CHAPTER - VI

CONCLUSION

The public image of Frost is so completely centered on his role as a poet that it requires a strong shift in perspective to perceive him primarily as a teacher, with a uniquely original philosophy of education and pedagogical method. The poet himself once noted that “the three strands were “writing, teaching and farming”! All three strands were intimately interrelated, and in time Frost himself became aware that a special identity little short of absolute existed between his poetry and his teaching:

“It slowly dawned on me that my poetry and my teaching were one, and if you know my poetry at all well, you’d see that.”

It Frost’s poems are perceived as parables in metaphorical language and structured form, and as intimate dialogues between the poet as speaker and his readers, they can indeed be regarded as instrumental means to a pedagogical end. Both Frost’s theory of poetry
and his philosophy of education were based upon his dualistic view of reality, and this provided the inexorable bond of unity between his poetry and teaching. His philosophy of Education laid great stress on superior intellectual and creative ability and the possession of cultural interests.

Poetry in the modern world, as in the ancient and medieval eras, is largely concerned with revealing God, man, and nature to the human race. A finished poem is capable of revealing the deepest insights into the meaning and value of the universe and ourselves. As revelation, a finished poem is so rooted in objective reality that it becomes a new thing, capable of appealing to our senses, our minds, our imaginations and emotions: in short, to our total nature. The revelation is not merely of knowledge, but of love: it involves not recognition only, but responses, beginning in ecstatic pleasure and ending in calm wisdom.

Robert Frost's recognition as a poet came relatively late but grew into a spectacular crescendo that has never stopped, even if critical appreciation has been divided
among poets, literary critics, and general readers. After arriving in England, Frost assembled *A Boy's Will*, and the first English publisher to whom Frost presented it, David Nutt, agreed to publish it. Frost was thirty nine when it appeared. A Year later, Nutt published *North of Boston*, a book consisting of poems far different in form from the first book.

Frost received remarkable praise on both sides of the Atlantic, expressing different perceptions on how he had become an American poet. Of *A Boy's Will*, Norman Douglas wrote in *The English Review*: "There is a wild, racy flavour in his poems; they sound that inevitable response to nature which is the hallmark of true lyric feeling."\(^3\) F.S. Flint, in another strong review in *Poetry and Drama*, similarly emphasizes Frost's breaking away from America and the merits of his simplicity of diction:

> Be it said, however, that Mr. Frost has escaped America and that his first book, *A Boy's Will*, has found an English Publisher. So much information, extrinsic to the poems, is necessary. Their intrinsic merits are great
despite faults of diction here and there, occasional inversions, and lapses, where he has not been strong enough to bear his own simplicity of utterance. It is this simplicity which is the great charm of the book; and it is a simplicity that proceeds from a candid heart.\textsuperscript{4}

Ezra Pound praised as, "This man has the good sense to speak naturally and to paint the thing, the thing as he sees it..."\textsuperscript{5}. In an even stronger review of North of Boston, Pound praises both the fresh depiction of New England life and the naturalness of its speech:

\begin{quote}
Mr. Frost is an honest writer, writing from himself, from his own knowledge and emotion; not simply is picking up the manner which magazines are accepting at the moment... Mr. Frost has dared to write for the most part with success, in the natural speech of New England; in natural spoken speech, which is very different from the "natural" speech of the newspapers.\textsuperscript{6}
\end{quote}

The remarkable fact was the range of praise Frost received for his first two books from influential critics,
including Pound, Flint, Ford Maddox Ford, Howells and Amy Lowell.

Amy Lowell reviewed *North of Boston* for *The New Republic* in 1914, she was struck by the flexibility of his blank verse and she said regarding Frost’s poetics, “he goes his own way, regardless of anyone else’s rules, and the result is a book of unusual power and sincerity”:

*Mr. Frost has produced both people and scenery with a vividness which is extraordinary ... For Mr. Frost is not the kindly New England of Whittier, nor the humorous and sensible one of Lowell; it is the latter-day New England, where a civilization is decaying to give place to another and very different one.*

Frost experienced severe criticism, sometimes severely misguided during his own lifetime. Nevertheless, his appeal to a wide audience and a great variety of readers, philosophers and historians, has diminished little since his death in 1963. The readers look to him as an icon of meaning and order in a chaotic world. Nevertheless,
anthologists, poets, and readers appear to recognize what academics have failed to see – that Frost gives a powerful and compelling vision of the world, with insight into nature and human nature that stirs thought and recognition and brings one continually back to the poems.

The freshness and strangeness of both *A Boy's Will* and especially the dramatic poetry of *North of Boston*, *Mountain Interval* and *New Hampshire* established a new boundary and new audiences for American poetry while exploring the range of human existence with concision and depth.

The 1930's saw the first harsh wave of criticism directed against Frost. It came at the height of paisa. Frost had already received two Pulitzer prizes, the first for *New Hampshire* and the second for *Collected Poems*. *West-Running Brook* (1928) had baffled some readers with its more austere, philosophical poems. A third Pulitzer Prize had been awarded for *A Further Range* in 1936. R.P. Blackmore attacked not only the book but Frost, regarding him a technical virtuous, “at heart, an easy-going versifier of
all that comes to hand, and hence never lacks either a subject or the sense of its mastery.” The translator and poet Rolfe Humphries concluded bluntly “A Further Range? A further shrinking” Faulkner Malcolm Cowley in an essay entitled “The Case against Mr. Frost” Concedes:

*a poet has the right to be judged by his best work, and Frost has added to our never sufficient store of authentic poetry ... there is a case against the Zealous admirers who are not content to take the poet for what he is, with his integrity and limitations, but insist on regarding hi as a national sage. Still worse, they try to use him as a national banner for their own moral or political crusades.*

Cowley characterized these supporters of Frost as those who “demand, however, that American writing be affirmative, optimistic, and, not too critical” and also as those who do not like poetry, especially modern poetry.

Another critic, Yvor Winters also joined those who felt that Frost’s reputation exceeded his achievement. In his 1948 essay, “Robert Frost, or, the Spiritual Drifter as Poet.”
Winters criticized Frost no so much for his politics but for his lack of intelligence. He regarded Frost as working within a tradition of romantic sentiment and nostalgic attitudes towards rural life. Winters did not seem to recognize the deeper ironic inherent in the concept of the pastoral. He also objected to Frost’s interest in ordinary speech:

"But poetry is not conversation ... conversation is the most careless and formless of human utterance; it is spontaneous and unrevised, and its vocabulary is commonly limited. Poetry is the most difficult form of utterance; we revise poems carefully in order to make them nearly perfect."\(^{11}\)

The only valuable aspect of Frost, Winters believed, were “Principles of Greek and Christian thought”.\(^{12}\)

Writing in *The New York Times*, Randall Jarrell said of *Steeple Bush*, “that most of the poems remind you, by their persistence in their mannerisms of what was genius, that they are the productions of somebody who once, somewhere else, was a great poet”, though Jarrell acknowledged the brilliance of “Directive”, a poem that almost all critics find
out only one of Frost's best but one of the great meditative lyrics of the twentieth century. Such opposites as Jarrell and W.H. Auden as well as Robert Lowell in the last decade of Frost's life wrote some of the most powerful, perceptive and lasting appreciations of his work. Lionel Trilling, pointing to "Design" and "Neither out far nor in Deep", Trilling called Frost a "terrifying poet." While W.H. Auden characterized Frost as a "a Prospero Poet", mature and controlled.

Some of the most powerful advocacy for Frost's work has come from English language poets and from European exiles living in the United States. Seamus Heaney, one of the Ireland's most acclaimed contemporary poets, writes in a pastoral tradition that acknowledges the inheritance of Wordsworth and Frost. Heavy found, referring specifically to the conclusion of "Home Burial", "The rising not out of the fallen condition is the essential one which Frost achieves in his greatest work." The pressure of intellect in Frost releases, according to Heaney, the powerful, deep wellsprings of sound and language.
Heaney's younger contemporary, Paul Muldoon, who also grew up in Northern Ireland and now lives and teaches in United states, admires Frost greatly for the adventurousness and playfulness of his language and drama. Muldoon alludes to such trickster figures in his own work as the farmer of “The Mountain” or the narrator of “Directive”.17

Czeslaw Milosz, another Nobel Laureate, recognized Frost’s “superb ear”, “powerful intellect, unusual intelligence”, and that he was “well-read in philosophy”. He saw Frost’s strategy as one of the “Such enormous deceptiveness that he was capable of hiding his skepticism behind his constant ambivalence, so that his poems deceived with their supposedly wise affability.”18 For Milosz, Frost’s poetry ultimately concealed “a grim, hopeless vision of man’s fate.

The post-modern critics, Charles Berustein, gave a reply about the pleasures of teaching Frost and how much a poem such as “Mending Wall” was misunderstood by readers. Bernstein points to a recurrent theme in Frost’s
reception: the way the poetry continues to speak in its complexity beneath or against what it appears to be doing at first. Frost seemed to have a genius for being misunderstood:

A funny thing happens when you become a professor of poetry as I am: you end up teaching Frost with great pleasure ... I find myself going back to some of Frost's most famous poems. "Mending Wall" is a fascinating fabrication, a materialized, colloquial voice that breaks the vernacular over its lines, as theme synthesizes sound. As a first-wave modernist, Frost is at the centre of the conflict between dialect and meter, traditional prosody... This is one reason he is such an enduring poet because he continues to speak to our enduring condition in poetry ... It is so successful as to almost completely destroy its meaning, although of course it doesn't: the meaning is still there.¹⁹

In the above poem, the contradiction is logical, for the opposing statements are uttered by two different types of people and both are right. Man cannot live without walls,
boundaries, limits and particularly self-limitations; yet he resents all bound: and is happy at the downfall of any barrier.

Frost’s central subject is humanity. His poetry lives with a particular aliveness because it expresses living people. Other poets have written about people. But Frost’s poems are the people; they work, end walk about, and converse, and tell their tales with the freedom of common speech. His major themes are alienation, isolation, loneliness, boundaries and barriers and hostile environment. His best poems offer queries, not affirmations.

Frost’s poems show deep appreciation of natural world and sensibility about the human aspirations. His images – woods, stars, houses, brooks – are usually taken from everyday life. With his down to earth approach to his subjects, readers found it easy to follow the poet into deeper truths, without being burdened with pedantry. Often Frost used the rhythms and vocabulary of ordinary speech or even the looser free verse of dialogue. He depicted the fields and farms of his surroundings, observing the details of rural
life, which hide universal meaning. He tried to examine the complex relationship between man and God. However, Frost developed a suspicion for religious mysticism. Edward Thomas recognized the originality and success of Frost's experiments with the cadences of vernacular speech – with what Frost called 'the sound of sense'. His personal ambition and private grief gave him reasons for cultivating an idealized persona.
References


