# FROST and the BOOK OF NATURE

George F. Bagby

The University of Tennessee Press • Knoxville

# Contents

Preface ix

#### Acknowledgments xv

# 1. "Assorted Characters" 1

Analogies or correspondences between "outer" and "inner weather"; natural objects as signs, emblems, or "characters," the created world as "a text albeit done in plant"; the seventeenth-century and Emersonian sources of such ideas and metaphors; post-Emersonian complications in the "reading" process—causes and potential uses.

## 2. "Eyes Seeking the Response of Eyes" 21

Imaginative self-reliance; the need for visionary preparation: solitude, "extra-vagance," and "heavenly lostness"; the question of solipsism; poetry as natural expression.

#### 3. Synecdochism 39

Frost's "synecdochism" and its Emersonian background; structural implications of the method; its correspondence to the process of reading the book of nature; a suggested structural grouping of the nature lyrics.

#### 4. "Too Absent-Spirited to Count" 53

Structural tendencies: fablelike poems, though not true fables; "the soul enslaved to the hard facts of experience"; nature seen as threatening; the "waste" of natural process (especially in several spring poems) seen as a measure of human "absent-spiritedness"; the desire for extravagance and assertion thwarted; imaginative resignation and tactical withdrawal.

#### 5. "What to Make of a Diminished Thing" 68

Structural tendencies of the prototypical emblem poems; the "design of darkness" read in several of these poems; the seasonal cycle here: expanded perspective ("foresight") and faith in natural process; appreciation of the commonplace; anticipation of processive emblem poems.

#### 6. The Promethean Frost 95

Meditative emblem poems and the meditative pause; "Kitty Hawk" and the characteristic Prometheanism of these poems; apparent defeat of human yearning; natural obstruction and the stirring imagination; education by opposition; imaginative outreach; "Birches" and the return from Prometheanism; a foreshadowing of the heuristic emblem poems.

## 7. Tales of a Better Kind 129

Structural characteristics of the heuristic emblem poems; caveats against excessive anthropocentrism in the reading process; the seasonal cycle here: winter transformation, summer fulfillment, natural blessing; the convention of natural order opposed to human disorder; egregious fictions "about fellowship" between man and man (or woman).

#### 8. The Uses of a Tradition 177

The emblem-reading tradition and some of the boundaries of Frost's poetic world; his adaptation of some of the conventions of that tradition; its resources for confronting modern "dislocation and detachment," epistemological, temporal, and social.

Notes 199 Works Cited 209 Index 213