, though, you overdo it a little.  
 What was it brought you up to think it the thing  
 To take your mother-loss of a first child  
 So inconsolably--in the face of love.  
 You'd think his memory might be satisfied--'

At this point the synthesis breaks down. When he charges her with complicity, he mends the small breach in the wall opened by his plea for understanding. The wife accuses him of sneering; and the husband, wounded, strikes back in anger, hurling bitter words across the renewed barrier. In anger, not in understanding, the wife discloses the foundation of her animosity towards her husband. He has no right to speak of his dead child, for with his own hands he dug the little grave--and, at the same time, dug the grave for their marriage. The wife saw him; in horror she watched him

'Making the gravel leap and leap in air,  
 Leap up, like that, like that, and land so lightly  
 And roll back down the mound beside the hole.'

At that moment he changed from the husband she loved to a stranger. Unbelieving, she crept downstairs to confront him, to search out this man, new to her. She saw him, once her husband, as the unfeeling agent of her baby's burial.

'You could sit there with the stains on your shoes  
 Of the fresh earth from your own baby's grave  
 And talk about your everyday concerns.'

You had stood the spade up against the wall  
Outside there in the entry, for I saw it.'

The dialogue abruptly focuses on the spade: to the wife it is a symbol of her husband's insensitivity; with it he dug his dead child's grave and with it he returned to the house, setting it in the entry. Hysterical with grief, the wife can see only mocking indifference in her husband's unthinking act. The full force of her accusation and its implications bursts on him and he cries out:

'I shall laugh the worst laugh I ever laughed.  
I'm cursed. God, if I don't believe I'm cursed.'

To him the spade was not a diabolical instrument responsible for their lost child. The spade was simply a tool, an everyday implement employed in everyday labor. Attaching no particular significance to his behavior, he acted in a manner the reader might reasonably assume was habitual to him: after accomplishing the task at hand (and this was a task that was his responsibility to perform), he turned to the house for a respite, bringing along with him the tool used to complete the task. If he noticed it at all, he perceived the spade in simple denotative and insignificant terms; under the pressure of grief, his wife viewed it with heavily charged connotation. She compounds her accusation of him by repeating the words he uttered:

"Three foggy mornings and one rainy day  
Will rot the best birch fence a man can build."

How could he talk at such a time of everyday concerns, she demands; and one cannot help but catch the morbid significance of the word "rot" to the grief-stricken mother, mindful of the child in the coffin. Overwrought, she concludes from his remarks that he cared nothing about their dead baby. What she fails to see is that he reacted to the death of

their child with masculinely controlled sorrow. Being a woman, she might give way to her feelings; but because of his manhood, he had to stifle his.

The tragedy in "Home Burial" grows out of the wife's misinterpretation of her husband's actions; she recoils from him in horror of what she believes these actions imply. Reacting against his seemingly callous indifference, she hugs her grief more tightly to her until her sorrow blots out all possibility of a normal life. She will not compromise her grief: it is her protection from her husband's brutal insensitivity--and the wall that isolates her from him whom she now hates.

'No, from the time when one is sick to death,  
One is alone, and he dies more alone.  
Friends make pretense of following to the grave,  
But before one is in it, their minds are turned  
And making the best of their way back to life  
And living people, and things they understand.  
But the world's evil. I won't have grief so  
If I can change it. Oh, I won't, I won't!'

Irrationally she attempts to breach the natural barrier of death; she cannot return to normal living, for she would then have to acknowledge, at least partially, the validity of her husband's viewpoint. The husband, however, does not see the implication behind her words; and feeling that since she has now unburdened herself they will be able to re-establish their relationship, he unwittingly commits the final error by which he makes the wall between them impenetrable. Interrupting himself, he says:

'Amy! There's someone coming down the road!'

To the wife his irrelevant remark is the final indignity. Any chance they might have had of reaching a solution to their problem, a synthesis, has vanished now, for in his wife's eyes he has reaffirmed his callous indifference. At a moment of psychological crisis he returns again to

everyday concerns, just as he had during the ordeal of the burial. The parallel between the husband's two irrelevant remarks made at psychologically critical moments is inescapable. As the wife had interpreted his earlier words regarding fences as a sign of his indifference to her feelings, so she now interprets them, and her resolve to leave him is strengthened. She responds:

'You--oh, you think the talk is all. I must go--  
Somewhere out of this house. How can I make you--'

Her final retort is left hanging in mid-air, unvoiced: "How can I make you--" What? Understand her withdrawal into grief? If this were her reason for unburdening her sorrow, they might have effected a reconciliation. On the basis of her husband's reply, however, the wife's last remark would seem to imply something more final. One feels that she has so isolated herself from him in mind and spirit that she is now prepared to withdraw from him physically and leave him permanently ("She was opening the door wider"). The husband senses what lies behind her uncompleted statement; and his manner, begun in an insistent search for understanding, degenerates to force.

No resolution of any kind occurs in "Home Burial": husband and wife find no way to tear down the wall; neither takes any decisive action. At the poem's end the wife opens the door wider, preparing to flee, while the husband threatens to bring her back by force if necessary. They are at once inextricably bound to one another and isolated from each other. The wall cannot be torn down; neither can they pick up their separate lives on either side of the wall. The wife senses that if she flees she will compromise her grief since by such action she would both cut herself off from the source of grief and establish herself on

the side of life. The crux of their problem originates in their separate views of death and culminates in their responses to it. These views cannot be reconciled. The wife wishes to embrace grief to the extent that she stops living and merely exists; she wishes to bury her life with her dead child. Firmly established on the side of life, the husband believes that life must go on even in the face of overwhelming sorrow. Submission to her husband would be an affirmation of love--the principle of life--which the wife cannot but deny; and the husband, groping blindly after her, cannot hope to win her back again on the same terms as they had lived before the death of the child intervened.

The dramatic situation in the poem comes down to a choice that is no choice: neither husband nor wife can act differently--the husband cannot become more perceptive, the wife cannot discipline her imaginative sensitivity. Had either gained the saving power of understanding and tolerance, had either the ability to see the other's point of view with detached sympathy, they might have effected a reconciliation. Since the wife cannot endure or even understand her husband's masculine bluntness and concern for daily life, and since the husband cannot understand his wife's hysterical morbidity, both are condemned to the hells of their own limitations. Neither total union nor total separation is possible. Thesis and antithesis are irrevocably condemned to exist together without hope of a reconciling synthesis.

Unlike "Home Burial" and "Mending Wall," "A Servant to Servants" does not include the narrator nor does it develop through the dialogue

of two people speaking from opposite viewpoints. The poem is a wholly psychological drama in which the speaker, disclosing to an unnamed listener her fear that she will succumb to hereditary insanity, reaches a full understanding of herself and an acceptance of her fate. Even though there is no dialogue in the poem, "A Servant to Servants" nonetheless incorporates the dialectical pattern as a means of development. Here, however, one does not receive the two points of view independently of one another; the woman voices both. She hurls no bitter accusations at her husband who, if not responsible for her plight, at least contributes to it. She delivers her monologue with objective apathy, wanting to assign no blame, only to understand and come to terms with her situation. Her husband, Len--embodying the thesis point of view--holds the conventional or "normal" view; his physical and mental energies are focused on the business of daily living and getting ahead in the world. Reacting to the thesis, the wife--embodying the antithesis point of view--holds the opposing, less rational view; while her physical energies are devoted to daily living, her psychological drives are so rooted in her morbid past that they seriously affect her ability to cope with the world around her. A synthesis--confinement in the state mental hospital and a physical move away from the past--has been tried and it has failed, placing the woman once more in a psychologically vulnerable position.

Marked similarities exist between "Home Burial" and "A Servant to Servants": both poems involve a married couple, in which the wife holds the antithesis point of view, the husband the thesis. Both involve a problem in perception. The wife in each poem suffers from a morbid

sensitivity, a highly charged emotional reaction to a traumatic experience. Both husbands are so immersed in the business of daily living that they fail to perceive the depths of isolation to which each wife is driven. Neither husband nor wife in either poem can accept the other's view. While objectively there exists the possibility of resolution--the synthesis, in the context of either poem a synthesis is impossible because of the enormity of the problem under consideration and the limitations of each married pair.

Fearful of relapsing into hereditary insanity--a culmination which she realizes must ultimately come--the wife in "A Servant to Servants" seeks to stay the inevitable for a little while by talking to a person completely uninvolved with her life. After welcoming her audience, a woman who is camping nearby, the wife begins to analyze her state of mind and reveals the apathy which has kept her from welcoming her visitor earlier. The camper is merely the catalyst by which the wife comes to terms with herself. In the introductory portion of the poem, before she begins to strip away the layers of her problem in attempting to get at the core, the wife unconsciously indicates the nature of her problem, her sense of inadequacy and despair. In fifteen lines she employs seven negatives: her life is "all gone wrong"; there is no positive factor in her thinking.

It's got so I don't even know for sure  
 Whether I am glad, sorry, or anything.  
 There's nothing but a voice-like left inside  
 That seems to tell me how I ought to feel,  
 And would feel if I wasn't all gone wrong.

To exemplify her state of mind, the wife comments on the lake bordering their property. She knows how she ought to see it--would see it if she were not "all gone wrong," but there is an implicit disparity between



the manner in which she feels she ought to view it ("I see it's a fair, pretty sheet of water"--with all the proper connotations) and the way, after listing its attributes, she actually does see it ("I see it's a fair, pretty sheet of water"). In the repetition of this line she displays no feeling at all--only a dull apathy. Minus any connotation, the lake, like her life, is stripped bare of any intrinsic beauty, any real meaning. It is simply a facade which hides the emptiness beneath it. Possessing the ability, a part of her psychological problem, of standing apart from herself and seeing the divergence between normal, healthy behavior and her own abnormal reactions, she acknowledges the full horror of her situation.

Having once lapsed into insanity ("I've been away once--yes, I've been away./ The State Asylum."), she believes it inevitable that she will succumb again to hereditary illness. Her husband, Len, a hard-working, ambitious man who lives in a world of external stimuli and few psychological complications, cannot see the depths to which his wife has been driven by her belief that she is disintegrating into a psychotic state similar to that of her uncle. Imaginative only in terms of his ambition (he later saw the possibilities of making their shoreline into a tourist camp site), he was otherwise blindly imperceptive of his wife's mental state until it became so apparent that he agreed to her treatment at the State Asylum. Frost is not specific about the sequence of events that led to the establishment of the pair in the house by the lake. It would seem logical that, seeing her mental disintegration, Len agreed to her confinement at the state mental institution. At the doctor's suggestion after her release, he made the decision to move to the house by the lake. Like the husband in "Home Burial," Len is not a brutal

man; he is merely insensitive to the psychological needs of others. Len typifies the normal, optimistic, unheedingly imperceptive human being; the woman represents the fatalistic pessimist who dares not count on hope:

The cottages Len built, sometimes we rent them,  
 Sometimes we don't. We've a good piece of shore  
 That ought to be worth something, and may yet.  
 But I don't count on it as much as Len.  
 He looks on the bright side of everything,  
 Including me.

Her confinement at the state mental hospital plus Len's decision to move her from the scene of her family's disintegration form the synthesis of this dialectical pattern. For a time the compromise--probably suggested by the woman's doctor--proved effective. As the wife observes, however,

Somehow the change wore out like a prescription.

While each contributed to it, the synthesis did not really affect either the thesis or the antithesis. Thus it failed, merely delaying the inevitable for a period of time. Like the synthesis proposed in "Home Burial," the synthesis in "A Servant to Servants" is totally futile. Ironically, the compromise seems at first glance to be the most effective solution--surely the doctor believed it to be--for the synthesis benefits both husband and wife. But this synthesis cannot get to the core of the problem: the essential natures of the thesis and antithesis characters who cannot be anything but what they are. Len must, by the nature of his individuality, be the optimistically insensitive person that he is; his wife, by reason of that which makes her a person, must be the morbidly sensitive fatalist that she is. Len's generalization clearly demonstrates the married pair's inability to attain a compromise. Because

it is a generalization, it extends to encompass a multitude of situations comparable to the particular one of which Len and his wife are prototypes.

He [Len] says the best way out is always through.

The thesis-antithesis relationship depends from the interpretation of the word through: in essence the two interpretations of the word encompass two completely opposed views. For Len the best way to overcome a problem is simply to work at it until it no longer exists, until one has come through it and stands safely on the other side. For the wife there is no breaking through in the optimistic sense of the term. For her "through" is the final and irremediable succumbing to madness-- utter degradation. Len sees hope for her condition; he relies on doctoring and medication to see her "through." The wife, too,

can see no way out but through--  
Leastways for me--and then they'll be convinced.

She recognizes the failure of the synthesis, but also sees the faint possibility of a real solution for herself.

But it's not medicine--  
Lowe is the only doctor's dared to say so--  
It's rest I want--there, I have said it out--  
From cooking meals for hungry hired men  
And washing dishes after them--from doing  
Things over and over that just won't stay done.  
By good rights I ought not to have so much  
Put on me, but there seems no other way.

there's more to it than just window-views  
And living by a lake. I'm past such help--  
Unless Len took the notion, which he won't,  
And I won't ask him--it's not sure enough.

This solution--complete rest and some needed pampering--is as doomed as the defeated compromise because it rests on a reversal of Len's character: he must change his essential nature to become more perceptive. She cannot suggest the terms of her salvation to him ("It's not sure enough"),

and he cannot perceive it for himself.

Unintentionally, through a lack of understanding of his wife's problem, Len has added to that problem: through his worldly ambition he has degraded his wife to the position of a servant to servants. She fears that she will fall heir to the animal state of her uncle's insanity; and her husband, by unthinkingly expecting her to serve his hired help, has brought her to the edge of animal servitude. In his insensitivity he does not take into account her abnormal sensitivity; he simply acts in the light of the tradition that it is the wife's duty to feed the hired help. Nowhere does the wife imply that her husband knowingly tries to degrade her; she is totally aware of the fact that to Len his expectations of her are conventionally acceptable and economically necessary. She knows how she ought to feel, but she is "all gone wrong."

The source of her "wrongness" lies in her acceptance of her uncle's cage as a symbol of her fate. Reared in the house in which her uncle was for a long period caged like an animal to protect himself and others, she lived with the evidence of his insanity--the cage of hickory bars, built within an upstairs room. Her uncle had disappeared before her time; and with the slightest suggestion, the woman hints that her uncle did not die a natural death, that her parents murdered him whom they tried to save from the degradation of the insane asylum:

I've heard them say, though,  
They found a way to put a stop to it.

She implies that her parents had stood all that they could stand and so had gotten rid of him, that they too had bowed to insanity in doing away with him. Thus it is possible that the woman's despair is coupled also with guilt for her parents' deed. The cage, then, becomes a compound

symbol of derangement and murder. On the basis of her family history she believes her fate is sealed.

Again there is the wall which separates the woman from her husband, the past from the present and future, the morbidly abnormal from the imperceptive normal. Initially erected by the woman because of her ties with the past, the wall is further augmented by her husband's lack of insight, by his unintentional degradation of her. Indeed he scarcely recognizes the existence of the wall. Because of his lack of understanding, the husband believes her situation to be scientifically remediable; but the wife, recognizing that her husband can act no differently, that her only hope is but a temporary respite from daily degradation, can see no total resolution of her situation except the doom of insensate madness.

In "The Witch of Coös," Frost again makes use of the dialectical pattern although the dramatic part of the poem somewhat obscures it. Involved this time in the action of the poem, the narrator acts as the catalyst through which the woman comes to terms with herself and her situation. In quest of shelter for the night, the narrator stops at the farm house of a mother and son, "two old believers," who regale him with a fantastic tale of the supernatural. It soon becomes apparent that the literal action of the poem is not its center (the frame-story technique): that the literal action merely presents the occasion for the mother's revelation at the end of her narrative of the skeleton that traveled from the basement to the attic. It is this revelation which discloses the dialectical pattern and which also accounts for the mother's witchcraft.

Living up to her status as a witch, the woman at the beginning of

the poem performs the role expected of her. While she executes no super-natural act, she discourses on the black art; however, she appears more interested in the philosophy that underlies witchcraft than in the actual witchcraft itself.

And when I've done it [made a table kick like an army mule], what  
good have I done?

Rather than tip a table for you, let me  
Tell you what Ralle the Sioux Control once told me.  
He said the dead had souls, but when I asked him  
How could that be--I thought the dead were souls,  
He broke my trance. Don't that make you suspicious  
That there's something the dead are keeping back?  
Yes, there's something the dead are keeping back.

Replying to his mother's comments, the son (evidently mentally retarded),<sup>9</sup> asks if she won't tell the visitor what they have in the attic. One suspects that the opening remarks and the mother's subsequent narration constitute an old routine the mother and son have prepared to act out for the benefit of chance visitors. However, one also feels that the opening gambit has not proceeded as rehearsed, that instead of the usual discourse on her supernatural abilities, the mother has brought in a philosophical irrelevancy. Responding like an actor who knows his lines but whose partner has missed his cue, the son prompts his mother back into the established role; and the mother proceeds with the drama, humoring him.

While the son was still a baby forty years ago, a skeleton, buried in the cellar, exhumed itself and made its way from the basement to the attic. During its journey only the mother saw it. Her husband, Toffle, dead now, had gone to bed and did not see it. Peculiarly enough, the skeleton was no horrifying apparition; the mother and son describe it in mundane, everyday images: a "pile of dishes," "a chalk pile," "like lightning or a scribble," bones put together "like a chandelier."

To mother and son the bones are as familiar and accepted a part of their lives as her mending. Only parenthetically and half-heartedly does the old witch refer to the skeleton in the manner one would expect:

(A tongue of fire  
Flashed out and licked along his upper teeth.  
Smoke rolled inside the sockets of his eyes.)

During the narrative the witch gives clues concerning the identity of the bones. Mentioned almost irrelevantly in terms of the narrative, these details foreshadow the revelation. Guessing that the cause of the disturbance in the cellar was the bones, the witch remarks

I knew them--and good reason.

Later, describing the skeleton's advance, she says

Then he came at me with one hand outstretched,  
The way he did in life once.

As the bones proceeded on their journey upstairs, the wife shouted

'Shut the bedroom door,  
Toffle, for my sake!'

Toffle, unaware of the note of urgency in her voice, responded

'Company?' he said,  
'Don't make me get up; I'm too warm in bed.'

When she blurted out that the bones were on the prowl, Toffle asked

"What bones?" suggesting that he had completely forgotten their existence.

His wife reminded him

'The cellar bones--out of the grave.'

That galvanized him into frightened action, and together they decided what to do with them. The wife said

'I'll tell you what--  
It's looking for another door to try.  
The uncommonly deep snow has made him think  
Of his old song, The Wild Colonial Boy,  
He always used to sing along the tote road.  
He's after an open door to get outdoors.  
Let's trap him with an open door up attic.'

At the woman's suggestion they opened the attic door, allowed the bones to continue their journey, then locked and nailed it shut, pushing the head board of their bed against it. Forty years later the witch consigns them again--forever--to the attic.

Let them stay in the attic since they went there.  
I promised Toffle to be cruel to them  
For helping them be cruel once to him.

The truth begins to emerge. The son dimwittedly continues the long-rehearsed version of the incident, but the witch stops him.

SON. We think they had a grave down in the cellar.

MOTHER. We know they had a grave down in the cellar.

SON. We never could find out whose bones they were.

MOTHER. Yes, we could too, son. Tell the truth for once.  
They were a man's his father killed for me.  
I mean a man he killed instead of me.  
The least I could do was to help dig their grave.  
We were about it one night in the cellar.  
Son knows the story: but 'twas not for him  
To tell the truth, suppose the time had come.

The need to persist in the lie has ended; indeed the witch finds it difficult to believe that the need ever existed.

But tonight I don't care enough to lie--  
I don't remember why I ever cared.  
Toffle, if he were here, I don't believe  
Could tell you why he ever cared himself. . . .

The bones are finally put to rest. The journey of the bones never occurred, just as the woman's witchcraft and her belief in witchcraft never existed. The bones' walk existed either as an imaginative experience or, perhaps at the time the incident was supposed to have occurred, as a real hallucination. For either alternative, the journey of the bones fulfilled some need within the woman, a need that is but barely suggested in the narrative itself.



The hints of Toffle's character and the wife's disclosure, together with the revelation of murder, supply the key to "The Witch of Coös"; and this key turns on the dialectical pattern. Again the husband holds the thesis point of view, the wife the antithesis; the agreement between husband and wife concerning the murder and subsequent burial, and later the wife's adoption of witchcraft, constitute the synthesis. The first suggestion of Toffle's nature comes in the wife's remark:

The only fault my husband found with me--  
I went to sleep before I went to bed

Irrelevant to the story of the bones, the witch's remark is laden with irony in light of the revelation. Toffle had murdered the man with whom he had discovered his wife in adultery--evidently the only instance of infidelity on her part ("Then he came at me with hand outstretched, / The way he did in life once"). Obeying the unwritten law that a man may kill another with impunity to protect his home and wife, Toffle had murdered the adulterer. His wife, seeking to make reparation, became an accessory to the murder by helping Toffle bury the corpse. They agreed either implicitly or explicitly to keep their act a secret, indeed wholly to forget about it--the synthesis. Toffle succeeded in pushing the crime entirely out of his consciousness to the point that he had to be forceably reminded of it (see p. 43); for he had absolved himself of any guilt by acting within the province of the unwritten law. His wife could not forget her complicity in the deed; she resurrected the bones at the bidding of her guilty conscience, instilling them with will enough to haunt her. Thus the compromise, the synthesis, on which she and Toffle had agreed failed for her.

Like the husbands in "A Servant to Servants" and "Home Burial,"

Toffle was a blunt, practical, insensitive man, imperceptive of his wife's emotional needs, apparently taking her presence for granted as he would take for granted the presence of a cow or a hoe. His insensitivity is so pronounced that he becomes a ludicrous figure in the poem. The wife, like those in "Home Burial" and "A Servant to Servants" possesses a tragic imagination and a morbid sensitivity; in fact there exists in all three of these wives an instinct for self-flagellation and masochism. The reader cannot know what events led up to the infidelity of Toffle's wife, whether the adultery was in fact adultery or rape. It seems likely, on the basis of the sketchy information given, that the wife committed adultery with the man who sang The Wild Colonial Boy in outrage against Toffle's lack of sensitivity and understanding. She harbored no guilt for her adultery, subtly implying that she committed adultery to make Toffle aware of her as an individual and to punish him for his imperceptiveness ("I mean a man he killed instead of me"). Frost gives almost no information about the adulterer, but by the suggestiveness of the title of the song he sang as he walked along the tote road, one might reasonably assume that his nature was the opposite of Toffle's; that where Toffle was unimaginatively practical, the adulterer was dynamically romantic, recognizing and sympathizing with the wife's need for expression of self. It seems safe to assume that Toffle reacted to the adultery fundamentally, responding to his first impulse: he saw the threat to his home; and without stopping to think about possible consequences, he rid himself of that threat through murder.

Husband and wife arrived at the synthesis of silence which Toffle wholly adopted but which his wife could not. Free of conscience, he was able to bury the dead past and reinstate his wife as if the incident had

never occurred. Because of her masochistic tendency, the wife could not fulfill the terms of the synthesis and so figuratively exhumed the bones of her dead lover to punish herself and Toffle. The imaginary bones behind their bed served constantly to remind Toffle of his wife's rebellion. She adopted witchcraft partly to keep her side of the bargain and partly to punish herself and Toffle by cutting them off from the community, thereby effecting a kind of imprisonment. Now her narration of the past frees her from it; she has served her sentence. Her witchcraft fulfilled both her emotional need and Toffle's practical one. While she could perhaps forgive Toffle the murder and her part in it, she could not forgive him the callousness he exhibited in failing to punish her. What should have been a wall between them was not. It was evidence to her that he did not care and further proof of his unintentional brutality ("The only fault my husband found with me--"). To Toffle her act of rebellion was as if it had never been.

As in "The Witch of Coös," the narrator in "The Housekeeper" is involved in the action, action which, however, merely provides the occasion for the narrative (see p. 11). While this poem is a dramatic narrative, nothing of importance occurs in the dramatic portion of the poem. The interest and center of the poem fall on past events reconstructed by Estelle's mother. While not totally impartial, she does perceive and report both John's and Estelle's points of view. The narrator in "The Housekeeper" does not seem to be the Frost speaker of the other poems: far from being objective, he judges the actions of both John and Estelle, siding, man-fashion, with John. As with the other poems discussed, the dialectical pattern forms the key to understanding "The Housekeeper." John holds the thesis point of view, Estelle the antithesis, since the

antithesis is that which reacts to the thesis. The synthesis is clearly stated; it has been tried and it has failed. Unlike the other dramatic narrative poems explicated, the emphasis of the narrative falls on John's personality while Frost merely suggests Estelle's.

Dropping in to visit his neighbor John only to find that he is absent from the farm, the narrator learns from Estelle's mother that Estelle, John's common-law wife, has run off with another man. During the conversation with Estelle's mother, the narrator--and the reader--discovers the situation which led to Estelle's elopement. Fifteen years before, Estelle had taken the position of housekeeper for John to provide for herself and her mother.

'We came here for a home for me, you know,  
Estelle to do the housework for the board  
Of both of us. But look how it turns out:  
She seems to have the housework, and besides  
Half of the outdoor work, though as for that,  
He'd say she does it more because she likes it.'

During those years Estelle and John drifted into a common-law relationship, a relationship that Estelle's mother, though she did not relish it at first, got accustomed to. Then Estelle suddenly eloped with another man. The narrator observes:

~~and that is a long time~~  
To live together and then pull apart.'

One discovers that neither shame nor social condemnation caused Estelle's flight:

'Is it the neighbors,  
Being cut off from friends?'

'We have our friends.  
That isn't it. Folks aren't afraid of us.'

Resentment against John, the cause of which lay at the core of John's and Estelle's personalities, led her to rebel against him.

John, a "hugger-mugger" farmer,<sup>10</sup> allowed the care of the farm to drop from his shoulders onto Estelle's while he indulged himself in buying and raising fine farm stock.

'You see our pretty things are all outdoors.  
Our hens and cows and pigs are always better  
Than folks like us have any business with.'

Although he received offers for his fine stock, he refused to sell any, declaring,

If they're worth  
That much to sell, they're worth as much to keep.'

In contrast to the husbands in the other poems, John is impractical in the extreme. He shifted his man's responsibility to the women; and because he is a kind and gentle man, they indulged his whims. To keep the farm going, Estelle and her mother took in sewing to help pay the bills.

'... and we paid the bill with beads--  
Wampum, I call it. Mind, we don't complain,  
But you see, don't you, we take care of him.'

'And like it, too. It makes it all the worse.'

As Estelle's mother declares, John is like a child. His is not the tough, blunt, insensitive nature of the men in the other poems; he is too little absorbed in making a living. Easily frustrated, he strikes impulsively and ineffectually at that which frustrates him rather than trying to rectify the situation. Asked what she thinks John's reaction will be to Estelle's elopement, her mother says,

'What I think he will do, is let things smash.  
He'll sort of swear the time away. He's awful!  
I never saw a man let family troubles  
Make so much difference in his man's affairs.  
He's just dropped everything. He's like a child.'

Estelle fled not from John's shirking of his man's responsibilities but from his self-centered imperceptiveness. While the men in the other poems fail to understand the needs of their women, they do so because

they are wholly involved in the practical world of making a living. John's lack of insight stems from his childishness: like a child, he is aware only of his own needs, not the needs of others. Recognizing that "he's kinder than the run of men," John feels that Estelle should be satisfied with their common-law arrangement just because he is content with it. As with his farm work, John wants only the pleasure with none of the responsibility entailed in marriage.

On the other hand Estelle feels that John owes her marriage. She has willingly assumed the status of working partner on the farm, and she mutely insists upon an equal footing in their sexual relationship. John's tacit refusal to marry her makes Estelle feel as if she is little more than property, that her status as housekeeper places her below John's valuable livestock. Thus John unthinkingly denies her as an individual. As Thompson states, "Estelle broods proudly over the unintentional insult of the man's 'free love' attitude toward marriage. . . . Proud and self-contained, she never told [John] the inner hurt he should have seen."<sup>11</sup> As in "The Witch of Coös," the synthesis satisfied the man's need but not the woman's:

'The strain's been too much for her all these years:  
I can't explain it any other way.  
It's different with a man, at least with John:  
He knows he's kinder than the run of men.  
Better than married ought to be as good  
As married--that's what he has always said.  
I know the way he's felt--but all the same!'

Her mother voices the indignation that Estelle could not. Because of John's careless insensitivity to her feelings, Estelle revolted, eloping with another man. One cannot know whether or not Estelle is as morbidly sensitive as her predecessors in the other poems; but she does resent the indignity which John has unwittingly heaped upon her, and she reacts

against it. What John refused to give her--marriage and a move upwards from her subservient rank--she hopes to attain by marriage to another man.

Neither John nor Estelle is wholly blameless for the failure of their relationship; nor is either completely at fault. Blind and self-centered, John was unable to see the inadequacy of the synthesis he proposed and they lived by. Smoldering resentment burst, after fifteen years, into the flame of rebellion at which time Estelle fled from the common-law arrangement to a solution of her own choosing. Ironically, John could have effected a workable synthesis with Estelle simply by marrying her. Since he refused to take this responsibility, and since Estelle could not ask him to take it without compromising her integrity, she overthrew her responsibility to him--one which she had assumed fifteen years before--and effected her own synthesis--with another man. Because it does not evolve from the thesis and antithesis, this "synthesis" is doomed.

One may consider "The Fear," coming immediately after "The Housekeeper," as the dramatic portrayal of the misdirected synthesis of "The Housekeeper." Dealing only with the synthesis of the dialectical pattern, Frost presents in "The Fear" the final synthesis of "The Housekeeper" in all of its ineffectiveness, demonstrating fully and significantly the incomplete synthesis. In many respects "The Fear" is one of the finest of the dramatic narratives; it consists of one dramatically tense scene that portrays the strain under which the man and wife must live. The man and woman play out a scene which they have enacted before and which they will live again.

Returning home after dark, the wife believes she has seen a face in

the shadows along the road. While the significance is unclear at first, it becomes apparent that the woman fears that her former lover has come to punish her--and possibly her husband--for running away from him. Whether or not the woman's former lover actually contemplates revenge does not matter: his motives and actions are not at issue in this poem. Morbidly imaginative, the woman is obsessed with the idea that he will retaliate, and she cringes at each shadow. She assumes the full responsibility of her flight from the original lover and seeks to protect Joel from the real or imagined danger.

'You're not to come,' she said. 'This is my business  
If the time's come to face it, I'm the one  
To put it the right way. He'd never dare--  
Listen! He kicked a stone. Hear that, hear that!  
He's coming towards us. Joel, go in--please.'

Joel responds, not with kindness and insight, but with a brutal failure of tact.

'But it's nonsense to think he'd care enough.'

Implying that he does not believe her former lover could care enough about her to come after her, Joel suggests also that his wife does not merit even the distorted affection of hate. There is an indication lying beneath Joel's remark that he may not fully trust his wife: since she abandoned another man, might she not also leave him? The implication in this line recalls the narrator's condemnation of Estelle in "The Housekeeper": "'She's bad, that's all!'" Estelle had established a responsibility to John by living with him for fifteen years, a responsibility which she renounced when she eloped with another man.

The import of Joel's remark is painfully clear to the woman:

'You mean you couldn't understand his caring.  
Oh, but you see he hadn't had enough--  
Joel, I won't--I won't--I promise you.  
We mustn't say hard things. You mustn't either.'



The woman's retort suggests that a wall exists between them, that the woman's flight from her old lover has become a continual source of strain. One receives the impression that the recurring argument centers on the fact not that she had a former lover but that she proved herself false by deserting him.

Responding now to the woman's fear, a fear he begins to share himself, Joel confronts the situation by half-heartedly attempting to seize the responsibility of protection.

'I'll be the one, if anybody goes!'

However, it is not he who makes the advance; his wife usurps the man's role and questions the voice that calls out to them from the road. Satisfying herself that the voice belongs to a stranger walking with his child, the wife reverts once more to the woman's place in marriage, handing over the reins of authority to her husband with a plea for understanding and trust.

'But if that's all--Joel--you realize--  
You won't think anything. You understand?  
You understand that we have to be careful,  
This is a very, very lonely place.  
Joel!' She spoke as if she couldn't turn.

One senses that her supplication will not be met. A wall exists between them which neither is likely to breach: Joel, because of stubborn refusal and lack of diplomacy, the wife because of her error in marrying Joel in the first place when her responsibility lay elsewhere. Although Joel is infected with the fear, he and his wife do not share it; they present no united front to it. It is her problem, not theirs.

The poems thus far treated have all been dramatic narratives, but many of the border line poems exhibit the same type of dialectical pattern--the failure of the synthesis. "The Hill Wife" is typical of this group

of poems. Divided into five short lyric scenes, two lyric monologues and three narrative sections (see p. 13), the poem depicts the disintegration of a human being. The situation, implied rather than explicitly stated, is quite similar to that found in "A Servant to Servants." The husband, who holds the thesis point of view, does not have the perception to detect the intensity of his wife's depression. He knows that she has fallen prey to vague fears--he even shares some of them--but he is not cognizant of the impact that these anxieties have on her personality. He merely accepts them; he does not attempt to rectify them or look for their source, which is loneliness. Acting from the antithesis viewpoint, the wife, even more morbidly imaginative than her counterparts in other poems, reveals her loneliness to him by stages, seeking his help. She does not ask him for it. The narrator indicates a possible synthesis--a child to overcome the wife's loneliness, a child to give her secluded life some purpose. As in "A Servant to Servants," the wife struggles alone and desperately with her fears, possibly sensing the answer but unable to reveal it to her husband who should have seen it for himself. It is possible, indeed probable, that the wife herself is not consciously aware of her incompleteness. Her vague fears seem to be an unconscious manifestation of her deep sense of inadequacy.

The first section of "The Hill Wife," a monologue entitled "Loneliness: Her Word," announces the theme of the poem and reveals the poignant loneliness experienced by husband and wife who exist on a secluded hill farm. The wife's loneliness and need are divulged in the couple's shared response, interpreted by the wife, to the comings and goings of the birds.

One ought not to have to care  
 So much as you and I  
 Care when the birds come round the house  
 To seem to say good-by;

Or care so much when they come back  
 With whatever it is they sing;  
 The truth being we are as much  
 Too glad for the one thing

As we are too sad for the other here--  
 With birds that fill their breasts  
 But with each other and themselves  
 And their built or driven nests.

Husband and wife have no human companionship other than themselves, and this appears to be insufficient. There is only the presence of nature to comfort them. But nature and man are wholly separate: nature will not respond to man. Represented by the birds, nature is self-sufficient, caring nothing for man, who seeks in it a reflection of, a response to, himself.<sup>12</sup> Poignancy stems also from the implied observation that while the birds lead a meaningful existence in the context of nature, either through will or blind instinct ("their built or driven nests"), these people do not share a similar completeness. Suggested in the last line, the lack seems to have something to do with home and family; birds erect nests for one purpose only: to house their offspring.

The sense of loneliness and anxiety deepens in the second section of the poem, "House Fear." The narrator describes the timid actions of husband and wife upon their return to their home. Instead of offering a safe and cozy nest, the house presents a mysterious and frightening menace to the couple who seek to reclaim it. Since "House Fear" follows the description of the birds' joy at returning in the first section, it strengthens the contrast between the reactions of the married couple and those of the birds. The house is menacing, as we later learn, because

it is incomplete: it does not shelter a whole family, only a fraction of one.

In the third section (the wife's monologue entitled "The Smile")<sup>13</sup> and in the two that follow, the emphasis shifts from the shared apprehensiveness of husband and wife to the solitary fears of the wife. The wife's vague fears crystalize momentarily in the ambiguous smile of a chance beggar, and she seeks a meaning behind the smile. The wife construes the smile variously as a sneer at their poverty, as the knowledge that he might have taken what he wished rather than ask for it, as a bold-faced mockery of their marriage and of their present youth and inevitable decay. She fears the smile because it betrays a knowledge that she does not consciously possess. Her interpretations of the smile suggest the lack which her anxiety betokens: poverty of spirit, lack of a united strength to protect them from external forces, a mockery of a marriage that is incomplete, old age and death without the knowledge of fulfillment.

The fourth section, "The Oft-Repeated Dream," presents the wife's fear of the encroachment of nature on their lives. A pine bough, located outside their window, seems fitfully but ineffectually determined to gain access into their lives.

She had no saying dark enough  
For the dark pine that kept  
Forever trying the window-latch  
Of the room where they slept.

The tireless but ineffectual hands  
That with every futile pass  
Made the great tree seem as a little bird  
Before the mystery of glass!

Symbolizing too her ineffectual attempts to penetrate the barrier of loneliness in marriage, the pine bough has a more sinister meaning for her.

The tree seeks to penetrate the barrier of glass; at the moment nature is effectively held at bay by the man-made hindrance. Against "the mystery of glass" the pine bough poses no more threat than a little bird. But the wife fears that the persistent attempts of nature to regain what man has wrested from it will prove successful, and the pine bough thus represents to her the threat of nature to their existence. While the woman dreams, her husband sleeps beside her, untroubled by the pine bough which to him is nothing more than what it appears to be; and he remains unaware of its symbolic portent to his wife.

It never had been inside the room,  
And only one of the two  
Was afraid in an oft-repeated dream  
Of what the tree might do.

The wife quails before the fear of what the broken barrier might allow to pour forth.

The first stanza of "The Impulse" re-emphasizes the theme of loneliness-in-marriage and provides the fullest answer to the wife's near-psychotic state. Her existence lacks purpose, for she believes that there is nothing and no one who needs her. Since their home takes little care, she is denied--or feels denied--the small fulfillment of household drudgery. No child exists whose need of her might fill the empty hours, the void caused by desperate loneliness. Her husband has little need of her. His energies are directed towards the physical labor of farming--the man's world, from which he gains fulfillment, although he does not think of his labor in terms of purpose.

It was too lonely for her there,  
And too wild,  
And since there were but two of them,  
And no child,

And work was little in the house,  
 She was free,  
 And followed where he furrowed field,  
 Or felled tree.

The wife follows her husband about in his daily round of activity, striving for fulfillment through him, seeking to alleviate her loneliness. But the man's world is only a world she can observe; she cannot share it with him. With the possibility of psychological rapport gone, she attempts to cling to her husband physically, only to find that physical proximity is not the answer. While her husband accepts her presence, probably glad of her company, he fails to question it, not seeing the wreckage that it portends. Drifting aimlessly away from where he labors, she barely hears his call. She listens, hesitates, and then, as if the near inaudibility of his call evokes the faintness of communication between them, she breaks the weak thread binding them together and flees. Though he searches for her, he cannot find her: with total and implacable finality the ties between them give.

Sudden and swift and light as that  
 The ties gave,  
 And he learned of finalities  
 Besides the grave.

The distraught wife has allowed her husband ample opportunity to see for himself what troubled her, to discover her need for separate and purposeful identity and thus discover her. When he repeatedly fails to see the extent of her depression and help her heal it, she completes the psychological withdrawal with the physical one. With no strength of identity or purpose, unarmed for the fight for existence, she runs away; the wildness and separateness of nature, external and human, overwhelm her. The possibility of synthesis, a solution to the problem growing out of both thesis and antithesis, never evolves, making it necessary for the

wife to cut herself off entirely from her husband.

The border line poem "The Vanishing Red" contains the most extreme example of Frost's use of the incomplete synthesis. Not only is no synthesis achieved, but the Miller, who holds the antithesis point of view, reacts so violently against the manifestation of the thesis-- John's "guttural exclamation of surprise"--that the antithesis eradicates the thesis. In this poem the wall--John's Indian blood--acts as such an extreme isolating factor in the eyes of the Miller that he cannot bear to consider John human enough to have the right to an opinion. The accident of color renders John sub-human. To the Miller the Indian is nothing more than an insect pest, which, having made the mistake of annoying him, has to be exterminated. John had unthinkingly presumed to voice a comment on the Miller's behavior, an action not to be borne from something of sub-human status. With the same lack of remorse that one would feel upon squashing a mosquito, the Miller pushed John under the grindstone, thus ridding himself of a tiresome annoyance.

"Mending Wall," along with several of the other pastoral dramatic narratives and border line poems and "Build Soil" (a poem which Lynen classifies as a philosophical dialogue but which Frost subtitled "A Political Pastoral"), exhibits a development of the dialectical pattern which is peculiar to and characteristic of this group of poems. In the more usual form of the dialectical pattern as discussed in the first chapter, Frost created two major characters holding opposed views--the thesis and the antithesis which grows out of and reacts against the thesis. The characters either achieve or fail to achieve a synthesis, a compromise of both points of view. While the thesis is present in one of the major characters in the pastoral dramatic narrative and border line poems,

the antithesis is not (although sometimes this pattern is reversed-- the antithesis being present, the thesis not). Instead, the contrasting major character (frequently a species of the Frost narrator) embodies the synthesis, and the antithesis appears implicitly in terms of the views held by the synthesis and thesis characters. This property explains why the points of view held by the major characters in "Mending Wall" and the other poems of this type are not as diametrically opposed as those in poems like "Home Burial," "A Servant to Servants," or "The Pauper Witch of Grafton." Because of their more philosophical nature, the pastoral dramatic narratives seem to lend themselves easily to the expression of the synthesis as a point of view held by a Yankee character,<sup>14</sup> whereas most of the other types of dramatic narratives, because of their dependence on action rather than on ideas, do not.

"Mending Wall" is a deceptively simple dramatization of the opposed viewpoints of two neighbors who set about to mend the winter damage done to the stone wall dividing their properties. Feeling that "Something there is that doesn't love a wall," the speaker observes that

There where it is we do not need the wall:  
He is all pine and I am apple orchard.  
My apple trees will never get across  
And eat the cones under his pine

But the neighbor believes that the wall dividing the two properties should be maintained:

'Good fences make good neighbors.'

An unrecognized force--the mischief element of Spring, the narrator surmises--prods him on to see if he can alter his neighbor's view by reasoning with him (the debate that follows may either take place between the two men, or it may occur only in the mind of the speaker. I favor



the latter view).

'Why do they make good neighbors? Isn't it  
Where there are cows? But here there are no cows.  
Before I built a wall I'd ask to know  
What I was walling in or walling out,  
And to whom I was like to give offense.  
Something there is that doesn't love a wall,  
That wants it down.'

The speaker muses about the identity of this force which seeks to demolish all walls and about the manner by which he might suggest the existence of this force to his neighbor.

I could say 'Elves' to him  
But it's not elves exactly, and I'd rather  
He said it for himself.

With shrewd insight the speaker realizes that any revelation he might make to his neighbor would be meaningless, that in order for the neighbor to understand, he must see it for himself. As the implication behind his declaration asserts itself, he perceives the neighbor

Bringing a stone grasped firmly by the top  
In each hand. Like an old-stone savage armed.  
He moves in darkness as it seems to me,  
Not of woods only and the shade of trees.

The speaker becomes aware of the primitive aspect of the neighbor who, through blind adherence to tradition, seeks to maintain barriers--walls--which no longer need to exist simply because they have always existed. Because of his closed mind, because of his conventionalized perception, the neighbor cannot see; and the speaker cannot make him see. Just as the neighbor cannot accept his view point, so the speaker cannot accept his neighbor's; for he would have to accept also the neighbor's limited vision. The speaker's reticence stems not so much from impatience with the other's point of view as from tolerant sadness at its blindness. There is no synthesis, no resolution. The wall that they kept between

them while mending remains at the end of the poem, a symbol of isolation.

Speaking for Frost, the narrator in "Mending Wall" holds the key to synthesis: he favors walls only where they are needed to protect individuality. He knows that the absence of the wall will not endanger either his or his neighbor's independence: their personalities are too different and distinct ("He is all pine and I am apple orchard."). Holding the thesis point of view--that all walls are necessary simply because they have existed in the past, the neighbor does not have sufficient insight or imagination to perceive for himself the validity of the speaker's position. Frost presents no antithesis point of view in "Mending Wall," although he suggests its existence in the unidentified force which seeks to tear down all walls. While Frost implies that walls are responsible in part for human misery, he does not imply that the speaker wishes to abolish them all. The speaker as synthesis knows that some walls are necessary for the defense of personal identity and integrity, that to raze all walls would mean to abolish individuality. He also understands that the force that seeks to destroy walls seeks to destroy those that are necessary for independence as well as those that serve no practical end, that this unidentified natural force shows no selectivity in its destructive tendencies.

In "Mending Wall" the wall in any specific application becomes an isolating factor. Further, it is a man-made barrier, one erected willfully to separate man from man. While the speaker recognizes the implication of the barrier he and his neighbor are re-establishing, he realizes the futility of trying to change the neighbor's attitude: the attitude cannot be changed unless the neighbor sees the implications for himself, and this he cannot do. No compromise between the neighbor's different

points of view has been accomplished; rather as the mending progresses and the wall becomes stronger, the psychological barrier between the two increases also. The speaker who had attempted to probe the other's point of view at the beginning of the task solidifies his side of the barrier by acknowledging the futility of argument. The old-stone savage remains unaware of and unaffected by the implications lying behind the simple act of mending the wall. The breach in the wall that might have allowed for mutual understanding and rapport has been mended, and the isolation of one individual from another is complete.

As in "Mending Wall," a thesis viewpoint appears in "A Hundred Collars" unaccompanied by an antithesis; the synthesis, held as a point of view by a species of the Frost narrator, a Frostian Yankee, provides the opposing point of view. Again as in "Mending Wall," this point of view is not as diametrically opposed to the thesis as those that generally appear in the dramatic narrative and border line poems. Unlike "The Hill Wife" or "Home Burial," "A Hundred Collars" does not starkly portray an inmitigable woe between two married people; instead it humorously describes the relationship--and the wall--between two total strangers: Doctor Magoon, who by virtue of the title of professor is a sensitive and knowledgeable man, holds the thesis point of view; and Iafe, an itinerant bill collector for a local newspaper, maintains the synthesis.

Returning to join his vacationing family in the New England town in which he was born, Doctor Magoon is forced because of a missed train to share a hotel room with Iafe. More than a little apprehensive about the stranger with whom he will pass the night, Doctor Magoon seeks to protect himself by aloofness and complete distrust of the unknown roommate. Iafe, too, reacts to the situation with almost instinctive

distrust, but unlike Doctor Magoon, he trusts in his own ability to defend himself should the need arise. The two men circle each other, sizing one another up like two wary dogs. The Doctor condescendingly verifies Lafe's name, to which Lafe replies with icy dignity and asks his. Magoon does not give Lafe his first name--only his surname plus the title to which Lafe responds with signs of thaw and a measured overture of friendliness. Having appraised Doctor Magoon and found him an innocuous enough human being, Lafe attempts to set him at ease by talking about the first thing that comes to mind--the fact that he has put on weight and must increase the size of his shirt collars. Doctor Magoon evaluates Lafe also, but only on the superficial basis of appearance, and judges him an animal, a possibly dangerous one at that.

The Doctor looked at Lafe and looked away.  
A man? A brute. Naked above the waist,  
He sat there creased and shining in the light,  
Fumbling the buttons in a well-starched shirt.

When Lafe, attempting to include Magoon in his monologue, asks what size collar the Doctor wears, Magoon convulsively grasps his throat, misreading the significance of Lafe's innocent question. Lafe chooses not to comment on the fear behind Magoon's response. Learning that the Doctor wears a collar in a size which Lafe has outgrown and of which he has a superabundance, Lafe graciously offers them to the Doctor: holding the key to synthesis, he tries to establish a common meeting ground, a bond of relationship, by extending something of himself that will not compromise his own needs nor make the recipient beholden to him. Magoon, who is a democrat "If not at heart, at least on principle," cannot bring himself to meet Lafe halfway, thereby conferring on him a measure of equality. Lafe's generous offer only increases Magoon's apprehension.

Recognizing this, Lafe mischievously augments the Doctor's fearfulness by bringing out into the open the Doctor's unspoken mistrust. He lays the total of his cash --ninety dollars--before him as evidence of his trustworthiness, to which Magoon blusteringly responds with only five dollars.

'I'm not afraid.  
There's five: that's all I carry.'

Certainly this is not the full sum he carries. Maliciously Lafe inquires whether he may search Magoon as a guarantee of good faith, and Magoon shrinks from him in obvious consternation. Having had his fun--just retribution for the Doctor's unthinking insults--Lafe ceases to prod him further, channeling the one-sided conversation to his occupation as bill collector for the Weekly News. Because Magoon is familiar with the paper, for the first time a rapprochement is established between the two strangers: the synthesis has been achieved.

'. . . You know the Weekly News?'

'Known it since I was young.'

'Then you know me.  
Now we are getting on together--talking.'

For a short time the two converse on the subject of Lafe's business, with Lafe carrying the burden of the conversation. Thawing a little with each comment he makes while still holding himself aloof, Magoon remarks on Lafe's description of his work. Then Lafe, who has been drinking steadily, presumes too much on the fragile cordiality between them and, hoping to cement it further, offers Magoon a drink from his flask. The Doctor shrinks from this intimacy and the rapport between them shatters. Giving up, Lafe retreats from the room. Making one more attempt before he leaves to recover the concord between them, Lafe tries

again to give Magoon the collars, but again Magoon refuses them.

In terms of action, little happens in "A Hundred Collars": two strangers meet, view one another with suspicion, establish rapport, and in the end draw apart again. A great deal of the significance of "A Hundred Collars" lies in its pastoral context. As Lynen states, the poem is more than a mere character sketch or anecdote:

. . . Frost's real subject is the contrast between two worlds. Drama is subordinated to the purposes of pastoral; it becomes the means for exploring rural New England by holding it up for comparison with modern urban life. Those who take 'A Hundred Collars' as a mere character sketch are apt to miss the true richness of this poem. For while Lafe emerges as a distinct person, what makes his character interesting is the way of life it embodies. He represents the solid Yankee virtues, the common sense, the shrewd perceptiveness, and subtle tact which raise New England above the rest of the country. And these are revealed dramatically through the juxtaposition of Lafe and Doctor Magoon, the urban sophisticate, whose superior education and respectability mask a very ordinary mind.<sup>15</sup>

The poem's importance also emerges as the statement it makes regarding man's relationship to man, a statement arrived at through the use of the dialectical pattern. The viewpoint held by Doctor Magoon portrays man's instinctive withdrawal from and suspicion of another human whom he does not know and with whom he feels he will have little in common. The antithesis, unrepresented but implied, suggests the other pole of man's reaction to a human foreign to him: an immediate attempt at intimacy, all walls razed, and individuality and independence devoured by well-meant curiosity. There is, however, a compromise, a synthesis, Frost seems to say, in the character of Lafe whose shrewd perceptiveness combined with sympathy and complete integrity (all part of the Yankee manner<sup>16</sup>) enable him to reach out to other men and invite them to share his vision. One need not attempt to destroy all walls, to usurp another's right of privacy; nor, on the other hand, need one view a stranger as a

potential threat to his own well-being. As Lafe tries to do, one can make an effort to determine a common meeting ground without jeopardizing his own independence. In many respects "A Hundred Collars" is a variation of the theme of "Mending Wall." As the narrator in "Mending Wall" suggests, some walls are necessary; but when they do not interfere with one's individuality, when they are there to isolate men from one another simply for the sake of being there, walls may be torn down safely--if slowly.

Deviating slightly from Frost's pastoral expression of the dialectical pattern in "Mending Wall" and "A Hundred Collars," "Blueberries," another pastoral dramatic narrative, incorporates all three elements of the dialectical pattern: thesis, antithesis, and synthesis. In this poem Loren "the fatherly," holding the antithesis point of view, attempts to keep blueberries (and all uncultivated produce) to himself. Hoping to keep his neighbors from sharing the windfall of profit without labor, Loren and his family maintain a strict secrecy concerning the whereabouts of wild fruits and berries. Loren believes that nature owes him sustenance, that he need not work for a living. Instead he conceives of nature's bounties as his own private property, restricted for him.

'He seems to be thrifty; and hasn't he need,  
With the mouths of all those young Lorens to feed?  
He has brought them all up on wild berries, they say,  
Like birds. They store a great many away.  
They eat them the year round, and those they don't eat  
They sell in the store and buy shoes for their feet.'

Indicated by the slight description of Patterson's point of view (he is the rightful owner of the blueberries), the thesis character--Patterson--contends that one does not take advantage of nature's generosity but leaves it to the wild creatures for whom it was intended.

'Does Patterson know what he has, do you think?'

'He may and not care and so leave the chewink  
To gather them for him--you know what he is.  
He won't make the fact that they're rightfully his  
An excuse for keeping us other folk out.'

Patterson also embodies elements of the synthesis: he will not assert his right to the berries because he has not worked for them, but neither will he bar his neighbors from sharing the unexpected gift.

Loren is an object of kindly derision and sympathetic mirth to the married couple whose combined points of view represent the synthesis in the poem. They evidently labor for their existence, farming the rocky soil of New England. Thus they encompass the point of view of the thesis indicated in the short description of Patterson: one receives only what one works for; one is given nothing, one takes nothing unearned. But they also entertain the antithesis point of view held by Loren in that they are not adverse to taking nature's bounty when it offers itself.

While the married couple are sympathetically inclined towards Loren's view,

'Who cares what they say? It's a nice way to live,  
Just taking what Nature is willing to give,  
Not forcing her hand with harrow and plow.'

they nevertheless assert their rights to a share in the windfall:

'If he thinks all the fruit that grows wild is for him,  
He'll find he's mistaken. See here, for a whim,  
We'll pick in the Pattersons' pasture this year.'

At first they conceive of their plan in terms of a joke on Loren, just retribution for Loren's dog-in-the-manger attitude about the berries which are not rightfully his. They act from the same motives as Lafe in "A Hundred Collars" who, with mischievous vengefulness, goads Doctor Magoon for the Doctor's insensitive--if unintended--insults. But the



couple quickly forget their mischief-making as they recall the golden moment they once shared when picking berries. They realize that they will not be able to relive the earlier event because of the mournful presence of Loren and his brood, but they intend to make the best of the situation, entering it with the joyous attitude of thieves who take advantage of nature's largesse.

As in the other pastoral dramatic narrative and border line poems, a species of the Frost narrator holds the synthesis viewpoint in "The Code." While all three elements of the dialectical pattern appear in "The Code" (in fact, Frost employed the dialectical pattern twice in this poem), the main emphasis of the poem falls on the Yankee hired hand and Sanders, whose points of view represent the synthesis and antithesis respectively. As in "The Vanishing Red," the poem focuses on violent action; but instead of the understated horror implicit in "The Vanishing Red," Frost treated the hired hand's murderous response to an insult with wry humor. The humorous tone does not mean that the incident--indeed the poem--is not to be taken seriously. As Lynen points out, "The Code" is Frost's most dramatically explicit statement of the Yankee manner; it suggests the whole body of regional belief.<sup>17</sup> Through the pastoral context of the poem, an implicit contrast emerges between regional and urban values, a contrast that is indicated in the ignorant questions of the city-bred farmer and the knowledgeable replies of the Yankee farm hand--and in the title, "The Code." According to Lynen,

The word 'code' has two meanings. It can signify either a system of communication or an ethical standard. In this poem Frost uses both meanings simultaneously, for his subject is the unity of the two. He wishes to show that the rural New Englander's special way of communicating and his ultimate beliefs are inseparable, that both are aspects of the same thought process. Thus 'The Code' is a symbol of the coherence of regional life. It joins the individual

to the community through a bond of shared customs and beliefs, and what is more important, it combines thought and belief. In the Yankee code, one is the function of the other. The way of communicating is a value, and, conversely, Yankee values are the cause of this elaborate system of signals.<sup>18</sup>

In addition to a symbolic examination of rural values, the code forms the synthesis, the conditions under which the Yankee lives and works and by which he understands his fellow man. Because he lives by the code, the Yankee farm hand holds the synthesis point of view.

Puzzled by the action of one of his two farm hands who has thrust his pitchfork into the ground and marched home, the city farmer turns to the remaining hand for explanation. More perceptive and tolerant than the angry hired man, the Yankee interprets his fellow-worker's action for the city farmer who he knows does not understand the Yankee code: the city farmer had unintentionally insulted the hired man by suggesting that they all hurry to get the hay in before it rained. The Yankee explains:

'The hand that knows his business won't be told  
To do work better or faster--those two things.'

To urge a Yankee hired man on constitutes an infringement on his dignity and integrity as a man, a slur that no self-respecting Yankee could tolerate. Any harrassment suggests that the hand has failed to keep his part of the bargain: to work fairly for fair pay. The city farmer, acting from the thesis viewpoint in the first dialectical pattern, and the angry hired man, who holds the antithesis point of view, fail to achieve the synthesis of the code because of the farmer's lack of knowledge and the hired man's failure to perceive that the insult was unintentional. At the end of the poem, the Yankee hand implicitly converts the city farmer, still holding the thesis view point, to the

synthesis--the Yankee's point of view--by explaining and demonstrating to him the nature of the code.

As he says, the Yankee hand is "as particular as anyone," but he took no offense at the unintentional insult because of the farmer's urban ignorance. The Yankee will not accept, however, the same comment from one who knows and is bound by the code, as he proceeds to demonstrate by means of an anecdote. The anecdote serves four purposes: first, it verifies his interpretation of his fellow worker's action; second, it vividly establishes his own pride and independence; third, by implicit comparison with the city farmer, it shows the Yankee's greater perception and sympathetic forbearance when it is deserved; last, and most important, it reveals the nature of the code.

In the anecdote, the antithesis is held by Sanders, the Yankee farmer for whom the narrator worked. While he embodied the New England tradition of hard work (part of the code), Sanders deviated from the belief underlying it.

'But work! that man could work, especially  
If by so doing he could get more work  
Out of his hired help. I'm not denying  
He was hard on himself.'

Instead of working to the limit of his capabilities for his pride's sake, he did so in order to drive the hired men. Not by word did he command his help to work harder--he knew that they would not tolerate such a breach of the code. Instead he "encouraged" his men as if they were cattle.

'But what he liked was someone to encourage.  
Them that he couldn't lead he'd get behind  
And drive, the way you can, you know, in mowing--  
Keep at their heels and threaten to mow their legs off.  
I'd seen about enough of his bulling tricks  
(We call that bulling). I'd been watching him.'

Observing Sanders' actions, the Yankee prepared himself for his employer's onslaught, knowing that he too would become the target of Sanders' hazing. When he could no longer resist the temptation to goad him, Sanders in effect told the Yankee hand how to do his work by shouting "Let her come!" just as the hand prepared to unload the wagon-load of hay. In revenge for the intentional insult to his self-respect, the Yankee hand dropped the whole load of hay on him.

'Thinks I, D'ye mean it? "What was that you said?"  
I asked out loud, so's there'd be no mistake,  
"Did you say, Let her come?" "Yes, let her come."  
He said it over, but he said it softer.  
Never you say a thing like that to a man,  
Not if he values what he is. God, I'd as soon  
Murdered him as left out his middle name.  
I'd built the load and knew right where to find it.  
Two or three forkfuls I picked lightly round for  
Like meditating, and then I just dug in  
And dumped the rackful on him in ten lots.'

The Yankee did not simply attempt to repay Sanders; he sought to disgrace Sanders so thoroughly that his employer would never again dare to harass him. If Sanders happened to suffer serious--or fatal--injury as a result of the Yankee's vengeance, he fully merited it.

Growing aware now of the implication behind the anecdote (he does not condemn the hired hand--he begins to see the justification), the city farmer asks the hand if Sanders had discharged him. The Yankee replies:

'Discharge me? No! He knew I did just right.'

Sanders had emerged physically unhurt by the hay load toppled on him, but he had suffered a terrible blow to his self-esteem.

'He looked so clean disgusted from behind  
There was no one that dared to stir him up,  
Or let him know that he was being looked at,  
Apparently I hadn't buried him  
(I may have knocked him down); but my just trying  
To bury him had hurt his dignity,  
He had gone to the house so's not to meet me.  
He kept away from us all afternoon.'

By denying the integrity of his hired help, Sanders had paved the way for his own humiliation. He had committed a serious breach of the code. In the eyes of both the Yankee hand and Sanders, Sanders richly deserved the Yankee's vengeance. Unlike the city farmer, Sanders was aware of the code and the possible consequences any breach of it might entail. In

In neither "A Hundred Collars" nor in "Blueberries" does the synthesis character sway the antithesis or the thesis characters to his point of view. While for a short time Lafe manages to bring Doctor Magoon--the thesis character--closer to his point of view, Magoon still retains his aloofness; and ultimately Lafe fails. The married couple in "Blueberries" undoubtedly will not even attempt to reconcile Loren to their viewpoint; they will merely accept Loren's unspoken accusation of robbery without complaint, trying to make the best of it. On the other hand, while the synthesis characters are affected by the thesis or antithesis, they do not alter their viewpoints. While they do not succeed, they do not fail either, for each--Lafe and the married couple--retains his identity intact. In one instance in "The Code" the synthesis fails; in the other the Yankee farm hand succeeds in bringing a measure of understanding to the city farmer (the thesis character). Although the city farmer is not explicitly won over to the Yankee's point of view (the synthesis), the lack of the city farmer's condemnation of the Yankee suggests that he may come to accept and live by the code. Thus a synthesis, a means of getting along with others, exists in Frost's New England. Those who live by the code achieve harmony with themselves and with their neighbors. Those who do not must suffer the consequences. Frost seems to indicate through these pastoral dramatic narratives that synthesis is possible, that even in a world where there are unnecessary

walls--isolating factors which wrongly separate man from man--it is possible for man to achieve a measure of insight and tolerance, while still retaining his integrity and independence, through sympathetic identification that will enable him to live richly and meaningfully in a divided world.

## CHAPTER III

### THE COMPLETE SYNTHESIS

As I have demonstrated, Frost very often chose to create dramatic narrative and border line poems involving "immedicable woes--woes that nothing can be done for--woes flat and final" ( see p. 18). In these poems the thesis and antithesis characters fail to establish and maintain a synthesis. The pastoral dramatic narratives (in which Frost altered the dialectical pattern from the usual thesis-antithesis-synthesis relationship) depict the failure of the synthesis character to bring either the thesis or antithesis character (as the case may be) to his point of view. In the poems in which no synthesis occurs, it fails to occur because of the lack of understanding and perception on the part of one or both antagonists. Often, as in "Home Burial" or "The Housekeeper," failure to achieve the synthesis originates from the inability of the thesis or antithesis character to accept the inevitable and go on. In some of the dramatic narrative and border line poems, however, the characters who embody the thesis and antithesis points of view do reach and maintain a synthesis. Instead of portraying immitigable woes, most of these poems depict situations which, while they may be critical, do not develop into impenetrable walls. The reason for the lack of a permanent isolating factor lies in the perception and understanding of

either--or both--the thesis or antithesis character. The purpose of this chapter is to explore and demonstrate Frost's use of the complete synthesis in representative poems.

"The Death of the Hired Man" is one of the few dramatic narrative poems in which Frost portrayed a happily married couple who enjoy rapport and a sensitive understanding. Mary, the wife, exhibits great insight and sensitivity, rather than the morbid imagination characteristic of so many of the wives in Frost's poems. Warren, the husband, devotes himself primarily to the man's world of physical considerations, having little inclination to delve into the woman's world of psychological penetration. They are opposed, yet united: the imaginatively sensitive Mary is joined to the bluntly practical Warren through the love and understanding of one for the other. Their marriage, then, presents a complete synthesis.

As in "Home Burial" the reader becomes immediately aware with the first two lines that tension either exists between husband and wife or will develop. Frost created the strained opening of the poem by emphasizing the first word in the second line (as in "Home Burial") and by using alliteration.

Mary sat musing on the lamp-flame at the table  
*Waiting for Warren.* (The italics are mine).

The barrier between them emerges with abrupt clarity, centering on the return of Silas and their opposed reactions to the handling of it. With patience and tact, Mary gently induces Warren to air his grievances, quietly breaking down the wall dividing them. Unlike the husband in "Home Burial," Mary proceeds with infinite patience, not allowing anger to gain the upper hand. Her gentle perseverance sways Warren to a more



tolerant attitude concerning Silas, but it does not totally convert him to her point of view. While husband and wife are unable to achieve a synthesis in "Home Burial" because of hatred and angry intolerance, Mary and Warren manage to accomplish one through patience and understanding.

When Warren enters, Mary immediately puts him on his guard by announcing Silas' return. She draws him to the porch and admonishes him to be kind. Warren responds with righteous indignation: when had he ever been less than kind to Silas? But he will not have the fellow back. He reminds her of the major grievance he has against the hired man: time after time Silas has abandoned Warren for a better paying job when Warren needed him most. Warren's point of view, the thesis, is certainly a reasonable one, based as it is on duty and obligation. Mary permits him to state his case without interruption and then gently parries not with a refutation of Warren's charges but with a poignant description of Silas as he appeared upon his return. Holding the antithesis viewpoint, Mary does not explicitly reveal her position; it is implicit in her attitude toward Silas and her handling of Warren: she wishes to accept the hired man on the level on which he wants to be accepted.

Obstinately convinced of the practical virtue of his point of view, Warren demands that Mary tell him what Silas had to say. As he expected, Silas had justified his return by claiming that he came to ditch the meadow. But Silas had evidently returned with this excuse on several occasions, and now it offers further support for Warren's argument. Warren responds sarcastically; and Mary, piqued at Warren's callousness, continues, omitting no detail that will improve the logic of Warren's case. But she does not depend on logic to win him to her point of view.

Her plea rests on compassion. She wishes Warren to reinstate Silas not as a charity case but on the old basis of hired help. She recognizes that Silas' needs are based upon a lie, but she knows the lie is necessary to support the fiction of his independence and thus his self respect. Gently changing the direction of the argument, Mary turns the debate to an account of Silas' pitiful condition, his confusion of other times and other places, his frustration with an old argument.

'After so many years he still keeps finding  
 Good arguments he sees he might have used.  
 I sympathize, I know just how it feels  
 To think of the right thing to say too late.'

Mary's declaration of sympathy indicates not only her general personality; it also emphasizes her present concern. She too knows the intense frustration that she might leave something unsaid, some word or phrase that might change Warren's attitude toward Silas. Through indirection she reminds Warren of Silas' one ability--his skill in building a load of hay. Warren respects this talent of Silas and gives it grudging acknowledgment. Proceeding from Warren's one note of praise, Mary explains Silas' need to pass his skill on to another: he must prove that he has not lived a totally worthless life. She tries to make Warren see Silas' pitiful goal for what it is, hoping to make her husband forget his practical--if selfish--considerations.

'He thinks if he could teach him that, he'd be  
 Some good perhaps to someone in the world.  
 He hates to see a boy the fool of books.  
 Poor Silas, so concerned for other folk,  
 And nothing to look backward to with pride,  
 And nothing to look forward to with hope,  
 So now and never any different.'

Mary's attempt to convert Warren to her position of pity and compassion, and the method by which she proceeds, becomes clear through metaphor in

the narrative passage:

She put out her hand  
Among the harp-like morning-glory strings,  
Taut with the dew from garden bed to eaves,  
As if she played unheard some tenderness  
That wrought on him beside her in the night.

Just as she plays a hauntingly silent melody on the harp-like morning-glory strings, so with great tenderness and compassion she plucks at the heartstrings of the man beside her. Quietly she offers the conclusion to her unvoiced argument.

'Warren,' she said, 'he has come home to die:  
You needn't be afraid he'll leave you this time.'

Her tenderness begins to bring Warren over to her point of view: no more does Warren speak with angry indignation,

'Home,' he mocked gently.

Drawing an implicit analogy between Silas and the hound they took in, which, like Silas, had no claim on them, Mary indirectly asserts that they must do the same for Silas--he is after all more than an animal. Warren taunts her kindly with the famous definition of what constitutes a home. Mary reproves him gently with her own, making him feel slightly ashamed so that he pauses before he goes on to ask why Silas feels he has more claim on them than on his brother. As Thompson points out, Mary with intuitive perception that contrasts throughout with Warren's slow searchings, gets to the reason behind Silas' return.<sup>1</sup>

'Silas is what he is--we wouldn't mind him--  
But just the kind that kinsfolk can't abide.  
He never did a thing so very bad.  
He don't know why he isn't quite as good  
As anybody. Worthless though he is,  
He won't be made ashamed to please his brother.'

In revealing this she reasserts Silas' plea for the self respect of independence. If he were to live with his brother, he would have to accept

his brother's charity; thus he would have to swallow the pride that makes him a man. Won over now as far as he can be and still retain his dignity, Warren signifies his capitulation to Mary's tenderness by calling Silas by his nickname, Si, and by taking his part against the brother's imagined indignities. But he still maintains the shreds of his argument. Mary does not ask Warren to surrender entirely to her point of view; it is enough to her that he has come this far, and she perceives the need he has to retain the partial dignity of his argument. She entreats Warren to see for himself the truth of her summation of the old man's condition, admonishing him not to allow Silas to see the lie behind his reinstatement.

'Go, look, see for yourself.  
 But, Warren, please remember how it is:  
 He's come to help you ditch the meadow.  
 He has a plan. You mustn't laugh at him.  
 He may not speak of it, and then he may.'

Warren enters the house to talk with Silas, only to find him dead.

Returning to Mary, he

Slipped to her side, caught up her hand and waited.

Until she questions him, he does not tell her of Silas' death. His actions form a mute acknowledgment of love and an understanding of what she has done for him. He need feel no guilt about the death of Silas.

Through debate, Mary, embodying the antithesis viewpoint, has won Warren, the thesis character, to her compassionate view of Silas. But she has acknowledged also the validity of Warren's charges against the hired man. Through Mary's tender compassion, they arrive together at the synthesis of a fictitious independence for Silas. Both know that Silas can no longer work--nor would he if he were able. But Mary has made Warren perceive the old man's need of pride and self respect; and by leading Warren on both literally and figuratively to see for himself, to

come independently to a more compassionate view of Silas, she has not only given Warren understanding but also has preserved and enhanced his dignity and integrity.

"The Self-Seeker" is one of the few poems in which Frost presented both a complete synthesis and an immitigable woe. The central character has lost his feet in a saw mill accident, and nothing can be done to replace his maimed limbs. He is able to face the inevitable and compromise with it, and he reaches a double synthesis. "The Self-Seeker" incorporates the complete dialectical pattern with each of the elements represented by a character in the poem. In each case the main emphasis falls on the synthesis which is represented by the viewpoint of the injured man. The city lawyer and the injured man's friend, Willis, hold the thesis and antithesis viewpoints respectively.

Afraid his injured friend will allow himself to be cheated, Willis, the antithesis character, visits his friend to try to keep him from signing an insurance agreement that will settle on him the sum of \$500 for his lost feet. Perceptive in the shrewd Yankee manner, Willis recognizes the full significance of his friend's injury: not only does the injury decrease his ability to earn a living; it also means the end of his beloved hobby of collecting and classifying wild orchids. Willis sees the lawyer's document as a cold attempt to pay his friend for his lost feet; he knows the lawyer will not understand what those feet mean to the man who has lost them. In order to prevent the lawyer from taking advantage of his friend--cheating the country bumpkin--Willis tries to talk the injured man into asking for more money--\$1,000--to compensate him for the loss of both vocation and avocation. The city lawyer--the thesis character--intends to capitalize on the situation as much as

possible. He neither perceives nor cares to perceive the psychological effect of the accident on the man in terms of his work or hobby. His duty lies in serving the best interests of the insurance company, and he therefore offers the least amount of money possible.

The injured man, however, has resigned himself to his loss, and he knows that money cannot compensate him for it. His character begins to emerge in the description he gives of the accident. When the shaft caught his coat, dragging him along with it, he did not lose his head and struggle vainly. Instead he grabbed the shaft and waited until someone rescued him, thereby saving his life, if not his feet. He has no illusions about his importance:

'Everything goes the same without me there.'

Nor does he condemn the machine that crippled him:

'No doubt it has a sort of prosperous sound,  
And it's our life.'

'Yes, when it's not our death.'

'You make that sound as if it wasn't so  
With everything. What we live by we die by.'

The injured man sees no horror or futility in his observation. To him there is a certain fitness in dying in one's profession: one gains sustenance from it and must give something in return. Implicit in his dialogue is stoical resignation: there is no point in crying out against one's fate since such action alters nothing. Implicit also is Willis' belief that his injured friend is dead for all intents and purposes. To Willis nothing remains to the injured man but to take all he can get.

Ironically "The Broken One" is not entirely broken. Physically maimed as he is, he has not allowed his injury to impair his integrity. He cannot live the life he led before, but he can still make the best of

what is left without accepting the charity that would destroy his dignity.

'No, the five hundred was the sum they named  
To pay the doctor's bill and tide me over,  
It's that or fight, and I don't want to fight--  
I just want to get settled in my life,  
Such as it's going to be, and know the worst,  
Or best--it may not be so bad. The firm  
Promise me all the shocks I want to nail.'

He refuses to beg for more than the insurance company offers to give to help him through the recovery period. He will take only what he feels is owed him. Nor need he accept charity after his recovery; while he cannot perform the task he did before, he can work elsewhere in the saw mill and still earn a living with dignity. Thus he has achieved the first part of a two-fold synthesis.

Anne, the injured man's little friend, is the solution to the other half of his problem: his avocation. Evidently the little girl has frequently accompanied him on forays after the wild orchids. Because of her interest in him and the wild flowers, she has had to repress her natural childish desire to pick the flowers. Now that her friend is crippled, she may serve him and indulge herself by picking the flowers for him.

'I've broken Anne of gathering bouquets.  
It's not fair to the child. It can't be helped though:  
Pressed into service means pressed out of shape.  
Somehow I'll make it right with her--she'll see.  
She's going to do my scouting in the field,  
Over stone walls and all along a wood  
And by a river bank for water flowers'

Anne too has been injured, though in a much less critical sense.

'Anne has a way with flowers to take the place  
Of what she's lost: she goes down on one knee  
And lifts their faces by the chin to hers  
And says their names, and leaves them where they are.'

The arrangement to which Anne and her friend have tacitly agreed--the

second synthesis--not only allows the injured man to continue his interest in the taxonomy of wild flowers but also heals the breach he caused in Anne.

One feels that for the injured man the most important compromise is the partial restoration of his avocation. Although he does not underestimate its value, he is objective, almost disinterested in the synthesis achieved in his vocation. Although he jokes about the synthesis Anne has helped him reach, there is an undercurrent of deep poignancy and sincerity in his remarks.

'I have to keep on the good side of Anne.  
I'm a great boy to think of number one.  
And you can't blame me in the place I'm in.  
Who will take care of my necessities  
Unless I do?'

To him the necessities of life cannot be assigned a monetary value, nor can they be fulfilled by money as the thesis character--the city lawyer--and the antithesis character--Willis--would have him believe. The real necessities of life are dignity and purpose, essentials with which the injured man has supplied himself since no one, neither casual acquaintance nor close friend, can bestow them on him.

The significance of the injured man's conversation with Anne is totally lost on the city lawyer, whose knowledge of and interest in the individual man is limited by his fealty to a corporation.

'A pretty interlude,'  
The lawyer said. 'I'm sorry, but my train--'

And it is not fully recognized by Willis. Not realizing that his friend has gotten all that he wants--or can have--to rebuild his life, Willis turns on the lawyer, charging him with dishonesty and demanding twice as much money. The injured man shrinks from the argument over the monetary



value of his feet and commands them to stop or get out. He wants no part of such a battle, for it compromises his dignity as a man. Willis gives up and stalks out; the injured man signs the document, apologizes for Willis' behavior, and gracefully provides for the lawyer's exit.

'Willis, bring Anne back with you when you come.  
 Yes. Thanks for caring. Don't mind Will: he's savage.  
 He thinks you ought to pay me for my flowers.  
 You don't know what I mean about the flowers.  
 Don't stop to try to now. You'll miss your train.  
 Good-by.' He flung his arms around his face.

As soon as he is alone, the injured man gives way to the enormity of his loss. At no time when people are present does he succumb to grief. Before the world he presents a brave and dignified front; only in privacy can he indulge his grief and still retain his integrity.

Ironically, the thesis character, the city lawyer, believes he has won the injured man to his point of view; and Willis believes he has failed his friend because he has been unable to make the lawyer reimburse him for the loss of his wild flowers or get him to see that he ought to be reimbursed. In a sense, both thesis and antithesis viewpoints fail; in a sense they both succeed. The lawyer does not perceive (and would not care) that the justice of his point of view is immaterial to the injured man. The lawyer accepts the man's capitulation without seeing the dignity that is its motive. Willis does not fully understand that he has witnessed the solution to his friend's avocation. The injured man refuses to accept the false solution of money (had a financial agreement been achieved between Willis and the lawyer, the sum of \$750 would have been settled on the man). The true synthesis is a compromise between the facts (represented by the lawyer's position) and the desire for his old way of life (represented by Willis' well-meaning actions). The

injured man achieves a workable compromise between them; through Anne he manages to retain his avocation and a sense of purpose; and through his ability to work, lessened now but still present, he has maintained his independence and dignity. Only by resigning himself to the unalterable fact of his lost feet has he been able to arrive at a synthesis; and while the synthesis is a far cry from his old way of life, it is the best possible solution to his problem.

"From Plane to Plane," one of Frost's philosophic dramatic narratives, incorporates the dialectical pattern in which the thesis and antithesis characters reach a synthesis by means of an analogy. While philosophically opposed, the thesis and antithesis characters manage to attain a synthesis because each gives up something of himself in order to reach a compromise. With tact and understanding, Dick, who holds the antithesis point of view, cedes some of his self-importance; and Pike, who speaks from the thesis viewpoint, responds by surrendering some of his hard-bitten Yankee stubbornness. Each retains his pride, and both benefit from the concessions made in attaining the synthesis in kindlier attitudes toward one another.

As they hoe a field of corn together, the two men observe the local doctor returning from a house call. The Doctor is obviously in no hurry, for he allows his horse to meander slowly along the road while he himself relaxes, slumped down in his seat with his foot against the dash board. The two observers, Pike, an old Yankee hired hand who has farmed for fifty years, and Dick, a college boy working on his summer vacation, return to a debate which now focuses on the Doctor. Pike states the issue:

'It's whether these professions really work.'

Diametrically opposed, Dick and Pike are, nonetheless, equally matched.

Neither of them was better than the other,  
 They both were hired. And though Pike had the advantage  
 Of having hoed and mowed for fifty years,  
 Dick had of being fresh and full of college.  
 So if they fought about equality  
 It was on an equality they fought,

Where Dick has the advantage of education, Pike has the advantage of experience. Pike, the thesis character, opens the argument by taking exception to the Doctor's slow progress through the country side. To him the Doctor's relaxed pose is evidence that professional men do not understand the meaning of labor.

'That class of people don't know what work is--'

Dick responds to Pike's goad, for he realizes that Pike makes his allegation out of fierce pride in himself and as a subtle dig at the college boy who intends to pursue some as yet undecided profession. Instead of rebutting with a heated charge of his own, however, Dick, embodying the antithesis viewpoint, states his position with tact, pointing out the similarities between Pike's attitude toward his work and the Doctor's suggested attitude towards his own.

Dick told him to be fairer to the Doctor:  
 'He looks to me like going home successful,  
 Full of success, with that foot on the dashboard,  
 As a small self-conferred reward of virtue.  
 I get you when you hoe out to the river,  
 Then pick your hoe up, maybe shoulder it,  
 And take your walk of recreation back  
 To curry favor with the dirt some more.  
 Isn't it pretty much the same idea?  
 You said yourself you weren't avoiding work,  
 You'd bet you got more work done in a day,  
 Or at least in a lifetime, by that method.'

Although neither Dick nor Pike has the advantage of the other, Dick perceives that Pike might feel as if the college boy were condescending to him. Pike, who has all the integrity of labor and pride-in-ability

typical of the Frostian Yankee, will not tolerate any suggestion, intentional or unintentional, that he is Dick's inferior because of lack of education and lack of a professional status. Understanding Pike's enormous pride and integrity, Dick takes care not to offend the prickly Yankee. For the most part Dick tries to sway Pike to his point of view with gentle allusions to the older man's experience; but being young, he cannot resist showing off his superior education just a little bit. Analogies gleaned from books, however, irritate Pike, and he angrily charges Dick with straying from the subject. Because of his respect and liking for the older man, Dick forbears from pointing out that Pike's arguments often suffer from lack of logic; and because of Dick's tact with Pike, the two can amiably debate issues that might otherwise result in a wall springing up between them.

Dick points out that Pike hoes in one direction only, then shoulders the hoe and walks back to the other end of the field instead of hoeing in both directions. When Dick asks if Pike does not see the similarity between his actions and the Doctor's, Pike replies with heat, thinking that perhaps Dick means to impugn his integrity as a laborer:

'I wouldn't hoe both ways for anybody!'

Dick quickly tries to soothe Pike's ruffled feathers. Partially mollified, Pike justifies his behavior, at the same time indicating an essential element of the Yankee code<sup>2</sup> and giving his own contribution to the synthesis that eventually follows.

'A man has got to keep his extrication.  
The important thing is not to get bogged down  
In what he has to do to earn a living.'

In order for a man to have mastery over himself and therefore be free, he must take care not to enslave himself to his work. If he chains

himself to his occupation to the extent that he has no time for and little interest in other aspects of life, he thereby forfeits his manhood and his right to the integrity and pride of a free human individual. By no means does this philosophy license one to shirk his duty or responsibility. A man's work must constitute a portion of his life-- indeed a major portion; but it cannot be his whole life, else he loses the essential quality that makes him a free agent.

Although Pike has charged that Dick frequently changes the subject, it is Pike who is actually guilty of shifting the argument in a tangential direction. Dick will not allow him to stray from the topic long; and turning the conversation to the main debate by pointing out again the similarity between the Doctor's behavior and Pike's, Dick moves a step closer to the synthesis--and states his own point of view.

'I'm saying it to argue his idea's  
The same as your idea, only more so.  
And I suspect it may be more and more so  
The further up the scale of work you go.'

Pike continues to fight the logic of Dick's argument. Unlike Dick, who Pike begins to suspect will win him over, Pike has no scruples about patronizing the college boy. Rankling at the suggestion that there is a scale of work and that the Doctor's work is higher on the scale than his own, Pike belligerently asserts that the Doctor's attitude is not the same as his own. At the same time, Pike implies by the epithet "school-boy" that Dick suffers from immaturity and lack of practical experience; and Pike puts the young man off as if he were a child. Then to forestall more debate, Pike hastily changes the subject to the sun.

'It isn't just the same, and some day, schoolboy,  
I'll show you why it isn't--not today.  
Today I want to talk about the sun.

. . .

He [the sun] only stayed to set the summer on fire,  
 Then fled for fear of getting stuck in lava  
 In case the rocks should melt and run again.  
 Everyone has to keep his extrication.

With indirection, Pike uses an analogy (one that is not altogether sound) to defend his point of view that a man (namely himself) must keep his independence. Investing the sun with the human ability to reason, Pike uses its apparent revolutions to demonstrate that, like any sensible man, it avoids entrapment in its own labors: it keeps its independence. The sun does so much and no more; it refuses to become a slave to its tasks and thereby remains free.

Pike has backed himself into a corner with his own words, and Dick does not hesitate to take the advantage.

'That's what the Doctor's doing, keeping his.  
 That's what I have to do in school, keep mine  
 From knowing more than I know how to think with.  
 You see it in yourself and in the sun;  
 Yet you refuse to see it in the Doctor.'

Dick seizes the advantage, however, gently and with consideration, showing how the same principle holds true of himself. As he applies the synthesis to himself, he delicately suggests that there is much he does not know and that his brain is not capable of retaining all he reads: he surrenders a little of the pompous self-importance that so irks Pike. Thus he concedes something of himself, as Pike must also do if they are to reach an agreement. The older man immediately perceives that Dick, by his own admission, has made it easier for him to admit he was wrong and to accept the validity of the synthesis by backing down a little from his Yankee-stubborn position. With alacrity Pike seizes the compromise that allows him to yield with some dignity, sensing with shrewd perceptiveness that another such opportunity might not be forth-

coming.

'All right, let's harmonize about the Doctor.'

With dignity Pike wholly yields to this synthesis, admitting that during the winter months when more people are sick the Doctor becomes extremely active. Dick longs to insert a pedantic analogy; but he restrains himself, not certain of the facts and knowing that he will only jeopardize the accepted synthesis by showing off.

The two men return to work. Aware that Pike must feel that he has lost the argument and thus has suffered a blow to his pride, Dick sets about to mend the situation, obliquely praising the older man's practical philosophy of labor and his ability to put it into action.

And so to let Pike seem to have the palm  
 With grace and not too formal a surrender  
 Dick said, 'You've been a lesson in work wisdom  
 To work with, Bill. But you won't have my thanks.  
 I like to think the sun's like you in that--  
 Since you bring up the subject of the sun.  
 This would be my interpretation of him.  
 He bestows summer on us and escapes  
 Before our realizing what we have  
 To thank him for. He doesn't want our thanks.  
 He likes to turn his back on gratitude  
 And avoid being worshiped as a god.  
 Our worship was a thing he had too much of  
 In the old days in Persia and Peru.  
 Shall I go on or have I said enough--  
 To convey my respect for your position?'

Employing the synthesis at which they have arrived--namely that all men must keep their independence--Dick thanks Pike for adding to his practical knowledge. To show the sincerity of his gratitude, Dick indirectly compliments Pike by borrowing the older man's somewhat faulty analogy of the sun. He manages to keep his independence in the process of voicing his thanks, and he also adds to the synthesis the corollary--to which Pike readily agrees--that man must keep his independence in all human

activities. Just as one cannot enslave himself to his work and remain free, neither can he bind himself to another's gratitude.

The poem ends in the complete harmony of ideas between two individuals who were initially opposed. In the dialectical manner, Dick's point of view, the antithesis, grows out of Pike's, the thesis; and the boy takes exception to the position held by the older man. Only through Dick's tact and perceptiveness are the two able to arrive at the synthesis which is a truly Hegelian one. As Dick and Pike resolve their opposed views which turn upon the issue of whether or not one who labors with his mind labors at all (the Doctor), they fuse their positions in a single more universal truth than either of the original opposed truths. Pike contributes the idea that a man must keep his "extrication"---must not compromise his individuality by enslaving himself to labor. But Pike sees this truth only in terms of himself and others who labor physically. Dick contributes the idea that professional men also perform labor, suggesting that those who work with their brains may work harder than those who work only with brawn---an idea that incenses Pike. Accepting the synthesis long before Pike does, Dick fuses both truths in the synthesis: namely that Pike's idea is valid for all men in all walks of life, that a doctor (or lawyer or politician) must guard his independence as jealously as a hired hand. Thus both contribute to the synthesis; but before it can be fully achieved, both must give something too. The compromise reached, Dick then manages to restore that which each had to surrender in order to achieve the synthesis. Utilizing the synthesis, Dick re-establishes for Pike that modicum of pride lost when Pike gave in and accepted a viewpoint that contradicted his own---gave up the pride of being right. At the same time but more subtly now, Dick returns to his



academic pretentiousness. Thus, at the end of "From Plane to Plane," Dick and Pike enjoy a total harmony, while each maintains his whole individuality and integrity. They effected a synthesis which each made possible through understanding and willingness to yield a little in order to be made more whole.

Like "The Self-Seeker" "The Star-Splitter" includes a double synthesis. Brad McLaughlin effects a complete synthesis in his own personality, encompassing all three components of the dialectical pattern; and Brad as the antithesis character and the narrator as the thesis character achieve a temporary synthesis which seems to break down under the scrutiny of the narrator when he attempts to test its practical application. A discussion of "The Star-Splitter" becomes somewhat complicated by the fact that two thesis points of view exist, one held by the narrator and the other by the practical side of Brad McLaughlin's nature.

As is the case in the bulk of Frost's dramatic narrative and border line poems, Frost presents the drama of "The Star-Splitter" in a narrative framework. Briefly, the poem concerns Brad's personal synthesis and the practical validity of the synthesis achieved by Brad and the narrator. Brad, inadequate and unhappy as a farmer, burns down his farm house to collect the fire insurance and buy a telescope, thus indulging his need for contemplation of the universe. The poem opens in the middle of a conversation, which, the reader eventually learns, occurred in the past. The narrator now recalls Brad's words first to establish his character and second to prepare the reader for Brad's actions by suggesting a motive. Brad indicates his nearly obsessive interest in the cosmos by personifying Orion, which, he suggests, sees Brad as he really is and

finds him ludicrous. Brad holds no illusions about himself; he knows he is a poor farmer;

'. . . he looks in on me  
 Busy outdoors by lantern-light with something  
 I should have done by daylight, and indeed,  
 After the ground is frozen, I should have done  
 Before it froze. . .'

While Brad recognizes his shortcomings as a farmer, he questions the right of nature to subjugate man to it.

'Has a man, I should like to ask, no rights  
 These forces are obliged to pay respect to?'

Commenting after the fact on Brad's speech and recounting the events which followed, the narrator reveals his point of view: that of the typical Frostian Yankee:

So Brad McLaughlin mingled reckless talk  
 Of heavenly stars with hugger-mugger farming,  
 Till having failed at hugger-mugger farming,  
 He burned his house down for the fire insurance  
 And spent the proceeds on a telescope  
 To satisfy a life-long curiosity  
 About our place among the infinities.

Completely aware of another's rights as an individual, the narrator neither condemns nor praises Brad's actions, although he reserves his prerogative as a free agent to comment on them. By judging Brad's sweeping question and cosmic remarks as "reckless talk," the narrator establishes his viewpoint as the thesis, since the thesis involves the existing "normal" point of view to which the antithesis--Brad--reacts. The Frostian Yankee gears his life to the practical aspects of nature, labor, and human relationships. He has little time or inclination to puzzle about cosmic questions, finding it sufficient to understand himself, those with whom he comes in contact, and his relationship to his environment. Yet he tolerates conflicting views of man's purpose insofar as they do

not trespass on his own individuality.

Before Brad gets his telescope, the narrator, annoyed at his friend's impracticality, attempts to talk him out of it.

'What do you want with one of those blame things?'  
I asked him well beforehand. 'Don't you get one.!''

The narrator cannot see any practical reason for Brad's wanting the instrument; to him it is a waste of money. While Brad seems to recognize the impracticality of what has now become an obsession with him, he knows that it can harm no one. Further, he sees in it what his plain-spoken Yankee friend does not:

'Don't call it blamed; there isn't anything  
More blameless in the sense of being less  
A weapon in our human fight,' he said.

To Brad the telescope is a "weapon in our human fight"—a weapon that does not kill or maim but can help man to see his place in the scheme of things more clearly. Brad's vision has focused, not on the day-by-day microcosm in which the narrator moves, but on the macrocosm. Through examination of the cosmos he hopes to glean an understanding of his own small world, thereby winning another round in man's continual struggle not only for existence but also for comprehension.

'The best thing that we're put here for's to see;  
The strongest thing that's given us to see with's  
A telescope.'

In his initial statement, Brad suggests that there is another reason for wanting the telescope ("Has a man, I should like to ask, no rights/These forces are obliged to pay respect to?"): perhaps by understanding natural forces, man can eventually learn to control them. Frost evades any development of his issue, turning instead to the social implications of Brad's act. When Brad recognizes the fact that he will

be unable to sell his farm, with Yankee ingenuity he conceives and executes the idea of burning the house down to collect the fire insurance on it. The villagers are not deceived by Brad's seeming ill-luck, although the insurance company evidently is. The townsfolk know that Brad willfully created the blaze, and they do not allow him to believe he has succeeded in duping them. Their first collective reaction is to see that he is punished for his act. Upon reconsideration, they decide that since Brad harmed nothing but the house (which after all was not a sentient being) they can forgive Brad his strange behavior. Brad's action poses no threat to the individuals in Littleton, so they can afford to overlook his act. They know that in order to be forgiven their own small offenses they must be willing to forgive the peculiarities of others. Otherwise individuals would be unable to live together in a community, and society would be doomed. Speaking for the town's final judgment and interpreting it, the narrator recalls:

Mean laughter went about the town that day  
 To let him know we weren't the least imposed on,  
 And he could wait--we'd see to him tomorrow,  
 But the first thing next morning we reflected  
 If one by one we counted people out  
 For the least sin, it wouldn't take us long  
 To get so we had no one left to live with.  
 For to be social is to be forgiving.

While the narrator, speaking for the townspeople as well as for himself, considers Brad's telescope "a strange thing to be roguish over," he accepts Brad's right as an individual to express himself as long as it does not harm him or violate his own individuality. While nature is not obliged to pay respect to one man's individuality, the local community--at least the kind that will endure--must respect another's individuality in order to preserve its own.

Tolerant and perceptive, the Yankee narrator accepts Brad's expression of identity and recounts the means by which Brad reaches a compromise between the necessity of mundane labor and the desire for contemplation. Brad takes a job with the railroad company as a ticket agent; his position enables him to earn a living and retain his independence, and still allows him time for contemplation, time not allowed by the tendency farming had to consume unfruitfully nearly all his time and energy. In the eyes of the narrator--and in Brad's eyes, one must assume--the synthesis Brad achieves between the thesis of practical living and the antithesis of contemplative life forms an ideal compromise. While the labor itself is still mundane, the narrator sees in it a fusion of the opposed forces of Brad's character:

. . . his job, when he wasn't selling tickets,  
Was setting out up track and down, not plants  
As on a farm, but planets, evening stars  
That varied in their hue from red to green.

He got a good glass for six hundred dollars.  
His new job gave him leisure for star-gazing.

Just as Brad reaches a compromise in his own soul, Brad and the narrator succeed in attaining a synthesis. Acting from the thesis viewpoint, the narrator accepts the need for practical labor; from the antithesis viewpoint, Brad acts in terms of man's yearning toward something beyond the sphere of daily living. After the purchase of the telescope the two men often get together to observe the workings of the universe and to talk.

I recollect a night of broken clouds  
And underfoot snow melted down to ice,  
And melting further in the wind to mud.  
Bradford and I had out the telescope.  
We spread our two legs as we spread its three,  
Pointed our thoughts the way we pointed it  
And standing at our leisure till the day broke,  
Said some of the best things we ever said.

Through the medium of friendship and tolerance, the two--believers in opposed truths--fuse their positions in an unstated higher truth. By directing their thoughts as they point the telescope toward the universe, they gain cosmic insight into man, the particular and individual. While they learn little of the stars, they learn much about themselves and each other. Although the telescope with its gunsight glass focuses upon and splits the stars into quarter sections, the stars remain aloof and impenetrable, retaining their separate identities just as the two men who view them below retain theirs. Through a peculiar inversion, the telescope becomes a microscope, allowing each to probe his inner thoughts and share them with the other. The knowledge that Brad and the narrator gain through the telescope is not scientific but humanistic, and Frost seems to imply that man's knowledge of himself possesses the greater value. Neither Brad nor the narrator sways the other to his position although both implicitly admit the validity and worth of the other's way of life. Brad continues to ponder the universe, and the narrator returns to his practical view of life, each retaining his independence.

The synthesis that Brad and the narrator enjoy through the medium of the telescope causes the narrator to speculate upon the possibility of use to which the telescope might be put. But that use must be practical; it cannot be wholly theoretical:

It's a star-splitter if there ever was one  
 And ought to do some good if splitting stars  
 'Sa thing to be compared with splitting wood.

To the narrator, the value of an object or idea lies in its application. While a positive correlation exists between man's need (for fire in this instance) and splitting wood, the narrator doubts that knowledge of lasting value can come from "splitting" stars.

We've looked and looked, but after all where are we?  
 Do we know any better where we are,  
 And how it stands between the night tonight  
 And a man with a smoky lantern chimney?  
 How different from the way it ever stood?

The telescope may not be "The strongest thing that's given us to see with"; implicitly Frost suggests that the human heart is the stronger means of perception. While the narrator expresses his specific doubt concerning the value of their contemplation of the stars, he suggests, too, the more comprehensive skepticism concerning the value of science as a means of solving man's fundamental problems. The remembered moment of synthesis between the narrator and Brad revealed no new truth about man; it merely clarified some old ones. And they learned little of intrinsic value about the cosmos.

The synthesis Brad achieves within himself is an unquestionably Hegelian one. Although the second synthesis seems to break down under the narrator's reconsideration, nonetheless for a time it fused two men together, two men who hold separate and opposed views. While the "star-splitter" affords no specified scientific knowledge, it allows Brad to express his individual need of contemplation and creates a fuller understanding between two human beings whose individuality remains unimpaired in the process.

While "In the Home Stretch" is not one of Frost's best dramatic narratives, it does exemplify a species of the complete synthesis although the dialectical pattern is not immediately apparent. The situation in this poem, as in that of "The Death of the Hired Man," is a simple colloquy between two married people who love one another. Husband and wife have moved from town to country to spend their declining years, a choice made by the two of them--for different reasons. Little of the

thesis-antithesis-synthesis relationship exists overtly in the main action of the poem: the dialectical pattern lies below the surface of the dialogue and emerges only in retrospect and as a result of the explicit statement of synthesis that occurs near the end of the poem.

The poem opens at the close of the moving day; as the movers finish unloading the van, the woman, evidently for the first time that day, pauses to examine her new surroundings. She stares at the view from her kitchen window, a view that is somewhat obscured by the layers of dust on the glass; and one recognizes as the poem progresses that the condition of the window reflects and suggests the woman's state of mind. Like the view, her vision--usually clear--is clouded and obscured by doubts regarding the wisdom of their move and by a nostalgic longing for familiar surroundings. All this she carefully hides from Joe, responding to him and his buoyant mood with cheerful good humor. Joe enters and seeing her gazing through the window asks:

'What are you seeing out the window, lady?'

'Never was I beladied so before.  
 Would evidence of having been called lady  
 More than so many times make me a lady  
 In common law, I wonder.'

From the woman's response, the reader wonders whether the two have formally married. There is the suggestion of a common-law relationship between them, although the epithet "lady" may signify nothing more than a private joke between married lovers. The question of their marital status is immaterial, however, for it is obvious that the two love one another and have long lived together.

Seeking to reassure himself that the move has been right for both of them, Joe persists with his questions, hoping that his wife will give



him the answer which he longs to hear. She cannot, and he senses this. The relationship between Joe and his wife emerges as one filled with sensitivity and understanding, toleration of the other's point of view and a deep sense of responsibility for the other's happiness. He calls her from the window from which he is afraid she will see too much and tries to interest her in the movements of the burly men who are about to leave. As the movers leave, Joe turns to his wife:

'Did they make something lonesome go through you?  
It would take more than them to sicken you---  
Us of our bargain. But they left us so  
As to our fate, like fools past reasoning with.  
They almost shook me.'

The bargain Joe speaks of between him and his wife is not entirely clear and may refer to one of two pacts: their common-law or marriage relationship or their agreement to give up the city for the farm. The latter seems more plausible. Recognizing her husband's need for reassurance, the wife responds:

'It's all so much  
What we have always wanted, I confess  
It's seeming bad for a moment makes it seem  
Even worse still, and so on down, down, down.'

As she minimizes Joe's doubts, she also explains the reason for her own. She does not attempt to reassure Joe with platitudes or half-truths. The basis of their relationship seems to lie in complete honesty and integrity with the other. One senses that the farm has long been a dream for them and that the realization of this dream does not quite fulfill their expectations of it. Further, one senses that the dream sprang from Joe and that the wife gave into it only because of its importance to him. Joe perceives this possibility; and seeking her happiness, he probes at her reasons for acquiescence to his dream.

'It's all so much what I have always wanted,  
I can't believe it's what you wanted, too.'

Unable to soothe his doubts, the wife sheers away from her husband's oblique question, saying in effect that it matters not who first conceived the dream since they both accept it.

'. . . You're searching, Joe,  
For things that don't exist; I mean beginnings.  
Ends and beginnings--there are no such things.  
There are only middles.'

To her there are no ends and no beginnings involved, only the middle, a different phase of which they are about to enter. Their move represents a compromise, a synthesis:

'You won't deny the lantern isn't new.  
The stove is not, and you are not to me,  
Nor I to you.'

'New is a word for fools in towns who think  
Style upon style in dress and thought at last  
Must get somewhere. I've heard you say as much.  
No, this is no beginning.'

In stating the synthesis, the wife incorporates Joe's viewpoint as well as her own, and Joe accepts the reasonableness of her attitude, questioning her no further. She has stilled the doubts in him and in herself, and together they prepare to meet the new demands of a new existence firm in the old relationship that has persisted.

Unlike the other poems treated in this chapter, the dialectical pattern in "In the Home Stretch" is not readily obvious. It does, however, exist. Joe's point of view forms the thesis to which his wife, holding the antithesis point of view, reacts. Through the media of love and understanding, they achieve a synthesis, each having to give up something in order to reach the synthesis which is a fusion of a higher order than either of their separate attitudes. Joe conceives the dream of spending

their latter years in the totally new existence of farming. Desiring Joe's happiness, his wife succumbs to this dream, although one suspects that she is not altogether content with the idea. To her Joe's happiness is more important than her own; and in a real sense, his happiness is her own. Thus she gives up the idea of living out their lives in the old way. While he seems to have won his wife to his point of view, Joe must accept the implicit fact that he has done so not on the merits of his dream but simply because his wife seeks his happiness. Thus they arrive at their new home, each with his own doubts about the future. Through the woman's loving diplomacy, they reach an agreement concerning their new way of life that satisfies them both: the recognition that the new life will be formed on the old and that rather than a new and separate existence, their venture is merely a continuation of the old.

"West-Running Brook" is one of the few dramatic narrative poems Frost published after 1923; and, along with the other later dramatic narratives, John Lyden designates it a philosophic dialogue.<sup>3</sup> After the publication of his volume New Hampshire (1923), Frost largely abandoned the dramatic narrative form which includes much of his finest poetry. Lyden attributes the change in Frost's poetic emphasis to a growing interest in ideas rather than people: after 1923 Frost published no more dramatic narratives like "The Fear" or "The Death of the Hired Man"; in the dramatic area he confined himself instead to philosophic dialogues, poems in which the dialogue serves more to dramatize a thesis than a human relationship.<sup>4</sup> The dramatic unfolding of a human relationship exists in these poems, but it remains subordinate to the thesis that the poem develops. "The Literate Farmer and the Planet Venus" exemplifies Frost's technique in this area; "West-Running Brook" offers perhaps the

best example.

As one might expect, since the emphasis of the philosophic dialogue falls on ideas rather than on people, the Hegelian dialectical pattern, a philosophical device, becomes more pronounced. While "West-Running Brook" presents Frost's most complete fusion between the Hegelian philosophical pattern and his own dynamic creativity, it seems to Lawrence Thompson--and to me--that Frost compromised the dramatic integrity of the poem. As Thompson points out,

The title poem of West-running Brook is an excellent example of of this extended application [of analogy] which asserts with clarity the poet's philosophic convictions, but at the expense of that aesthetic structure which is the poem itself.<sup>5</sup>

The poem fails to an extent dramatically in that while husband and wife speak in character, Frost molded their characters around his convictions. The characters in "West-Running Brook" are not spontaneous, whole, and completely conceived as husband and wife are in "Home Burial" or "The Fear," nor do they arrive at a solution to a human problem as the characters in "The Death of the Hired Man" and "The Self-Seeker" do.

The dialogue in "West-Running Brook" occurs between a young married couple who pause during a walk to enjoy the beauty of a country brook. The wife first notices that the brook seems to flow in a direction opposite to the rest of the brooks in that country and calls her husband's attention to this fact. This incident forms the texture of the poem's drama; during the remainder of the poem Frost devotes the married pair's colloquy to interpretations of the phenomenon. Working from opposite viewpoints concerning the meaning of the brook's contrariety, the couple eventually reaches an agreement, a synthesis, about the brook's symbolic portent.

Like a younger version of Warren and Mary in "The Death of the Hired Man," Fred and his wife form a synthesis in their marriage. The imaginatively emotional wife in "West-Running Brook" and the objectively practical Fred have achieved marital harmony through perceptive love and understanding, and a tolerance for one another's points of view. Because the wife first observes and comments on the phenomenon of the brook, the wife's position forms the thesis to which her husband, the antithesis, reacts. She sees in the brook's contrary movement an analogy between its situation and theirs.

'What does it think it's doing running west  
When all the other country brooks flow east  
To reach the ocean? It must be the brook  
Can trust itself to go by contraries  
The way I can with you--and you with me--'

As the brook can exist and flourish in opposition to and yet in harmony with both nature and the neighbor brooks which run east, so she and Fred can exist as separate and individual entities and still retain their union; indeed the separateness is necessary to their relationship. Seizing this truth symbolized in the movement of the brook, the wife imaginatively fuses the brook with their relationship, making it a symbol of their marriage. Her perception of the brook's contrary motion has particular rather than universal application; she sees it in personal terms only. To solidify her intuitive insight into the brook's meaning, she wrenches a sign from the brook itself:

'Look, look, it's waving to us with a wave  
To let us know it hears me.'

As the narrator of the poem describes it, the wave is formed by

(The black stream, catching on a sunken rock,  
Flung backward on itself in one white wave,  
And the white water rode the black forever,  
Not gaining but not losing. . .)

Fred has silently agreed to her interpretation of the brook; but being of a logical and practical turn of mind, he cannot accept the whimsical sign his wife fancies the brook has made to signify the truth of her remarks.

'That wave's been standing off this jut of shore  
Ever since rivers, I was going to say,  
Were made in heaven. It wasn't waved to us.'

Thus dramatically they begin to demonstrate the truth of the wife's analogy: they begin to run counter to one another as paired contraries. The wife adheres to her interpretation; and teasing her gently, Fred allows her her point of view while he refuses to accept it, closing the argument with "I have no more to say." Understanding him, the wife recognizes Fred's words as a ruse to get her to coax from him his opinion; and she complies. Fred responds with a generalization concerning existence, suggested to him by the brook's movement and by his wife's observations.

'Speaking of contraries, see how the brook  
In that white wave runs counter to itself.  
It is from that in water we were from  
Long, long before we were from any creature.  
Here we, in our impatience of the steps,  
Get back to the beginning of beginnings,  
The stream of everything that runs away.

The universal cataract of death  
That spends to nothingness--and unresisted,  
Save by some strange resistance in itself  
Not just a swerving, but a throwing back,  
As if regret were in it and were sacred.  
It has this throwing backward on itself  
So that the fall of most of it is always  
Raising a little, sending up a little.  
Our life runs down in sending up the clock.  
The brook runs down in sending up our life.  
The sun runs down in sending up the brook.  
And there is something sending up the sun.  
It is this backward motion toward the source,  
Against the stream, that most we see ourselves in,

The tribute of the current to the source,  
 It is from this in nature we are from,  
 It is most us,'

Finding an analogy in the wave's resistance to the brook to the condition of life, Fred reflects that the contrary westward flow of the stream symbolizes the movement of nature which runs counter to "The universal cataract of death." All life, he says, runs counter to the larger movement of decay. While the stream of life must ultimately flow into the stream of decay and death, within each spark of life resides the instinct to check the ultimate cataract; like the wave which resists the movement of the brook--"Not gaining but not losing"--life resists the current of decay. Fred sees the instinctive vital force (the wave) not as a passive attempt to avoid the current of decay to which it must ultimately surrender, but as an active repulsion of it. As the wave pays tribute to its source, so Fred, seeing the condition of life symbolized in the wave's action, pays tribute to it.

Fred's general concept grows out of his wife's particular insight. Unlike his wife, he does not grasp truth intuitively; like most men he must ruminate, working over the outlines of truth in his mind until the truth emerges full-bodied as a result of intellectual processes. It is important to note that Fred's generalization emerges as a result of his wife's grasp of the particular relationship. Working from opposite intellectual positions each offers a portion of truth which, when fused like the brook with their relationship, offers a greater, more encompassing truth than either of the separate portions.

The poem ends on a note of Hegelian synthesis. Each extends to the other the validity of his opponent's position, and neither attempts to impose his own concept on the other. At the end of Fred's dissertation,

his wife solemnly proclaims (with a hint of loving malice in her words):

'Today will be the day  
You said so.'

Fred responds, taking no umbrage at his wife's subtle taunt and acknowledging the truth of her observations:

'No, today will be the day  
You said the brook was called West-running Brook.'

The wife then fuses both points of view:

'Today will be the day of what we both said.'

The small exchange of words at the end of the poem does more than establish the synthesis; dramatically it re-establishes the truth of both positions--thesis and antithesis. Husband and wife can indeed trust each other "to go by contraries," and each can actively resist the current of the decay of identity by retaining his separate identity in a union of paired contraries.

Thesis and antithesis are clearly opposed, if paired, contraries. The wife, typical of Frostian wives, is imaginatively emotional and perceptive; the truth she grasps is immediate, intuitive, and personal. Representing the antithesis point of view, Fred, typical of some Frostian husbands, is ponderously objective, slow to perceive, and logical in his approach to intellectual concepts. Where the wife works from particular concepts bearing personal connotations, the husband proceeds from general concepts to universal truths. Each contributes to the synthesis, and the final truth, the poem's philosophical thesis--that all life emanates from an instinctive resistance to the "universal cataract of death"--emerges as a result of the particular insight. Without the particular truth, the universal concept would be vitiated if indeed it were even to come into existence. Thus the synthesis of "West-Running Brook" presents



a fusion into a truth of a higher order of both kinds of truth, particular and universal, the one depending on the other.

## CHAPTER IV

### CONCLUSION

As I have demonstrated, Frost often utilized the Hegelian dialectical pattern or a variation of it in his dramatic narrative poetry. The Hegelian dialectic contains a thesis out of which grows an opposed entity, the antithesis. Conflict between thesis and antithesis results in a synthesis which unites the two opposed entities in a more inclusive statement containing what is significant in both of them. The synthesis in turn becomes a thesis for a new stage of the dialectical pattern. Frost confined himself to the first two stages of the dialectical pattern, but frequently altered this pattern. While in many of his earlier dramatic narrative poems thesis and antithesis characters fail to achieve a synthesis, in the later dramatic poems, especially in the philosophic dialogues, synthesis generally occurs. To this basic pattern Frost often added that which is implicit in the dialectic--the isolating factor which either produces the antithesis or causes its emergence.

In his earlier dramatic poems (those published in North of Boston [1914], Mountain Interval [1916], and New Hampshire [1923]) Frost generally portrayed a psychologically critical moment between two people who, for one reason or another, fail to resolve their differences; their points of view, thesis and antithesis, do not unite in synthesis.

For example, husband and wife in "Home Burial," each reacting to the death of their child in a different manner, find themselves unable and unwilling to accept the other's mode of grief. The death of their child, which should have brought them closer together, became instead the alienating factor, irremediably cutting husband and wife off from one another. In the border line poem "The Hill Wife," Frost created a comparable situation in which the isolating factor--in this case the loneliness of husband and wife who are cut off from neighbors-- instead of strengthening the ties between them causes the wreckage of their marriage. Instead of drawing closer to one another in their shared loneliness, husband and wife draw apart because of the husband's persistent inability to see the depths of his wife's depression and her inability to communicate it to him. In "The Housekeeper" Frost created another example of the failure of the synthesis between man and woman. The childish self-indulgence of John (the thesis character) causes Estelle, his common-law wife (the antithesis character), to desert him after fifteen years of shared existence. John had effected a "synthesis" between them that satisfied only him--the common-law arrangement. Estelle brooded silently for fifteen years over John's unintended abasement of her before she effected a "synthesis" of her own by eloping with another man.

In addition to altering the Hegelian dialectical pattern by portraying the failure of thesis and antithesis to achieve synthesis, Frost also varied the dialectical pattern in his pastoral dramatic narratives. In these poems Frost presented the synthesis as a major character who fails to bring the opposing character (either thesis or antithesis character, depending upon the poem) to his point of view.

In "Mending Wall," for example, the narrator (the synthesis character) cannot make his neighbor (the thesis character) see that the wall they mend protects neither; instead it unnecessarily isolates the one from the other. The neighbor, however, feels that it must be maintained simply because it has always existed. The speaker realizes that his neighbor walks in the darkness of conventionalized perception and cannot be made to question for himself the necessity of the wall. At the end of the poem the wall, mended now, isolates the speaker from his neighbor: the synthesis character has failed to bring the thesis character to his point of view that walls--barriers--should exist only to protect one individual from another. The wall itself becomes a symbol of all unnecessary barriers that needlessly separate man from man, and as a symbol it permeates many of the dramatic narrative and border line poems in which the dialectical pattern exists. Almost an extension of "Mending Wall," "A Hundred Collars" depicts the wall that springs up between two strangers, isolating them from one another. Although Lafe, the synthesis character, quickly determines that Doctor Magoon, the thesis character, poses no threat to him and attempts to tear down the wall dividing them, Doctor Magoon, wary and aloof, refuses to accept the other's overtures of friendliness. While Lafe does manage to breach the wall of distrust for a short time by establishing a common ground, he inadvertently seals the breach by presuming too far on the fragile cordiality that he has effected. The wall once more springs up between them, and Lafe concedes defeat by leaving.

In many of the dramatic narratives Frost utilized the basic Hegelian dialectical pattern, and thesis and antithesis characters manage to attain a synthesis which unites what is significant in both

both points of view. In "The Death of the Hired Man," for instance, Mary and Warren react to Silas' return from different points of view. Acting from the thesis viewpoint, Warren considers Silas' return with righteous indignation: time after time he had hired the old man only to have Silas leave him for a better paying job when he needed him most. Reacting antithetically to Warren's reasonable position, Mary attempts to make Warren see the piteous bid for independence inherent in the old man's return: where Warren's reaction to Silas is eminently practical, Mary's is compassionately emotional. As Mary concedes the validity of Warren's position, she gradually converts Warren to her point of view until finally they attain the synthesis of Silas' fictitious reinstatement as a hired hand: while they will compassionately accept the old man's return at face value, realistically they will place no trust in his promises of hard labor. Perhaps the best example of Frost's use of the dialectical pattern occurs in "West-Running Brook." Since it is a philosophic dialogue, the ideas in the poem take precedence over the characters; and since the Hegelian pattern is primarily a philosophical device, the dialectical pattern becomes more pronounced than in some of the other poems. In this poem husband and wife stop to enjoy the beauty of a country brook. Noticing that the stream runs counter to the other streams in the neighborhood, the wife draws from the brook's contrary movement an analogy between its situation and theirs. Both brook and couple represent a union of paired contraries-- a synthesis. Just as the brook can exist and flourish in opposition to and yet in harmony with both nature and the neighboring streams, so husband and wife can maintain their union in the face of opposing viewpoints. The wife fancifully wrenches a sign from the brook to

corroborate her position, but Fred cannot fully accept her interpretation. Working from his wife's particular insight, the husband states his own view of the brook's meaning (and the poem's philosophical thesis): the counter movement of the brook symbolizes the resistance of all life to the current of decay. Both husband and wife contribute to the synthesis; through the wife's particular insight the husband can form the universal concept, and husband and wife resolve their separate positions in the higher truth by conceding validity to the other's viewpoint.

In well over half of the dramatic narrative poems, Frost chose to create dramatic situations between man and woman, husband and wife, at psychologically critical moments. In this most basic of all human relationships, Frost discovered that the dialectical pattern exists naturally; the marriage relationship itself forms a synthesis, and the intrinsic psychological differences between man and woman, frequently generate a clash of viewpoints which is readily translatable into thesis and antithesis. Frost of course dealt with other aspects of human relationship besides that between man and woman, but in nearly all the dramatic narrative poems he conceived of the clash between two humans in terms of an attempt to preserve or gain recognition as an individual. Frost believed that conflict in human relationships stemmed not from opposed views of good versus evil but from opposed aspects of good, conflict arising from barriers which separate individual from individual. While Frost maintained that some barriers are necessary to protect individual identity, he believed that discord arises from those barriers that spring up to isolate totally one human being from another. Barriers emerge when two people regard an object or a situation

from opposite viewpoints which form into thesis and antithesis positions. Out of the conflict between thesis and antithesis viewpoints, the characters either achieve or fail to achieve a synthesis. When they fail to achieve a synthesis between their opposed views, failure generally occurs because of a lack of understanding and perception on the part of one or both characters, or because one of the characters cannot accept the inevitable and go on. As one might expect, synthesis occurs only in those human relationships in which love, understanding, and respect for the other's individuality prevail. When both opponents make a concerted effort to understand and accept the other's point of view, when each is willing to concede something of his position to his opponent in order to form a more encompassing truth, synthesis generally results.

Frost made use of the dialectical pattern in other dramatic narrative and border line poems than those that I have discussed in this thesis. It has not been my intention to touch upon them all, only to demonstrate this pattern in some of Frost's more representative dramatic poems. Whether or not Frost consciously employed the dialectical pattern to create his dramatic narratives is a moot point. This pattern appears regularly enough in Frost's poetry for one to say that he found it, either consciously or unconsciously, a useful device in creating and portraying many and diverse facets of both inter-personal and intra-personal human relationships.

## NOTES

## CHAPTER I

<sup>1</sup>This situation is fast being remedied; of the sixteen books published on Frost, nine were published within the last four years. However, as Elizabeth Isaacs states in the preface to An Introduction to Robert Frost (Denver, 1962), p. 7, "in spite of his current popularity, the poet Robert Frost has had very little serious consideration from professional critics and very little real understanding from his many readers."

<sup>2</sup>James M. Cox, ed., Introduction to Robert Frost: A Collection of Critical Essays (Englewood Cliffs, 1962), p. 5.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 11.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., pp. 11, 13.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 6.

<sup>6</sup>George W. Nitchie, Human Values in the Poetry of Robert Frost: A Study of a Poet's Convictions (Durham, 1960), p. x.

<sup>7</sup>Isaacs, p. 8.

<sup>8</sup>Reuben A. Brower, The Poetry of Robert Frost: Constellations of Intention (New York, 1963), p. viii.

<sup>9</sup>According to Karl Beckson and Arthur Ganz, A Reader's Guide to Literary Terms: A Dictionary (New York, 1960), p. 113 and M. H. Abrams, A Glossary of Literary Terms (New York, 1959), p. 48, a lyric is any generally short (though sometimes long) poem that presents a single speaker's thoughts and feelings. In accordance with the above definition, a choice or decision would not generally appear in a lyric. Drama, according to Beckson and Ganz, p. 46, is "a serious play (though it may end either happily or unhappily) dealing with a problem of importance but not aiming at tragic exhaltation." That which is dramatic then, would entail elements--characters, plot, effect--similar to those of some acted plays.

<sup>10</sup>All quotations from Frost's poetry are taken from Complete Poems of Robert Frost: 1949 (New York, 1949). Since this most recent, authoritative and complete edition has an index, page and line references will not be indicated in this study.

<sup>11</sup>Lawrance Thompson, Fire and Ice: The Art and Thought of Robert Frost (New York, 1942), p. 106.

<sup>12</sup>John F. Lynen, The Pastoral Art of Robert Frost (New Haven, 1960), p. 109.



<sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 110.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 109.

<sup>15</sup>See p. 4 of this thesis. For a fuller explanation of Frost's pastoralism, see Lynen's chapter "The Pastoral Mode," pp. 111-112.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., pp. 112-125, 133. Lynen's complete classification of the dramatic poems is as follows (p. 133):

<u>Book</u>	<u>Poem</u>	<u>Form</u>
<u>A Boy's Will</u> (1913)	None	
<u>North of Boston</u> (1914)	The Death of the Hired Man	dramatic dialogue
	Home Burial	dramatic dialogue
	The Fear	dramatic dialogue
	The Self-Seeker	dramatic dialogue
	The Generations of Men	dramatic dialogue
	A Servant to Servants	dramatic monologue
	The Mountain	pastoral dialogue
	A Hundred Collars	pastoral dialogue
	Blueberries	pastoral dialogue
	The Housekeeper	narrative monologue
<u>Mountain Interval</u> (1916)	In the Home Stretch	dramatic dialogue
	Snow	dramatic dialogue
	The Bonfire	narrative monologue
<u>New Hampshire</u> (1923)	The Witch of Coös	dramatic monologue
	The Pauper Witch of Grafton	dramatic monologue
	A Fountain, a Bottle, a Donkey's Ears, and Some Books	philosophic dialogue
<u>West-Running Brook</u> (1928)	West-Running Brook	philosophic dialogue
<u>A Further Range</u> (1936)	Build Soil (1931-2)	philosophic dialogue
<u>A Witness Tree</u> (1942)	A Literate Farmer and the Planet Venus (1926)	philosophic dialogue
<u>Steeple Bush</u> (1947)	None	
<u>Complete Poems</u> (1949)	From Plane to Plane	philosophic dialogue

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., p. 124.

<sup>18</sup>Thompson, p. 107.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., p. 107-109.

- <sup>20</sup>Ibid., pp. 116-119.
- <sup>21</sup>Ibid., p. 117.
- <sup>22</sup>Cox, p. 8.
- <sup>23</sup>Marion Montgomery, "Robert Frost and His Use of Barriers: Man vs. Nature toward God," Robert Frost: A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. James M. Cox, p. 147. Originally published in The South Atlantic Quarterly, LVII (Summer, 1958), 339-353.
- <sup>24</sup>Langdon Elsbree, "Frost and the Isolation of Man," Claremont Quarterly, VII (1960), IV, 30.
- <sup>25</sup>Isaacs, p. 65.
- <sup>26</sup>John T. Napier, "A Momentary Stay Against Confusion," Robert Frost: A Collection of Critical Essays, ed., James M. Cox, p. 128. Originally published in The Virginia Quarterly Review, XXXIII (Summer, 1957), 378-394.
- <sup>27</sup>Thompson, p. 114.
- <sup>28</sup>Robert Frost, Introduction to Edwin Arlington Robinson, King Jasper (New York, 1935), p. viii.
- <sup>29</sup>Ibid., p. xv.
- <sup>30</sup>Ezra Pound, "Modern Georgics," Poetry, V (December, 1914), p. 129.

## CHAPTER II

- <sup>1</sup>Nitchie, pp. 123-124.
- <sup>2</sup>Lynen, p. 78.
- <sup>3</sup>The full explication of "Mending Wall" in conjunction with the dialectical pattern occurs on pp. 60-63 of this study. "Mending Wall" is a pastoral border line poem; and since the dialectical pattern in Frost's pastoral dramatic narrative poetry develops somewhat atypically, I have placed the analysis of "Mending Wall" with those of other poems in this category.
- <sup>4</sup>Lynen, p. 25.
- <sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 30.
- <sup>6</sup>Lynen discusses the essential difference between Eliot's and Frost's use of symbols. On pp. 26-27 he states: "In Eliot's 'Sweeney Among the Nightingales,' for example, one finds a use of symbols

quite different from that we have noted in 'The Pasture' [and in 'Mending Wall']. Eliot's poem, like Frost's, is based upon the analogy between two distinct levels of being, but here both are stated. Sweeney and his milieu, the bordello or cheap eating house where the hero finds himself surrounded by prostitutes and rather dangerous low-life criminals, comprise the main subject, but its meaning is revealed by comparison with Agamemnon and the whole context of the house of Atreus myth. The elements of Sweeney's story have specific reference to the elements of the myth, Sweeney to Agamemnon, the prostitutes who conspire against him to Clytemnestra, and so forth. Of course, the meaning of Eliot's symbols extends beyond these mythic parallels, but nevertheless the symbolism has a quality of exactitude because the two levels compared are both presented. Frost, by leaving one side of his analogy to implication, achieves a symbolism which appears to be far less precise."

<sup>7</sup>Lynen, p. 31.

<sup>8</sup>According to many authorities, the narrator or Frost persona is the central figure of Frost's poetry (Lynen, p. 80ff. and Cox, p. 13, are advocates of this theory), and he appears to develop and mature in conjunction with Frost's poetry. The narrator of "Directive" seems to be the same as the narrator of "The Pasture" and "Mending Wall," the prime difference among the narrative portions of these poems lying in the amount of perception each has. The narrator of "Directive" has completed the initiatory process beginning and but hazily understood in "The Pasture" and "Mending Wall."

<sup>9</sup>On the basis of the mother's patient handling of him and his childish remarks and responses, one would be inclined to say that the son is mentally deficient. There is no evidence that the son has any understanding of the raison d'être behind his mother's actions--her witchcraft--although he has been told. For a similar view, see Lynen, p. 116.

<sup>10</sup>From "The Star-Splitter."

<sup>11</sup>Thompson, p. 110.

<sup>12</sup>According to several authors, most notably Lynen in his chapter entitled "Nature and Pastoralism," Nitchie in his chapter entitled "The World of Others," and Montgomery in her essay mentioned earlier, Frost's view of nature is that it is separate from man. This idea is perhaps most cogently treated by Lynen, who, briefly, views Frost's conception of nature as being sharply separate from man, as existing by no moral standards. On p. 145 he states: "The only meaning one can find in nature is that imposed upon it by the human mind." While Frost draws--usually implicitly--on nature for comparison with man, he believes that far from presenting merged identities the resulting analogies represent parallels between man and nature. "But," according to Lynen, p. 158, in a discussion of "Two Look at Two," "there is still the impassible gulf--the horror at man's isolation and the delight in finding resemblances are aspects of a single view."

<sup>13</sup>An interesting and marked similarity exist between "The Smile" in "The Hill Wife" and Frost's early border line poem "Love and a Question" (A Boy's Will [1914]).

<sup>14</sup>When the Yankee narrator or a variation of him plays an active role in Frost's dramatic poems (usually he appears as a major character only in the pastoral dramatic narrative and border line poems), frequently his point of view is that of the synthesis; and he seems to speak for Frost. In the character of the narrator, Frost combines shrewd perceptiveness with sympathy and complete integrity, an ability to see and understand another's point of view with a reluctance to infringe on the other's right to an opposite opinion. This does not mean that he refuses to attempt to draw his antagonist to his point of view; he works toward synthesis (his viewpoint), but does not try to force the other to his side. The antagonist must see the rightness of the narrator's position for himself. For a fuller treatment of the conception of Frost's Yankee and his importance to Frost's poetry, see the discussions in this paper of "Mending Wall," "A Hundred Collars," "Blueberries," and "The Code" (pp. 59-73); and Lynen's chapters entitled "New Hampshire and Arcadia" and "The Yankee Manner: Style as Symbol."

<sup>15</sup>Lynen, p. 119.

<sup>16</sup>See note 14.

<sup>17</sup>For a full explication of "The Code" in terms of its pastoral context, see Lynen, pp. 101-107.

<sup>18</sup>Lynen, p. 101.

### CHAPTER III

<sup>1</sup>Thompson, p. 113

<sup>2</sup>See pp. 69-73 of this study.

<sup>3</sup>Lynen, p. 112. Also see note 16.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 136.

<sup>5</sup>Thompson, p. 136.

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