Of all the universal desires of the human heart, there is none more noble or ingrained into our being than the search for a truth that supersedes our finite perception. This desire, this search for the truth, takes center stage in Robert Frost's poem “For Once, then Something.” Frost presents many clear concepts and unmistakable symbols in this poem to not only illustrate the search itself, but also the feelings and obstacles associated with the quest.

Frost begins this poem by highlighting the speaker’s attitude towards some of his fellows. “Others taunt me with having knelt at well-curbs/ Always wrong to the light, so never seeing/ Deeper down in the well...” (Ln 1-3). It seems to irk the speaker that these “others” do not seem interested in looking beyond their reflection in the well. One can almost feel the unspoken words, “There is surely so much more to see!” Regardless of other's attitudes, if we feel the calling of this quest for truth, we must follow it.

Is the speaker correct in assuming that there is more to see in his solitary reflections at the well side? What of the unnamed “others” he speaks of? Is there supposed indifference to his search really that? In Richard Rorty's book *Objectivity, Relativism, and Truth*, it is stated, “There are two principle ways in which reflective human beings try... to gives sense to [their] lives. The first... contribution to their community.... The second... immediate relation to a non-human reality”(23). It seems as if the speaker in Frost's poem follows the secondary mode of searching for meaning. This can be inferred from his attitude towards his unnamed contemporaries and the
solitary nature of his viewings. The “others” can be assumed to follow the first mode, or be indifferent at the time, content in their shared consensus. By searching in the context of a reality not dependent on the shifting views of his community or peers, the speaker seeks something that is timeless and unchanging.

Frost goes on to show us what many others, and indeed himself, would see at their initial viewing. “… in the well… where the water/ Gives me back… Me myself in the summer heaven, godlike…”(24). This quote is reflective of many first perception of life itself. We view ourselves as kings or queens surrounded by a wondrous experience, here to seek and have pleasurable experiences, so never giving a thought that the neon lights, or the fanciful reflections that play across our eyes, might obscure a deeper meaning or reason for our life. It is indeed the morality of our human nature that drives us to reject the pure pursuit of pleasure in a natural maturing of our conscience. Frans de Waal, in a foreword to his edited collection of papers titled, *Evolved Morality: the Biology and Philosophy of Human Conscience*, states, “… morality and evolution were considered largely incompatible… we are now returning to the view that morality requires… an evolutionary explanation…”(137). It is our current scientific understanding that we are made to seek; we are made to rise above the animal pursuit of pleasure alone and examine life.

It is then, in this stillness, or in one of many moments like it, that the speaker catches his first glimpse of a picture in the well that is not a mere play of light. “I discerned… beyond the picture… a something white, uncertain/ Something more of the depths…”(25). The speaker sees something tangible and solid. What is seen is something that does not depend upon the angle it is viewed or the quality of light to take its true form. This object the speaker sees is Truth, and, for the first time, he is viewing it without the reflective surface of his bias.
But, all too quickly, the outside world interferes and shatters the surface of his once calm portal. “Water came to rebuke the too clear water./ One drop fell... Blurred it, blotted it out”(27-29). This drop represents the things outside of our control, things that thrust us once more into the midst of our shifting inner mirrors. Having once seen this truth, even if it was not fully understood, we can be sure that if we look hard enough, we will see it again.

Being that we were made to search, could it be that our reality is made to be understood? In *The Nature and Extent of Divine Inspiration*, Christopher Adolphus Row states,

> “Ancient philosophers indulged in useless speculations... They thought that the deductive powers of the human intellect were adequate to the investigation... Nature obstinately refused to give a response to such a mode of investigation: endless metaphysical jargon was the result, but no great truth was discovered. Our present knowledge of the universe has been attained, not by theorizing what the universe aught to be, but by investigating what it actually is” (2-3).

Row claims that over the course of human history, our knowledge and understanding have come from an investigation of objective reality. The object our speaker saw was not subjective, but objective. It was, and is, there regardless of his ability to see it. He need only find a way to see it again.

Frost's poem is a beautiful metaphorical representation of the inner journey towards truth in a world ready to lead the earnest seeker. It is a journey of balancing what we see and what we feel with a deep inner longing that we can't quite explain. Perhaps it is the mystery of it all, that groping in the darkness for something we can feel, but not see, that will teach us to fully appreciate what we find?
Works Cited


