



eCOMMONS

Loyola University Chicago
Loyola eCommons

Master's Theses

Theses and Dissertations

1958

Human Love and Struggle in the Poetry of Robert Frost

John T. Trahey
Loyola University Chicago

Follow this and additional works at: https://ecommons.luc.edu/luc_theses

 Part of the [English Language and Literature Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Trahey, John T., "Human Love and Struggle in the Poetry of Robert Frost" (1958). *Master's Theses*. 1716.
https://ecommons.luc.edu/luc_theses/1716

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Theses and Dissertations at Loyola eCommons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Master's Theses by an authorized administrator of Loyola eCommons. For more information, please contact ecommons@luc.edu.



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 License](#).
Copyright © 1958 John T. Trahey

HUMAN LOVE AND STRUGGLE IN THE
POETRY OF ROBERT FROST

by

John Thomas Trahey, S.J.

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School
of Loyola University in Partial Fulfilment of
the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts

June

1958

LIFE

John Thomas Trahey, S.J. was born in Chicago, Illinois, July 27, 1933.

He graduated from St. Leo's Grammar School, Chicago, Illinois, June, 1947, and from St. Ignatius High School, Chicago, June, 1951. Then, he entered Milford Novitiate of the Society of Jesus in Milford, Ohio. During his four years at Milford, 1951-1955, he was enrolled in the liberal arts program of the Milford division of Xavier University, Cincinnati, Ohio. In 1955, he entered the Jesuit Philosophate at West Baden College, West Baden Springs, Indiana. Since West Baden is affiliated with Loyola University, Chicago, Illinois, he graduated from Loyola in 1956 with the degree of Bachelor of Arts. He began his graduate studies at Loyola University in the summer of 1956.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
 I. INTRODUCTION	
A. Frost's complexity.....	1
B. Recurrent themes.....	5
C. A possible key to the poet's message.....	7
D. Procedure.....	8
 II. HUMAN STRUGGLE IN THE POETRY OF ROBERT FROST	
A. Frost's faith in human dignity.....	12
B. Man's superiority to animals and nature.....	12
C. Nature's opposition to man.....	16
D. Symbols of opposition.....	18
E. The nature of individual struggle.....	20
1. The individual.....	21
2. Struggle as change.....	22
3. Failures in the struggle.....	24
F. Man's adversaries in the struggle.....	26
1. Struggle with other men.....	27
a. Their persuasion to evil.....	27
b. Their science.....	28
c. Their philosophy.....	30
d. Their religion.....	31
2. Struggle within.....	32
a. Necessity for solitude.....	33
b. Doubt.....	34
c. Independence and self-reliance.....	35
G. The value of the struggle.....	36
1. God's part in life.....	38
2. Emphasis on the here and now.....	39
H. Symbols of the struggle.....	40
I. Frost's development.....	42
 III. HUMAN LOVE IN THE POETRY OF ROBERT FROST	
A. The relation of love to struggle.....	45
B. The meaning of love.....	47
C. The necessity of love.....	48
D. Conjugal love.....	49
E. Love for children.....	57
F. Love for mother.....	58

G. Love for God.....	59
H. Love for others.....	60
I. Frost's way of saying it.....	61
J. Life without love.....	66
K. Love as the better half of the theme.....	68
 IV. HUMAN LOVE AND STRUGGLE IN ROBERT FROST'S "STOPPING BY WOODS ON A SNOWY EVENING"	
A. The ordinary explication.....	70
B. The poem in the light of love and struggle.....	75
C. The possible implied meanings.....	81
 V. HUMAN LOVE AND STRUGGLE IN ROBERT FROST'S "MENDING WALL"	
A. An explanation of the poet's experience.....	83
B. Symbolic meaning through love and struggle.....	86
C. Other possible, but less probable, interpretations....	88
 VI. SUMMARY	
A. The problem.....	94
B. Human struggle.....	94
C. Human love.....	96
D. "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening".....	97
E. "Mending Wall".....	97
F. The Thesis' value to the reader of Frost.....	98
 BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	99

CHAPTER I

AN INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this thesis is to study one of the basic themes in the poetry of Robert Frost. The theme is expressed by Robert Frost's reflections on human love and on life's struggle. Once clearly understood, this love-struggle concept sheds new light on Frost's poetry and richly rewards the careful reader of his poems. The present thesis proposes to analyze this theme according to the following method: first, Frost's concept of human struggle will be studied; second, his concept of human love; third, how an analysis of these two complementary concepts in his poetry affords a deeper appreciation of two of Frost's poems, "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening" and "Mending Wall."

The reason for examining this love-struggle theme, instead of some other basic theme, is that Frost is not a simple poet. Even though some critics have accused him of simplicity, the more common accusation is that he writes overly complex and unintelligibly ambiguous poetry. This accusation is made by those whom Frost calls "the people who analyze poems."¹ Complexity, however, is not a fault. One friendly critic, Donald A. Stauffer, instances

¹Robert Lee Frost, quoted by George Adams and Frank Neelon, "Robert Frost: Poet for a Jubilee," The Boston College Stylus, LXX (May 1957), 53.

two lines of Frost's poem "Sceptic" as an example of the way a great poet condenses much meaning into few words. The lines read, "I don't believe what makes you red in the face/ Is after explosion going away so fast."²

Stauffer says in praise of these lines, "To put into two lines a whole astronomical theory of the present state of the universe, including the supporting data dependent upon the wave-lengths of light, and then . . . denying the theory, is perhaps as much metaphysical complexity as is good for half of any quatrain. Yet Frost is accused of simplicity."³ Stauffer thinks that the number of astronomical facts that Robert Frost has telescoped into two lines of poetry indicates the power-packed nature of Frost's words. And while density-of-fact is not the only factor that contributes to the complexity of Frost's poetry, it does indicate just how much meaning Frost can inject into his words; it indicates, too, that an appreciation of one of Frost's recurrent themes may be the reader's key to the poet's deeper message. Quite obviously, Frost is not a simple poet -- as the rest of this thesis shall make clear.

If one is going to seek Frost's meaning -- or at least a meaning that could be Frost's -- in his poetry, one might begin by finding out the poet's definition of poetry. In other words, does Frost's own idea of the nature of poetry allow for the communication of the author's complex and deeper

²Frost, Complete Poems of Robert Frost (New York, 1949), p. 549.

³Donald A. Stauffer, "The New Lyrics of Robert Frost," The Atlantic Monthly, CLXXX (October 1947), 115-116.

meanings? Frost believes that good poetry is always a "clarification of life."⁴

From this "definition" it may be inferred: if good poetry is a "clarification of life," Frost's good poetry may well be expected to be as deep as his own understanding of life. The fact is, as Peter Viereck says, that "on first reading, Frost seems easier than he really is." It is also true that "Frost's conventionality of form makes many young poets and readers think his is also a conventionality of meaning. On the contrary, he is one of the most original writers of our time."⁵ The result of the easy-going, chatty, and commonplace tone in Frost's poetry, as Professor James G. Southworth says, is that the poet's clarification of life and his deeper meaning remain hidden from the casual reader. Such a reader either misses the reportorial and philosophical qualities of the poems, or he is puzzled.⁶

"What does Frost mean?" nevertheless, is a frequent question of those who are more than casual readers of his work. Frost so tires of hearing it that he practically refuses to answer it. He says, "Such presumption needs to be twinkled at and baffled. The answer must be, 'If I had wanted you to know, I should have told you in the poem.'"⁷ This statement should not be taken to

⁴Frost, "The Figure a Poem Makes," Complete Poems, p. vi.

⁵Peter Viereck, "Parnassus Divided," The Atlantic Monthly, CLXXXIV (October 1949), 67-68.

⁶James G. Southworth, Some Modern American Poets (Oxford, 1950), pp. 68-69.

⁷Frost, "An Introduction" to Edwin Arlington Robinson's King Jasper (New York, 1935), p. xii.

mean that Frost thinks poetry's meaning should be either ambiguous or lost in a maze of metaphor and adjective. Rather, as Lawrance Thompson points out, Frost says that he admires the type of poetry in which "there is only one way to read each word."⁸ Frost seems to think that he has written his meaning into his poems, and that, since he has written it into them, he should not have to explicate them to his readers.

Therefore, he has refused his editors the right to indicate the change of speakers -- in such poems as "The Death of the Hired Man" -- by names in the left hand margin of the page. According to Frost, the change of speakers is written into the poem. In his lecture of April 11, 1957 at Loyola University in Chicago, he mentioned that he had written a self-mocking tone into "The Road Not Taken" and that he wished more people would notice it without his telling them.⁹ And in saying this, Frost seems to admit that "What does Frost mean?" is not an easy question to answer, even though the meaning is written into each word.

Since Frost has written a deep meaning into his poetry, it is not fair to him to dismiss his writing as simple and elementary. But critics do by-pass Frost for the more sophisticated complexity of Eliot and Pound and Yeats. Randall Jarrell complains about the superficial treatment Frost's

⁸Frost, quoted by Lawrance Thompson, Fire and Ice (New York, 1942), p. 46.

⁹Frost, in a lecture delivered at Loyola University in Chicago on April 11, 1957. The tape-recording used by the author was made by Robert Lefley of Station WFMT in Chicago and was obtained through Arthur McGovern, S.J.

poetry receives. "I am certain that any of the regular ways of looking at Frost's poetry are grotesque simplifications, distortions, falsifications -- coming to know his poetry well ought to be enough, in itself, to dispel any of them, and to make plain the necessity of finding some other way of talking about his work."¹⁰ The thesis will try to provide the "some other way" to Frost's meaning by elaborating his basic theme of human love and struggle.

Randall Jarrell says that his fellow critics neglect Frost because they are afraid of the "real complication" and the real depth of the poet's thought.¹¹ Now, as a clarification of life, Robert Frost's poetry contains a sort of philosophy, a practical attitude to life in which certain themes and ideas recur again and again. Although the critical reader will find that each of Frost's poems is strikingly different, he will also find certain common philosophic denominators or themes running throughout. For example, there is Frost's twinkling and slightly mocking humor; there is his fear of school education -- as Frost remarks, "I'd rather take a degree from a college than an education."¹² There is his distrust of abstract art, poetry, and philosophy. And there is his love of a story, especially a dramatic one, as a means of communication between two people.

And there are even more basic themes which are more helpful in the explication of Frost's deeper symbolic meanings. These themes, as Professor

¹⁰Randall Jarrell, "To the Laodiceans," The Kenyon Review, XIV (Autumn 1952), 536.

¹¹Ibid., pp. 536-537.

¹²Frost, quoted by W. G. Rogers, "Recipe for Frost-ing," The Cincinnati Enquirer, Section 3 (May 19, 1957), 1.

Jarrell remarks, are "rather usual in Frost's best poetry." He mentions one of them as Frost's "recognition of the essential limitations of man, without denial or protest or rhetoric or palliation."¹³ It seems to be because of these basic themes that James Southworth, Randall Jarrell, and Peter Viereck recommend an extensive knowledge of Frost's poetry to the critic who would penetrate it.¹⁴

It seems that the center around which Frost's basic themes usually revolve is man. Randall Jarrell has pointed out the poet's emphasis on the essential limitations of man. William W. Adams has elaborated the thesis that Frost clarifies life in terms of man's struggle to maintain his individual dignity. As he says, Frost "sees man striving to better himself in a world that would drag him down . . . he looks for what many would call the kingdom of heaven within man himself. . . he places hope not in creed, political, social, or religious, but in the simple dignity of man."¹⁵ Frost's constant faith in the dignity of man was noted by Edward Thomas of Boston College in his introduction to Frost's lecture of April 3, 1957. He said, "In an age when all traditions and all truths have been challenged, and at times dismissed, he has continued to assert a confidence in the dignity of man."¹⁶

¹³Jarrell, p. 540.

¹⁴Jarrell, p. 536; Viereck, p. 67; Southworth, p. 81.

¹⁵William W. Adams, "The Concept of Man in Robert Frost," Unpublished Master's Thesis (Loyola University, Chicago, 1954), pp. 64-65.

¹⁶Edward J. Thomas, quoted by George Adams and Frank Neelon, p. 47.

Unfortunately, Adams omits Frost's ideas on human love in his treatment of the poet's concept of man, without an understanding of which, an attempt to penetrate Frost's underlying meanings falls far short of its goal. Adams treats the relation of opposition and struggle which every man has with himself, the battle of man with weather and rocky New England soil; and with other men, the battle of man with those who deny man's dignity. The present thesis will devote the following chapter to man's struggle to maintain his dignity. It will examine, in a later chapter, man's love relationship towards nature and towards other human beings. This love relation is the complement of the poet's struggle relation. Without human love as an essential note, the interpretation of life as "struggle" is an unsatisfactory key to the poet's deeper meanings. Both love and struggle are needed to complete Frost's philosophy of life.

Robert Frost's attitudes of philosophy can be worked out in terms of ideas-often-expressed, because in his poetry, prose, and lectures he frequently expresses his opinions about man. As James G. Southworth says, just "because Mr. Frost does not invariably write in the first person we must not overlook the essentially subjective quality of many outwardly objective poems." The poetry of Frost is a carefully wrought expression of himself, "of his own deeply felt passion."¹⁷ Southworth does not mean that Frost writes about himself, that he is autobiographical in his poetry. Rather, he writes his own

¹⁷Southworth, p. 45.

theories of life into his poetry.

For instance, he manages to express these opinions on life even in his fables, "The Cow in Apple Time" and "Departmental." The cow becomes a symbol of irrationality, which Frost scorns; and the specialized ants become his symbols for modern man's efficient, pigeon-holing, departmentalized inhumanity. From behind these fables Frost criticizes life in a mocking, good-natured way. In his lyrics, his experience stands out as more important than the beauty or fact experienced. For example, in "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening" the subjective element -- the man who stops -- is much more important than the objective woods or evening or snow or horse. Louis Untermeyer observes that while Frost's poems are "superficially reticent" they are actually "profound and personal revelations. Frost has never been 'content to limn a landscape.' He cannot suggest a character or a countryside without informing the subject with his own philosophy."¹⁸

Thus far in this chapter, the general purpose and procedure of this thesis have been sketched. It has been indicated that Frost's complex meaning requires the critical reader to have a key to that meaning. And since Frost's more basic themes about life recur often in his poetry and prose, it is possible to find a good explicatory key. Therefore, the chief burden of the study will be an explanation of the love-struggle concept and the light it sheds on two of Frost's poems. There are, of course, other themes in his

¹⁸Louis G. Untermeyer, ed., Modern American Poetry and Modern British Poetry (New York, 1950), part I, p. 181.

poetry that also might be useful keys, e.g. the poet's sense of humor, or his love of the dramatic. The thesis, however, will concentrate on Frost's attitude to human life which is epitomized in the dignity of human love and struggle.

The two poems that have been chosen for explication have been selected because they admit of very superficial interpretation -- and that is often just what they receive. But in the light of Frost's basic attitudes to man and to life, "Mending Wall" loses its ambiguity and becomes a rather serious expression of one of the poet's theories. And in the same light the critical reader can find deeper meaning in Frost's "simple" lyric, "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening."

A word must be added here about the sources and arrangement of the following chapters. The most important source of this study will, of course, be Robert Frost -- in his essays, both introductory and critical, in his published or tape-recorded speeches, and in his poetry both in oral and written form. It will certainly not be possible to examine all of Frost's writings and poetry. It will, however, be possible to examine enough of them to prove the points made in the thesis. Articles by many students and friends of Frost often quote his conversation, and hence are useful in determining his personal views. And besides these secondary sources there are many other articles of general criticism of Frost, several books which evaluate the poet, one thesis on the poet's philosophy of man, and numerous explications of individual poems. Many of these are listed in the bibliography at the end of the thesis.

The thesis will include, where pertinent, the more important details of the family, professional, and poetic life of Robert Frost. For instance,

it will be necessary to mention the three periods of Frost's development. It will also be necessary, at times, to include some of his personal opinions on poetry, education, science, and religion. These facts will be mentioned where they are helpful to the explanation of Frost's concept of love and struggle.

The second chapter will treat the poet's concept of struggle, while the third chapter will explain his concept of love. This is something of a chronological inversion because Frost's early poetry has more "love" in it than "struggle." On the other hand, his later poetry has more "struggle" in it than "love." Professor Southworth calls Frost's later poetry the product of his "intellectual" period; his earlier poetry the product of his "sensuous" period.¹⁹ But it must be noted immediately that both love and struggle are present in Frost's poetry from the first word on. However, the youthful love element in his early work is rather surprising, since Frost was about thirty-eight years old when he published his first poems.²⁰ This mature age explains the intellectual element present in his earliest work.

One reason for treating the intellectual or struggle element of Frost's attitude to life first is that it is the essential note of the concept. Love may be said to flow from it like a property. Another reason is that the

¹⁹Southworth, pp. 59-61.

²⁰Frost's first volume of poetry, A Boy's Will, was published in England in 1913. Although some of the poems date back to his college days, the few that he saved for this collection show the maturity of an older man. Cf. Louis Untermeyer, p. 179, and James Southworth, p. 74.

love theme is not so obvious; nor is it so easy to treat in logical fashion. It is the natural complement of the struggle concept and needs it as a background before it can mean anything. Finally, love is the more important of the two. As Frost says, love is what saves his poetry as it stands on "the brink of all disaster," i.e., on the verge of cynical pessimism.²¹ The fourth chapter will interpret "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening" with the help of the love and struggle theme. The fifth chapter will be an interpretation of "Mending Wall." And some few conclusions will be drawn in a final summary chapter.

²¹Frost in his lecture at Loyola University, Chicago, April 11, 1957.

CHAPTER II

HUMAN STRUGGLE IN THE POETRY OF ROBERT FROST

This chapter will discuss Robert Frost's philosophic concept of human struggle. Since the poet's theory of struggle is based on his blind faith in the dignity of the human individual, it will be necessary to preface the analysis of struggle with a consideration of Frost's belief in man's value. Man's dignity or value will be shown to be distinct from and superior to the value of animals, inanimate things, and even the brutish tendencies in man himself. While it is true that Frost thinks that this dignity is, in a certain sense, something that man is; nevertheless, it is more true to say that man's dignity is something a man achieves. Therefore, it will be necessary to consider just how man achieves his dignity, in what that dignity consists, and whether dignity-achieved brings happiness in this life and bliss in the future. Since man's dignity is to struggle, it will be helpful to consider both the conditions and adversaries of man's struggle. And finally, there will be a few remarks on the religion, the optimism, and the sceptical agnosticism of this theory.

William W. Adams says that Frost believes in the dignity of the individual, concrete, and particular man. The poet does not seem to have any religious or metaphysical grounds for this belief. It just seems to be a feeling whereby Frost comes to the conclusion that an individual man is, or at least should be, the center of his own universe, of his own interest and study.

Man achieves dignity by winning the struggle with his adversaries: (1) nature, (2) other men, and (3) himself. And in order to win the struggle, man must become an individual by "walling" his own personality away from that of other men. In other words, Frost postulates a sort of existential self-realization as a necessary condition of success in this life. Hence, man must prove his worth, his essential superiority to animals and elements of nature; man must achieve his individual dignity.¹

In order to show man's distinct position in Frost's universe, it will be necessary to point out the essential difference between man and the brute. Because Frost likes to play on this diversity of nature, he brings it up often in his poetry. Here, it will only be necessary to mention a few pertinent examples.

One instance of man's superiority to the brute occurs when Frost calls his neighbor in "Mending Wall" the equivalent of a brute: "an old-stone savage."² Frost's whole point is that a man can think about his father's saying, can weigh its value, and can reject it if it is no longer practical. In a sense, a man who refuses to exercise his individuality by thinking for himself might just as well be a brute. Brutes do not have an intellect. Man does, and he should use it. In "A Considerable Speck" Frost talks about a

¹William W. Adams, "The Concept of Man in Robert Frost," Unpublished Master's Thesis (Loyola University, Chicago, 1954), pp. 2, ii.

²Robert Lee Frost, Complete Poems of Robert Frost (New York, 1949), p. 48.

small black bug, a speck, that is on his writing paper. By a clever personification Frost attributes an intellect to the "poor microscopic item." And then, he remarks in an ironic, comic-serious tone:

I have a mind myself and recognize
Mind when I meet with it in any guise.
No one can know how glad I am to find
On any sheet the least display of mind.³

Frost in "Departmental" makes his own kind of comically-serious condemnations of man's departmentalization. That sort of thing is for inhuman brutes. The ants of the poem are departmentalized in their funeral services for a dead ant, "Our selfless forager Jerry."⁴ The progress of the funeral, from the finding of the body through the bureaucratic order of the Queen given to the formal mortician, is a patent play on human departmentalization. Of course, there is no thinking involved in either human or ant departments. And so for man to departmentalize his life is, in a certain sense, to give up thinking -- to live on the level of the ant is a degradation for man.

In "A Drumlin Woodchuck" Frost tries to teach men their superiority by letting a woodchuck act the way man should. The woodchuck says that he dives "down under the farm" in order to avoid the hunt and war and pestilence, in order to "take occasion to think."⁵ Once again, by comparing man with the

³Ibid., pp. 481-482.

⁴Ibid., pp. 372-373.

⁵Ibid., pp. 365-366.

animal, Frost is preaching that intellectual independence and that self-reliance which are the conditions of man's successful struggle. Woodchucks are not shrewd; nor do they know, abstractly, why they hide; nor do they think. But Frost implies, it would be a good idea for man to go off alone once in a while -- to take occasion to think. The last four lines of "After Apple-Picking" comment directly on the difference between man and woodchuck. A man thinks, worries about, remembers in his sleep all the things he has done during the day. But the woodchuck cannot have anything like thought to disturb his long winter's sleep. In his dreams the apple-picking Frost sees "Magnified apples appear and disappear,/ Stem end and blossom end," and feels in his instep arch the ache and pressure of a ladder round. At the end of the poem he wonders if his sleep is like the woodchuck's "long sleep," or if it is "just some human sleep."⁶ Thus, he points out the difference.

In several other poems Frost displays real sadness at the fact that, because of the brute's lack of intellect, there can be no communication between man and beast. In "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening" the poet quietly notes that his "little horse must think it queer/ To stop without a farmhouse near." The horse is impatient and "gives his harness bells a shake."⁷ The horse knows nothing of the beauty of the scene before him. Frost would like to share the beauty with some mind, but he cannot. In "One More Brevity" Frost takes in a stray dog, calls him "Gus," and pretends that he can "talk dog" to him. In a wonderful little dialogue they converse -- man's mind, so

⁶Ibid., pp. 88-89.

⁷Ibid., p. 275.

imaginative, can do such things. But the man's best friend really cannot talk back.⁸

Just as mind is what distinguishes man from the brute, so mind is what makes man different from nature. Now, to Frost, nature means snow, wind, rain, sunshine, mountains, woods, soil -- or, as he says in "Lucretius versus the Lake Poets," nature is "the Whole Goddam Machinery" and not just Landor's "Pretty Scenery."⁹ But not only is man different from nature, he is also in a certain sense, opposed to it. Frost manifests great love for animals and nature in his poetry. But there is a slight difference in his treatment of each of them. The animal is lovable, but below man; nature is lovable and below man, but sometimes very terribly opposed to man. As will be demonstrated in the next few paragraphs, nature is one of the opponents with which man must struggle in order to maintain his dignity. With regard to these opponents of man, William W. Adams says, Robert Frost "sees man striving to better himself in a world that would drag him down."¹⁰ And it seems that nature is a part of that opposing world, since nature is man's adversary at times.

One example of nature's opposition occurs in the poem "Snow" when Fred and Helen Cole try to dissuade Brother Meserve from trying to make it home

⁸Frost, in a poem not yet publicly printed but one which he reads on Caedmon's record number TC1060, released April 15, 1957.

⁹Frost, Complete Poems, p. 558.

¹⁰Adams, p. 64.

through a terrible winter storm. Before he leaves, Meserve does a little preaching about the storm. When he says that it is the storm that "says I must go on," that it is the storm that "wants me as a war might if it came,"¹¹ it becomes evident that the storm is more than just a mere obstacle in the way of a man's getting home. Earlier Meserve had pointed out that he would rather be a "man fighting it to keep above it" than a "beast that sleeps the sleep under it all." And then he asks, "Shall I [a man] be counted less than they [the beasts] are?"¹²

In an article entitled "Pawky Poet," Time magazine mentions the fact that occasionally in Frost's poetry a snowstorm becomes the symbol of all peril to man.¹³ The use of snow as a symbol of danger and opposition to man is common enough to merit this mention. In "Storm Fear" Frost is lying in bed during a night snowstorm. As the fury of the storm grows he says:

I count our strength,
Two and a child,
.....
And my heart owns a doubt
Whether 'tis in us to arise with day
And save ourselves unaided.¹⁴

In "A Leaf Treader" Frost says that all summer long he has heard the leaves threatening to carry him to death when they fall in the autumn. As he answers

¹¹Frost, Complete Poems, p. 189.

¹²Ibid., p. 188.

¹³Anonymous, "Pawky Poet," Time (October 9, 1950), 81.

¹⁴Frost, Complete Poems, p. 13.

the snow that tries to bury him in the winter, so he answered the leaves that "it was no reason I had to go because they had to go."¹⁵ And in "The Onset" Frost speaks of the falling snow as "death" descending and "winter death" which overtakes a man on a "fated night."¹⁶

It may be noted here that while nature in many forms becomes the adversary of man, still Frost finds great beauty in it. But Frost's love of nature will be treated more fully in the next chapter. Here it might be mentioned, in connection with "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening,"¹⁷ that the downy flakes of snow in this poem become a symbol of all beauty. Thus it may be seen that man has a dual relationship with nature, one of struggle and one of love.

The relationship of struggle has been pointed out in the symbol of snow. The wind and the rain also, on occasion, symbolize all peril. In "Lodged"¹⁸ and in "Tree at My Window"¹⁹ the pelting rain and pushing wind become symbols of peril. It has been suggested in the "Pawky Poet" article²⁰ and by Louis Untermeyer²¹ that Frost's struggle between 1900 and 1911, to wrest

¹⁵Ibid., p. 388.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 278.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 275.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 315.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 318.

²⁰Time (October 9, 1950), 81.

²¹Louis G. Untermeyer, ed., Modern American Poetry and Modern British Poetry (New York, 1950), part I, p. 179.

a living from New England's rocky soil, is in some way responsible for his use of the symbol of peril and opposition. The symbol of opposition is strong in "On a Tree Fallen Across the Road," for Frost makes a big point of denying that the tree, or nature, can

. bar
Our passage to our journey's end for good.

He insists that the tree's

. obstruction is in vain:
We will not be put off the final goal
We have it hidden in us to attain.²²

Time points to the fallen tree in this poem as the poet's symbol for all obstacles.²³

Perhaps one more example will suffice to demonstrate the fact that the poet considers nature as an opposing force in man's life. In the poem, "The Mountain," Frost pictures the mountain in its dual relationship with man: first, as a lovable mother which holds the town protectively in its shadow; second, as a dreadful and mysterious adversary which "takes all the room" and sends "boulders broken off the upper cliff" down on the farm and farmer and town below.²⁴ Even the soil of the mountain becomes something with which man must struggle in order to maintain his human dignity.

²²Frost, Complete Poems, p. 296.

²³Time, (October 9, 1950), 81.

²⁴Frost, Complete Poems, 56-60.

In his thesis, William W. Adams comes to the conclusion that human struggle is individual man's fight for survival with the "forces inside and outside" him, forces that would hold him back from victory.²⁵ One aspect of that struggle, nature's opposition to man, has already been mentioned. There are, however, two other general aspects to that struggle: first, the struggle with self; second, the struggle with other men. Man must struggle with himself in the sense that he must fight his own inability to make a life-decision, as in "The Road Not Taken"; his own reluctance to seek the truth and true meaning of his life, as in "Build Soil"; his own fears of death and failure, as in The Masque of Reason. Man must struggle with other men's philosophy and religion and science and politics insofar as any one of them encroaches on the individual's dignity. After a consideration of what Frost's idea of "individual struggle" means in itself, there will be some paragraphs devoted to the explanation of the struggle (1) with self and (2) with other men.

It is important to note that Frost conceives of the struggle as an individual problem that must be solved by every man himself. The poet puts flesh and blood into his concept of the individual, rather than leaving the term man a bodyless abstraction. He thinks that each and every man is more important to himself than any social and corporate body, or any other individual. In a chapter which he entitles "The Individual," William Adams

²⁵Adams, p. 37-39.

states and proves that the individual's need for self-reliance is a basic tenet in the philosophy of Robert Frost.²⁶

In the poem "Build Soil" the poet makes very clear his idea of individual isolationism. It is a kind of standing other people off, of getting separate, and of resisting the help they offer the individual in his difficulties.²⁷ After all, Frost thinks that each individual man has within himself the most important book he will ever read and know. As he remarks in "Any Size We Please," it is silly for a man to extend both his arms "absolutely parallel/ In infinite appeal" in order to embrace a universe of knowledge, truth and people. The man who does that is "too all out, too much extended." Rather a man should fold his arms about himself and hug "himself for all his universe."²⁸

Frost proposes many important problems in his poetry, but the most important are the problems of man as an individual. Professor James G. Southworth indicates that Frost considers each man's life a necessary and painful struggle, and that Frost considers each man responsible, by reason of his free choice, for his own success or failure in that struggle.²⁹ Man is the

²⁶Ibid., p. 12.

²⁷Frost, Complete Poems, pp. 421-430.

²⁸Ibid., p. 564.

²⁹James G. Southworth, Some Modern American Poets (Oxford, 1950), pp. 55, 58, 62-63.

most important being in the world; therefore, since to struggle successfully is to maintain dignity, man's most important problem is to succeed in the struggle. And so, the individual man's difficulties assume great importance in Frost's mind.

The poet, as an individual, manifests anxiety about his death. Is the struggle here worthwhile for eternity? Is the success achieved in this world really satisfying? What do pain and failure mean? This emphasis on the individual is very evident in "Build Soil" where, among other things, Frost says that if any revolution is coming it will not be a general one -- rather it will be a "one-man revolution."³⁰ This emphasis is the reason for Lawrance Thompson's statement to the effect that "Frost likes his people in individuals."³¹

Now that the word individual has been explained, it will be helpful to mention the philosophical significance of the term struggle. Struggle, if successful, may be called a change for the better even though every man has a certain innate dignity. Now, change can be said to be a kind of Bergsonian or Hegelian absolute in Frost's philosophy. And so, a successful struggle in man is an absolute gain in dignity. That Frost considers change as the absolute in life is evident in "In The Home Stretch" where he says through Joe's wife:

. '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.'³²

³⁰Frost, Complete Poems, p. 429.

³¹Lawrance Thompson, Fire and Ice (New York, 1942), p. 63.

³²Frost, Complete Poems, p. 145.

Adams makes the same point when he says, "Frost can be said to be implicitly in the tradition of vital movement in philosophy that is best exemplified by the system of Heraclitus."³³ Lawrance Thompson also notes the change absolute in Frost's philosophy.³⁴ Struggle means the same as change when applied to man's life.

In "West-Running Brook" Frost goes into a rather philosophical discussion of the law of change in general, and of the law of change as it applies to man's life. He describes existence in this way:

it runs away,

 It flows between us
 To separate us for a panic moment.
 It flows between us, over us, and with us.
 And it is time, strength, tone, light, life, and love—
 And even substance lapsing unsubstantial;
 The universal catract of death
 That spends to nothingness.³⁵

This is the way he states the universal law of change:

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.³⁶

As the poet says in "Choose Something like a Star" what we men need is something "to stay our minds on and be staid."³⁷ And since it is very difficult for

³³Adams, pp. 74-75; what Adams calls Heraclitean in Frost ought, more properly, be called Bergsonian or Hegelian, for perpetual flux is not the only absolute in Frost's philosophy.

³⁴Thompson, p. 194.

³⁵Frost, Complete Poems, pp. 328-329.

³⁶Ibid., p. 329.

³⁷Ibid., p. 575.

Frost to stay his mind on the impermanence of life, he seeks in "West-Running Brook" to find some absolute value for every individual man's life. He uses the symbol of water's backward motion, on striking a rock in its downstream course, to signify man's constant and vital resistance to the drift of things, to signify man's successful struggle.

He says:

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 . . .

.
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.³⁸

Lawrance Thompson and H. T. Webster say that Frost thinks of man's struggle as "the sacred essence of life itself."³⁹

It is most interesting to note what Frost thinks of the man who is unwilling, because of sloth or ignorance or avarice or any other vice or weakness, to struggle to maintain his dignity. In "The Death of the Hired Man" Frost, although deep down he pities poor Silas, has these serious words to say about the man who had "nothing to look backward to with pride, and nothing to look forward to with hope":

³⁸ Ibid., pp. 327-329.

³⁹ Thompson, pp. 186-187; H. T. Webster, "Frost's 'West-Running Brook,'" The Explicator, VIII (February 1950), item 32.

What good is he? Who else will harbor him
 At his age for the little he can do?
 What help he is there's no depending on.
 Off he goes always when I need him most.

.....
 I'm done.⁴⁰

Silas had somehow misused his life; he had failed to maintain his dignity. The same is true for the "old-stone savage" in "Mending Wall," for, as Frost says:

He moves in darkness as it seems to me,
 Not of woods only and the shade of trees.⁴¹
 He will not go behind his father's saying.

In the poem, "Two Tramps in Mud Time" the poet shows that he has no use for the "two hulking tramps" who come out of the woods "from sleeping God knows where last night."⁴² Charles Kaplan notes that Frost condemns these men because they "live without a regulated principle of self-control."⁴³ In other words, their lives really don't mean too much to them; their lives are not to them, as Frost's life is to him, opportunities to prove their own dignity and value.

So too, in "A Roadside Stand," Frost shows that he has no use for the avaricious man who tries to make "easy money" by going into the roadside stand business. That kind of country businessman just tries to exploit the innocent city traveler in order to get all the comforts money can buy. The poet remarks

⁴⁰Frost, Complete Poems, pp. 49-55.

⁴¹Ibid., p. 48.

⁴²Ibid., p. 358.

⁴³Charles Kaplan, "Frost's 'Two Tramps in Mud Time,'" The Explicator, XII (June 1954), item 51.

cryptically that these comforts "are calculated to soothe them [the businessmen] out of their wits."⁴⁴ Men like that give up their struggle.

What Frost does admire, though, is the rugged individual who likes to, can and does live up to the requirements of his own struggle. For example, the man in the poem "The Figure in the Doorway" had provided himself with his own oaks for heat and light, his own well for water, and his own garden, pigs, and hens for food. This is the way to suffice unto one's self and to win the struggle for personal dignity. This man lived and struggled his way alone and "the miles and miles he lived from anywhere/ Were evidently something he could bear."⁴⁵

Thus far in the thesis, the concept of man's superiority to animals and all nature has been explained. Then, the three major adversaries to man's dignity or superiority were mentioned: (1) nature, (2) other men, (3) the man himself. Nature's attempt to conquer man, and thus to drag him down, has been treated at length. And, the necessity for and the nature of individual struggle has been outlined. Now, in the following paragraphs, we will consider the struggle which each man must carry on with other men who try to drag him down. After that, the struggle which man must carry on with the downward-dragging forces within himself will be treated. And finally, the questions of God, success in this life, and eternal victory will require some analysis.

⁴⁴Frost, Complete Poems, p. 370.

⁴⁵Ibid., p. 378.

The struggle against other men may be called the attempt of each individual to live according to his dignity and his convictions. Philosophers, scientists, religious fanatics, and the seductive advocates of unworthy actions actually do try to lead man to a life below his dignity. Frost believes in the dignity of man and refuses to let other men talk him out of this faith, no matter what proofs they offer for man's worthlessness. The poet seems to think that many people in this country are not convinced of their own value. In "To the Right Person" he blames this lack of conviction on Americans' failure to meditate. In other words, they do not think their lives through as intellectual beings should. Americans have given up thinking in order to go to school, in order to depend upon a teacher for their convictions instead of on themselves.⁴⁶

The poem "The Subverted Flower" is an instance of what Frost thinks of men who try to lead others into sexual sins. In the poem an adolescent boy tries to lead an adolescent girl into fornication. It is interesting to note that Frost keeps referring to the boy as if in his sexual habits he were a dog. It is evident that Frost despises this sort of thing as fit only for brutes for he portrays the boy this way: "He . . . cracked his ragged muzzle"; he was like "a tiger at a bone"; his hand is "like a paw"; his nose is a "snout"; and finally she heard "the dog or what it was" obey bestial laws and "bark outright."⁴⁷ The pity of it is that, even though the girl does not consent, she still suffered some loss of personal integrity by contact with this boy

⁴⁶Ibid., p. 572.

⁴⁷Ibid., p. 453-455.

animal.⁴⁸

Although Frost has no metaphysical reason to scoff at any philosophy or science, he does not hesitate to lash out against any political, social, or scientific doctrine that contradicts his belief in the dignity of man. For instance, here is Frost's dismissal of materialistic evolution's glorified-mud concept of man: "I myself get too tired of evolution. I emancipate myself by simply saying that I . . . am not much interested in it."⁴⁹ In "Sitting by a Bush in Broad Sunlight" he speaks ironically of evolution and this time of its basic theory of life-from-non-life:

And if men have watched a long time
And never seen sun-smitten slime
Again come to life and crawl off,
We must not be too ready to scoff.⁵⁰

Likewise, Frost has no use for the scientific theory of mechanism, simply because it takes away man's essential dignity his intellect and his individuality. Mechanism denies the basis for anything like a struggle philosophy of life. Therefore, Frost attacks it. And he fights with the only weapon he can -- an unscientific but nevertheless lethal reduction to absurdity:

Somebody said to me a little while ago, "It is easy enough
for me to think of the universe as a machine, as a mechanism."
I said, "You mean the universe is like a machine."
He said, "No, I think it is one Well, it is like"

⁴⁸Donald B. Stauffer, "Frost's 'The Subverted Flower,'" The Explicator, XV (March 1957), item 38.

⁴⁹Frost, quoted in Thompson, p. 166.

⁵⁰Frost, Complete Poems, p. 342.

"I think you mean the universe is like a machine."

"All right. Let it go at that."

I asked him, "Did you ever see a machine without a pedal for the foot, or a lever for the hand, or a button for the finger?"

He said, "No, no."

I said, "All right. Is the universe like that?"

And he said, "No. I mean it is like a machine, only. . ."

". . . it is different from a machine," I said.⁵¹

And Frost has just as much contempt for the scientific dogma that man is worth the dollar's worth of chemicals in him, and nothing more. Science, during Frost's lifetime, has tried to awe man into a conviction of his own nothingness by its astronomical exploration of the vastly more immense universe. Frost notes this attack on his dignity in "Desert Places." But he is not disturbed in his belief in man, for he says,

They cannot scare me with their empty spaces
Between stars--on stars where no human race is.
I have it in me so much nearer home
To scare myself with my own desert places.⁵²

Because Frost has worked out his own poetic, practical, existentialist solution to life's meaning, he is sceptical about the factual explanation of science, the theoretical explanation of philosophy, and the spiritual explanation of religion. He mocks science's vain search for a statistical answer in "The Bear." He portrays the bear running back and forth from telescope to microscope only, in the end, to arrive at pathetic doubt.⁵³ And as

⁵¹Frost, "Education by Poetry: A Meditative Monologue," Amherst Graduates Quarterly, XX (February 1931), 16.

⁵²Frost, Complete Poems, p. 386.

⁵³Ibid., pp. 347-348.

Southworth indicates, Frost insists on the immediacy of life; he will not be satisfied to live by doubt in the here and now.⁵⁴

The philosophic explanation of life is too rational for Frost. Southworth emphasizes the fact that the poet's theory of life is based on experience. "The answers to the questions Mr. Frost has asked over the years brings him the calm acceptance of life for which he has striven. Society may not have been able to think things out, but he has. He has found out . . . that 'the discipline man needed most/ Was to learn his submission to unreason.'"⁵⁵ Philosophic jargon galls Frost for he says in his play The Masque of Reason:

. when there's so much pretense
Of metaphysical profundity
The obscurity's a fraud to cover nothing.⁵⁶

In "The Bear" he explicitly includes Aristotle and another Greek philosopher in his ridicule of scientists-turned-philosophers.⁵⁷ Frost's conclusion in The Masque of Reason is that uncertainty is man's lot on the speculative level, that man just cannot figure life into a formula, and that man can know enough reality to act on without formal philosophy. He adds that when philosophy and science know all that they can know and progress has progressed as far as it can progress, man will find this world just as hard a

⁵⁴Southworth, p. 61.

⁵⁵Ibid., pp. 64-65, italics added.

⁵⁶Frost, Complete Poems, p. 598.

⁵⁷Ibid., pp. 347-348.

place in which to save his soul.⁵⁸

Nor is Frost satisfied with the traditional religious explanation of life. In his one-act play, The Masque of Reason, he modernizes the Old Testament classic drama of evil, the suffering of Job. He makes it a drama of questions. Job keeps pressing God for an answer to the unanswerable question, "Why do You permit or even cause evil to Your friends?" In reference to this play Southworth remarks, "Mr. Frost found no easy answer to his questions."⁵⁹ After God has given the traditional answer for suffering -- a permitted trial, Job asks "Why did You hurt me so? I am reduced to asking flatly for the reason-outright."⁶⁰ Frost makes God answer:

[God] I was just showing off to the Devil, Job,

 Do you mind?

[Job] No. No, I musn't.
 'Twas human of You. I expected more
 Than I could understand and what I get
 Is almost less than I can understand.⁶¹

In The Masque of Mercy Frost speaks just as disrespectfully about God's mercy and justice, "His mercy-justice contradiction."⁶² God's merciful justice and God's permission of evil have been difficult problems for all people

⁵⁸Ibid., pp. 599-600.

⁵⁹Southworth, p. 64.

⁶⁰Frost, Complete Poems, p. 598.

⁶¹Ibid., p. 600.

⁶²Ibid., p. 615.

of all times. The ultimate solution must and can only be a solution of faith, not one of reason. Thus, in reference to the problem of evil in Job, Father John McKenzie says:

The poet is not trying to make the mystery of evil unintelligible; one must confess the limits of one's reason, and commit oneself to faith in a God who is great enough, wise enough, just enough, powerful enough to administer a world which exhibits such flagrant disorder. There is no other principle of stability in which the mind can find repose. We have no answer to the problem; the consoling truth which the speeches of the Lord communicate is that we do not need to have an answer, if we have faith in the wisdom of God, in His power and will for good.⁶³

It is just such a faith that Frost seems to lack, even though he retains an agnostic type of belief in a Supreme Being.

Important as the outward struggles (1) with nature and (2) with other men are, the inward struggle-with-self is of greater moment because it is the most intense element in the individual's life. There is an inner anxiety for truth, for life's meaning; an inner battle between reason and emotion, between the desire to lead a reasonably ordered life and the slothful tendency to go with the drift of things; an inner need to meditate in order to find the answer to life and to live according to that answer.

Frost has the deep conviction that, even though this world is almost too confusing to live in, the intelligent man must find a meaning for his life.

⁶³John L. McKenzie, S.J., The Two-Edged Sword, (Milwaukee, 1956), p. 237.

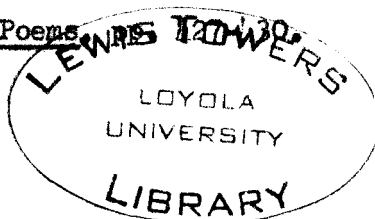
He says, "I think what I'm after is free meditation. I don't think anybody gets to it when he's in anybody's company; only when his soul is alone."⁶⁴ In other words, a man must figure out and live his own life; and in order to do the necessary thinking a man must separate himself from other men and take time to think. In farming, this process is called "building soil." The farmer leaves a field alone for a year or two in order to let the soil rebuild its fertility. Hence the title of Frost's poem "Build Soil." But the poet is talking about building the soul's soil by self-restraint, by staying away from others, by not joining gangs, by going home from company -- in order to come to one's senses.⁶⁵

It is when Frost is alone that he criticizes religion and science for belittling man -- one compares man to God, the other compares him to space. It is in the profound and lonely silence of the woods that Frost perceives the beauty of nature. His love of natural beauty is well put in "Hyla Brook," "We love the things we love for what they are."⁶⁶ When he is alone in "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening," he delays to enjoy a wood filling up with snow. When he has a decision to make (one that will make all the difference, as in "The Road Not Taken"), he is in the profound silence of the woods. Frost, in "Two Tramps in Mud Time," makes a sort of meditation as he swings his axe out in the forest. He believes that too many Americans do not refer all things to their

1. ⁶⁴Frost, "The Manumitted Student," New Student, VI (January 12, 1927),

⁶⁵Frost, Complete Poems, 1930.

⁶⁶Ibid., p. 149.



own lives, do not make a constant endeavor to gather up their personality within themselves.

We're always too much out or too much in.

.....
But inside in is where we've got to get.

My friends all know I'm interpersonal.

But long before I'm interpersonal

Away 'way down inside I'm personal.⁶⁷

It is "inside in" where Frost experiences the agony of the thought of death, the fear of the terrible forces of nature, the unintelligibility of the mercy-justice contradiction. Yet, he cannot live satisfied with his father's sayings like the old-stone savage. As Louis Untermeyer says, "He refuses to be fooled by easy solutions or tricked by slogans."⁶⁸ Joseph Warren Beach, a personal friend of Frost, says that Frost "may not think that the individual man has direct intuitions of divine truth. But he certainly thinks that every man must make up his mind for himself, and that only in this way can a man have strength and quality."⁶⁹

In his early poem "Reluctance" Frost thinks that it is nothing less than treason for love, heart, and emotion "to yield with a grace to reason."⁷⁰ In other words, he thought then that his heart should rule his head. And although the power of love helped the younger Frost to find a meaning in life,

⁶⁷Ibid., p. 425.

⁶⁸Untermeyer, The Road Not Taken: An Introduction to Robert Frost (New York, 1951), p. xxv.

⁶⁹Joseph Warren Beach, "Robert Frost," Yale Review, XLIII (Winter 1954), 211.

⁷⁰Frost, Complete Poems, p. 43.

he gradually changed from an emotional to a more intellectual outlook. As Southworth comments, "The intellectual elements in the poems increase as Mr. Frost approaches and passes fifty."⁷¹ Thus it is that Frost grew in wisdom and insisted more and more on every man's duty to get "inside in," on every man's duty to solve his own problems by his own thinking.

To build up the soil of the soul requires a good deal of stubborn Yankee independence. According to Beach, Frost has the necessary self-reliance: "He is very stubborn indeed in his resistance to the pressures of opinion. He has been able to live his own life, and to be a poet, by virtue of his stubborn power of resistance. He has never been a party man, never followed any school but his own. . . . he is an extreme independent."⁷²

All his life he has been an extreme independent. He early found his own way out of the Puritan religion of New England. At Dartmouth in 1893 he refused to submit to academic pressures and left. Since then, he has stubbornly kept up daily reading of the Latin classic poets. He flouted all his neighbors' farming customs in 1900 by milking his cows at ten o'clock at night so that he could sleep later in the morning. From 1903-1908 he aroused some hostility in the other teachers at the Derry, New Hampshire, school by his peculiar way of teaching Latin, Greek, and English.

As a poet, Frost refused, at the request of a prospective editor in 1908, to change his style to fit into the conventional pattern. And even

⁷¹Southworth, p. 60.

⁷²Beach, p. 205.

though Frost got his first "break" in the poetic world from Ezra Pound and the Imagist school, he does not seem to have been influenced either by Pound or Amy Lowell or T. S. Eliot. Frost never was enthusiastic about Milton's type of poetry and he did not mind telling people about that fact. Frost thinks that Milton does not love the speaking tone of voice. Frost has a deep belief that the speaking tone is more evocative of the imagination than rhetorical devices or just plain logical meaning. Thus, during the 'teens, twenties, and thirties Frost was a lonely poet defending his views against a hostile world.⁷³ This independence has enabled Frost to succeed in his own inner struggle.

The question may be asked: what is the end or goal or victory towards which man must struggle? The answer to this question leads to another question: does Frost believe in God? Despite Frost's manifest scepticism, Beach says that he "has some lingering trace of the old theological notion that there is in the universe besides ourselves some directing power that means well by us."⁷⁴ There are many instances, especially in his later poetry, where he speaks very reverently and trustfully about God. It is in his later poems, out under the stars, that he expresses the hope that he has used his life in such a way as to "prove himself worthy in the sight of God."⁷⁵

⁷³These facts have been gathered from Beach, Time, Untermeyer (both books), and Robert Newdick, "Robert Frost and the Sound of Sense," American Literature, IX (November 1937), 290-300.

⁷⁴Beach, p. 213.

⁷⁵Frost, "An Introduction" to Edwin Arlington Robinson's King Jasper (New York, 1935), p. vi.

In "Innate Helium" he speaks of faith as a sort of "natural uplifter" of man.⁷⁶ And in "Astrometaphysical" he reminds God:

Lord, I have loved your sky,

 Have loved it clear and high,
 Or low and stormy;

Till I have reeled and stumbled
 From looking up too much,
 And fallen and been humbled
 To wear a crutch.

My love for every Heaven

 Should be rewarded.

.
 At least it ought to send
 Me up, not down.⁷⁷

Certainly, Frost's God has nothing to do with man's failure or success in this life. As Frost asserts in "Trial by Existence," each man is responsible for that: "Life has for us on the wrack/ Nothing but what we somehow chose."⁷⁸ He seems to consider God as a Great Power who, as it were, turns the water on in man's stream of life, lets it flow a short time -- from a distance, and will shut it off at the end. While it flows God stays out of the picture. However, God could end it all any time, as Frost says in "Once by the Pacific," by speaking His "last Put Out the Light."⁷⁹

⁷⁶Frost, Complete Poems, p. 541.

⁷⁷Ibid., p. 548.

⁷⁸Ibid., p. 30.

⁷⁹Ibid., p. 314.

But God does have something to do with man's failure or success in the life after death. In The Masque of Mercy Frost hopes and prays that his life may be found acceptable:

[Paul] Our sacrifice, the best we have to offer,
And not our worst nor second best, our best,
Our very best, our lives laid down like Jonah's,
Our lives laid down in war and peace, may not
Be found acceptable in Heaven's sight.
And that they may be is the only prayer
Worth praying. May my sacrifice
Be found acceptable in Heaven's sight.⁸⁰

Notice the doubt about the after-life. It is this agony of doubt about death and "the knowledge beyond the bounds of life"⁸¹ that constitutes a great part of Frost's inner struggle. In "Out, Out—" the tragic death of the boy seems to be the worst possible evil, almost a reduction of the boy to nothing.

Frost has an agnostic belief in and regard for the good life, but meanwhile "the strong are saying nothing until they see."⁸² In "Acceptance" he solves the problems of doubt about death and the future, of pain at the end of a love or of a season by saying, "Let the night be too dark for me to see/ Into the future. Let what will be, be."⁸³

⁸⁰Ibid., pp. 641-642, italics added.

⁸¹Ibid., p. 292.

⁸²Ibid., p. 391.

⁸³Ibid., p. 313.

He transmits the possibility of success in another life to concentrate on a successful struggle in this one. Success means that the individual is keeping up the struggle and asserting his superiority over nature, animals, and other men. The chances are good for success. According to John Holmes, Frost thinks that the "balance of life and death . . . the forces of positive and negative, good and evil, success and failure, whatever one calls them -- are roughly fifty-five for life and forty-five for death."⁸⁴ The sense of victory seems to be like an athlete's pleasure at having exercised a muscle, like the thrill of the comedian who has made others laugh, like the artist's satisfaction in having produced a unit of beauty.

To keep struggling is a serious business, play for mortal stakes that contributes in some way to our Heaven and to our future.⁸⁵ Hence, in "The Onset" Frost indicates that the man who gives up the struggle and "lets death descend/ On him where he is, with nothing done/ To evil, no important triumph won" might as well not have been born.⁸⁶ So too, he has no use for the culpably poor -- who are mere lazy loafers who have never lived up to their dignity as men. He asks why he should be charitable to such cowards.⁸⁷

⁸⁴John Holmes, "Close-up of an American Poet at 75," The New York Times Magazine (March 26, 1950), 12.

⁸⁵Frost, Complete Poems, p. 359.

⁸⁶Ibid., p. 278.

⁸⁷Ibid., p. 496.

However, the here and now victory that man wins is a tasteless, insufficient sort of thing. Man knows he has won. But what does it matter? In "Gathering Leaves" Frost is puzzled by his victory, a useless barn and shed full of leaves that are as light as balloons, have no color, and are of no value. He comforts himself that he has a crop, at least that.⁸⁸ But his victory echoes the emptiness of the "famous victory" of Blenheim. And what if he had struggled to get a crop out of his rocky soil, and had failed because of weather conditions? Frost would say, as Southworth has paraphrased Frost's "An Empty Threat," that if he fails struggling he has at least "achieved more than those who have stumbled blindly and unwittingly into success, into what the poet calls 'life's victories of doubt.'"⁸⁹

The sensuous beauty of a kiss from the beloved or of a touch of a rose petal on the hand may have been enough success for youth. But the mature person, if he is to satisfy his mind and soul, must take his nourishment from sterner stuff. Mere pain will not do, it also needs the struggle. In "To Earthward" Frost says,

The hurt is not enough:
I long for weight and strength
To feel the earth as rough
To all my length.⁹⁰

It is man's dignity to struggle, to raise himself a little. Therefore, Frost

⁸⁸Ibid., p. 290.

⁸⁹Southworth, p. 61.

⁹⁰Frost, Complete Poems, p. 280.

wants man to struggle, to maintain his dignity in a world that would take it away from him. Reginald L. Cook establishes the fact that Frost finds the subject matter of his poetry in the dramatic interaction between the individual and the downward influences and tensions about him, in the struggle between inner and outer worlds.⁹¹

In summary, it ought to be noted that there are certain words and images in Frost that take on a rather definite connotation in view of his concept of human struggle. In an article entitled "Robert Frost and the Dark Woods," J. McBride Dabbs notes that in Frost's poetry "there is one image which, by its character and by the frequency of its appearance, suggests that it has a special personal value. This is the image of a wood."⁹² Southworth agrees that Frost's poems take on "added significance if we remember the symbolism Frost attaches to the wood."⁹³ It must also be noted that in his earlier work his images are drawn largely from the woods. These woods "represent his own inner nature, and his withdrawal into them typifies his examination of himself."⁹⁴

For example, in Frost's first four published collections, all of which were printed before 1929, almost half the poems either take place in the woods or are about the woods. In the first collection, A Boy's Will, the woods

⁹¹Reginald L. Cook, "Frost as Parablist," Accent, X (Autumn 1949), 39.

⁹²J. McBride Dabbs, "Robert Frost and the Dark Woods," Yale Review, XXIII (March 1934), 517.

⁹³Southworth, p. 48.

⁹⁴Ibid., p. 76.

image is especially strong in these poems: "Storm Fear," "In Hardwood Groves," "October," and "Reluctance." In the second, North of Boston, only "The Wood-Pile" and "Good Hours" contain the woods image. But in the third and fourth, Mountain Interval and New Hampshire, it is still predominant -- especially in poems like "The Road Not Taken," "Birches," "The Sound of Trees," "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening," "The Valley's Singing Day," and "On a Tree Fallen Across the Road." As was mentioned earlier in this chapter, the woods is where Frost does his thinking, strengthens his independence, and develops his personality as an individual.

In his middle years, he refers to the woods less frequently. And in his later years the metaphors of the woods have given way to those drawn from the stars, which means that "the poet has turned from the problems of the personal to those of the universal and abstract."⁹⁵ This intellectual emphasis in later years causes him to encourage others to meditation, withdrawal from the activities of life, and self-discipline for the purpose of personal development. It is evident, in poems like "Lost in Heaven," "Desert Places," "Moon Compasses," "Astrometaphysical," "Choose Something Like a Star," that the maturing Frost did much of his thinking under the stars and that he wished to share his wisdom and insight with others.

This emphasis on man's need to think for himself occurs even in poems like "Build Soil," "Why Wait for Science," "From Plane to Plane;" in the plays, The Masque of Reason and The Masque of Mercy; and in Frost's lectures,

⁹⁵Ibid.

articles, and talks, e.g., "The Mammitt Student," "The Poet's Next of Kin in a College," "Education by Poetry: A Meditative Monologue," "Poetry and School," and the talk he gave at Loyola, Chicago, April 11, 1957.

We must conclude this chapter by connecting Frost's "temporary transmittance" of death, of pain, and of future victory with his sincere belief in the victory of the present moment. He ever the sceptic, doubts the traditional answers to the questions of pain and of death. He is especially bitter in the poem "Design" where, according to Randall Jarrell, Frost scoffs at the Thomistic, Darwinian, Positivistic and Lamarckian answers to pain and death. "Accident, chance, statistics, natural selection are helpless to account for such designed terror and heartbreak, such an awful symbolic perversion of the innocent being of the world."⁹⁶ Despite this disconsolate confession of the limitations of reason, the poet has not given up his search for some kind of an answer to life. Thus, because he recognizes the failure of natural philosophy, of physical science, and of Protestant religion to explain life in its relation to pain and death and the future-life, he mocks them. He attacks them with "outer humor" precisely because he seeks the truth with "inner seriousness."⁹⁷

Therefore, as has been detailed in this chapter, Frost preaches his explanation of life in relation to the present moment. If men will struggle

⁹⁶Randall Jarrell, "To the Laodiceans," The Kenyon Review, XIV (Autumn 1952), 543.

⁹⁷Frost, "An Introduction" to King Jasper, p. xiii.

(1) with nature, (2) with other men, (3) with themselves -- in order to live worthy of the dignity which he firmly believes they possess -- then, they will be successes in this life. But if they do not become individuals who think through their own lives for themselves, who keep up the struggle against the forces that would drag them down, they will be the failures of the present moment who might just as well have been born brutes. This is Frost's personal, poetically philosophical answer to the confusion in which man lives.

CHAPTER III

HUMAN LOVE IN THE POETRY OF ROBERT FROST

The intellectual or struggle aspect of Robert Frost's love-struggle concept of human life was abstracted from the emotional or love aspect of the same theme in the previous chapter. The present chapter will attempt to explain the love aspect itself and its relation to the struggle aspect of this basic Frostian insight into life. In his younger days Frost gave the ascendancy to emotion; and in his maturer years he emphasized the rational. But this shift of emphasis does not explain the relationship between the love and struggle which Frost combines as an explanation or clarification of life's meaning. In one sense they are related as contraries; and in another sense they are related as complementaries. As contraries, an intellectual pessimism of struggle faces an emotional optimism of love. As complementaries, the gloomy and tragic tone of Frost's intellectual solution to life is softened by the twinkling but quiet gaiety of his emotional, optimistic answer.

Frost's two contrary attitudes to life, a skeptical mind and an optimistic heart, have been reconciled in what Mark Van Doren calls Frost's "golden mean."¹ Lawrance Thompson analyzes the relationship of mind and heart

¹Mark Van Doren, "The Permanence of Robert Frost," The American Scholar, V (Spring 1936), 195.

as a battle between reason and the irrational for the control of man's conduct.² The question in debate is whether or not love dominates Frost's attitude to life.

Southworth thinks that mind "wins the day" in Frost's later life:

"As Mr. Frost has grown older he has realized that the nature of love alters, that the meaning of life [The intellectual] constantly obtrudes itself, preventing the early satisfaction from moments of pure sensuousness."³ Thompson and Southworth agree that reason does not take over completely in later life. However, Thompson believes that love dominates Frost's attitude throughout his life. There are two reasons why Thompson believes that, even in his later work, "love . . . dominates Frost's attitude toward life."⁴ First from the positive standpoint, Frost thinks that love can always find a meaning in the world around man. On the other hand, from the negative standpoint, he does not think that intellect can always find a meaning, at least a certain and satisfying one. Hence, the theme of love runs through all of Frost's poetry -- as Frost himself says, "All my poems are love poems."⁵

²Lawrance Thompson, Fire and Ice (New York, 1942), p. 183.

³James G. Southworth, Some Modern American Poets (Oxford, 1950), p. 49.

⁴Thompson, p. 184.

⁵Robert Lee Frost, Quoted in Thompson, p. 184.

It seems that even in Frost's intellectual period love dominates his attitude to life. This is evident once the nature of love and the nature of struggle-complemented-by-love have been explained. But, and this is the problem, how can the emotion of love dominate Frost's intellectual period? The problem arises because Frost recognizes a strong element of suffering, pain, and uncertainty in life's struggle. One would expect the poet to give way to the pessimism of his contemporaries, e.g., Thomas Hardy and Edwin Arlington Robinson, in the face of his own rather inadequate and purely rational explanation of life. After all, this explanation is based on an irrational faith in man's dignity and offers man no certitude for the present life, and only doubt for the future life. It is strange, then, to find the poet's latest works full of what Stauffer calls "hope, courage, and love."⁶ The answer to Frost's strange contentedness and optimism seems to lie in the fact that Frost becomes "less sentimental with the years"⁷ and, therefore, does not fill up what is lacking to reason with pure sentiment; and yet another kind of love, a non-sentimental love, does seem to help the poet to keep up the struggle as he grows older.

The question here, of course, is "What is this other kind of love?" Southworth describes every love in Frost's poetry as a "concrete thing" which "has meaning only in concrete terms."⁸ What he means is that love, for Frost,

⁶ Donald A. Stauffer, "The New Lyrics of Robert Frost," The Atlantic Monthly, CLXXX (October 1947), 116.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Southworth, p. 43.

always terminates in someone or something very dear to the one loving. In "Build Soil" Frost puts the same idea this way:

There's only love of men and women, love
Of children, love of friends, of men, of God,
Divine love, human love, parental love.⁹

The non-sentimental love of maturity and age, as Thompson indicates, gives man the courage to go on living worthy of his dignity in this time of tears, pain, and sorrow. In fact, the trials and troubles of life actually "enrich love and at the same time intensify our hunger for it. The increased longing even for the pain of love is closely related to our joy in the bitter-sweet of all human experience."¹⁰ In other words, this "other kind of love" not only can help a man to bear the struggle of life, but also it can make him want to bear it. It is in this way that human love dominates Frost's attitude to life, even in the poet's later years.

The fact that Frost's poetry is full of sadness, woe, and struggle makes it difficult for many to see how either a sentimental or a mature love fits into the picture. To add to this poetic preference for sadness and woe, Frost puzzles his readers and listeners with prose statements like this: "Poetry's place in the world is on the brink of all disaster,"¹¹ or "There is

⁹Frost, Complete Poems of Robert Frost (New York, 1949), p. 423.

¹⁰Thompson, p. 185, italics added.

¹¹Frost, in a lecture given at Loyola University, Chicago, April 11, 1957. Tape recorded by Robert Lefley of station WFMT and obtained through Arthur McGovern, S.J.

solid satisfaction in a sadness that is not just a fishing for ministration and consolation. Give us immedicable woes [In poetry] -- woes that nothing can be done for -- woes flat and final,"¹² or "What I like in poetry is griefs. . . . I should think we might be indulged to the extent of leaving poetry free to go its way in tears."¹³ Only if we understand Frost's conviction -- that the cares of life cannot be born in a balanced and sane manner unless a man has someone to whom to cling, someone with whom to share life¹⁴ -- can we grasp the place of human love in Frost's attitude to life.

Human love in Frost's poetry is more often love of someone than love of something precisely because Frost feels the need of sharing the woe and sadness of life with someone. In his lecture at Loyola Frost elaborates what he means by "love" in the poem "Birches" ("Earth's the right place for love:/ I don't know where it's likely to go better,"¹⁵): "I mean human love, the love between a man and a woman."¹⁶ Love of someone is the only thing that can make the struggle "worth it."

With regard to conjugal love, Southworth says that "Frost not only thinks of companionship and complete congeniality as prime qualities of love,

¹²Frost, "Introduction" to Edwin Arlington Robinson's King Jasper (New York, 1935), p. xv.

¹³Ibid., p. viii.

¹⁴Joseph Warren Beach, "Robert Frost," Yale Review, XLIII (Winter 1954), 216.

¹⁵Frost, Complete Poems, p. 153.

¹⁶Frost, lecture at Loyola.

but that he cannot conceive of love without them."¹⁷ Conjugal love is the complement of struggle because it is the ability of two lovers to share life's griefs, woes, and even joys. Love enables man and woman to believe in and to cling to one another and, therefore, not to fear life.¹⁸

In "All Revelation," one of Frost's latest poems, he reaffirms the power of love to free man from what would drag him from his position of superiority in the world:

Eyes seeking the response of eyes [Love]
 Bring out the stars, bring out the flowers,
 Thus concentrating earth and skies
 So none need be afraid of size.¹⁹

Size, in the above poem, is a symbol for those scientists who would make man insignificant by comparing him to the size of the universe. Therefore, as Frost had already indicated in "Two Look at Two," love is the greatest power man has.²⁰

Mutual giving and sharing is the essential note of true conjugal love; it is a relationship which the poet expresses metaphorically by the words elected friends in these lines quoted by Southworth: "During his sojourn in England, he and his wife found themselves experiencing a miracle of nature.

¹⁷Southworth, p. 47.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 52.

¹⁹Frost, Complete Poems, p. 444.

²⁰Ibid., pp. 282-283.

The moon shining through the air heavy with dew made a rainbow about them that, instead of moving . . . as they moved, closed a circle, while they 'stood in it softly circled round/ From all division time or foe can bring/ In a relation of elected friends.' 'Elected friends' describes their relationship."²¹

In "The Master Speed" Frost tells two young lovers that their mutual giving-and-sharing love will enable them "in the rush of everything to waste," to "have the power of standing still." Thus they will be able to remain what they are, dignified human beings in the face of all opposition. Life cannot part two such lovers once they have agreed that it must be "life forevermore/ Together wing to wing and oar to oar."²² Just as the moon in "Moon Compasses" exalts the everyday reality of the mountain, so love exalts and makes worthwhile the everyday reality of life.²³ Frost, according to Southworth, thinks that conjugal love is the "richest experience possible to man . . . the world opens to him as it is impossible for it otherwise to do. Even his attempts to plumb the meaning of life, as in 'West-Running Brook,' take on a richness and profundity when they can be shared."²⁴ As Frost says, the love of giving and sharing is like a poem: "It begins in delight and ends in wisdom."²⁵ In other

²¹Southworth, p. 51.

²²Frost, Complete Poems, p. 392.

²³Ibid., p. 393.

²⁴Southworth, p. 48.

²⁵Frost, "The Figure a Poem Makes," Complete Poems, p. vi.

words, it begins in sensuous love and it ends in a mature love that makes the everyday struggle meaningful.

Therefore, the intimate relationship between man and wife is not some kind of shell in which man can hide in the face of life's difficulty; nor is it merely a sharing of sorrows. Love of one another permits a man and woman to share their love of things, and especially their love of natural beauty. As Thompson says of the power of love, 'Man's sacred love for one woman may instill in him a love and worship for entirely different manifestations of life.'²⁶ In poems like "The Pasture," "Flower-Gathering," and "Waiting," Frost shows how two lovers give and share their lives and not just their sorrows. He makes no overt statement of love, but nevertheless shows deep passion. Unfortunately, many readers miss the love element in these poems. As Southworth says, "'The Pasture' is frequently misunderstood. It is an unmistakable love poem."²⁷ In the poem Frost implies that the mere presence of the beloved, even at such a task as cleaning the pasture spring, will impregnate the action with joy and meaning.²⁸

The wife in "Flower-Gathering" walks a part of the way to the field with her husband, an action which binds him more closely to her and makes him

²⁶Thompson, p. 186.

²⁷Southworth, p. 46.

²⁸Frost, Complete Poems, p. 1.

more sad to leave her. When he returns in the evening she meets him in a silence that leads the poet to suggest that her love for her husband silences her. The genuine warmth of her greeting is all for him rather than for the flowers which took him away from her side for the ages of a day.²⁹ In "Waiting" Frost is dreamily sitting in the field at dusk, keenly aware of the "opposing lights of the hour." But he is much more aware of the woman who is waiting for his return, the woman "for whom these lines" were written.³⁰

"Revelation" seems to be a key to the difficulty one may experience in trying to find the human love in Frost's poetry. Many mistake his restraint for coldness, his decorum for a lack of passion. But Frost, in "Revelation," says that it is a "pity if the case require . . . [that] we speak the literal to inspire/ The understanding of a friend."³¹ The trouble is that Frost expresses his love in metaphors and symbols that are restrained and ascetic in style, but deep and pregnant in meaning. "The Telephone" is a model of restraint; but, at the same time, "it says far more than could a flood of words."³² By leaning his head against a flower, Frost's symbol for a telephone, the lover thinks that he can hear his loved one say, "Come."³³

²⁹Ibid., p. 18.

³⁰Ibid., p. 20.

³¹Ibid., p. 27.

³²Southworth, p. 48.

³³Frost, Complete Poems, p. 147.

That is the brief word by which Frost communicates the beauty and warmth of his love for Elinor White. It was over twenty years after their marriage in 1895 that he published this poem. But it is as fresh a love poem as if it had been written on their honeymoon.

A very sensitive soul is required to appreciate the love between the men and women in Frost's poems. In The Masque of Mercy there is that same "feeling of love and comradeship" that Beach notes in the couple of "West-Running Brook."³⁴ Many readers miss the intimacy which exists between Frost's married couples because it is not usually the main subject of the poem. Nevertheless, it is a subtle and important element in these poems. For instance, in "The Death of the Hired Man," the love that exists between Warren and Mary is the basis for the dramatic dialogue. And finally, it is because she asks him to be "kind" to poor old Silas that he relents. Only once does Frost become explicit about their beautiful love:

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.³⁵

In "The Pauper Witch of Grafton" Frost describes the strange love that existed between an adulteress and her husband. Yet, here too is that same

³⁴Beach, p. 212.

³⁵Frost, Complete Poems, p. 52.

relationship of elected friends sharing and giving. She says that she bewitched him with "woman signs to man." She made him gather wet snow berries for her. "I made him do it for me in the dark./ And he liked everything I made him do."³⁶ In reference to this poem Randall Jarrell remarks, "I sometimes murmur to myself, in a perverse voice, that there is more sexuality there than in several hothouses full of Dylan Thomas; and, of course there is love, there."³⁷

Despite the sublimity of Frost's concept of love as shared between two living lovers, even greater depth of passion and meaning is found in his later poems of lament at his wife's death in 1938. The whole collection entitled West-Running Brook is full of implied references to his loss, which was her death. There are four poems which express his numbness and pain very well: "Bereft," "Lodged," "A Minor Bird," and "Tree at My Window." A fierce autumn wind in "Bereft" occasions Frost to think,

Something sinister in the tone
Told me my secret must be known:
Word I was in the house alone
Somehow must have gotten abroad.
Word I was in my life alone,
Word I had no one left but God.³⁸

In "Lodged" the poet thinks that he is like the flowers that "lay lodged." "The rain to the wind said, 'You push and I'll pelt.'" When the

³⁶Ibid., p. 255.

³⁷Randall Jarrell, "To the Laodiceans," The Kenyon Review, XIV (Autumn 1952), p. 555.

³⁸Frost, Complete Poems, p. 317.

wind and rain had so smitten the garden bed that the flowers actually knelt, Frost says, "I know how the flowers felt."³⁹ And in "A Minor Bird" his grief makes him want to stop a bird's singing. But he says, "Of course there must be something wrong/ In wanting to silence any song."⁴⁰ In "Tree at My Window" he speaks to the tree as the companion of his grief, "You have seen me when I was taken and swept/ And all but lost." That is the extent of his grief, simply symbolized as a storm of "inner weather."⁴¹ And "An Old Man's Winter Night" expresses a similar feeling of desolation at the loss of the beloved. A home needs both man and wife. Man alone, "one aged man -- one man -- can't keep a house,/ A farm, a countryside."⁴²

In his lecture at Loyola Frost read three love poems which he wrote during his "intellectual" period. The first, "Never Again Would Bird's Song Be the Same," he calls a "poem in praise of a lady." Who is the lady? When he read the second poem, "The Silken Tent," he answered that question by saying that this was "another poem in praise of the same lady." He answered it again by dedicating the third poem to the same lady. The one lady in Frost's life has always been and always will be Elinor White. Each of these poems is a beautiful tribute to the poet's "elected friend"; but the first deserves

³⁹Ibid., p. 315.

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 316.

⁴¹Ibid., p. 318.

⁴²Ibid., p. 135.

special mention for its delicacy of feeling. He says that the birds who had heard her voice

Had added to their own an oversound,
 Her tone of meaning but without the words.

 she was in their song.
 Moreover her voice upon their voices crossed
 Had now persisted in the woods so long
 That probably it never would be lost.
 Never again would birds' song be the same. ⁴³

Human love in Frost's poetry, however, is not limited to the man-wife relationship. Mother-son and son-mother love are also present. However, there seems to be little father-son love. Perhaps this is because his father died when he was twelve. It is certain that he was very close to his mother.⁴⁴ And, occasionally, a mother and son relationship in his poetry reflects his own experience. One such is the mother-son bond in "The Witch of Coos."["] There are, too, several poems in which Frost manifests a tender, deep, and delicate love for children: "A Girl's Garden," "Locked Out," and especially "The Last Word of a Bluebird." The Bluebird's last word to the little, wondering child was an apology for leaving, or migrating, early.

He just had to fly!
 But he sent her Good-by,
 And said to be good.

⁴³Ibid., p. 452.

⁴⁴Beach, pp. 205-206.

Otherwise, the poor Bluebird might have caught a cold and coughed his tail-feathers off!⁴⁵ It is this ability to experience the imaginative thinking of children that shows how much Frost loves them.

Frost's love for his mother seems to have been very profound. In "The Lovely Shall be Choosers" he expresses his ironic bitterness against the gossiping, heckling "voices" which condemned his mother because she had married below her station. She was a native of Edinburgh and of Lowland Scotch descent. She was brought up, however, by a very rich uncle in Ohio. As a result of the gossip and the condemnation she received for choosing a man "below her," Mrs. Frost seems to have led a life of deep sorrows, sorrows which her son Robert suffered with her. Thompson says, "Those who knew his mother still recognize the accurate indication [in "The Lovely Shall Be Choosers"] of her mute heroism."⁴⁶

The poem begins with the voices deciding to take twenty years to "hurl her down."

She would refuse love safe with wealth and honor!
The lovely shall be choosers, shall they?
Then let them choose!

And because Frost's mother had chosen to marry William Frost the voices decided to crush her. They thought that the best way was to give her seven joys which would become in time seven sorrows. These seven "joys" would

⁴⁵Frost, Complete Poems, p. 170.

⁴⁶Thompson, p. 186.

correspond to the seven levels of the world and to the seven sorrows. And so it happened that Mrs. Frost's husband died of tuberculosis, that she was humiliated before her friends because she had to teach school for a living, that she never could quite learn how to live lower than the poor whose children she taught, that she was never known for what she really was, and that she never had anyone with whom she could share her sorrow.⁴⁷ This poem shows the extent to which Frost entered into the sorrow of his mother, how deeply he loved her.

Another of Frost's loves, although it sounded more like scepticism in the previous chapter, is his love for God. Thompson thinks that Frost's love of God is a "mutual collaboration." In other words, if a man lives out his every day life of struggle and love, if he lives according to his convictions, then he is loving God. "Through man's active and persistent yearning and seeking and doing he places himself in accord with the intended ways of God to man. The process requires mutual collaboration. And the underlying principle is love, from man to God, from God to man."⁴⁸ It is evident in "A Prayer in Spring" that, if man takes pleasure in the flowers "today" and does not bother to think too much about the "uncertain harvest" of the future, he need do no more. That is sufficient love of God. "For this pleasure today is love

⁴⁷Frost, Complete Poems, pp. 325-326.

⁴⁸Thompson, p. 189.

[of God] and nothing else is love."⁴⁹ The emphasis, even here in love of God, is "on the present moment."⁵⁰ Frost wrote this about belief in God, "Now I think . . . that the belief in God is a relationship you enter into with him [now] to bring about the future."⁵¹

It ought to be noted also that, when Frost suffered the loss of his wife, the words he used expressed an urgent present need of God, his utter dependence now on God, and his utter destitution in this life. "Word I was in the house alone . . . in my life alone . . . no one left but God."⁵² Frost indicates the necessity of God in man's everyday life in his introduction to Edwin Arlington Robinson's King Jasper. It is not a very personal relationship, but it is a relationship. He says that man should live in fear, not of God but of not proving his life worthy in God's eyes. "There is the fear that we shall not prove worthy in the eyes of . . . God."⁵³ The fear seems to be a present motive to man to struggle for his dignity. But Frost seems to be relating the present hopefully with the future through love.

There is another love, or another fear, in Frost's life. That is "the fear of Man -- the fear that men won't understand us and that we shall be cut off from them."⁵⁴ In his lecture at Loyola Frost complains about the fact

⁴⁹Frost, Complete Poems, p. 17.

⁵⁰Thompson, p. 189.

⁵¹Frost, "Education by Poetry: A Meditative Monologue," Amherst Graduates Quarterly, XX (February 1931), 78.

⁵²Frost, Complete Poems, p. 317.

⁵³Frost, "Introduction" to Jasper, p. vi.

⁵⁴Ibid.

that modern men do not even try to comprehend one another. Rather, they try to match wits, deeds, and output. "We're all trying to stay with each other. You with me; I with you. We're not trying to find each other out. We're just keeping company, not communicating."⁵⁵ Frost says this because he desires to share his own experiences and ideas with other men. And this wish to communicate does not contradict what has been already said about Frost's theories of individualism and independence. Of course, Frost still believes that man must meditate, must get inside himself and find his personal identity, and that man must find truth for himself; but this belief does not exclude intercommunication once a man has found himself and understood his life. Frost explains it this way, "My friends all know I'm interpersonal/ But long before I'm interpersonal Away 'way down inside I'm personal."⁵⁶

In his introduction to King Jasper Frost develops the idea that love is a kind of communication or sharing, that this kind of love is "all there is to satisfaction." He explains by saying that we begin in infancy to establish contact with others by "correspondence of eyes with eyes." We recognized "the same" in someone else. We went on to lips, mouth, and throat. "Smile answered smile." We were together -- "correspondence [communication] is all. Mind must convince mind that it can uncurl and wave the same filaments of subtlety, soul convince soul that it can give off the same shimmers of eternity."⁵⁷ It seems that Frost's poetry has been an attempt to establish

⁵⁵Frost, lecture at Loyola.

⁵⁶Frost, Complete Poems, p. 425.

⁵⁷Frost, "Introduction to Jasper, pp. vi-vii.

this communication with the reader. He wants to share his experiences with someone like the kindred spirit he finds in "The Tuft of Flowers." He says there that he "worked no more alone," "was glad with him," "sought at noon with him the shade," "held brotherly speech" once he had found this soul with whom he could share life.⁵⁸

Like the man in "The Most of It" Frost

. . . would cry out on life, that what it wants
Is not its own love back in copy speech,
But counter-love, original response.⁵⁹

In other words, life must have mutual love, the love of giving and sharing. And poetry must have the love of communication between poet and reader or it is useless. Southworth notes that the most important feature of Frost's poetry is "the spiritual communion he establishes with the reader. This accounts for the importance Mr. Frost attaches to 'colour' in his poems."⁶⁰

Conversational tones, image-words, and overtones play a great part in the poetry of Frost because they are the usual ways by which friends come to understand each other. As Beach points out, it is because he wants to communicate that Frost attaches "the supreme importance for poetic effect" to "the natural speaking tone of voice."⁶¹ Robert Newdick, too, thinks that

⁵⁸Frost, Complete Poems, pp. 31-32.

⁵⁹Ibid., p. 451.

⁶⁰Southworth, p. 67.

⁶¹Beach, p. 209.

communication is the primary aim of the intimate conversational tone that Frost attempts to establish between himself and the reader.⁶²

Since Frost feels the need to share his experiences of thought, beauty, and love, he tries to share them as lovers do: not by prosaic literalness of speech but by "light words that tease and flout."⁶³ Frost uses tone, imagery, and suggestion "to evoke a correspondence [In the reader] greater than he could have done had he resorted to overt statement."⁶⁴

As Frost says of his own poetry, "If I must be classified as a poet, I might be called a Synecdochist; for I prefer the synecdoche in poetry -- that figure of speech in which we use a part for the whole."⁶⁵ Frost likes to hint at his meaning by giving a part of it. But he does want to be found out. In "Revelation" he lets the reader know just how much he desires to be known and understood and appreciated. "But oh, the agitated heart/ Till someone really find us out."⁶⁶ In an article a few years ago Frost said that readers should try to refine their understanding even to the point of knowing what the poet

⁶²Robert Newdick, "Robert Frost and the Sound of Sense," American Literature, IX (November 1937), 292.

⁶³Frost, Complete Poems, p. 27.

⁶⁴Southworth, p. 52.

⁶⁵Frost, quoted in Louis G. Untermeyer, ed., Modern American Poetry and Modern British Poetry (New York, 1950), part I, p. 180.

⁶⁶Frost, Complete Poems, p. 27.

means beyond his metaphor. The reader should know, and Frost longs that he may know "how to take a hint when there is one."⁶⁷

Frost's ideas are not new. His sceptism and agnosticism do not constitute a very enobling philosophy. The deepest appeal of his poetry seems to be his own personal way of communicating his meaning to the reader. If he says things in a cryptic way, it is simply because he demands much of the reader. As Southworth says, this poet wants his reader to be a person who brings "a quality of soul (or correspondence) to the poems" so that he can see what Frost himself has seen. Frost's own ascetic pleasures require a corresponding asceticism in the reader. He selects only the more important details of a scene, "those that will control the imagination of the reader -- and pays little attention to the rest."⁶⁸ For example, the image words which set the color-tone for "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening" are, "The only other sound's the sweep/ or easy wind and downy flake."⁶⁹ And the whole scene of "The Road Not Taken" can be recreated from three details: "yellow wood," "two roads," and "In leaves no step had trodden black."⁷⁰ Thus the poet directs the reader to his meaning.

Very often the conversational tone establishes the rapport between Frost and the reader. Frost does this by superimposing on the basic rhythm

⁶⁷Frost, "Poetry and School," The Atlantic Monthly, CLXXXVII (June 1951), 30.

⁶⁸Southworth, pp. 68-69.

⁶⁹Frost, Complete Poems, p. 275.

⁷⁰Ibid., p. 131.

of the line the less regular rhythm of speech. The effect is contrapuntal as in a symphony. He uses colloquial diction and speech slightly above the common as counterpoints to high informal speech. He heightens the intimacy by occasional bits of homely wisdom, alliteration, repetition of a word, or personification. For instance, in "A Servant to Servants" he says, "the best way out is always through."⁷¹ In "A Hundred Collars" he puts his fear into these words, "There's nothing I'm afraid of like scared people."⁷² And, of course, there is Frost's famous definition of home in "The Death of the Hired Man": "Home is the place where, when you have to go there, / They have to let you in."⁷³

There is a danger in this almost off-hand tone. For, very often the introductory lines of Frost's longer poems sound trivial and unimportant, almost like the warm-up for a talk-fest. Also, in some of the dramatic dialogues he uses lines that sound trifling and common in order to pass from one mood or idea to another. And at times, a whole poem may sound trivial. Some of the audience at Loyola caught the trivial sound of "Never Again Would Birds' Song Be the Same" when Frost read it. They laughed.⁷⁴ They misunderstood the poem completely, probably because that was the first time they heard

⁷¹Ibid., p. 83.

⁷²Ibid., p. 67.

⁷³Ibid., p. 53.

⁷⁴Frost, lecture at Loyola.

it. One reading of Frost's poetry is not enough; it will never provide the reader with a true communication of Frost's experiences.

Human love has been examined in its different terms: love of wife (husband), mother, children, God, and other men (readers). In each of these cases, love complements struggle. People who enjoy these loves have something to live for. But what about those who have no true love in their lives? who cannot give and share life? The answer Frost gives seems to be that they descend to the level of the brute, i.e. they lose their dignity. For example, in "The Subverted Flower" the girl who has been tempted to sin is somehow the worse for the temptation. Because she takes on some of the bestial, dog-like animality of the boy who tried to seduce her, because she gave partial consent she will never rise to the heights of a chaste love of sharing and giving. Hers will always be a love somewhat obedient to "bestial laws."⁷⁵

Frost's volume, North of Boston, has several poems which suggest that persons wedded to the carnal cannot enjoy true love's meeting and fusing of the spirit. Their love "necessarily will be on a lower plane, on a more physical basis, without the wings of aspiration."⁷⁶ There are implications of this sad descent to brutality in love in "The Housekeeper" and "A Servant to Servants" in the same volume. In "The Housekeeper," for example, Frost discusses the tragedy of a common-law marriage without true love. The man in this case is the tragic figure. He would not legally marry his wife; so she leaves him in

⁷⁵Frost, Complete Poems, pp. 454-455.

⁷⁶Southworth, p. 53.

order to give and share her life with someone else. "'I wonder why he doesn't marry her/ And end it.' 'Too late now.'"⁷⁷ The "husband's" life has been and will continue to be a life without love.

In the country north of Boston the opportunities for running away from a life without love are few. There are not the diversions of a large city. A person must live with and cling to himself alone if he cannot share his life with another. Of such people Frost has this to say,

All those who try to go it sole alone,
Too proud to be beholden for relief,
Are absolutely sure to come to grief.⁷⁸

And, as Southworth says of them, "The only means of escape is through madness in mild or severe forms. It is through these forms that many of the poet's characters find the only freedom they can ever know."⁷⁹ One example of that madness is in "The Witch of Coos." The witch or wife had committed two faults while her husband was alive; one was adultery, the other was a loathing to go to bed with her husband. She had not loved him and, therefore, she had not been able to give or share her life with him. The reader finds her in the madness which many years before had taken the place of love in her life.⁸⁰

City people, and country people who imitate city people, run away from a life without love via diversions. In "The Investment" Frost makes it

⁷⁷Frost, Complete Poems, p. 106.

⁷⁸Ibid., p. 561.

⁷⁹Southworth, p. 53.

⁸⁰Frost, Complete Poems, p. 247-252.

clear that he does not think that there can be any substitute for love, not even money and what it can buy. A very poor country couple have gone to the extravagance of buying a piano when they cannot even feed themselves. And why? Because their love has failed to make life worth living. Therefore, they seek to escape thinking and struggling and loving by means of the noisy diversion of a piano.⁸¹ It is obvious that, if man does not understand his life through meditation, if man does not share the joys and struggles of life, reality will be too much for him to bear.

It might be said, that love is the better half of Frost's theme of human love and struggle. When his mind makes him sceptical about God and about the future, love brings him back to the present. When grief, fear, pain, and sorrow get the better of his understanding, his love for someone, wife or God or mother or reader, enables him to share the experience. When life's joys and beauties intoxicate him and when thought has worked out some theories of life, love makes him want to share them with others. For example, love makes him try to communicate a theory like "going home/ From company means coming to our senses."⁸²

The reader should be aware that, although Frost utters his ideas in such a chatty and almost flippant manner, there is beneath these sometimes lightsome words a "rich, comprehensive, and warmly passionate nature so disciplined in the art of expression that communication of the qualities of soul is possible."⁸³ Frost earnestly yearns to share his highly artistic experience

⁸¹Ibid., p. 337.

⁸²Ibid., p. 430.

⁸³Southworth, p. 53.

his deeper meaning with the reader. This means, therefore, that the reader must somehow climb to Frost's lofty metaphorical level; for, Frost cannot express a quality of soul or an experience at the reader's ordinary, literal-prose level. However, through an understanding of Frost's concept of human love and struggle, the reader can ascend more surely to some of the extended meanings of the poet's metaphor -- to a true communication with him.

CHAPTER IV

HUMAN LOVE AND STRUGGLE IN ROBERT FROST'S "STOPPING BY WOODS ON A SNOWY EVENING"

The purpose of this chapter is to give a brief explication of "Stopping By Woods on a Snowy Evening." We intend to examine the observations of previous critics in the light of Frost's theme of human love and struggle. The interpretation given here will be proposed as probable in the hope that it will give a clue to the poet's deeper meaning. When all is said and done, certainty is perhaps impossible in matters of poetic interpretation. A twofold division of the poem's implications will be made on the basis of the (1) sensuous and (2) intellectual levels of meaning. First the love and struggle theme will be considered at the level of an experience of beauty shared by the poet with the reader. Second, the same theme will be analyzed at the level of and idea, what Frost calls a "clarification of life," shared by the poet with the reader. And finally, some explications of the poem will be examined in an attempt to show their probability in contrast to the probability of the explication which the author here proposes.

In general, this poem is considered by critics as a sensuous experience. They emphasize the technical structure, the choice of words, the visual, auditory, thermal and kinesthetic imagery of the poem. "The first stanza is technically the introduction. The poet gives the setting, without any detailed description. . . . The second stanza . . . divides itself exactly in the

middle The first two lines of the second stanza give more information, namely, that the poet is driving and that there is not even a farmhouse near. The following two lines are devoted to atmosphere and are used primarily for emotional progression."¹

Charlotte Lee proceeds to outline the organization of the last two stanzas in the same way, pointing out that the purest aesthetic appeal of the poem comes in the third and fourth lines of the third stanza and that the last stanza leads the poet from emotional joy to wise fulfillment of duty (promises). In the usual explication, the stanza and sentence pattern, the length of the lines, and the use of familiar one-syllable words are examined in order to discover how they help tell the story of the winter's evening and the poet's experience. The conclusions about this poem are usually the same as Lee's: "Throughout, then, the choice of words harmonizes with the content and with the way in which that disarmingly simple content is organized -- with the simple, regular stanza pattern and the straight-forward sentences that are carefully coordinated with the length of the lines."²

Another conclusion is, "The ingenious use of each stanza's third-line rhyme as the dominant rhyme for the next stanza helps to unify the poem."³

¹Charlotte I. Lee, Oral Interpretation (Boston, 1952), p. 434.

²Ibid., p. 438; for the reader's convenience this poem is quoted in full on page 76 of the thesis.

³Frederick Gwynn, Ralph W. Condee, Arthur O. Lewis, eds., The Case For Poetry (New York, 1954), p. 151.

And Thompson says that the structure of the poem provides the reader with a "drama-in-miniature revealed with setting and lighting and actors and properties complete."⁴ Thompson goes on to give an excellent summary of the poem:

At the beginning, the reader finds the curtain going up on a little action which approaches the climax of an experience, real or imagined; that is, an experience which happened to the poet or one which came to the mind of the poet as possible. A rural traveler is the actor whose brief soliloquy describes the circumstances under which he has stopped his horsedrawn sleigh to enjoy, in spite of cold and loneliness, the strange beauty of white snowflakes falling against a background of dark trees. There are many reasons why he should not stop; common-sense reasons which seem to occur even to the traveler's little horse. But the spell of the moment is so strong that the traveler is reluctant to leave, regardless of the winter night and the cold storm. He is impelled to move on by the realization of duties and distances; those "promises" which he must keep and the "miles to go" before he completes his journey.⁵

A consideration of the imagery of the poem is the most important part of ordinary explications. The title and the first stanza are primarily visual in their appeal to the senses. Stopping in the title and in the third line, however, appeals to the kinesthetic sense. To stop is to rest and to be quiet; hence, stopping adds to the atmosphere of the poem. "Kinesthetic imagery is used consistently in the secondary position. It is usually in the form of increasing relaxation but shifts to slight tension in the last lines where responsibilities cause the poet to shake off his repose. Despite the fact that

⁴Lawrance Thompson, Fire and Ice (New York, 1942), p. 25.

⁵Ibid.

this is a poem of 'stopping,' kinesthetic imagery is present in exactly one-half of the lines."⁶ The auditory appeal is one of silence except for the shake of harness bells and the sweep of easy wind and downy flake. The thermal appeal is afforded by the snow-filled woods, the coldest evening of the year, the frozen lake, and the downy flake of falling snow. It is this sensory appeal which plays the most important part in the emotional climax of the poem: "The only other sound's the sweep/ Of easy wind and downy flake."⁷

It is very important, too, to point out the suggestive quality of the poem, the synecdoche, the onomatopoeia, the alliteration, the assonance, and the consonance. "The reader is aware of more than one possible meaning for such words as 'promises' and 'miles' and 'sleep.'"⁸ These words are suggestive of Frost's meaning. Frost the synecdochist provides the reader with fragments of the evening, e.g., one flake of snow, a woods, an indefinite farmhouse, a vague lake, and somewhat mysterious promises. He uses the significant part of what he has experienced in order to lead the reader to the same experience. There is onomatopoeia in the words shake and sweep, alliteration in his house and his harness, soft and meditative assonance in words like know and though and snow, and a gentle consonance in words like whose, woods, watch, with, snow. Lee Concludes, "This harmony of sound, content and imagery could hardly have been accidental. It may have been instinctive or subconscious, to a large

⁶Lee, p. 442.

⁷Robert Lee Frost, The Complete Poems of Robert Frost (New York, 1949) p. 275.

⁸Thompson, p. 26.

degree, in so experienced and sensitive a poet as Frost, but its contribution to total effect is clearly apparent."⁹

Ordinarily the poem is explicated as above because it is explicated solely on the basis of internal evidence, i.e., its technical devices, its words, and so forth. Such interpretations usually admit that they cannot give an adequate meaning to suggestive words like promises. But some internal-evidence critics would go so far as to deny a suggested or implied meaning at all. Earl Daniels, for example, maintains that the poem is an "experience and nothing else," a mere "record of experience" and nothing more. Daniels has two good reasons for this rather extreme position. First, some of his students excited his wrath by reading their own very subjective meanings into the poem, e.g., that the poet is contemplating suicide. Second, it is a known fact that Frost wrote the poem in extreme haste. This leads Daniels to contend that he could not have included secondary meanings while writing in such haste.¹⁰ It may be said, however, that the students' misinterpretation was due to youthful subjectivity and does not exclude the possibility of finding the poet's deeper meaning. Then too, with regard to Frost's haste, the instinctive and almost mechanical writing of the poem is only the last step in the birth of great

⁹Lee, p. 453.

¹⁰Daniels' interpretation and the facts pertaining to the writing of "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening" are found in Earl Daniels, The Art of Reading Poetry (New York, 1941), pp. 17-19; John Holmes, "On Frost's 'Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening,'" Preface to Poetry, ed. Charles W. Cooper (New York, 1946), pp. 603-608.

art. As the poet himself says, "'Poems . . . are anticipated in tranquility."¹¹ Frost realizes that the aesthetic experience and the mental construction of the poem precedes the actual writing: "A complete poem is one where an emotion has found its thought and the thought has found the words."¹² Haste in writing, therefore, does not necessarily mean haste in composition.

The love and struggle theme is manifested at the experience level of the poem in the way Frost wrote it. Other poets, like Wordsworth, would describe the scene in detail to the reader. They would praise its objective beauty and exclaim about their own rapture. This is the way of the observer. But Frost is a poet who not only observes but also experiences, and a poet who expects his reader to join him in the very same experience. In other words, he wishes to communicate his own dramatic experience of a winter's evening in the woods. Only two lovers or friends can become one, can meditate together, can see and feel through one another's senses. So, to experience the woods' beauty in the same way Frost does, the reader must become one with him. In order to establish this communication Frost has avoided the extravagant reportorial language of Wordsworth in preference for a common type of speech -- the kind two friends would use. And he puts his experience in the form of a dramatic story because friends talk in stories, hints, metaphors, and tones rather than in overt statements. At least Frost thinks so, for he says, "Poetry provides

¹¹Reginald L. Cook, "Frost on Frost: The Making of Poems," American Literature, XXVIII (March 1956), 66.

¹²From the dust jacket of West-Running Brook (New York, 1929).

the one permissible way of saying one thing and meaning another. . . . We like to talk in parables and in hints and in indirections,"¹³ and, "'The tone's everything in it [a poem], isn't it?'"¹⁴ What he means when he says that the dramatic tones of voice are the better half of poetry¹⁵ and that the understanding reader must hear the poem¹⁶ is that the reader must hear and feel and see what the poet hears and feels and sees. This is the way true friends and lovers share life's experiences.

Therefore, Frost's love theme does apply to the sensuous or "experience" level of the poem. Perhaps, before going on with a more detailed analysis of Frost's technique of communicating his sensuous meaning, the poem itself ought to be included for the easy reference of the reader:

Whose woods these are I think I know.
His house is in the village though;
He will not see me stopping here
To watch his woods fill up with snow.

My little horse must think it queer
To stop without a farmhouse near
Between the woods and frozen lake
The darkest evening of the year.

He gives his harness bells a shake
To ask if there is some mistake.
The only other sound's the sweep
Of easy wind and downy flake.

¹³Frost, quoted in Thompson, p. 55.

¹⁴Cook, "Frost on Frost," p. 69.

¹⁵Frost, "An Introduction" to King Jasper (New York, 1935), p. v.

¹⁶Frost, "Poetry and School," The Atlantic Monthly, CLXXXVII (June 1951), 31.

The woods are lovely, dark and deep,
 But I have promises to keep,
 And miles to go before I sleep,¹⁷
 And miles to go before I sleep.

The use of the first person singular as the focal point of the poem forces the reader to share the visual, auditory, thermal, and kinesthetic images with the poet. The reader must think and feel with the poet, identify himself with Frost to the extent of luxuriating in the silent beauty and in the solitude, of feeling the dramatic conflict: wanting to stay yet knowing that promises must be kept. Thus, Frost seems to have written the poem for those who would take the trouble to share with him a part of life's joy and a part of life's struggle. The reader need not notice the meditative sound of all the long vowels, nor the quiet reflection of the second stanza, nor the aaba bbb ccdc dddd rhyme scheme which unites each stanza within itself and to the preceeding and following stanzas. All these are matters of "tone" or "hint" which help to make the reader one with the poet. To give and to share his life with a reader-friend is the fulfillment in love for which Frost seeks and hopes.

However, there seems to be a greater fulfillment in love possible, if only the reader will penetrate to the deeper, implied meaning of the poem. Frost would like to share the "clarification of life" which is contained in the poem's deeper significance. Mark Van Doren encourages the reader to search out this deeper, richer content in Frost's poetry: "It is only when we read close

¹⁷Frost, Complete Poems, p. 275.

and listen well, and think between the sentences, that we become aware of what his poems are about. . . . His ideas are behind the poems, not in them."¹⁸ Frost himself says practically the same thing about "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening": "It contains all I ever knew . . . I would like to print it on one page to be followed by forty pages of footnotes."¹⁹ If the reader analyzes the poem in the light of Frost's love and struggle theme, he can hope for true and probable secondary meanings -- Frost's meanings, not just his own subjective projections. The poet encouraged the audience at Loyola to seek deeper meanings in his poetry, provided that they were his.²⁰

However, one must beware of finding secondary meanings that could never have been included by the poet. Thompson seems a little extreme when he claims three levels of implied meaning for this poem. These three levels, he says, would correspond roughly to the meanings found in the meter, the rhythm, and the rhyme.²¹ Thompson's ideas on this point are slightly obscure. Certainly, all secondary meanings ought to be verified by comparing them with the author's ideas as found in other places. Some extremists have tried to press the meaning of promises and miles to go much too far. For instance, Frost mentioned one of these so-called explications in his talk at Loyola. This

¹⁸Mark Van Doren, "Robert Frost's America," The Atlantic Monthly, CLXXXVII (June 1951), 33.

¹⁹Cook, "Robert Frost's Asides in His Poetry," American Literature, XIX (May 1948), 355.

²⁰Frost, in a lecture given at Loyola University, Chicago, April 11, 1957. Tape-recorded by Robert Lefley of Station WFMT and obtained through Arthur McGovern, S.J.

²¹Thompson, p. 65.

interpretation would have it that Frost is reluctant to leave the woods because he does not want to go home. It is then inferred that the poet's home life was very unhappy, which he flatly denies.²² Frost just gets sick and tired of "meaning-hunters" who bother him to death with questions. And on one occasion when they were pressing him against the wall about this poem, he almost snarled in defense, "All it means is going home." Cook recounts this scene and attributes this statement to Frost's anger. He adds that Frost's retort cannot be the true case.²³ In other words, there is an implied meaning, but it is Frost's meaning.

With the help of the struggle and love theme at least a probable interpretation is possible. For instance, there are many elements in the poem which suggest the struggle concept. The most important of these, of course, is the poet's resolve in the last stanza to go on about his duty despite the fact that he would like to stay and watch the woods fill up with snow. Man must keep up the struggle against the forces that would drag him down; he must be devoted to the promises that he has made to himself and to others. Other elements that point to the struggle concept are the solitude of the scene, the woods, the meditative form and tone of the poem, the failure of the horse to appreciate the beauty, and the snow.

As was mentioned in chapter two, Frost thinks that solitude is a necessary condition of a man's success. Only when a man is alone can he think

²²Frost, lecture at Loyola.

²³Cook, "Frost on Frost," p. 64.

out the problems of his life; only in isolation can he work out an independent intellectual answer to life's pain, death, sorrow, and mysteries. One mystery would be whether or not God exists; another whether or not He rewards a good life; another whether or not the struggle is worthwhile here and now. Only by going off by himself can a man develop his personality; and according to Frost, man must become personal way down deep inside long before he can become interpersonal.

The woods, due to its frequent use in Frost's poetry, becomes a symbol of this isolated self-examination for the purpose of personal development. Hence, since its symbolic meaning fits in with the context of solitude and meditative thought in the poem, it is probable that it carries this secondary meaning in the poem. The focal point of the poem, I, would seem to substantiate a "personal development" explication of the secondary meaning. Certainly, the resolve in the last stanza to live up to an intellectual conviction of duty indicates that a man can think clearly about his life when he is alone in the woods.

Other ideas mentioned in chapter two occur incidentally in the poem. There is the snow which many of Frost's other poems use as a symbol of all peril; there is the possibly ominous note in the dark and deep woods. While it is still true that Frost considers nature his adversary in the struggle, nevertheless nature does not appear under this guise in "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening." The snow is patently something beautiful. And while "dark and deep" could strike a note of opposition to man, the word lovely seems to indicate that the whole line describes beauty. "Dark and deep" might possibly, however, be interpreted as a kind of jarring note which makes the poet

remember that he has promises to keep. Thus, these words would be a preparation for the return to the world of struggle in the last three lines of the poem. And finally, the few remarks that the poem makes about the poor little horse who cannot comprehend beauty call to mind Frost's ideas on the superiority of man, especially of the man who lives up to his dignity by a life of struggle. It also reminds one that Frost despises the man who gives up the struggle because he considers him not better than a brute.

The word promises seems to imply that the poet must live up to the promises he has made to himself and to others. The promises to himself would be his convictions about the necessity of keeping up the struggle, about the independent thinking required of the man who would understand his own life. The promises to others might well be love promises to his wife or friendly promises of help to his neighbors. Perhaps he is on his way to do someone a kindness, and, in a way, to give and share life by means of this love. The miles to go could be either the ways in which he must struggle before he sleeps or the ways in which he must love before he sleeps--or both. And "before I sleep" might mean "before bed tonight" or "before death." There does not seem to be any really good reason for excluding the love concept from "promises" and "miles to go"; nor does there seem to be sufficient reason to say that sleep cannot mean death.

"Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening" casts a spell which seems to say so much, and yet to say so little--to leave so much unsaid. Some readers have found strange meanings in it. Perhaps Frost was afraid of these subjectively projected meanings when he said, "I don't want to be around when they

press "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening."²⁴

Certainly Frost would not have wanted to be around when Earl Daniels' English class at Colgate pressed the poem to mean (1) that the poet was a fugitive from the law, (2) that the poet was contemplating suicide, (3) that the poet is praising the Creator of the woods, and (4) that the poet is a fearful fugitive from the hardships of life.²⁵ Such interpretations, while they may have some basis in the text of the poem, just do not seem to fit the author. If they are true, then the poem is not something that "begins in delight and ends in wisdom."²⁶ If the explication given in this chapter is true, then the poem is a delightful experience which carries with it a thoughtful and wise clarification of life.

²⁴Ibid., p. 65.

²⁵Daniels, pp. 17-18.

²⁶Frost, "The Figure a Poem Makes," Complete Poems, p. vi.

CHAPTER V

HUMAN LOVE AND STRUGGLE IN ROBERT FROST'S

"MENDING WALL"

This chapter will not attempt a completely exhaustive and detailed explication of "Mending Wall." Its purpose is to explain the experience of the poem, and then to point out probable manifestations of the love and struggle theme in the poem. Most critics neglect the experience level of meaning in order to give more time to the "implied meaning" or symbolic level of the poem. Hence, it will not be necessary, as it was in the last chapter, to point out that the poem can have extended and secondary meanings. However, it will be necessary, after the neglected experience level of the poem has been analyzed, to propose a possible secondary meaning in the light of the love and struggle theme. It will also be necessary to examine the probability of the already existing interpretations in view of the context of the poem and the philosophic attitudes of the author. The poem is here included for the reader's easy reference:

Something there is that doesn't love a wall,
That sends the frozen-ground-swell under it,
And spills the upper boulders in the sun;
And makes gaps even two can pass abreast.
The work of hunters is another thing:
I have come after them and made repair
Where they have left not one stone on a stone,
But they would have the rabbit out of hiding,
To please the yelping dogs. The gaps I mean,
No one has seen them made or heard them made,
But at spring mending-time we find them there.

5

10

I let my neighbor know beyond the hill;
 And on a day we meet to walk the line
 And set the wall between us once again.
 We keep the wall between us as we go. 15
 To each the boulders that have fallen to each.
 And some are loaves and some so nearly balls
 We have to use a spell to make them balance:
 'Stay where you are until our backs are turned!'
 We wear our fingers rough with handling them. 20
 Oh, just another kind of outdoor game,
 One on a side. It comes to little more:
 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 25
 And eat the cones under his pines, I tell him.
 He only says, 'Good fences make good neighbors.'
 Spring is the mischief in me, and I wonder
 If I could put a notion in his head:
 'Why do they make good neighbors? Isn't it 30
 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, 35
 That wants it down.' I could say 'Elves' to him,
 But it's not elves exactly, and I'd rather
 He said it for himself. I see him there
 Bringing a stone grasped firmly by the top
 In each hand, like an old-stone savage armed. 40
 He moves in darkness as it seems to me,
 Not of woods only and the shade of trees.
 He will not go behind his father's saying,
 And he likes having thought of it so well
 He says again, 'Good fences make good neighbors.'¹ 45

The experience of the poem, as told through this humorous and
 dramatic story, deserves our attention. Here is, in many ways, an everyday
 experience that the poet wishes to share with the reader. He talks the way
 friends do when they have some complaints that they want to air, a humorous

¹Robert Lee Frost, The Complete Poems of Robert Frost (New York, 1949), pp. 47-48.

story to tell, and a pointed comment to make. The poet starts out talking in a chatty, off-hand manner about the trouble a wall has with the frozen-ground-swell, the hunters, and something that just doesn't love a wall. So, when spring comes along he and his neighbor go through the old routine of repairing the wall. These first fourteen lines carry a tone of weariness with the old job. For instance, the poet directs a reproof at the careless hunters because year after year he has come after them to make repair. And in line fourteen there is a tone of resignation to the inevitable "once again" of the task.

From lines fifteen to twenty-four the poet perks up a bit, even tries to make a kind of game of the old tiring job. Using a spell to make them balance, noticing the loave-shape of the stones, and working "together" with his neighbor provide Frost with a kind of extrinsic motivation to get the wall fixed. There is a tone of light fun in line nineteen where he casts a spell.

But in line twenty the poem takes a serious turn, for the poet begins to wear his fingers rough with these rocks. When he calls mending the wall just another kind of outdoor game, he seems somewhat weary of the game idea. He begins to think that they really do not need the wall. The simple fact that they are both orchard men, and therefore do not need walls, strikes him as somewhat humorous. He tries to communicate his playful mockery of the old conventional chore to his neighbor. The neighbor responds with an old, trite saying about good fences.

Then Frost becomes more playful and puts his whole argument before the fellow: no cows, no need for walls. But it is obvious that he is not communicating over the wall, for he repeats the first line (line thirty-five) of the poem to himself more than to his neighbor. Lines thirty-five and thirty-

six have a frustrated tone that is due to the fact that his neighbor has not been interested in his ideas. He has not been able to make the man see his viewpoint. And therefore, the last eight lines are a rather serious attack on the blindness of his neighbor's convention-bound action. By this time the poet has lost his playful and mocking tone. The experience is therefore, the yearly drudgery of the task, the playful motives, the ever-present question, "why?" the teasing mockery of his neighbor's opinion, the frustration of Frost's attempt to communicate, and the final and almost angry condemnation of savage narrow-mindedness. This experience Frost wants to share with the reader.

Of the experience level, this may be said in summary: most men have at some time or another gone through something similar to what Frost went through here. It is a blessing for a man to have some friend who understands his ideas. It is more often the case, as here, that a man does not have an understanding friend. The love and struggle theme adds new meaning to the experience level. For, with Frost it is not just a friend who is lacking, it is a lover. As was indicated in chapter three, the poet feels a deep need to give and share the experiences and ideas of his life. In this poem he is unable to do that with the "old-stone savage," so he tries to share both the experience and his desire to re-think conventions with some sympathetic reader.

On the symbolic level the love and struggle theme indicates that the poem may be considered as a contrast between the poet as an independent and progressive thinker and his neighbor as a custom-bound and narrow-minded

savage or non-thinker.² As Thompson says, the first twenty-five lines set the stage for "the mild and playful conflict of opinions, in the course of which the neighbor is characterized by a single statement, iterated and reiterated, while the narrator's character is developed through the more spritely and whimsical banter."³ Thus, the narrator becomes a symbol of intelligent progress, of those who "reexamine the customs" by which they live "and discard the out-moded ones in order to keep vital those that are sound."⁴ Frederick Gwynn says that the first line, which is repeated as the epigram of line thirty-five, manifests the narrator's disgust with the thick-headedness of his neighbor. It means that the narrator himself does not love a wall and even thinks it ought to come down. And the repeated slogan of lines twenty-seven and forty-five symbolizes the stone-age mentality that never progresses.⁵

The reader who knows Frost's theory of struggle, who knows how much importance the poet gives to independent thinking in man's development cannot help seeing that Frost is condemning this man as an utter failure in life. He has never thought through the meaning of his own life, for he is content to live

²Frederick Gwynn, Ralph W. Condee, Arthur O. Lewis, eds., The Case for Poetry (New York, 1954), p. 147; James G. Southworth, Some Modern American Poets (Oxford, 1950), p. 56; Lawrance Thompson, Fire and Ice (New York, 1942), p. 108.

³Thompson, p. 108.

⁴Southworth, p. 56.

⁵Gwynn, Condee, and Lewis, p. 147.

by his father's saying when he should go behind it. Frost tries to share his "clarification of life" with the man. But no luck! He compares his neighbor to a savage and, thus, shows that he thinks this man's life a degraded one. He walks in darkness when he should walk in the light of his own thinking. There are other ways, however, in which the struggle concept is evident. Nature keeps spilling the boulders of the wall in the sun; other men, like the hunters, keep knocking the wall down as they chase after the yelping dogs and the rabbit; and another man, his neighbor, opposes Frost's new idea on the value of walls. Here are two of the adversaries with which man must struggle in order to maintain his dignity: nature and other men.

Of course, all of these implied ideas Frost wishes to share with the reader who is sensitive enough to grasp them, i.e., lover enough to catch the poet's hints. The love concept is evident, too, in the sincere attempt the poet makes to share his "view of life" with his neighbor. Such a sharing and agreement would be true love. The experience level of meaning, as it has been explained, is rather obvious and is not disputed. The symbolic level, as it has been explained in the light of the love and struggle concept, is only a probable interpretation which has one great fact in its favor: not only is it possible in the context but it is also consonant with Frost's thought as found in other places. Certainly, Frost hopes that the reader will, even though his neighbor did not, understand both his message of individual responsibility to re-think life's values and his message of man's need to share his thoughts and emotions with loving friends.

There are, however, other possible ways of understanding this poem if the reader bases his explication only on the text of the poem. For instance,

Gwynn says that the poem advocates tolerance of useless conventions, of destructive hunters, and of unintelligent neighbors.⁶ In view of the tone of light humor and play in the first twenty-five lines, the tolerance of conventions and hunters could be intended. But the remaining context of the poem does not seem to support this idea because the poet does not tolerate the old-stone savage. In fact, the tone of the last few lines seems to be one of almost bitter condemnation rather than tolerance. At the end of the poem Frost is too serious to be willing, as he might have been in the earlier lines, to tolerate either unintelligent neighbors or useless conventions. Besides, Gwynn would have a hard time of it to find other places where Frost tolerates a man's failure to think for himself. For Frost, that is blameworthy failure--as was indicated in chapter two.

Another possible interpretation of the poem is given by John C. Broderick.⁷ He bases his explication merely on the text of the poem. He wants to explain the poem as a diatribe against dogmatic and ritualistic religions. In this, it is true, he could appeal beyond the poem to Frost's dislike for formal piety. As Joseph Warren Beach says, "Frost . . . early found the Puritan church and tone intolerable, and has gone his own way in his spiritual life without benefit of clergy."⁸

But Broderick did not choose to go beyond the poem. Rather, he stays

⁶Ibid.

⁷John C. Broderick, "Frost's 'Mending Wall,'" The Explicator, XIV (January 1956), item 24.

⁸Joseph Warren Beach, "Robert Frost," Yale Review, XLIII (Winter 1954), 205.

with the text and bases his interpretation on what he calls the "supernatural responsibility for the gaps in the wall" which is signified "by the indefinite 'something.'" Since this "something" has neither been seen nor heard, and since the word elves is used, therefore, according to Broderick, religious meanings are being suggested by Frost. And, besides this, Broderick adds that it is significant that the poet would be careful about whom he might offend by a wall. For, according to the critic, offend suggests a god who could be offended.

Moreover, he considers it significant that the old-stone savage actually seems to enjoy the ritual. Since, Broderick argues, religion is for savages, and since Frost attacks the opinion or ritualistic bias of his neighbor, it follows that Frost is attacking ritual religions. Broderick finds further evidence in the ritualistic spell which the poet tries to cast to make the rock balance, and also in the "magical formula" about good fences making good neighbors. The critic's conclusion, nevertheless, is that, while Frost is dissatisfied with outmoded forms of ritual, he "does not carry his individuality so far as to refuse to follow the established forms that are still meaningful to his neighbor."

The trouble with this explication is that there is no really good reason for "something" meaning "supernatural." The chore of mending the wall is a convention with which Frost is dissatisfied; but why does it have to be a religious convention? The word elves in the context seems to mean that Frost could give "Elves" as an answer to his neighbor's question: "Who wants the wall down?" It is a playful answer, intended to tease the questioner. After all, it is Frost who wants the wall down. When the poet uses the word offense

he seems to be referring to some neighbor who might not like a wall around his apple or pine orchard--as he himself does not. He might offend this neighbor. The use of a spell to make the stones balance does not seem to require anything but the playful tone of the first twenty-five lines to explain it. And the formula of the savage's father can be understood as a thought from a previous generation which the present generation should rethink before accepting it.

However, when all is said, one cannot deny the possibility of Broderick's interpretation. For Frost does condemn the rituals of Puritanism. But this explication does seem to read more into the poem than can be adequately substantiated. It seems to the author, at least, that the love-struggle theme throws more light on the poem than Broderick's explanation.

"Mending Wall" has had a curious history of possible interpretations just like Broderick's. Beach reviews most of them in his article entitled "Robert Frost."⁹ Some critics have thought that the poem is directed against those individualists and isolationists who want to wall themselves and the United States away from all social and trade contact with foreign nations. Others have said that it is a plea for closer bonds of fellowship between individuals and states. And still others take the poem to be a protest against war and against high tariffs. Socialists understand it as a declaration of sympathy with the socialist or proletarian movement.

With regard to "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening," the task of this thesis was to point out that there can be a secondary interpretation. But

⁹Ibid., pp. 210-211.

with regard to "Mending Wall," the task is to determine the secondary meaning with the highest degree of probability. Now, all of the explications mentioned by Beach are possible, but they do not fit in as well as the love and struggle interpretation does with the thought of Frost as found in other places.

It is certainly true that Frost is an individualist thinking his life through in "Mending Wall." But it seems to be rash to extend this complete individual isolation idea to the United States as a country, especially since there is no hint of this idea either in the poem or in Frost's political attitude. And although the poet does seem to ask, by wanting the wall down, for a greater love and fellowship among men, and states, nevertheless this interpretation of the wall does not seem to be its more obvious symbolic meaning in the context. Thus, the wall symbolizes the useless convention-heirlooms which men receive from preceding generations; more obviously, it symbolizes a barrier which separates men and prevents them from loving one another. Why? Because, in the context, the wall is not what separates the savage from the poet. Their individual ways of thinking about the wall separate them: the one progressive, the other unintelligent. Only intellectual agreement could bring about a greater love between these two men. Knocking the wall down would achieve nothing. Frost merely wants to communicate his idea about conventions. Therefore, we admit that the poem does advocate fellowship among men, and that it, therefore, may protest against war and high tariffs. But, let it be clear that the poem advocates greater love among men not through destruction of walls, but through mutual agreement and communication. Furthermore, because this is an early poem, and because political discussion is entirely absent from Frost's early poetry, it is unlikely that the poem protests against either war or high

tariffs.

Finally, if the absence of the wall would symbolize an attack on the right and value of private property, if the wall-taken-down would mean that the two neighbors were now perfectly equal, then perhaps the meaning is socialistic. Beach answers this explication by saying that Frost is a Yankee who did not like the Roosevelt New Deal, and who, therefore, likes Socialism a lot less. It might be added that Beach ought to know because he is a personal friend of Frost. After the above consideration of the other explications of this poem, it would seem that the most satisfactory interpretation, in view of the text and the attitudes of the author, is the one based on an understanding of the love and struggle theme.

CHAPTER VI

A SUMMARY

This chapter is a resumé of the important conclusions reached in the course of the thesis. In the first chapter an introduction to the problem was detailed. It was mentioned that Frost is a difficult poet. Consequently, there is a need for some kind of key to his deeper symbolic message. And since critics often avoid Frost's deeper meanings; since some neglect them completely, while others misinterpret them -- we must find some new approach or access or key to his work. A new way offers itself through the study of some of the themes, or attitudes to life, which recur frequently in Frost's writings. One of these attitudes, one that seems to include more of Frost's philosophy of life than any other, is his concept of human love and struggle. This thesis has attempted to study this theme with a view to providing the thoughtful reader of Frost with a fuller appreciation of Frost's implied and symbolic meanings.

The second chapter examined the struggle concept. Since man's duty to struggle is based on Frost's belief in man's superiority to the world about him, the nature of man's dignity was studied. Many of Frost's poems indicated man's "innate" superiority to animals and nature. But then it was pointed out that man must struggle with three adversaries in order to maintain that dignity intact. He must fight with nature's rocky soil and snow and bad weather; with other men's philosophic, scientific, and religious attacks on the

dignity of man; and with his own reason, emotion, indecisiveness, and laziness.

This struggle is an individual battle which each man must win or lose for himself. To win, each man must think through his own life's meaning, and then live up to his own convictions. Frost is convinced that such philosophic thinking requires a lot of independence and self-reliance. Therefore, he recommends that a man separate himself from others to come to this existential self-realization, to become personal way down deep inside. He himself has done his meditating on life in the woods and under the stars, "walled away" from other men.

Man's struggle is an absolute in Frost's Bergsonian or Hegelian philosophy. Man's continued resistance throughout life, in the face of every obstacle, is the victory Frost seeks. This victory in the here-and-now is the only paradise the poet is fairly sure about winning. And he is not even absolutely sure of winning this victory; but the chances are good, as we saw, about "fifty-five to forty-five." Frost does have a sort of agnostic belief in the existence of God and in an eternal victory. But he prefers to live for the present, transmitting eternity for now but hoping for the best. Nevertheless, many life-questions plague him with doubt: what about death, pain, God, and sin? He has no intellectual answer except his blind faith in the present-life dignity of man, and, therefore, the present-life value of the struggle.

In the struggle against nature, man must wrest a living from the soil and protect himself from the savage elements. In the struggle against other men, man must resist those who would persuade him to an unworthy life; those who would philosophically or scientifically "prove" that man is of very minor importance compared with the universe; those who would attack man's integrity

on puritanistic religious grounds. And in the struggle against himself, man must resist the extremes of emotion or reason, as well as other vices like laziness and avarice.

Certain words in Frost's poetry come to symbolize parts of this concept of struggle. The woods, for example, symbolizes both the poet's need for private meditation and the place where it usually occurs. Snow, at times, becomes a symbol of all peril. And, often enough, Frost symbolizes "the absolute" of his philosophy as a star, as something to stay our minds on. Animal action becomes a symbol of intelligent man's unintelligent procedures, at least in some of the fables.

Of course, such an intellectual answer to life is totally inadequate. Frost, therefore, relies on love of wife, children, mother, friends, and God to sustain him when his intellect fails him. This human love complements human struggle because it enables man to give and to share the trials of life. In fact, it is really more important than struggle because it can make life worth living when struggle cannot.

Frost relied very much on purely sensuous love early in his life; but with the years he has come more and more to rely on a love of sharing or communicating. As a youth, he shared the terrible trials which his mother had to suffer. As a man, he shared all his life with Elinor White in one of the most chaste loves ever described in poetry. And as a poet, he has shared his life both with the God he loves agnostically and with the careful readers of his poetry. One thing the reader of Frost must know is that the poet wants the reader to find him out. All his life Frost has felt the need to share his life with his friends, but especially has he felt it since God took away his

"elected friend" Elinor White.

Some of the ways by which he achieves this "friend" or "love" contact with the reader are: his common speech rhythms, his twinkling sense of humor, his pregnant synecdoches, and his dramatic stories. In fact, it is this need, this desire to communicate his own artistic experiences and ideas that moves him to write. For him, life is worse than meaningless if it cannot be shared in all its joy and sorrow.

For instance, in "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening," Frost is trying to communicate his experience of beauty. This meaning is, of course, obvious. But it is not so obvious that the poem can be interpreted as an attempt to communicate the poet's message of individual meditation and self-reliance, man's superiority to animals, the necessity of struggling in life and keeping one's promises, and the joy of sharing something beautiful with a friend. And yet, this is the explication which the love and struggle theme indicates as possible and even probable. Most readers, however, miss the deeper meanings of this "simple lyric."

In "Mending Wall," on the other hand, it is more obvious that Frost is trying to evoke in the reader a corresponding experience and attitude. The poet experiences great frustration because he cannot share his "view of life" with his neighbor. Now, Frost must share this experience as well as the idea he has about each man's duty to think through his own life, or his life loses its meaning. He must love some friend, cling to someone in all his joys and sorrows. He condemns the old-stone savage who refuses to rethink his father's saying, who will not let Frost share his thoughts with him. In this condemnation, Frost hopes that the reader, at least, will understand his message of

individual responsibility to think through life and its conventions; his message of man's need to share experience, thought, and emotion with loving and sympathetic friends. This is the explication afforded by the love and struggle theme. And while there are many other possible interpretations of "Mending Wall's" symbolic meaning, this one seems most probable.

Thus, the love and struggle concept certainly seems to provide a new insight into at least two of Frost's poems, and probably sheds new light on many more. Also, it gives the more than casual reader of Frost a general notion of the way the poet thinks. It makes the reader aware of the fact that Frost's poetry does admit of deeper meanings, and, therefore, encourages him to be on the alert for the poet's hints. And finally, this concept, since it includes most of Frost's practical philosophy of life, prepares the first-time reader for a poet who has probed just about as deeply as human intuition and reason allow into the meaning of life. The love and struggle concept should offer all Frost's readers a fuller appreciation of his poetry.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

I. PRIMARY SOURCES

A. BOOKS

- Frost, Robert Lee. From Snow to Snow. New York, 1936.
- Poems with an Introductory Essay. New York, 1946.
- Complete Poems of Robert Frost. New York, 1949.
- A Way Out. New York, 1929.
- West-Running Brook. New York, 1929.
- Selected Poems. Edited by W. H. Auden, C. Day Lewis, Paul Engle, and Edwin Muir. New York, 1936.

B. ARTICLES

- Frost, Robert Lee. "An Introduction" to Edwin Arlington Robinson's King Jasper. New York, 1935, v-xv.
- "The Poet's Next of Kin in a College," Biblia, Princeton, IX (February 1938), 1.
- "Education by Poetry: A Meditative Monologue," Amherst Graduates Quarterly, XX (February 1931), 75-85.
- "The Mammitted Student," New Student, VI (January 12, 1927), 1.
- "A Poet, Too, Must Learn the Magic Way of Poetry," The New York Times Book Review (March 21, 1954), 1-2.
- "Poetry and School," The Atlantic Monthly, CLXXXVII (June 1951), 30-1.

II. SECONDARY SOURCES

A. BOOKS

- Bogan, Louise. Achievement in American Poetry. Chicago, 1951.
- Brooks, Cleanth; Robert Penn Warren. Understanding Poetry. New York, 1944.
- Brooks, Van Wyck. New England: Indian Summer, 1865-1915. New York, 1940.
- Church, Richard. Eight for Immortality. London, 1941.
- Coffin, Robert P. New Poetry of New England: Frost and Robinson. Baltimore, 1938.
- Cox, Sidney. Robert Frost. New York, 1929.
- Daniels, Earl. The Art of Reading Poetry. New York, 1941.
- Ford, Caroline. The Less Traveled Road. Cambridge, Mass., 1935.
- Gwynn, Frederick; Ralph W. Condee; Arthur O. Lewis, eds. The Case for Poetry. New York, 1954.
- Holmes, John. "On Frost's 'Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening,'" Preface to Poetry. Edited by Charles W. Cooper. New York, 1946.
- Lee, Charlotte I. Oral Interpretation. Boston, 1952.
- McKenzie, John L. The Two-Edged Sword. Milwaukee, 1956.
- Mertins, Louis and Esther. The Intervals of Robert Frost. With an introduction by Fulmer Mood. Berkeley, Calif., 1947.
- Middleton Library. Robert Frost: A Chronological Survey. Compiled in connection with an exhibit of his work at the Olin Memorial Library, Wesleyan University. Middleton, Conn., 1936.
- Millett, Fred B. Contemporary American Authors. New York, 1940.
- Munson, Gorham B. Robert Frost. New York, 1927.
- Nash, R., ed. Fifty Years of Robert Frost. Cambridge, Mass., 1944.
- Southworth, James G. Some Modern American Poets. Oxford, 1950.
- Thompson, Lawrence. Fire and Ice. New York, 1942.

- Thornton, Richard, ed. Recognition of Robert Frost. New York, 1937.
- Untermeyer, Louis G. The Road Not Taken: An Introduction to Robert Frost. New York, 1951.
- . Modern American Poetry and Modern British Poetry. New York, 1950.

B. ARTICLES

- Adams, George; and Frank Neelon. "Robert Frost: Poet for a Jubilee," The Boston College Stylus, LXX (May 1957), 43-52.
- Anonymous. "Pawky Poet," Time (October 9, 1950), 76-82.
- Beach, Joseph Warren. "Robert Frost," Yale Review, XLIII (Winter 1954), 204-217.
- Braithwaite, W. S. "Robert Frost, New American Poet," Boston Evening Transcript (May 8, 1915), part 3, 4.
- Broderick, John C. "Frost's 'Mending Wall,'" The Explicator, XIV (January, 1956), item 24.
- Cook, Reginald L. "Frost on Frost: The Making of Poems," American Literature, XXVIII (March 1956), 62-72.
- . "Frost's Asides in His Poetry," American Literature, XIX (May 1948), 351-359.
- . "Frost as Parablist," Accent, X (Autumn 1949), 33-41.
- Cowley, Malcolm. "Frost: A Dissenting Opinion," The New Republic, XXXIX (September 11, 1944), 312-313.
- Cox, Sidney. "The Sincerity of Robert Frost," The New Republic, XII (August 25, 1917), 109-111.
- Dabbs, J. McBride. "Robert Frost and the Dark Woods," Yale Review, XXIII (March 1934), 514-520.
- Griffith, Ben W., Jr. "Frost's 'The Road Not Taken,'" The Explicator, XII (June 1954), item 55.
- Holmes, John. "Close-up of an American Poet at 75," The New York Times Magazine (March 26, 1950), 12.
- Jarrell, Randall. "To the Laodiceans," The Kenyon Review, XIV (Autumn 1952), 535-561.

- Kaplan, Charles. "Frost's 'Two Tramps in Mud Time,'" The Explicator, XII (June 1954), item 51.
- Newdick, Robert. "Robert Frost and the Dramatic," The New England Quarterly, X (Spring 1937), 262-269.
- . "Robert Frost and the Sound of Sense," American Literature, IX (November 1937), 290-300.
- O'Donnell, W. G. "Robert Frost and New England," Yale Review, XXVII (Summer 1948), 698-712.
- Perrine, Lawrence. "Frost's 'Neither Out Far Nor in Deep,'" The Explicator, VII (April 1950), item 46.
- Rogers, W. G. "Recipe for Frost-ing," The Cincinnati Enquirer (May 19, 1957), part 3, 1.
- Schwarz, Edward. "Frost's 'The Lovely Shall Be Choosers,'" The Explicator, XIII (October 1954), item 3.
- Sergeant, Howard. "The Poetry of Robert Frost," English, IX (Spring 1952), 13-16.
- Stauffer, Donald A. "The New Lyrics of Robert Frost," The Atlantic Monthly, CLXXX (October 1947), 115-116.
- Stauffer, Donald B. "Frost's 'The Subverted Flower,'" The Explicator, XV (March 1957), item 38.
- Van Doren, Mark. "Robert Frost's America," The Atlantic Monthly, CLXXXVII (June 1951), 32-34.
- Van Doren, Mark. "The Permanence of Robert Frost," The American Scholar, V, (Spring 1936), 190-198.
- Viereck, Peter. "Parnassus Divided," The Atlantic Monthly, CLXXXIV (October 1949), 67-70.
- Webster, H. T. "Frost's 'West-Running Brook,'" The Explicator, VIII (February 1950), item 32.
- Wilson, James Southall. "Robert Frost: American Poet," The Virginia Quarterly Review, VII (April 1931), 316-320.
- Winters, Yvor. "Robert Frost: or the Spiritual Drifter as Poet," Sewanee Review, LVI (October 1948), 564-596.

C. UNPUBLISHED MATERIAL

Frost, Robert Lee. Lecture given at Loyola University, Chicago, April 11, 1957. Tape recorded by Robert Lefley of station WPMI. Obtained through Mr. Arthur McGovern, S.J.

Adams, William W. "The Concept of Man in the Poetry of Robert Frost." Unpublished Master's Thesis. Loyola University, Chicago, 1954.

APPROVAL SHEET

The thesis submitted by **John Thomas Trahey, S.J.** has been read and approved by three members of the Department of **English.**

The final copies have been examined by the director of the thesis and the signature which appears below verifies the fact that any necessary changes have been incorporated, and that the thesis is now given final approval with reference to content, form, and mechanical accuracy.

The thesis is therefore accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

Feb. 10, 1958
Date

J.P. Marion, S.J.
Signature of Adviser