Conclusion

Forgive, O Lord, my little jokes on Thee,
And I'll forgive Thy great one on me.

Robert Frost

Only one with the playful intimacy of a naughty grandchild could be bold enough to say that. All of Frost’s poems are replenished with the essence of human relationships. He travelled a lot and was an educationist throughout his life. He socialised with people even while on his farm, observed the native people and learnt their vernacular tongue. In a simple and lucid language he has put down the common everyday incidents and situations of life exposing the very depth of the human heart vividly. In short, he was more of a psychologist who understood people in their true essence. This poet and philosopher wrote down his experiences and observations in a simple yet eloquent style.

Fear of seclusion, isolation, solitude and darkness always troubled Frost. One gets an insight to this in “Ghost House”, “The Black Cottage,” “The Wood-Pile,” “The Door in the Dark” to name a few. “Acquainted with the Night” creates a pensive and desolate mood. It is a poem of absolute isolation and solitude from the urban dwelling, ‘a place of togetherness’. A sensation one undergoes when one is not able to connect. It is rightly said, “If there is gloom within the heart, it is contagious” it definitely casts a spell on the surrounding. This lonely man walks down the city’s saddest lane, unable to even look into the eyes of the watchman. He is not comfortable, he is not able to relate, perhaps there is some kind of guilt, some internal anxiety that is building up, some internal clash reflected by his leaving and returning,
his stopping to see if the call was for him. It so seems he is on the threshold of making some major decision. The “luminary clock” (12), that “uneARTHLY” (11) higher thing is indifferent and unwilling to tell him whether the time is apt or not. Sofia Poullada, a literary critic says that the poem resonates with silence which is spellbinding and the ghostly experience that is felt when one goes beyond the self. Here in this poem Frost seemed to have walked out of himself into an anticipated aura of divine existence where the luminary clock decides the time and setting for his transcendence. This reflects the true philosopher within him raising his bar to a higher ground. The image of the moon as a clock and timekeeper is simply wonderful. The refrain, “I have been one acquainted with the night” reminds one of the Jewish prophets, Isaiah’s description of the son of man as “a man of sorrow and one acquainted with grief” (www.poemhunter.com). The narrator’s inability to make an eye contact with the people he meets suggests one simple thing that his depression has made him incapable of interacting in normal society. Where the normal people are associated with day, which is again synonymous to happiness, sunlight and surplus optimism, the narrator is solely acquainted with the night and can find nothing in common with those around him. He is unable to use the same sense of time like the others in the city. Instead of using the regular clock, he therefore uses the “One Luminary Clock” in the sky. Since night is the only time that he emerges from his solitude, he has zero opportunity to encounter someone who could pull him out of this depression. In a letter to Sidney Cox in December 1914 Frost objected to the subjective and objective elements in a poem: “We write of things we see and we write in accents we hear. Thus we gather both our material and our technique with the imagination from life and our technique become as much material as material itself.” For Frost, each poem was a victory over depression, anxiety, fear and sloth (Parini, Jay 267).
Very much like “Birches”, “Into my Own” includes the strange longing of the speaker. In the poem we find the speaker desiring for a life which is beyond his present state. It is towards the end that he finds an answer. The poem talks of a boy longing to leave home and find his own identity. The very title “Into my Own” suggests the child’s longing to explore himself. This brings about his transformation from a child to an adult, a fully grown individual. He looks for his own space where he can be himself. He not just longs for an identity but a breathing space where he is at complete liberty to do as his heart desires. He finally understands that he will not be able to change even if he leaves home. He asserts the fact that on his getting back they will not find any change, instead in their midst he will be more confident, more sure of himself. His convictions are very much like the speaker in “Birches” who expresses a desire to escape from the tough realities and hard rationalities of the adult world. He knows this is not possible. He desires to climb to heaven as a young boy, at the same time he wants to return to the earth. He has a strong desire to enter the imaginative world, but the truth of the real world is holding him from going. The freedom of imagination Frost says is certainly tempting and appealing, but he is helpless to free himself from the realities of his earthly life. His responsibilities in the world make him stick to the real world even though there is a strong urge to escape to the imaginative world. Frost has beautifully summed it in a concise manner, “It’s when I’m weary of consideration, / And life is too much like a pathless wood” (43-44 “Birches”) “I’d like to get away from Earth for awhile / And then come back to it and begin over.” (48-49) He has a strong desire to escape as well as return to it. He does admit towards the end that the earth is the right place for love.

The Irish poet Seamus Heaney's "Scaffolding" and Robert Frost's "Mending Wall" use walls as a metaphor for relationships. However they have different overall
themes. Heaney uses "scaffolding" to exemplify that relationships are built, developed and evolve with its help, whereas Frost uses a wall as an object of division between forward thinking, open-minded individuals and ignorant habitual sheep. Seamus Heaney uses his poem "Scaffolding" to show the development and evolution of relationships. "Masons, when they start upon a building, / Are careful to test out the scaffolding" (1-2" Scaffolding"). Heaney suggests that a relationship needs to be built gradually and tested to "Make sure that planks won’t slip at busy points." (3) With the scaffolding secure, a strong and trusting relationship can be developed within. "Never fear. We may let the scaffolds fall / Confident that we have built our wall." (9-10) When the relationship has progressed enough the scaffolding can be removed with confidence that it will stand strong. Scaffolding is the fundamental structure and framework that supports a wall as it is being constructed. Like walls, relationships need to be built over time and must have a strong foundation so that they can withstand the tribulations and problems that test relationships. (answers.yahoo.com)

Although a great admirer of Emerson Frost was not a transcendentalist, but a dualist. He regarded spirit and matter as real, existing together in a complex relationship in the universe and the existing world of mankind. Frost in all his poems talks only of the existing life. He talks about the day to day life and the struggle of the common man. As for Emerson, the universe lives in harmony and not amid opposing forces such as good and evil. Frost differs to this. In his opinion, “endless other things in pairs ordained to everlasting opposition.” A summary of this could include the following: good-evil, God-devil, body-soul, New Testament-Old Testament, justice-mercy, fire-ice, rich-poor, feminine-masculine, universal-particular, objective-subjective, light-dark, day-night, pessimism-optimism, servile-dominance, youth-age, civilisation-utopia, truth-error, past-present, reality-illusion, motion-rest, intelligence-
stupidity, whole-part, fact-fiction are to name a few. This could go on “ad infinitum.”

(Stanlis, Peter J. 3) The contradictions, contraries, paradoxes, ambiguities were to
Frost universal, God-given to prove the very existence of man. “Quandary”
exemplifies this dualism explicitly:

Never have I been sad or glad
That there was such a thing as bad
There had to be, I understood
For there to have been any good.
It was by having been contrasted
That good and bad so long had lasted  

In “The Wind and the Rain,” he out rightly rejects the optimistic monism and
the escapist psychology of Emerson: “It were unworthy of the tongue / To let the half
of life alone / And play the good without the ill.” (15-17) “The Literate Farmer and
the Planet Venus,” indicates that his dualism is built into the physical nature of man
and his spirituality: (Stanlis, 3,4)

You know how cunningly mankind is planned:
We have one loving and one hating hand.
The loving’s made to hold each other like,
While with the hating other hand we strike.  

Frost’s poems are replete with his ardent belief in dualism. He is of the
opinion that at the time of death, when the soul is about to leave the body, or couples
are to be separated, dualism dissolves into the oneness of monism. In “A Winter
Eden” he says, “So near to paradise all pairing ends,” (13) again in “Love and a
He serves as a mere onlooker, a silent spectator showing his reader the true picture. Darkness in Frost’s poetry leads to illumination, and chaos becomes cosmos. Frost must have been amused by the responses elicited by the question in “The Oven Bird”, “Is what to make of a diminished thing,” (14) The answer to this is given in two poems. On the one hand he says towards the end in “At Woodward Gardens,” “It’s knowing what to do with things that counts.” (37) But, on the other hand he adds in “Hyla Brook,” “We love the things we love for what they are” (15) He is also a realist. In “Spring Pools,” “Reluctance” and “Nothing Gold Can Stay,” he has adopted a very pragmatic and an optimistic approach towards life. He stands high on the human pedestal dealing with the irrevocable change of seasons and the unpredictability of things, and the losses brought about by the fall (both seasonal and theological) are experienced in winter as a kind of spiritual death. In many poems, like “Stars,” “Design,” and “Once by the Pacific,” the universe is portrayed as indifferent to human needs and even destructive of human life. The world of human beings too, as Frost suggests in “The Vanishing Red,” is replete with evidences of vanity and violence. The fears that separate men from women, the miscommunications that keep them apart and the loneliness that makes hatred harden into hostility are documented in the dramatic narratives of *North of Boston* and throughout Frost’s poetry. (Parini, Jay) In the above poems the realms of the real and the ideal are separated by a barrier that cannot be penetrated. On the other hand moments of joy Frost says are transitory, but they remain occasions for celebrations regardless of their brevity as in “Happiness Makes Up in Height for What It Lacks in Length.” Even the most trivial event can alter the poet’s mood by suggesting to him
the possibilities of communication and even communion between people and God, people and people, people and things as is suggested in “The Dust of Snow”:

The way a crow
Shook down on me
The dust of snow
From a hemlock tree

Has given my heart
A change of mood
And saved some part
Of a day I had rued (1-8)

Maybe the shaking off of the dust of snow from its wings is indicative of the crow being ready for its flight. This served as a hint to Frost that it was time for him too, to shed all inhibitions, gear himself and get started. In “Looking for a Sunset Bird in Winter,” Frost indirectly laments the passing of the summer into winter and realises that “A bird with an angelic gift” (7) he saw before has abandoned the tree and left only “a single leaf” (10) behind. But as he looks out from his vantage point on a hill, he sees something like a brushstroke across the blue sky and “a piercing little star” (20) shining through it. Being an optimist this clearly brings out that he is an ardent believer in ‘Carpe Diem’ a Latin word which means ‘to seize the opportunity’. The slightest streak of hope that he sees, he does not let it go. Every opportunity that came his way he made the most of it. In his essay, “Education by Poetry” he is of the opinion that if one believes in God he enters into a relationship with him to bring about his future. Once in a million years is one such divine soul born and sure enough
he is none other than Frost. This great soul inherited his spiritualism from his mother. He believed ‘in the sound of sense’. He did not have to make an effort to write poetry, poetry came to him. Being a recluse he remained confined to himself. He went for long solitary walks and it was here he said he heard voices. He shared a close affinity with God and fed himself on that relationship till the end. Otherwise, knowing Frost the way he was he would have collapsed long back. It was his faith in God that helped him pull up in life in spite of losing his four children and his wife who was his only source of inspiration. The presence of the almighty is always felt in his poems. Only a person very close to God can have the audacity to put up a question in “Question” to mankind:

A voice said, Look me in the stars
And tell me truly, men of earth,
If all the soul-and-body scars
Were not too much to pay for birth                   (1-4)

Reading Robert Frost – A Life by Jay Parini, one gets an insight into a poet’s personal life, a poet who had struggled throughout his life with depression, anxiety, self-doubt and confusion. A person whose family life was not often happy for he had experienced some extremely bad luck with his children, on the other hand what I saw of him made his stature stand tall before me, for I saw before me, a man of immense fortitude, a caring, loving and attentive father, and an artist of the first order who understood what he must do to create a body of work of everlasting significance, to “lodge a few poems where they can’t be gotten rid of easily.” There was no second thought about Robert Frost. He was a Numero Uno when it came to class room teaching. “Each class brilliantly taught, each vivid public reading, each child
comforted and cared for, each tender moment spent with his wife was accomplished by a steadiness of vision and hard spiritual work.”

Elizabeth Shepley Sergeant’s Robert Frost: The Trial by Existence (1960) attempts a broad portrait of “one of the most beloved poets and sages of our mid-twentieth century.” Frost, she tells us, owns “the stability and optimism of the Victorian age.” She virtually never tires of celebrating “this great, witty, complex, and endearing personality so loved by the American people.”  Frost was, according to De Voto, “the only pure proletarian poet of our time. His is the only body of poetry of this age which originates in the experience of humble people, treated with the profound respect of identification, and used as a sole measure of the reality and value of all experience.”  Stanley King of Amherst College quoted him as the wisest man in the field of human understanding. In the field of poetry, in words of Allen Ginsberg, “He was the first voyager, a kind of pioneer, the original entrepreneur of poetry.”

To sum up Frost, “He was an institution. In wartime, especially, it showed that civilisation was continuing, and that the arts mattered and were part of a young man’s education”.  “His conversation ranged widely over current affairs, the war, philosophy, agriculture, and – poetry.”  His vitality – intellectual as well as physical – struck everyone in the classroom. . . . His wit was stunning, marked by verbal play, by quirky (often folksy) turns of phrase, by unusual juxtapositions. The range of reference was dazzling, moving from ancient astronomy to Medieval Latin to baseball. (Parini, 349)

Any poem Frost says is the result of “enthusiasm passed through an idea”, and this process will not be hurried. Unborn poems linger for a long period in his mind, teasing the imagination. This observation might seem to lead nowhere, until at last, a
day came when idea and detail entwined naturally and became deed. The mind recognises gladly, “the long lost.” Work then proceeds swiftly as the ‘mental dam’ now broken, one step leads easily to another. Everything comes piling out ready for use. Poems are then created out of the storehouse of observation without the concern for immediate utility in the mind. Failures are ploughed back into the loam, “building soil” for future growth. Nothing is wholly lost; everything is finally used, if only to serve as compost for richer verses to come. A couplet, a line, a detail taken out from deleting from a poem may bear fruit at another time. Only when the time is ripe do all circumstances combine and take shape for a creative artist. Therefore, nothing is lost, “The fact is the sweetest dream that labor knows.” (13)

On his eightieth birthday Frost was so over-whelmed and humbled by the honour given to him. He responded to the often quoted line that “poets die young” saying that they die in many ways: “not just into the graves, but into businessmen, into critics, or into philosophers.” He didn’t want to be carried away by people calling him great. He said, “All I’ve wanted to do is to write a few little poems it’d be hard to get rid of”. “He walked in the woods every day that he could,” recalled Reginald L. Cook. He further says,

It had been a lifelong habit, this walking. Like Wordsworth, he walked and looked, he listened. He knew the bird-calls, the names of the flowers, their patterns of blooming. The life cycles of trees were always of close interest to him. Mushroom, mold, or fungus – everything caught his eye. He understood the rhythms of farm life, having farmed and lived around farming for most of his adult life. Right to the end he kept a garden. The
Physical world was metaphorical, of course, a source of metaphors and images for his poetry, but it was real, too. He could keep the figurative and literal in balance. That was his genius.”