Katherine Kearns: On "Fire and Ice"

Like ice shrieking across a red-hot griddle, his poetry does, indeed, ride on its own melting. One cannot, and Frost has ensured this absolutely with his unstable irony, make a validated choice between the fire and the ice, or between the language, so insistently mundane, and the potent oversound. Fire and ice are, after all, the inextricable complementarities of one apocalyptic vision: that endlessly regenerative cycle of desire and (self) hatred that necessarily brings the productive poet to scourge his own voice as he mocks both the poetic vocation and the state to which poetry - and if poetry then all language - has come. Frost anticipates modernism's lament and, it may be said, prefigures in his dualism its dubious palliative of self-referential irony. The lyric birds and the weary speakers tell us the genuine Frostian wisdom of achieving a commonsensical accommodation with the fallen world, while inciting at another, and ineffable, level a profound disquiet.