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The University of Southern Mississippi

WHY I KILLED THE DRAFT HORSE:

THE GOLDEN BOUGH, ROBERT FROST, AND "PROGRESS"

by

Eugene Charles McGregor Boyle III

A Thesis
Submitted to the Graduate School
of The University of Southern Mississippi
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Master of Arts

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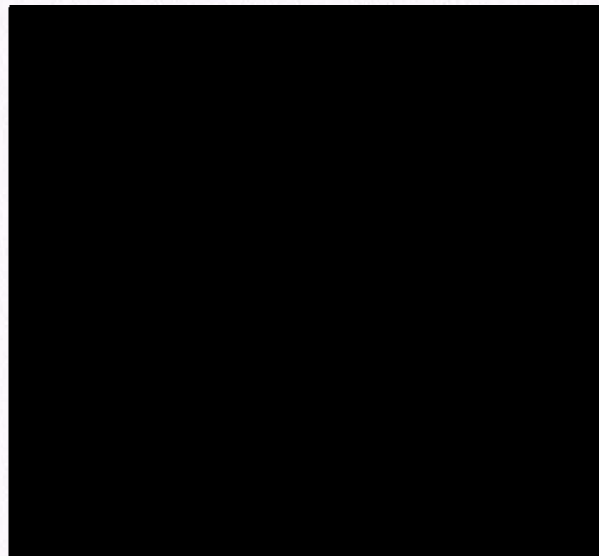

Dean of the Graduate School

August 2013

ABSTRACT

WHY I KILLED THE DRAFT HORSE:

THE GOLDEN BOUGH, ROBERT FROST, AND "PROGRESS"

by Eugene Charles McGregor Boyle III

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The absence of criticism on Robert Frost's "The Draft Horse" suggests that it is a challenge to Frost scholarship. This reading views Frost's strange and neglected poem as a return to a monomyth offered by James Frazer's hugely influential *The Golden Bough*. In "The Draft Horse," Frost reconsiders the concept of ceremonial sacrifice that undergirds Frazer's encyclopedic study of world culture and, by performing ceremony as a kind of modern poesis, Frost complicates the hero/sacrificial object role and critiques the progressive ideology that grounds Frazer's account to fashion a troubling epic for modern America that implicates its national readers in a kind of savagery.

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CHAPTER I

FRAZER, MODERNISM, FROST, AND PROGRESS

The absence of criticism on Robert Frost's "The Draft Horse" suggests that it is a challenge to Frost scholarship. This reading views Frost's strange and neglected poem as a return to a monomyth offered by James Frazer's hugely influential *The Golden Bough*. In "The Draft Horse," Frost reconsiders the concept of ceremonial sacrifice that undergirds Frazer's encyclopedic study of world culture and, by performing ceremony as a kind of modern poesis, Frost complicates the hero/sacrificial object role and critiques the progressive ideology that grounds Frazer's account to fashion a troubling epic for modern America that implicates its national readers in a kind of savagery.

Sir James George Frazer's *The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion* was a work of enormous scale and influence. It was first published in 1890, and continued to be updated and expanded until the completion of the twelve-volume third edition in 1915.[1] Frazer portrayed religion as a cultural phenomenon rather than a result of divine revelation. In *The Golden Bough*, he showed religious beliefs evolving over time, developing in particular patterns from older superstitions and acquiring different cultural trappings as they went. He saw this process as predictable and attempted to, by comparing developed religious ceremonies to more "primitive" belief systems, trace this development in reverse in order to better understand the original material, which could in turn be used to draw conclusions about the origins of other beliefs. Though his work has

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[1] Subsequent editions tended to be abridgements for the large portion of the population that felt twelve volumes to be somewhat excessive.

since been discredited as legitimate anthropology,[2] it had an enormous influence on the culture of the time, and a number of literary giants pulled inspiration from its pages.[3]

Robert Frost was among those who drew their material from Frazer, though little has been written on that subject. Frost's most obviously Frazerian poem, on which this thesis will focus, is "The Draft Horse." Analysis of this particular poem is scarce as a result because it makes little sense if read without the context of *The Golden Bough*. This article will present the theory that Frost's "man out of the trees" in line 5 of "The Draft Horse" can be identified as Frazer's King of the Wood,[4] and that "The Draft Horse" is an account of the performance of a cosmogonic ritual in America by Americans, in order to remake the world in their own image.

During Frost's lifetime, each violent upheaval served to remake the world as more *American*, and the nation rose in power. Through territorial acquisitions, economic domination, and war, America made the globe more and more its own, sacrificing others

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[2] One of the primary reasons for this is Frazer's lack of fieldwork -- much, if not all, of the data he uses to establish his theories is hearsay, third-hand accounts, &c. Additionally, the narrative of progress he uses as a framework has also fallen into disrepute; lumping wildly different cultures together under "primitive peoples" is seen as somewhat intellectually dishonest, and the idea that human history can be mapped out as a clear progression from savagery to civilization is no longer taken seriously. Essentially, Frazer's cultural background caused him to make a number of generalizations in his theoretical work that seriously call into question the validity of his work.

[3] In W.B. Yeats's "Sailing to Byzantium," the speaker crafts an image of himself sitting "on a golden bough" (30). In H.P. Lovecraft's "The Call of Cthulhu," the narrator finds, when going through a deceased professor's papers, "references to passages in such mythological and anthropological source-books as Frazer's *Golden Bough*" (204). Though it is only a passing reference, this passage is notable because Lovecraft's habit was to invent fictional books in which his characters might do their research, and *The Golden Bough* is one of a very few actual texts to which he refers. In T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*, Eliot expressly credits Frazer: "To another work of anthropology I am indebted in general, one which has influenced our generation profoundly; I mean *The Golden Bough*; I have used especially the two volumes *Attis Adonis Osiris*. Anyone who is acquainted with these works will immediately recognise in the poem certain references to vegetation ceremonies" (*Waste Land,* note 1).

[4] A connection between Frazer and "The Draft Horse" has been cursorily suggested before: Frederick L. Gwynn associates the killing of the horse with ritual sacrifice, pointing out that both "the stabbing of an animal" (Gwynn 225) and the fact that the man placed "his hand on the head" (225) of the horse are reminiscent of ancient religious rituals. He then suggests that "The role of the 'man. . . out of the trees' is like that of an initiated priest, like Frazer's King of the Woods [sic]" (225), and that the horse is a scapegoat killed in place of the two speakers. He does not further delve into the material, however.

to make this transformation occur. In his previous volume of poetry, *Steeple Bush*, Frost included poetry about the atomic bomb;[5] while "The Draft Horse" was originally composed before the invention of said device, by the time he published it, Frost was acutely aware that his nation had made burnt sacrifices of entire cities.[6] Thus, his depiction of a literal sacrificial remaking of the world can be interpreted as a comment on the nature of his nation's rise to power: despite the civilized veneer the United States places over such behaviors, at the core, they are violent and savage acts, calculated to create a specifically American world.

"The Draft Horse" was written around 1920,[7] but was not published until it was included in Frost's anthology *In the Clearing* (1962). It is a brief poem, only a few stanzas long, with a fairly simple but largely unexplained narrative. In the poem, two people are traveling through the forest in a frail buggy drawn by a draft horse. A man abruptly springs out of the trees by the side of the road, stabs their horse to death, and departs. The pair who were riding in the buggy decide not to further question the matter, and simply assume that someone wanted them to finish their journey on foot. Though the action appears initially inexplicable, reading the poem through the lens of Frazer allows us to assign meaning to the seemingly arbitrary violence here. Since Frost was not only aware of Frazer, but in fact owned the twelve-volume third edition, as Robert Faggen tells us in *Robert Frost and the Challenge of Darwin* (38), applying a Frazerian reading to Frost's poetry is easily justified.

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[5] Such as "Bursting Rapture" and "U.S. 1946 King's X."

[6] In "U.S. 1946 King's X," Frost refers to the atomic explosion as a "Holocaust" ("U.S. 1946" 1). The original definition of the word *holocaust* was "A sacrifice wholly consumed by fire; a whole burnt offering" ("Holocaust", *OED Online*).

[7] Thus placing it in the brief period of prosperity America enjoyed directly after the first World War, suggesting another connection to the idea of Americans benefiting from violent acts.

If we are to read this poem in the context of Frazer, an initial question to answer is: what was this sacrificial ritual meant to accomplish? While a cursory reading of the poem seems to point to a purposelessly violent act in a bleak and absurd world,[8] identifying this act as a religious ritual means that such a reading is inaccurate: religious ceremonies are freighted with deep spiritual meaning as part of their very nature. If the central act of the poem is a ritual sacrifice, it is necessary to explore the possible significance of the ritual in order to properly understand the poem.

Frazer tells us that all rituals have a deep underlying significance, some ancient theory about the way the world worked that necessitated the ritual being performed in the way that it was. However, the nature of this theory would often be forgotten over time or distorted as it was passed down through the oral tradition, so that eventually the ritual would be seen as purposeless (much as the action of "The Draft Horse" is seen as purposeless or arbitrary: this is the way both the aforementioned critics and the characters within the poem view the act). The theory that the rituals predate the myth is what allows Frazer to delve into twelve volumes of comparative mythology and ritual practice around the whole of the world in an attempt to give context for such behaviors. The identification of the man out of the trees with the King of the Wood is only the first step. As previously established, the sacrificial act is inherently creative; on some level, it is an echo of a myth of immense antiquity, variants of which can be found in many ancient religions, in which the existence of the entire cosmos is the result of a primordial sacrifice. Hence, we can speculate that the slaying of the horse in "The Draft Horse" is for a creative, possibly cosmogonic, purpose. Since Frost is working under the influence of Frazer, it is likely

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[8] Sandra W. Tomlinson compares "The Draft Horse" to the works of "Camus and Beckett" (28-9), and calls it "a striking revelation of life's absurdity" (29).

that he has taken some inspiration from Frazer's treatment of this theme. Frazer spends some time discussing this myth's Babylonian incarnation, in which the god Marduk kills the monster Tiamat, and fashions the cosmos out of its corpse.[9] Frazer goes on to show that versions of this myth[10] are found in a variety of faiths,[11] and suggests that its re-enactment, usually performed annually, is meant to hasten the coming of the spring, in a way re-making the world each year (4: 108-11).[12] Frazer also notes that, though this myth is most commonly presented as the slaughter of some great dragon, other animals — such as, perhaps, a draft horse — might also "possess a cosmological significance" (4: 111) in this manner.

Another connection between *The Golden Bough* and "The Draft Horse" becomes clear when Frazer addresses the fact that horses were not permitted in the sacred grove guarded by the King of the Wood, and, the framework of the matter thus established, provides an explanation of that taboo in a manner that seems to lead us directly to an explanation of the scene Frost has detailed in "The Draft Horse." Frazer observes a recurring pattern in myths created to explain a sacrificial ritual: the idea of sacrifice as creation faded,[13] and the animal that used to be sacrificed as a representative of the god

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[9] " . . . in the beginning the mighty god Marduk fought and killed the great dragon Tiamat, an embodiment of the primeval watery chaos . . . after his victory he created the present heaven and earth by splitting the huge carcase of the monster into halves . . . it describes how confusion was reduced to order, how a cosmos emerged from chaos" (Frazer 4: 105-6).

[10] That is, versions of the cosmogonic sacrifice where the act is depicted as a battle against a monster rather than the willing sacrifice of another god.

[11] Frazer points out that the very beginning of Genesis appears to be derived from this version of the myth, with Marduk replaced by God and Tiamat reduced to an insensate watery chaos.

[12] "On this theory the creation of the world is repeated every spring, and its dissolution is threatened every autumn" (4: 108)

[13] "For myth changes while custom remains constant; men continue to do what their fathers did before them, though the reasons on which their fathers acted have long been forgotten" (Frazer 8: 40).

was recast as an enemy of the god, sacrificed in an act of revenge.[14] Horses were excluded from the sacred grove ostensibly because Hippolytus, who was identified with Virbius in the context of the myth, was slain by horses. However, Frazer speculates that this myth was, in fact, invented to explain an annual equine sacrifice, the original motivation of which had since been forgotten.[15]

By collating the vast quantities of data he collected from missionaries and other people who had access to *primitive* civilizations, Frazer attempted to determine the commonalities between rituals and thus deduce their purpose by tracing them back to their shared roots. He theorized that all such rituals developed from the same ancient belief system just as Darwin had determined that all of humanity had developed from the same ancient population of plains apes. That belief system, according to Frazer, was based around the following theoretical construct: that the land, the divine king, and the people are linked at such a deep level that they can be identified with each other to a significant extent (i.e., the king is not just a symbol of the land, or a power within the land; he *is* the land), and changes in one effect changes in another.

This theory led Frazer to posit a sacrificial ritual as the original source of many of the strange folk customs he observes around the world. As the king began to grow old and infirm, the people were concerned that the land would lose its vitality. In this situation, a potential successor would arise. He would collect an object that held the

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[14] Among the examples given is the annual sacrifice of a goat to Athena. Originally the goat was identified with Athena, but later it was said that the goat was barred from entering the Acropolis because it injured the olive, her sacred tree. However, once a year, a goat was led into the Acropolis and sacrificed. Frazer notes, " . . . as has been remarked before, when an animal is sacrificed once and once only in the year, it is probably slain, not as a victim offered to the god, but as a representative of the god himself" (Frazer 8: 41).

[15] " . . . if we knew the ritual of the Arician grove better, we might find that the rule of excluding horses from it, like the rule of excluding goats from the Acropolis at Athens, was subject to an annual exception, a horse being once a year taken into the grove and sacrificed as an embodiment of the god Virbius" (Frazer 8: 41).

power of the land's vitality, the eponymous golden bough, and go to slay the king so that the land would no longer be threatened by his weakening. If he succeeded, then he became the king, his station verified by his possession of the bough. The ailing king was replaced by a healthy king, and the world was made anew, fresh and vital once more.[16] He summarizes this phenomenon as follows: " . . . the man-god must be killed as soon as he shews symptoms that his powers are beginning to fail, and his soul must be transferred to a vigorous successor . . ." (Frazer 4: 9).

Such *savage* customs, Frazer claims, were eventually mollified by the advance of time and the progress of civilization. This was primarily done through the invention of the *scapegoat*, a victim to die in the king's place. The king, having a great deal of political power and not wishing to die, might substitute a family member as a replacement sacrifice, consider himself to be symbolically slain, and go on ruling. This process then changed still further, and some citizen would be brought forth, treated as a king for a limited amount of time, and then slain as the king's representative. In this way, the original ritual changed and decayed into less offensive versions. Frazer points out contemporary incarnations in which the part of the king is played by a mannequin, or an animal, or a person in costume who only pretends to be harmed. Frazer credits the way in which these ancient rituals metamorphose into odd but harmless folk customs to the progress of human civilization, in which magic is replaced by religion which is in turn replaced by science.

[16] The theoretical underpinnings behind this process arise from the original creation myth, also discussed by Frazer, in which the world is created when one god slays another and makes the world out of its corpse. Each sacrifice of the king is a repetition of this process, and the world is considered to have been remade by the ritual slaying.

This narrative of *progress*[17] is therefore one of the concepts that is central to the understanding of *The Golden Bough* and, by extension, of "The Draft Horse." The narrative of progress implicit in Frazer's contention that religions evolved from more *primitive* superstitions was not only acknowledged, but embraced, expounded, and made explicit at several points throughout the work. Near the beginning of *The Golden Bough*, Frazer articulates what he sees as the progress of belief systems: "a belief in magic . . . represents a ruder and earlier phase of the human mind, through which all the races of mankind have passed or are passing on their way to religion and science" (1: 237). His work depends throughout on a narrative of progress, and is riddle with such statements as " . . . the Australians undoubtedly represent a ruder and earlier stage of human progress than the American Indians . . ." (Frazer 8: 312).

Frazer's theory of progress results in a colorful extended metaphor through which he asserts his main idea concerning the origin of human ritual:

> . . . we may illustrate the course which thought has hitherto run by likening it to a web woven of three different threads—the black thread of magic, the red thread of religion, and the white thread of science . . . Could we then survey the web of thought from the beginning, we should probably perceive it to be at first a chequer of black and white, a patchwork of true and false notions, hardly tinged as yet by the red thread of religion . . . there rests on the middle portion of the web, where religion has entered most deeply into its texture, a dark crimson stain, which shades off insensibly into a lighter tint as the white thread of science is

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[17] Progress, in this context, is the hypothesis that as time moves on, humanity continues to improve itself, resulting in increasingly *refined* instantiations of human civilization, approaching an ideal state.

> woven more and more into the tissue. To a web . . . gradually changing colour the farther it is unrolled, the state of modern thought . . . may be compared. (11: 308)

In Frazer's reading, even science depends on the foundational myth of ritual sacrifice. This narrative of progress can, in fact, be said to be the underlying mythos of any Western industrial state: that though great sacrifices may be made along the way, and the whole world violently reshaped, it's all going *somewhere*, and tomorrow's world will be better than today's.

An example of this foundational myth of sacrifice, and the incarnation of said myth with which *The Golden Bough* begins, comes from a custom in classical Rome that Frazer hypothesized was a relic of a previous stage in the progress from *savagery* to *civilization*: the King of the Wood. In order to make the connection between *The Golden Bough* and "The Draft Horse" clear, one must be aware of the particulars of this custom as presented by Frazer. The man known as the King of the Wood dwelt in a sacred grove[18] in what is now Italy. He was a priest of Diana,[19] who acquired his office through an ancient tradition that Frazer called "a custom . . . which seems to transport us at once from civilisation to savagery" (1: 8). The custom in question follows the pattern that Frazer uncovered: the only way to become the King of the Wood was to seek out the current King of the Wood and slay him in single combat. A number of other customs were linked to the wood and to the king's office, customs that find their analogue in "The

[18] This grove was sometimes called Nemi, after the lake found within it, and sometimes called the Arician grove, after the nearby village of Aricia. Accordingly, the material quoted regarding this matter may refer to the location in either manner.

[19] Specifically, Diana in her aspect of Diana Nemorensis (Frazer 1: 2) though the worship of Diana at Nemi may derive from her aspect as the Tauric Diana, a particularly bloody deity who required a significant quantity of human sacrifice (1: 11).

Draft Horse." For instance, "horses were excluded from the Arician grove and sanctuary" (Frazer 1: 20) and a "holy fire" (1: 41) consecrated to Diana was maintained nearby.

The origins of this unusual office cannot be securely established historically, beyond the fact that it was associated with a semi-divine figure known as Virbius:

> For Diana, like Artemis, was a goddess of fertility in general, and of childbirth in particular. As such she . . . needed a male partner. That partner . . . was Virbius . . . clearly the mythical predecessor or archetype of the line of priests who served Diana under the title of Kings of the Wood. (Frazer 1: 40)[20]

Frazer characterizes the various canonical explanations of the King of the Wood and the traditions that surrounded him as "belong[ing] to that large class of myths which are made up to explain the origin of a religious ritual" (1: 21), i.e., myths which are created as a reaction to the existence of an established ritual, rather than vice versa.

Frost was not the only poet of his era to work from Frazer, or even the most well-known Frazerian poet of his day. Frazer's work was exceptionally popular among the modernists: his discussion of ancient traditions with its underlying narrative of progress and evolution supported the modernist desire to take the product of tradition and the past and "make it new," as suggested by Ezra Pound's critical work of that title. This was perhaps most prominent in the work of T.S. Eliot. Indeed, Eliot's *The Waste Land* draws both content and approach from Frazer: as Michael H. Levenson points out, *The Waste Land* both includes "a wealth of cultural allusions" (201) and "is a product of the

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[20] Though Artemis/Diana is primarily remembered as a virgin goddess, Frazer establishes that this is a later development: "To the ancients... she was the ideal and embodiment of the wild life of nature . . . in all its exuberant fertility and profusion . . . in a number of her older worships we find Artemis associated with a nature-god of similar character . . ." (1: 35)

anthropological temper which understands by comparing, which sets systems of belief in relation to one another" (202). Given Eliot's concerns regarding the state of art in his time, this was natural: he saw Frazer as presenting a solution to a difficult problem with which he had been wrestling.

Eliot was deeply concerned with the problem of how to create art in the modern world, after societal upheaval had separated humanity from its past and traditions. However, upon reading *The Golden Bough*, he claimed that he had discovered the solution to this problem. In his essay "*Ulysses*, Order, and Myth," he claimed that

> ethnology and *The Golden Bough* have concurred to make possible what was impossible only a few years ago. Instead of the narrative method, we may now use the mythical method. It is, I seriously believe, a step toward making the modern world possible for art. (178)

What precisely Eliot meant by "the mythical method" is not entirely agreed upon, but one possible explanation stands out. Jewel Spears Brooker suggests that it is a system of fragmented disunity on the surface, paired with an underlying cohesion supported by a connecting myth; a tableau of allusions, concepts, and narratives that initially suggest no clear meaning, but can be traced back to a single unifying idea.

Eliot imagined this method would be useful in surmounting what he called the modern era's "dissociation of sensibility" ("Metaphysical Poets" 247) By that, he meant to denote the modern break from the majority of human history when a culture's art and literature was unified by shared cultural ideas, myths, and abstractions. Eliot was convinced that this was no longer true in the 20th century. As contemporary society split into wildly different movements and ideologies, the mythical method was his way of

reconstructing cultural abstractions from the fragments into which they had been broken. Brooker presents us with the following analogy:

> If one should find widely scattered fragments of pottery, and be able to reconstruct half of a once-beautiful vase, he would be led to realize the whole, the original, as an abstraction. And in the construction of this ideal vase, he would be using the mythical method. (548)

Eliot saw this process as having been demonstrated when Frazer gathered the various myths and customs from around the world and used them to reconstruct the ancient beliefs from which he theorized all of the world's religions had evolved. In *The Waste Land*, Eliot tried to present fragments and attempt to provoke the generation of an abstracted whole. In short, the mythical method created works that appear to be fragmented, but upon consideration have a deeper unity.

The mythic method's clear connection to Frazer's *The Golden Bough* is this: it is an assemblage of fragments of story, myth, and belief designed to find the underlying commonalities. Brooker sums this up by declaring that

> modern artists are profoundly indebted to Sir James George Frazer. He taught them how to take a heap of broken images, ruins on the horizon of history, and erect structures beautifully symmetrical, perfectly unified . . . his projection of increasingly comprehensive abstractions of universal significance, is a triumph . . . he took chaos, and gave back order . . . . (552)

We can thus begin to understand the connection between Frazer and the modernists. Frazer did not merely provide them with material, but also with method. Furthermore, he

contributed to the process of instilling a reverence for tradition, a belief in inherent values, and a glimmer of universal morality in poets such as Eliot. He can be seen as one of the guiding lights in allowing the modern artists to reconnect with the distant past and, thus, according to Eliot, make art possible in the modern world.

CHAPTER II

"THE DRAFT HORSE" AS COSMOGONIC SACRIFICE

Frost, a contemporary of Eliot, was familiar to some degree with the theoretical underpinnings that connected that poet to Frazer and to his theory for creating art in the modern world. Turning to Frost, then, we find that in addition to Frazer, two other philosophers also contribute to the ideas that constitute the theme of "The Draft Horse": Herbert Spencer and Henri Bergson. Unlike Frazer, Bergson rejects the suggestion that the *primitive* mind is fundamentally different from the *civilized* mind, but he seems to have little difficulty using the labels *primitive* and *civilized* to refer to groups of people, and even goes so far as to present the value judgment of "inferior" (Bergson 103) when referring to the more *primitive* groups in his *Two Sources of Morality and Religion.* Yet, like Frazer, he too makes a case for the evolution and progression of human thought; it is his opinion that there is a "road to civilization" (122) in which laws evolve from customs, religious systems from superstitions, &c.

Spencer, too makes a case for progress and evolution in society in his *Social Statics*:

> Concerning the present position of the human race, we must therefore say that man needed one moral constitution to fit him for his original state; that he needs another to fit him for his present state; and that he has been, is, and will long continue to be in process of adaptation. By the term *civilization* we signify the adaptation that has already taken place. The changes that constitute *progress* are the successive steps of the transition. (Spencer 58)

Spencer goes still further, making the claim that "the ultimate development of the ideal man is logically certain" (59). He concludes that "progress, therefore, is not an accident, but a necessity. Instead of civilization being artificial, it is a part of nature . . ." (60).

With these three men's ideas as the background, then, I turn now to Frost's oft-ignored poem "The Draft Horse." If we read "The Draft Horse" with Frazer in mind, the identity of this mysterious figure becomes clear. The atmosphere of the poem and the depiction of the equinicide are consistent with Frazer's depiction of the King of the Wood:

> In the sacred grove there grew a certain tree, round which . . . a grim figure might be seen to prowl. In his hand he carried a drawn sword . . . It is a sombre picture, set to melancholy music — the background of forest shewing black and jagged against a lowering and stormy sky . . . and in the foreground, pacing to and fro, now in twilight and now in gloom, a dark figure with a glitter of steel at the shoulder whenever the pale moon, riding clear of the cloud-rack, peers down at him through the matted boughs. (Frazer 1: 8-9)

The similarity of this figure to the man "out of the trees" in "The Draft Horse" is undeniable. Knowing that Frost was familiar with this text, it seems likely that the similarity is no coincidence and that "The Draft Horse" is a poem about the King of the Wood.

Thus, one can arrive at the conclusion that Frost, inspired by Frazer's analysis of these ancient religious rituals, depicted this ritual in poetic form. The action in "The Draft Horse" is, therefore, the sacrifice of the god Virbius in the shape of a horse, and the lack

of comprehension shown by the pair in the buggy[21] is only to be expected, given the long-forgotten nature of this ritual. Their incomprehension need not be ours, however: we have the tools to properly interpret the meaning of this unusual equinicide.

Across most, if not all, world cultures, sacrificial ideology and ritual adheres to a few basic tenets, which must be made explicit before continuing on to the text of the poem. First, though sacrifice is a destructive act on the surface, it has spiritual significance as a constructive or even creative act. Second, a properly-performed ritual sacrifice is not merely a symbolic re-enactment of the creative act it is meant to commemorate, but it is itself that act.[22] Frazer gives us a fairly grandiose depiction of this idea when he discusses certain Brahmanic rites: "Thus is the world continually created afresh by the self-sacrifice of the deity; and, wonderful to relate, the priest who offers the sacrifice identifies himself with the Creator, and so by the very act of sacrificing renews the universe, and keeps up uninterrupted the revolution of time and matter" (Frazer 9: 411). Therefore, the question, which otherwise might arise, of whether "The Draft Horse" is a depiction of the ritual at Aricia, the ritual performed again in the 20th century, or the original act on which the ritual was patterned is not only irrelevant, but meaningless: working from proper ritualistic principles, there is no distinction whatsoever between the ritual performed at one time or place and the ritual performed at another time or place, as all performances of the ritual are identical with the original.[23] We can also anticipate that,

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[21] And, generally, the reader; Frost was known to describe "The Draft Horse" as a poem "that nobody knows how to take" (qtd. in Perrine) This may be why he never explained its basis in Frazer: the fact that his audience didn't understand was entirely congruent with his source material, and explaining would have ruined that.

[22] ". . . priests within the Indo-European tradition claimed to repeat this process [i.e., cosmogony] with the performance of every act of ritual sacrifice" (Lincoln 168-9). Lincoln goes on to list examples to this effect in Persian, Druidic, and Indic beliefs.

[23] A comparison could be easily drawn to the Christian tradition of taking communion: in some denominations, it is asserted that each time one eats the bread and drinks the wine, they are truly eating

once the details of the poem are sorted out, it will become apparent that the slaying of the draft horse has a cosmogonic effect, in the vein of the aforementioned Marduk/Tiamat myth.

With the preceding theoretical framework established, we come to the application, demonstrated through a line-by-line explication of "The Draft Horse." The poem begins with a series of images that set the scene and cue us to read the poem mythologically and allegorically:

> With a lantern that wouldn't burn
>
> In too frail a buggy we drove
>
> Behind too heavy a horse
>
> Through a pitch-dark limitless grove. ("Draft Horse" 1-4)

The image of a lantern that won't burn happens to align well with the King of the Wood, since, in the grove that he made his home, one of the features of the worship of Diana Nemorensis was a sacred fire.[24] Moreover, burning lamps were likely brought to her grove for ritual purposes: terra-cotta lamps have been found in the Arician grove, and we also have the evidence of the dedication of "a perpetually burning lamp in a little shrine at Nemi for the safety of the Emperor Claudius and his family" (Frazer 1: 13). The fact that Frost begins "The Draft Horse" with the image of an *unlit* lantern is likely a reference to this aspect of the tradition, reinforcing the lack of order and safety that traveling through the dark with a defective light source might suggest.[25]

Christ's body and drinking Christ's blood. Thus we can see a remnant of this ancient ideology surviving in rituals that are performed even today.

[24] ". . . fire seems to have played a foremost part in her [Diana at Nemi] ritual . . . the day [of her festival] was kept with holy rites at every domestic hearth... Further, the title of Vesta borne by Diana at Nemi points clearly to the maintenance of a perpetual holy fire in her sanctuary" (Frazer 1: 12-3).

[25] cf. *Inferno*:

Midway the journey of this life I was 'ware

One can also link the unlit lantern back to the cosmogonic act of sacrifice. The festival of Diana at Nemi, at which point "her grove shone with a multitude of torches" (Frazer 1: 12) was celebrated "at the hottest time of the year" (1: 12); a lantern that not only *doesn't* burn, but *won't*, is an image diametrically opposed to this. In the same way, midwinter, the time at which one would be most inclined to place a ritual that attempts to remake the world and hasten the coming of spring, is the polar opposite of midsummer, the time of Diana's festival. The large-scale symbolic potential here is plain: midsummer, when the lanterns burn, is blessed with an excess of sunlight and heat, whereas midwinter, when the lanterns do not burn, is characterized by a lack of same. Naturally, in a creation myth, one of the important components is the creation of the sun, so it would only make sense for Frost to set up his own creation account by establishing that the fire remains unlit. Thus, the fact that the lantern won't burn is a sign to the pagan priest that it is time to "create the world afresh" (Frazer 4: 109), which the priest promptly does by slaying the monstrous draft horse.[26]

The frailness of the buggy seems to be another reference to the need for an improvement in circumstances. The problems with the buggy, however, are not tied to a specific deficiency or the need for repairs; it is, perhaps inherently, too frail. This might be meant to indicate that the best approach is to abandon it entirely, as, in fact, they are

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That I had strayed into a dark forest,
And the right path appeared not anywhere.
Ah, tongue cannot describe how it oppressed,
This wood, so harsh, so dismal, so wild . . . (Aligheri 1-5)

[26] Going by Frazer's analysis, the choice of horse as sacrificial animal is appropriate for this interpretation, as a number of Greek cultures sacrificed horses specifically for the purpose of ensuring the sun continued to rise: "The ancient Greeks believed that the sun drove in a chariot across the sky; hence the Rhodians, who worshipped the sun as their chief deity, annually dedicated a chariot and four horses to him, and flung them into the sea for his use. Doubtless they thought that after a year's work his old horses and chariot would be worn out. From a like motive, probably, the idolatrous kings of Judah dedicated chariots and horses to the sun, and the Spartans, Persians, and Massagetae sacrificed horses to him" (Frazer 1: 315).

forced to do. Since there are no buggies to be found in ancient cosmogonic myth, the proper interpretation of this is somewhat obscure; however, it may be that the very lack of buggies in Frost's source material is the key. There has, of course, been a great deal of societal and technological change since the days of the original King of the Wood. Since the buggy is the new element in the ritual, it may well be a representation of modern society.

If we take the buggy to be a symbol of modern civilization, then Frost seems to be sending a message that he includes in a number of his poems: there is something wrong with modern civilization and the way we do things today. The buggy must be abandoned, even destroyed if it is read as a symbol of modern civilization. In the ritual that Frazer uncovered, the frail trappings of modern civilization, like any dead king, must be tossed aside and the people must start over. The fact that it is specifically a buggy, not a wagon or a chariot — since chariots were occasionally included in equine sacrifices — makes it clear to the reader that he is speaking of today's society when he speaks of the buggy. The inclusion of the buggy could also be interpreted as a statement on the immutability of the nature of the world, working in parallel to the rejection of modernity. Not only does Frost, through this poem, scorn our modern civilization, he asserts that despite our technological developments, and the *progress* that has come with the rise of what Spencer might call *civilized man*, it is still necessary to periodically remake the world through destruction, whether one chooses to acknowledge it or not.

On the other hand, perhaps the reason the buggy is considered too frail is because it has been hitched to too heavy a horse, as the next line of the poem specifies. This leads to the horse appearing, as Gwynn points out, "pointedly monstrous" (225). This quality of

monstrosity makes it a suitable cosmogonic sacrifice: though, as mentioned, the dragon is standard, Frazer often refers to the slain creature simply as the "monster" (4: 111), since in some cultures the myth is formed around large, monstrous animals of some other species.

The last line of this scene-setting stanza, where the nature of the grove is established, contains a number of important signals. Declaring the grove to be "limitless" ties into the aforementioned fact that the setting of this ritual is irrelevant. Frost is essentially rejecting any attempts to locate this narrative in time and space, since there is no such place as a "limitless grove" (4) anywhere on Earth.[27] Thus, the use of the adjective *limitless* laconically separates this narrative from mortal, terrestrial experience entirely, placing us in the realm of myth and legend. In a related vein, Frost's use of the word *grove* is unusual. A grove, as Logan says, is usually quite small: "Woods can be large, forests immense; but you can usually see from one side of a grove to the other" ("Frost's Horse" 14). This is borne out by the official definition, "a small wood" ("Grove", *OED Online*), hinting that a *limitless grove* is even more of a contradiction than a *limitless forest*, enhancing the effect of the word. In addition, "sacred grove" is the phrase that Frazer uses when describing the home of the King of the Wood (1: 2), a usage also supported by the OED, which is sure to explicitly note that "Groves were commonly planted by heathen peoples in honour of deities to serve as places of worship or for the reception of images" ("Grove", *OED Online*).

The description of the grove as "pitch-dark" is congruent with the cosmogonic interpretation. A creation myth should, traditionally speaking, begin with darkness and

[27] For the simple reason that, in the world as we know it, all locations are bound by some sort of geographical constriction. William Logan makes a similar observation: "Part of this nightmare is that the grove is *limitless* . . . this half-real grove is half unreal" ("Frost's Horse" 14).

chaos, in some primordial void. Moreover, the apparent total lack of light makes the darkness appear to be not only a nod towards a pre-creation milieu, but a depiction of the void that is described in the very portion of Genesis that Frazer identified as an adaptation of the myth of Marduk and Tiamat: "The earth was without form and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep; and the Spirit of God was moving over the face of the waters" (*RSV*, Gen 1:2).

The connection initially seems tenuous, but the first few verses of Genesis 1[28] and the first few stanzas of "The Draft Horse" have a number of similarities; upon examination, it appears likely that some of Frost's stylistic choices were influenced by, even modeled on, the language in the beginning of Genesis. The relevant stanza is as follows:

> And a man came out of the trees
> And took our horse by the head
> And reaching back to his ribs
> Deliberately stabbed him dead. ("Draft Horse" 5-8)

The second stanza's repetition of the word *and* is startlingly similar to the Biblical description of the creation:[29]

> *And* God said, 'Let there be light'; *and* there was light. *And* God saw that the light was good; *and* God separated the light from the darkness. God called the light Day, *and* the darkness he called night. *And* there was evening *and* there was morning, one day. (*RSV,* Gen 3-5, emphasis mine)

[28] i.e., the part of Genesis that is a retelling of Marduk's slaughter of the dragon Tiamat.
[29] As William Logan describes it in "Frost's Horse, Wilbur's Ride": "Frost piles up his matter-of-fact *And*'s — what might seem like Biblical anaphora reads like blackboard addition (a more theatrical storyteller would have started with *Then*)" ("Frost's Horse" 14). Logan does not pursue the comparison to Biblical anaphora, but it would appear that this initial comparison is the one that Frost intended.

Frost's *and*s are used to describe the actual slaying of the horse, which, in a cosmogonic sacrifice, is the act of creation, just as God's declaration of "let there be light" is the act of creation *ex nihilo*.

Turning to the fact that the man "came out of the trees": Frost could just as well have said he *stepped* out of the trees, or *sprang* out of the trees, or even *fell* out of the trees, or any number of single-syllable descriptors of motion. However, saying merely that he "came" out of the trees has some effect on the sense of the line. First of all, by not describing the manner of the man's motion, Frost allows readers more latitude in picturing the event themselves; the same effect is provided by simply calling him "a man," and, for that matter, simply saying "trees" rather than giving a species. This is the kind of decision that makes this poem feel universal:[30] unnecessary details are not provided, allowing the reader to fill them in with whatever carries the most power for them. In addition, saying that the man "came out of the trees," while it ostensibly sounds like a description of action, might also provide for an origin story. This man comes from the natural world, but is now out of it, a situation reminiscent of the history of the human species; in the distant past, man's ancestors did indeed come out of the trees when they began to remake the world for themselves.

The third stanza depicts the actual death of the horse:

> The ponderous beast went down
>
> With a crack of a broken shaft.
>
> And the night drew through the trees
>
> In one long invidious draft. ("Draft Horse" 9-12)

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[30] This is also unusual for Frost, whose poetry often depicts specific scenery and names particular species of flora and fauna.

Gwynn identifies line 11 of "The Draft Horse," where the night is described as arriving "through the trees," as one that "cannot adequately be paraphrased" (Gwynn 223). This line has been explained in the past as being an identification of the wind with night itself,[31] to give it a more sinister air, or as a description of the darkness becoming still darker,[32] but a strictly literal interpretation of the line fits with the cosmogonic scene. There was previously, at the beginning of the poem, no night, only darkness; after the King of the Wood slays the draft horse, the night arrives. In the pre-creation void, night has not yet come to be, because day has not yet come to be; night is defined only when the darkness and the light are "separated" (*RSV*, Gen 1: 4), and the opposition of night and day is created. The *night* draws through the trees at this point in "The Draft Horse" because it is only now, when God / Marduk / the King of the Wood has begun the process of dividing the waters / the carcass of Tiamat / Virbius embodied in a horse, that "the darkness" has been "called Night" (*RSV,* Gen 1: 5).

Curiously, though, none of this reaches the pair in the buggy. They are described as

> The most unquestioning pair
>
> That ever accepted fate
>
> And the least disposed to ascribe
>
> Any more than we had to to hate ("Draft Horse" 13-16)

Indeed, they ask no questions, and calmly submit to this unexplained authority, assuming it's all for the best. However, the problem with trying to explain this part of the poem is

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[31] "The couple are left alone with the night wind blowing through the trees 'in one long invidious draft'" (Tomlinson 29).

[32] "If the night approaches only now, the grove must have been dark as a grave by evening" (Logan, "Frost's Horse" 15).

that we have no idea who the pair are. In the cosmogonic interpretation, Pack's suggestion that they are "like Adam and Eve envisioned late in the world's history" (145) appears plausible. On the other hand, one could start from the fact that Frazer opened *The Golden Bough* with a quotation from Macaulay's poem *The Battle of Lake Regillus*, which is about the divine intervention of the Dioskouroi and, from that, claim that the pair in this Frazer-inspired poem are Castor and Pollux[33] themselves. One could work from the description of the horse as "heavy" ("Draft Horse" 3) and, through the etymological connection with the word "gravid",[34] suggest that this is the scene of a violent birth. This interpretation could identify the pair as the twin children of the Celtic horse-goddess Macha, who died in birth "uttering a curse on the Ulstermen" (Puhvel 166) who killed her. Or, perhaps, they are none of these, or a composite of all of them, and are meant to represent the first people of a new creation myth, which can be applied to America just as, above, the implications of the cosmogonic interpretation were applied.

It seems most likely, however, that their specific identity is not only uncertain but irrelevant and would serve only to confuse the matter; the important part is their reaction to the slaying of their horse before them:

> We assumed that the man himself
>
> Or someone he had to obey
>
> Wanted us to get down
>
> And walk the rest of the way. ("Draft Horse" 17-20)

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[33] The Dioskouroi, somewhat better known in modern times as Castor and Pollux, were the Greco-Roman incarnation of a common mythological motif — twin horse-gods. To quote Walter Burkert's *Greek Religion*: "Two of the most memorable figures in Greek mythology are the divine twins Castor and Polydeuces (Pollux in Latin), the brothers of Helen, the youths of Zeus *Dios kouroi*. The worship of the Dioskouroui clearly derives from the Indo-European heritage, as is shown above all by the parallel of the shining, horse-owning brothers, *Asvin*, in Vedic mythology" (212). In addition, Homer's *Odyssey* mentions "Castor and Polydeuces . . . / Both of whom the grain-giving earth holds alive" (Homer 11.300-1).

[34] "Gravid" is a Latinate borrowing, originating from "gravis," meaning "heavy" ("Gravid", *OED Online*).

First of all, we note that they know nothing of the reasons behind what has just occurred: they only "make what may be called a creative *assumption*" (Pack 148). This hints at what Frazer mentions in *The Golden Bough*: the tendency of a people who do not know the origin of their culture's rituals to invent a myth that explains them. There is no guarantee that the pair are correct in their interpretation; the explanation they present reveals much more about them than the event they are explaining.

The most prominent feature of the explanation the pair provides is that they assume the ritual they have witnessed is all about them. They took no part in it except as observers, and the priest did not so much as acknowledge their presence. From their perspective, however, they are the focus of the events before them. The horse was slain because someone wanted *them* to get down, not because they wanted anything related to the horse. One also notes that the message they decide to take from this is all about relying upon themselves, without the assistance of the horse or of other external forces. In the last line, the pair acknowledges that something about the nature of the place through which they are travelling has changed: in the first stanza it was "limitless," but now they can "walk the rest of the way." If there is a *rest of the way*, then the journey is no longer infinite, but finite. At the beginning of "The Draft Horse", they traveled through dark and unending chaos, but now they have a destination. This would seem to be because the poem is cosmogonic in nature: there was, before the horse was slain, no place for them to go, but now a world exists, and they are on their way there. However, though they previously noted that the grove was limitless, and now they note the existence of a destination to which they can travel, they seem to take nothing from this fact, refusing to acknowledge that this change has occurred.

To sum up, it would appear that "The Draft Horse" is a creation myth, which Frost was inspired to craft after his reading of Frazer's *The Golden Bough*. The event shown is the King of the Wood sacrificing the corn-god Virbius and creating a world out of his remains. The pair benefit from this but do not question it or recognize the import of what has happened.

CHAPTER III

IMPLICATIONS: AN AMERICAN SACRIFICE

Identifying the plot that "The Draft Horse" follows is, after all, only the first step. The next step concerns the question: what might Frazer's explanation of an ancient equine sacrifice mean to Frost? Frazer hands us two pieces of information that are crucial to the interpretation of Frost's intentions here. First, Virbius was not merely Diana's lover; he was a deity of vegetation in his own right, a "nature-god of similar character" linked to her (Frazer 1: 35), and, given his association with the horse, it is likely that he was specifically linked with corn.[35] Second, part of the remaking of the world in this ancient cosmogonic sacrifice was the replacement of the king,[36] and for this reason, the animal sacrificed was often "the sacred animal or totem of the royal house" (Frazer 4: 111).

With this set of data, we can see why the sacrifice of a horse to Virbius would resonate with Frost, who apparently took some satisfaction in being known as a "homespun New England farmer-poet" (Simonson 141). The ritual sacrifice of this horse has become, in a way that could not have been anticipated by the ancients and was undoubtedly accidental on the part of the people of the time during which Frost composed "The Draft Horse," a very American act. Corn has become linked with America through linguistic development, and the idea of a horse representing the king has

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[35] " . . . spirits of the corn are not infrequently represented in the form of horses . . ." (Frazer 8: 40); "In both the Roman and the African custom the animal [i.e., the horse] apparently stands for the corn-spirit . . ." (Frazer 8: 43).

[36] " . . . the fatal part of the dragon might be assigned to the monarch as the representative of the old order, the old year, or the old cycle which was passing away, while the part of the victorious god or hero might be supported by his successor and executioner" (Frazer 4: 111).

some interesting implications when the traditional symbolism of horses is juxtaposed with the American ideals of government.

To Frazer, and certainly to the ancient Romans, *corn* could be used to refer to any sort of cereal crop or to any variety of grain. When they spoke of Virbius as a god of the corn, therefore, they were not restricting him to a particular species and, therefore, not to a particular region. However, to Frost, and to American audiences in general, *corn* referred to a more specific crop, that which is also referred to as *maize*[37]. Maize is a plant native to America, cultivated there long before the arrival of the Europeans. So, to Frost, a god of the corn would be linked to America. While he was doubtless aware that Virbius had no connection to this indigenous American grain, the fact that Frost was raised in America and spoke an American dialect meant, inescapably, that to him, *corn* was *maize*. In this way, we can see the sacrifice of a corn-god as an American sacrifice through and through.

A central concept in many ancient cultures, going back all the way to the Proto-Indo-Europeans several millennia ago, was the division of society into three roles, or functions: the priests/kings, the warriors, and the herders/cultivators. This scheme survived in many cultures, as J.P. Mallory shows in *In Search of the Indo-Europeans*, including Greece and Rome (131). Even the gods are divided this way, and it is here that we see a notable return to equine symbolism. Mallory notes

> A third estate conceptualizing fertility or sustenance and embracing the herder-cultivators. Here the mythic personages normally take the form of

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[37] According to the Oxford English Dictionary, "Wheat, rye, barley, oats, etc. are in U.S. called collectively *grain. Corn-* in combinations, in American usage, must therefore be understood to mean *maize*, whereas in English usage it may mean any cereal; e.g. a *cornfield* in England is a field of any cereal that is grown in the country, in U.S. one of maize" ("Corn", *OED Online*).

> divine twins, intimately associated with horses, and accompanied by a female figure, for example, the Indic Asvins (horsemen) and Sarasvati, the Greek Castor and Pollux with Helen, the Norse Frey, Freyr and Njörth. (132)

It is difficult to see this connection as a coincidence. There is a long tradition, stretching back to the Proto-Indo-Europeans, of deities that come in pairs, associated with horses and agriculture. "The Draft Horse" contains an unidentified pair, who arrive with a horse which is sacrificed for an agricultural ritual. Since Frost had a substantial knowledge of mythology, it is entirely likely that he was fully conscious of this tradition when he decided that the buggy contained a "pair" ("Draft Horse" 13), of which the constituent members are never identified. This confirms the horse as symbolic of agriculture and, by extension, farmers.

It is not coincidental that Mallory, in the above quotation, refers to the group of "herder-cultivators" as a "third estate," a phrase that should be familiar. One of the legacies of the Proto-Indo-European *three functions* arrangement was France, where the Three Estates survived into the 18th century. The French Revolution, in which the Third Estate rose against the first and second, took its influence from the same philosophical ideals as the American; in fact, it could be said that a democratic government is, by its nature, the Third Estate taking power. It is at this point that we can return to Frazer's observation that an annual cosmogonic sacrifice often involved an animal tied to the kingship. Having that animal be not only a horse, but a draft horse, i.e., one used to pull a plow, is a very democratic, very American move.

It can be seen to make a great deal of sense for a New England farmer-poet to write about the sacrifice of a horse to Virbius. Moreover, we can identify this as an American poem not merely in the sense that it was written by an American citizen, but in that it deals with American themes. To support this assertion, one might also turn to the fact that neither the buggy nor the "Percheron horse" — in an early draft, Frost identified the breed (Logan, "Frost's Horse" 17) — were in use in ancient Rome, but both were common in the America in which Frost grew up.

The message that this appears to be sending about America is not altogether positive. Frost is, at the very least, bringing an ancient tradition that is often considered *savage*[38] to America in this poem. As Frazer explains, the annual cosmogonic sacrifices of this sort were very possibly echoes of a time when the king, considered as having a divine power over the land, was not merely symbolically but literally sacrificed. One recalls Frazer's description of the uncomfortably anachronistic nature of the King of the Wood even in ancient Rome: "No one will deny that such a custom savours of a barbarous age, and, surviving into imperial times, stands out in striking isolation from the polished Italian society of the day, like a primaeval rock rising from a smooth-shaven lawn" (Frazer 1: 10). In a mid-20th-century book of poetry, the effect is still more unsettling, prompting Logan to comment that "this is the Frost who makes readers uncomfortable" ("Other Other Frost"). Frost, we can be sure, knew exactly what he was doing when he decided to unearth that ancient, bloodstained stone and show it to a 20th-century audience.

This strange and ancient barbarism is reinforced by the tie to American agriculture; in ancient Greece, sacrificial ritual often included agricultural products,

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[38] Or, at least, was considered so by Frazer, as quoted earlier.

usually barley-cakes, which concealed the knife before the sacrifice and were hurled at the victim afterwards. It might well have pleased Frost, and resonated with his purpose in writing this poem, to hear Walter Burkert describe this custom as "marking as it were the boundaries of domesticated life from between which death erupts as from an atavistic chasm" (58). "The Draft Horse" is, indeed, a depiction of death erupting from an atavistic chasm, in the form of an agricultural ritual from the darkest reaches of history.

As mentioned earlier, Frost does not specifically set the narrative of "The Draft Horse" in America, but he also does not specifically set it somewhere else: the location is vaguely archaic, mythological, and thus, in a way, universal. By leaving the setting so ambiguous, Frost allows the reader to assume that, like much of Frost's poetry, it is set in America. The actions in this poem were, according to Frost's source material, savage compared to the world of two thousand years ago, and thus still more savage compared to the world of today. Thus, by implication, Frost's audience of 20th-century Americans were complicit in savagery themselves. After all, did they not benefit if the world were remade, the sun rekindled, and the spring's arrival hastened?

It is, of course, unlikely that Frost was suggesting that his audience was benefiting from a literal sacrifice-driven cosmogony, but one does not have far to go to find a way in which Americans could be said to be complicit beneficiaries of a violent reshaping of the world order. Over the lifetime of the nation, as Frost was aware, there were a number of events in which America effected, through violence, a change in the order of the world for its own benefit. In his lecture "Anxiety for the Liberal Arts", Frost made a point along these lines, when he compared nations to phoenixes: "It rises, you know, big from something else, but not derived in the way of birth — rises out of the ashes" (*Anxiety* 34).

As Frost demonstrated in poems like "The Vanishing Red," he was very aware of the fact that the America he knew[39] was built on a foundation of genocide. Destroying one culture in order to build another is, inescapably, an example of remaking the world through a violent, sacrificial act. The link between the extermination of a native people and this sort of cosmogonic sacrifice is strengthened when we consider that, as mentioned before, Virbius was a god of the corn, and to Frost, *corn* meant *maize*. Maize was originally cultivated by the aforementioned native people, but by Frost's day, it was used to feed the descendants of the European conquerors. In this way, the world was remade, and the god of the corn appropriated by the people who would come to call themselves Americans. Moreover, one of the advantages that the Europeans enjoyed when conquering America was their possession of the domesticated horse and related technology. This is a recent incarnation of a long tradition: the Proto-Indo-European culture is thought to have spread so widely precisely because they possessed cavalry and most of their opponents did not. The links that the act depicted in "The Draft Horse" forges between ancient tradition and modern America are difficult to ignore.

It is at this point that we should return once again to the fact that, in the context of ritual, the re-enactment of an event is identical to the event. By depicting a cosmogonic sacrifice, or the re-enactment of same, Frost is, in a real sense, actually *performing* a cosmogonic sacrifice. Though he is not, in a literal sense, slaying a horse in Virbius's shrine, he is re-enacting such a slaying; the fact that the sacrificial animal is a fictional construct and not a physical beast makes no difference to this fact. It is a re-enactment and, therefore, it is the event, albeit in the realm of literature instead of the corporeal world.

[39] And, thus, the America that his readers knew and the America that we know today.

It would be logically consistent, given this principle, to treat the poem as an actual cosmogonic event in itself. Frost is returning to *primitive* ritual in order to not only examine the idea of remaking the world, but to actually remake the world. According to the societies which performed these rituals, the reason the world had to be periodically remade was because it lost fertility and vitality over time, and those qualities had to be renewed. As Frazer explains, "The general explanation . . . of these [sacrifices of the god-king or his representative] and many similar ceremonies is that they are . . . intended to ensure the revival of nature in spring" (4: 266). However, Frost's sacrifice is made on a page rather than in a shrine, and the victim exists only in a line of poetry, so naturally its intended effect would be in the realm of art, not agriculture. Instead of remaking the world in order to renew the fields and grow crops, Frost is remaking it in order to assuage the Modernist fears articulated by Eliot and cause a world to come into being in which it is once again possible to produce art.

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