FRATERNAL RELATIONSHIP

My birth neither shook the German Empire nor caused much of an upheaval in the home. It pleased mother, caused father a certain amount of pride and my elder brother the usual fraternal jealousy of a hitherto only son.

Conrad Veidt

“The universal brotherhood of man is our most precious possession, what there is of it”

Mark Twain

The Collins English Dictionary terms the word fraternal “as emerging from the Latin root frāternus, from frater brother”. Adj: 1. “of or suitable to a brother, brotherly. 2. Of or relating to a fraternity”. As quoted above by Conrad Veidt, the renowned German actor while, expressing his views on fraternity the meaning becomes very clear. The children, may it be brother and sister, brothers born in the family of the same parents spending their childhood and years of nurturing together, each knowing the other’s likes and dislikes, strength and weaknesses, have a soft corner for each other. Many a time on account of extra attention given to the other, jealousy is activated which strains the relationship, but all in all, this relationship has all the flavours of sweetness and sourness, so much so that sometimes it strengthens the bond and at times it unleashes the sacred bond given by God. In short, it is a long and everlasting relationship that has its roots to the very depth or root of a relationship.

Fraternal, in a broader sense, also means a feeling of brotherhood – of being humane. Silas in “Death of the Hired Man” was not the off-spring of Warren or Mary
but the bond shared between them was closer, more lasting. In fact, when one is at close quarters with death one’s utmost desire is to be in one’s home surrounded by his kith and kin. Silas slowly crept in Mary’s house instead of breathing his last at his brother’s den. This shows that one only understands the language of love. One does not have to belong to the same blood to share the bond of fraternal love. This feeling of intimacy and the feeling of belonging comes with the love for humanity which was shown to him by Mary and Warren. Similarly, when Mary says it really hurt her how Silas lay, touches the heart and one realizes that it is not just physical hurt that causes pain, but emotional when one connects oneself to another. It is a feeling of empathy and being humane that evokes compassion and links the two hearts. It is in this manner that we are all bound together by hurt that is in the world the very condition of life. When Warren says, “‘Home is the place where, when you have to go there, / They have to take you in’” (131-132), Mary contradicts saying, “‘I should have called it / Something you somehow haven’t to deserve’” (133-134). Warren now begins thinking about home and the obligations of family seem to have shifted. He questions Mary saying, “Silas has better claim on us you think / than on his brother?” (138) This raises a question of human brotherhood and the claim that all human misery has on all of us. In spite of the fact that Silas’s brother is well off, as both Warren and Mary know, and that Silas’s brother “ought of right / To take him in,” (147-148) the bond that is more powerful than blood, the reason why Mary wants to accept Silas back to work or to die, is the bond of pity. Mary’s pithy remark generalizing that Silas is “just the kind that kinsfolk can’t abide” (157) reinforces her argument why she and her husband must assume responsibility for Silas on the basis of their acceptance of the fact that “Silas is what he is” (156). This is why Silas’s brother does not accept him. Silas’s puzzlement about himself as a failure, as acknowledged by Mary, “He
don’t know why he isn’t quite as good / As anybody,” (159-160) raises a question about universal justice. Why should it be given to some to succeed and others to fail? Can everyone be held equally accountable for their fate? Mary gets an answer to all her queries towards the end when Warren returns to inform Mary of Silas’s death, thus confirming Mary’s intuition about the human fate – that it is determined by forces beyond human understanding and human control. (Vogel, Nancy. 201)

“Wild Grapes” was one poem that Frost wrote when Miss Susan Hayes Ward, the poetry editor of the Independent magazine and Frost’s first publisher asked him to write her a poem that would do for girls what “Birches” did for boys – a poem based on her own childhood experiences (“The Way There” [unpublished preface, summer 1958]). In the poem “Wild Grapes” the narrator who is a girl recollects that her brother had bent down a birch tree so that she could reach the wild grapes entangled on vines in its upper branches. When he released it, she was carried heavenward as she grasped the vines, only getting back to earth when her brother bent the tree back down again.

Riding heavenward and back to earth on a birch tree is the central motive of “Birches” and “Wild Grapes”. In the case of the boy, both the ascent and descent are achieved with conscious mastery, in the case of the little girl both are involuntary – “Be run off with by birch trees into space,” (91) then rescued when her brother bends the tree back down. An emotional touch of love that brings out the brother’s love and concern for his sister for it is here that Frost has used the word “rescued,” the brother acting as a saviour for his sister. He has captured the moment that relates to all times to come, the true bond shared between the brother and sister.
As already quoted, in “Birches” Frost’s longing for a retreat towards heaven is tempered by the reminder that “Earth’s the right place for love.” (52) No matter what problems one has in life, there are times when one wishes to withdraw himself from this world only to realise that it is the earth one has to withdraw to, for that is the only place for love. The feeling of being wanted, being loved is only possible when one lives on this planet. Human relationship is something that one looks to and that one can seek only on earth. In “Wild Grapes” the little girl who is run away with by the birch tree into space achieves a second birth, is born again when her brother brings her safely back to earth by bending down the birch tree from where she dangled amongst the grapes. Up there the little one thought she was far off from the ordinary world:

I don’t know much about the letting down;
But once I felt ground with my stocking feet
And the world came revolving back to me,
I know I looked long at my curled-up fingers,
Before I straightened them and brushed the bark off. (84-88)

The feel of the earth under her feet brought the world “revolving back” to her. The fraternal ties the narrator says are so strong that they have the capability of bringing the world revolving back. There is nothing that these ties are incapable of doing. This poem talks of the love, affection, care and protectiveness of the brother towards his sibling:

My brother did the climbing; and at first
Threw me down grapes to miss and scatter
And have to hunt for in sweet fern and hardhack;
Which gave him some time to himself to eat. (31-34)

In the above lines the poet has given a graphic picture; he has immortalised this moment. Every reader reading these lines will draw a similarity to his / her life. They also appeal directly to the heart. Frost has very cleverly delineated the fraternal relationship in these lines and given such an apt graphic image of the whole scene that one is touched. It is very close to real life and brings one abreast with the bond shared between the brother and sister. Giving the elder brother the status of the father Frost writes, “So then, to make me wholly self-supporting, / He climbed still higher and bent the tree to earth / And put it in my hands to pick my own grapes.” (36-38) The brother having the fatherly traits in him wanted her to be self-reliant and take the onus of plucking for herself and eating, an obvious reason, for he knew one enjoys the fruit of one’s labour.

“I said I had the tree. It wasn’t true. / The opposite was true. The tree had me.” (41-42) This happened because she did not hold it with all her might when her brother let it go and later, in spite of him shouting and telling her to “let go” she did not “let go” of it. Instead she clung to it like a little child afraid to let go of her mother’s hand. Seeing her hanging, the poor brother grew restless, no matter how much he tried to assure her to “let go” of the bough and drop for he would gather her in his arms and not let a single scratch mar her skin, she turned a deaf ear. “Drop or I’ll shake the tree and shake you down.” (78) Moreover, when sweet assurances did not help he tried to threaten her and this worked. She tried. “Hold tight awhile till I think what to do. / I’ll bend the tree down and let you down by it.” (82-83) This was a very considerate gesture on his part. He knew what his sister was going through, so he tried to think of some other way to bring her down.
The last line holds the essence of the whole poem. In “Maple”, Maple’s husband had told her to “let go” when she desperately desired to find a meaning to her name. The little girl in the “Wild Grapes” was very ignorant while the brother had been telling her to “let go”. Now she has grown up, matured, has gained an understanding, but she confesses that she is the same.

I had not learned to let go with the hands,
As still I have not learned to with the heart,
And have no wish to with the heart – nor need,
That I can see. The mind – is not the heart.
I may yet live, as I know others live,
To wish in vain to let go with the mind –
Of cares, at night, to sleep; but nothing tells me
That I need learn to let go with the heart.

(Wild Grapes, 96-103)

Times change, other relationships like social and marital take priority in life, but fraternal ties are so deep-rooted in one’s soul that one cannot “let go” of this relationship. It lingers and always takes a front seat till one ceases to live. This little girl responds to her brother’s tutelage, but is not able to act on his advice “to let go” of the branch which she was clutching. Her life is difficult, and will continue to be until she acquires the ability to release her human hold on transitory things.

“To let go with the heart” makes a person nothing but insensitive, stone-hearted like the stars in “Stars”: “Those stars like some snow-white / Minerva’s snow-white marble eyes / Without the gift of sight.” (10-12) This incident shredded away
her ignorance and she realised there are certain cherished memories one cannot let go from the heart. One often likes to linger on in their tranquilising effect.

Talking about this kind of bonding one cannot help recollecting the trauma that the brother went through in “Out, Out –”. Being the only support to himself and bearing the responsibility of a younger sister the boy worked for long hours.

. . . day was all but done.

Call it a day, I wish they might have said

To please the boy by giving him the half hour

That a boy counts so much when saved from work. (9-12)

This is also a comment on humanity. If the onlookers in the poem “Out, Out ” wanted they could have asked the boy to stop work and take rest for half an hour. Take rest, have a bite and then resume work. But they were not bothered. “His sister stood beside them in her apron / To tell them ‘Supper.’” (13-14) The little one had not eaten, but was waiting for her brother. The moment the word supper was uttered, it seemed supper time for the saw too, for it leaped out of his hand . . . . Somewhere it comes to the mind, if only she had not uttered a word maybe his mind would not have been diverted and this irreparable loss would not have happened. In Frost’s life too, there were many such instances. Instead of being a support, his sister had accused and held him accountable for his mother’s deteriorating health. Seeing no hope, the boy in “Out, Out –” made a last attempt and pleaded, “‘Don’t let him cut my hand off – / The doctor, when he comes. Don’t let him, sister!’” (25-26) Reading the above lines makes the reader well aware of the plight of the boy as well as the helplessness of the sister who was now left all alone in this mysterious wide world. Her only support had been snatched by the cruel hands of destiny. Here Frost, very subtly, in a
larger sense scorns fraternal relationship. In addition to blaming the saw, Frost blames the adults on the scene for not intervening and telling the boy to “call it a day”. Before the accident had the boy not continued working and got some rest, he would have avoided cutting off his hand and saved himself from the cruel hands of death. Moreover, a short break from work would have allowed the child to regain his childhood.

After moving to England with his family, Frost was forced to return to America because of the onset of World War I in 1915, an event that would destroy the lives of many innocent young boys. This poem can be read as a critique of the world events that forced the young boy to leave his childhood behind and ultimately be destroyed by circumstances beyond his control. After his hand is severed, he is still enough of an adult to realise that he has lost enough blood and chances of his survival are less. Here, in this poem Frost has scorned the fraternal ties, the bond that one human has with another and the insensitivity of people towards their fellow men.

. . . They listened at his heart.

Little – less – nothing! – and that ended it.

No more to build on there. And they, since they

Were not the one dead, turned to their affairs. (31-34)

When one lives in society it is expected of one to sensitise oneself to the mutual feelings of brotherhood. Instead, what one saw here was indifference in the attitude of people. The human emotions in the society as Philip L. Gerber in “Out, Out –” says, “had dwindled”. People had become insensitive and more materialistic, inhuman to be more precise. (Gerber, Philip L. 119.)
Love crosses all boundaries. True love is selfless and does not ask for any sacrifice. Laban in “Place for a Third” hunts for the grave of his wife Elizabeth’s first husband whom she loved dearly, and desired to lie by his side after her death. On the side of the grave was vacant land, enough for the burial of one person. On inquiring he found it was for the unmarried sister. Laban’s penultimate goal in life now was to convince the sister for the vacant land that would serve as his wife’s grave. After a lot of contemplation and queries regarding why, how much he cared, and so on she negated the proposal saying, “Eliza’s had too many other men.” (78) This sister and Elizabeth had been very good friends, but when it came to doing a favour to one who had not stood by her brother, she refused. Fraternal ties did not give way. Here they were stronger than friendship.

Relating the incident of the lady’s uncle in “A Servant to Servants”, Frost reflects on the inhuman and insensitive attitude of the father whose brother had been locked up and treated in an inhuman, beastly manner. Frost is of the opinion that keeping the person in the asylum is better than keeping him at home because he feels that people are prejudiced and feel that they (the insane) can be looked after well at home. They do not realise that love, the feeling of being cared and looked after is what they really want. It was due to lack of love that her father’s brother had turned insane. By keeping her insane uncle at home, her father had further ruined his brother’s life. Frost, with a lot of defiance, has openly unmasked the brutality of kinship. In “A Servant to Servants,” when her father’s brother was at the height of madness, instead of being his support her father dropped a thunderbolt on him by getting married. The poor soul was kept within a cage “of hickory poles” and instead of being given a comfortable bed; he was made to sleep on straw,
Like a beast’s stall, to ease their consciences.

Of course they had to feed him without dishes.

They tried to keep him clothed, but he paraded

With his clothes on his arm – all of his clothes.  (120-123)

...................................................................................................................

...................................................................................................................

...................................................................................................................

... He’d shout and shout

Until the strength was shouted out of him,

And his voice died down slowly from exhaustion. (131-133)

...................................................................................................................

...................................................................................................................

...................................................................................................................

... They found a way to put a stop to it. (139)

How very brutal!! The poor soul was ultimately suffocated. This is one face of the fraternal relationship. Here again through an anecdote, Frost has conveyed and left it to his readers to decide. There is one thing to note in Frost’s poetry. He has exposed the aspects, the negative as well as the positive of every relationship.

The image formed on reading “Mending Wall” is ambiguous: two men meeting on terms of civility and neighbourliness to build a barrier between them. This is a paradoxical situation that talks of a feeling of brotherhood on the one hand and building barriers on the other. Initially, they do so as a matter of tradition, but the earth conspires against them and makes their task difficult by having the boulders roll down again. Whether it be the hunters, or the frost and “thaw of nature’s invisible hand,” the boulders tumble down again. The speaker sees no reason for the wall to be kept, but the neighbour resorts to an age-old adage: “Good fences make good neighbours.” (27) The speaker scorns the neighbour’s wall building; he observes the
whole activity with humorous detachment, but he himself goes to the wall to mend the
damage done by hunters. In fact, it is the speaker who contacts the neighbour at wall
mending to set the appointment for wall building. Yes, it is true that “Good fences
make good neighbours.” There is a certain kind of privacy that a person needs. What
is remarkable about the wall mending as Parini says is that when the two of them meet
to discuss, or during the time of mending they talk, they bond, a fraternal relationship
is shared between them, which otherwise in this busy world would not have been
possible. (Parini, 138-39.)

“A Tuft of Flowers” resounds with brotherly speech. The speaker in “A Tuft
of Flowers” goes to the field that has been mowed. He felt lonely like the mower must
who had cut the grass and gone his way. Just then he sees a butterfly that flew past
him towards a tuft of flowers that the mower had left standing. Instantly, the joy that
must have led the mower to admire and spare the flowers is transferred through the
sight of flowers to the speaker. This awakens in him a fraternal bond with the mower
and immediately banishes his loneliness. He no longer feels lonely; instead, he feels
he is working with the mower side by side. (Gerber, Philip L. 124.)

In his poem “Build Soil” – A Political Pastoral, Frost showed up a serious
imbalance between the individual and society in modern times with the individual
seriously involved and overwhelmed by his commitments. The two chief characters of
the poem Tityrus, the rural poet, and Meliboeus, the potato man, discuss and draw a
range of a well-balanced society. This poem is a plea to draw in for privacy from too
many social involvements in society. Tityrus says of the contemporary man “we are
too much out, and if we don’t draw in / We shall be driven in.” (243-244) Towards
the end Meliboeus confirms this theme at the conclusion of the poem. “. . . I agree
with you / we’re too unseperate. And going home / From company means coming to
our senses.” (290-293)

Frost too, like these two characters, felt a kind of imbalance throughout the
world of the 20th century due to the submergence of the country into the city. The
industrialised urban life had literally swallowed the rural life of United States.
Towards the early decades of the 20th century the nation had already gone into
urbanisation, but being full of optimism he hoped for a revival of rural life. In an
interview in 1931 Frost stated, “What all survives of farming has only demeaned itself
in an attempt to imitate industrialisation. It has lost its self-respect. The farmer has
made himself too social. He has ventured into a competitive world. All this is due to
the fact that he has got his requirements, that he did not feel the need to go out.”
(Westbrook, Perry D. 239.) “The strength of his position is that he’s got so many
things that he doesn’t need to go out.” The tendency for the preservation of his
individuality as Westbrook suggests, draws him back. He is of the belief that
industrialization has made them draw away from their base which is in the country.
No matter how much a person craves to be alone, it is not possible. He has to seek
company, some kind of relationship is a must and fraternal relationship as shown by
Frost in his poems is an ideal relationship which is needed for man’s own progress
and the progress of the society.

Frost is remarkable when it comes to dealing with human sentiments and
emotions. Expressing the different aspects of human nature, how they could not
connect with one another was his forte. In several of his poems it seems the poet is in
conversation with someone. For instance, in “The Pastures” he says, “I sha’n’t be
gone long – you come too” (4). In some of his poems, solitary individuals wander
through a natural setting and encounter another individual. These encounters make them realise their connection to the others, or the way they feel isolated from the community. Frost’s early poems feature speakers who actively choose solitude and isolation in order to learn about themselves, but ultimately discover a firm connection to the world around them as in “Mending Wall”. When one talks of a human being who “wants” the wall down, it means he has a heart that cares about brotherhood, community and human interaction. If he cannot maintain this, he is bound to get lost in oblivion. Barriers confine, but for some they encourage freedom and productivity by offering challenging frameworks within which to work. “Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening”, the division seems to lie between the village (society, civilization, duty, sensibility, responsibility) and the woods (that which is beyond the border of the village). Out of the two, the traveller chooses the village, as he is reminded of his commitments and responsibilities. (Gerber, Philip L. 85.)

The lady in “A Servant to Servants” is highly obliged that she has got a listener, “I’d rather you’d not go unless you must.” (177) “Ghost House” is another remarkable poem that dwells on Frost’s sombre state of mind, his loneliness. The house had been abandoned long back. To the narrator, it seemed as though the forest was reclaiming him. It is at this time Frost says that one realises the emptiness of life, the sultry feeling in the absence of one’s kith and kin. Similarly, “Not to keep” stimulates one’s emotions and makes one aware of the sacrifices a soldier makes in order to guard our frontiers. A big salute to his wife and parents for their dedication, commitment and selfless love they shower without a single complaint. Away from the cosy comfort of home the soldier fights on the front assuring his countrymen, his brethren that they are in safe hands.
In “Build Soil” Frost has made his belief very clear that man by nature is a social animal. His membership in the society is not a matter of personal choice or a voluntary relationship that can be broken. It is rather a biological and moral necessity. Man is born in society without his choice (Sinclair, T.A. Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1962, 28). We, Frost further says, are too much out or too much in. Once you are very much out it becomes very difficult to turn inside. Therefore, introspection is what one needs to do. He adds, everybody knew that he was interpersonal, but he knew how personal he is. Here, as Peter J. Stanlis suggests, Frost indirectly makes an appeal to the general mass that before being international one should be national, have an obsession with one’s own nation. (Stanlis, 234.) It is in the self-interest of both, the individual and society, to make a lot of adjustments if they wish to live in peace and harmony. “Nothing not built with hands of course is sacred,” a line from “New Hampshire” clearly portrays his belief in mankind giving priority to mankind before nature. He did not consider human society as “artificial” and mountains, rivers, brooks, etc as something “natural” to man. Just like animals need to live in a state of physical “nature,” it is perfectly natural for humans to live in a society. As regards the rural and urban life, Frost was of the opinion that each had an advantage that the other lacked. They supplement each other. A common problem for these two basic ways of life was how one should maintain his integrity as an individual with the public demands made upon him by other men and his membership in the social institutions. This is very much the same problem that Plato raised in The Republic, “How can man be both a good man, true to his highest moral self and also a good citizen, true to the legitimate claims of his political society? (The Republic) (Stanlis, Peter J. 222.)

To what extent should a man be self-reliant as an individual? Should he have sufficient or surplus wealth? This was immaterial for Frost, for he believed in
“character”. He was of the opinion that in the initial stages of man’s life, “the greatest degree of self-reliance, love of individual freedom, reflective leisure, integrity and character was to be found in country life.”

The simplicity of country life brought forth the human qualities in many ways. The personal character defined as moral and intellectual virtues could best be cultivated in country life. In order to develop as a total human being, Frost believed that a man had to depend on his own inner resources and this he learnt best through his life at the farm. Solitude for self-reflection is an essential ingredient for self-development and this could well be found in country life. In order to seek inspiration one has to be drawn within. Urban life being so busy does not give one a chance to introspect. He felt, “there was a conscious sense of self-identity through isolation” just like the speaker in “A Tuft of Flowers.” The happiness of the mower on deliberately sparing a tuft of flower is transferred to the speaker. He immediately develops a sense of social relationship with the mower. Frost was of the belief that an individual should live a rural life, he should “plunge deeper into his own nature, to explore and find his own strength and weaknesses, to measure his ordinary self against his ideal self, so that when he entered the urban society he came with the greatness of his intellectual, moral, aesthetic and social capability already well developed.” The reflective isolation of country life when young prepares the individual for civil society where a feeling of fraternity plays the prime role.

Although Frost loved both “the quiet of the garden” and “the market place” of urban dwelling, he saw them closely related but two distinct spheres of man’s life. The highest purpose of life and one of utmost priority, according to Frost, was the perfection of each individual in his relationship to the other. He was of the opinion
that when a large number of individuals maturely developed as complete human beings, the society in which we live will definitely receive the benefit of their knowledge, talents and character resulting in an overall improvement of society. Frost gave more importance to a well-balanced social individual than to an excessively personal or one too committed to society.

Frost highly esteemed Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe*, Darwin’s *Voyage of the Beagle* and Thoreau’s *Walden*. “These three classics have a special shelf in my heart.” *Walden* was to Frost, “a tale of adventure – a declaration of independence and a gospel of wisdom” (Stanlis, Peter J. 227). Frost was well aware that the kind of self-contained freedom that was forced upon Robinson Crusoe, and freely chosen by Thoreau at Walden Pond was not man’s “freedom in society”, but merely “independence from society”. Thoreau showed at Walden Pond how much of political and economic society he could live without. Frost dismissed Thoreau’s theme of independence from the society saying, “Life amongst the Woodchucks is not for me.” In other words, any kind of seclusion from mankind was not acceptable to Frost. The moralist’s kind of “independence” from society was unacceptable to Frost and inadequate for social freedom.

Frost noted that there was plenty of empty unclaimed land always available for any individual who wished to return to the country in order to gain more self-reliance and independence than was possible in an urban society. This he felt was “return to nature.” What determines the population of the world is not the land that can be tilled but something in the nature of the people that limits the size of the world in which he lives. He doesn’t want people to come as a product till they’ve turned themselves under many times. A nation is not merely the number of individuals living within a
geographical area. As a nation “people” is the product of their total historical inheritance, which gives them their “essential character.”

Frost’s poem “The Gift Outright,” is a brief history of the United States from its settlement in colonial times to the present. It celebrates the emergence of the American self-identity and national consciousness. It is a fusion of a desire for political freedom and a growing love of the land as something that possessed them as people. His most famous lines, “The land was ours before we were the land’s.” (1) By this total gift to themselves, by the colonist’s surrender to the land, they acquired a new identity – that of a politically free American nation. Frost was in favour of local or regional autonomy and called himself a “se- p- a- ra- tist”: “I am . . . also a separatist” (Stanlis, 231). He further argued that one cannot mix properly unless one is separated to test one’s qualities and values. The proper relationship between the individual and society was according to the liberty provided by the state and the free impulse of its citizens. Frost was of the opinion that if the free impulse of its citizens is unrestrained it would be wrong, because men usually by nature are not good and wise. Therefore, constitutional and statutory laws have been levied so that men may be free, not in themselves but in society. Frost further believes that an individual’s relationship to his fellow beings extends to his family, close friends, then home town or the local community, his state and finally his country. (Stanlis, Peter J. 231) The personal and moral loyalties differ from those of legal loyalties. Thoreau wrote a tribute to a man who loved his home town as the core of his regionalism and nationalism.

A man is as tall as his height

Plus the height of his home town

I know a Denverite
Who, measured from sea to crown,
Is one mile five foot ten,
And he swings a commensurate pen.

Frost was deeply critical of those Americans who ignored their local and national loyalties while seeking to include a love for the whole world. He felt one cannot be universal without first being provincial, for him it was like trying to embrace the wind. In the words of Edmund Burke, “To love the little platoon we belong to in society is the first principle of public affection.” Jonathan Swift went further to say that he hated all nations, professions and communities, all his love was for individuals. He hated the tribe of lawyers but loved one counsellor, and so was it with a judge or a physician. But, principally I hate and detest that animal called man, although I heartily love John and Peter.

In March 1950, on his 75th birthday at a press conference the poet said, “What do I want for my Birthday? I want prowess for my country, and by prowess I mean, the native ability to help in everything its people attempt.” Nine years later in 1959 when an interviewer asked if he wanted anything for the world and his country, the poet replied, for the world ‘no’: I’m not large enough for that. For my country ‘yes’; there is something for my country. “I want it to win at every turn in everything it does. I am a terrible nationalist.” When someone pointed that Mr. Frost was slightly doubtful regarding International good will, Frost quoted him saying, “I am a national and I expect others to be.” This applied to his view of his country throughout his life.

In his poem, “Hyla Brook” Frost summarized the theme in one line, “We love the things we love for what they are.” (15) This conception to Frost applied for all his
countrymen. He loved his country for its weaknesses and faults as well as for its strength and virtues. This love for his country marked a huge difference between him and his friend Louis Untermeyer, whose ideologies were totally different, for he was a Marxist.

The most unpardonable offence for Frost is to put on a fake front. One should be proud of one’s national origin, his race, his religion, his culture and everything that gave him an individual character. 80% of his people were nationalist and he was proud of the fact. On August 18, 1917, he wrote to Untermeyer, “We are still surer of nationality than we are of anything else in the world – ninety-nine millions of us as in this country.” Frost cherished his Nationality that gave him full freedom. This freedom given to him by his country was “like old clothes or old shoes; it fitted his temperament.” He defines his freedom as “feeling easy in his harness.”

The fraternal ties shared and experienced by his countrymen were much superior to the fraternal ties experienced in Soviet Russia. His countrymen, were in fact superior to any other because they were willing to tolerate the whole vast range of human expression of freedom. He was very critical when the Russian government condemned Boris Pasternak on his criticism of the Soviet system in *Dr. Zhivago*, as an example of political tyranny. When Boris Pasternak’s was nominated for the Nobel Prize in Literature and the communist government prevented him from accepting it, Frost once again criticised calling them selfish and saying that they didn’t want their truth being exposed. To this effect he said in November 1958: “What they’re ridiculing him for is from selfishness. They don’t want their own thing reflected on – it’s treason. We stand all that better than they do.” In his view, Pasternak’s criticism of Soviet repression and humanity was based upon an intense love for Russia – this
was very close to his type of patriotic nationalism concerning the U.S.A. He also refused to make a personal public protest against the Soviet condemnation of Pasternak:

I couldn’t do that. I understood what it was he wanted. He wanted to be left alone. . . . He had done what he wanted. He’d made his criticism. He (Pasternak) lived in a little artist’s colony outside Moscow, and that was where he wanted to live and be left alone, and I had to respect that. I’m a nationalist myself. (Stanlis 237, 3-7.)

His respect for Pasternak was even stronger than his convictions regarding Soviet repression. His refusal to condemn the system is an example of his magnanimity and empathy towards individuals. His satirical poem, “To a Thinker” (January 1936), is against those countrymen who idealise the Russian policy. To Frost, such Americans were worse than enemies during war. “The Flood” is metaphorically titled for the bloodshed that flows when the country wages a war against its kind or a man against man. We use weapons under a pretext that we are using and producing weapons of mass destruction for peace and harmony, as a tool for self-protection, but in reality it’s the other way round. “Might is right” is what we want to delude ourselves with, and thus in order to assert our authority over the others we use power. “But power of blood itself releases blood.” (“The Flood”, 6) When a nation encroaches on the others’ land in order to assert its authority, it is a kind of “new slaughter”. Weapons are used on both sides – the one who attacks and the other who tries to defend.

“A Massive Missile” is a satire on mankind. It talks of the invention of missiles used for mass destruction of the innocent. It tells us about the little pebble
wheel with two dots in red symbolic to tears falling from each eye, tears that would bring sorrow. “And the wave line a shaken sigh” (12). But why is the colour red? Maybe, red symbolises blood. The line must be a “jagged blade” referring to the unevenly cut wound inflicted during the war. The poet says that the sender of this sorrow will have to pay with his death. It is crystal clear who is behind the mischief, yet obscure because it is not direct, the sender is all candy the cold blood shed is due to the missile. The motive still stands, and in order to fulfil it humans are killed and thrown off like mud dug with a spade and thrown off from a shovel. The narrator expresses his views and says why should he hold himself back? Here, he talks of the ambitions and the inhibitions one has that are always satiated. So long as one wishes, one can make one’s power felt. Two souls could meet, but the gap has been widened because of the distance they have created between themselves. By bringing the reality before us, Frost makes one realise how wrong this is, how far it is from being humane. This is not what one would call fraternal. Through some such evidences and anecdotes Frost clears the mist before one’s eye.

In spite of being so vulnerable as regards his feelings towards fraternal relationship, Frost was against the League of Nations and the United Nations Organisation and called them disastrous. For him life was a choice of decisions; it was based on challenges and risks – no risk, no life. (Stanlis, 238.) The dominating nations were the ones that risked everything to dominate, the rest just survived. One ought to be clear about one’s choice. According to him the UN was formed out of desperation and anything born out of desperation can never solve any problem. In 1957, UN was given a huge metal rock of solid iron-ore by Sweden. It was decided to build the rock into the UN building in New York as a symbol of nature’s strength and man’s unity. Frost was invited to write a poem celebrating the interdependence of the Nations. He
outrightly rejected the theme of the invitation saying, ironically, that iron could indeed be used to strengthen the UN building but it could also be used for weapons of war which was historically the way with nature and man. “I was thinking when I wrote of that lump of iron in the United Nations building that stands for unity. But, even as you look at it, it seems to split. You think of tools that can be made of it, and you think of weapons. . . .” (Stanlis, 239.) In his satirical poems, he has laid bare the message he chooses to convey. One sees it clearly in his verses on the bomb in “U.S.1946 King’s X”, following the atomic blasts over Nagasaki and Hiroshima. On the one hand, use of these weapons was defended pragmatically as the most direct and utilitarian means of victory, on the other hand, banishment of the bomb was called for on humanitarian grounds. For Frost this is sheer hypocrisy.

Boasting of the fraternal front Frost attacked Roosevelt’s programme in a few of his poems, namely, “A Roadside Stand,” “Departmental,” “Build Soil,” and “To a Thinker.” He termed Roosevelt’s administration “The New Devil,” in Scottish dialect, “The New Deil” (Stanlis, 239). “Build Soil” is a defence of ‘personal’ identity and independence against the interpersonal demands of the New Deal. It contains an attack upon the abuse of freedom in private enterprises. In 1939, to an audience at the Bread Loaf School, England, he attacked their Marxist view of labour. What some people call exploitation, I call employment. When New Deal politicians condemned “rugged individualism,” Frost called himself “ragged individualist” thereby insisting that he valued his personal freedom even if it meant poverty. In order to live life assertively with courage, Frost said that men needed some “social insecurity.” In reply to Mrs. Roosevelt’s humanitarian talk about the need to abolish poverty, Frost said, “When I think of all the good that has come from poverty, I would hesitate to abolish it.”
Frost believed that Franklin. D. Roosevelt wished to create a homogenised society in which the cream of human nature would never be allowed to rise to the top. As he perceived it, New Deal was a utopian dream for the new masses of future America. True civilisation, according to him, was Individual freedom under constitutional law and representative government. In 1944, to an audience at Bread Loaf, he threw a question – What is the opposite of Utopia? Someone said, “Hell.” “No,” he said, “It’s civilisation. The opposite of civilisation is not barbarism, but Utopia.” Utopia, can do nothing but makes a man his worst enemy. A social control and repression of individual freedom existed in all societies that had for their objective a Utopian society for man. The free choice of each individual to be independent of the collective commune is still the best. Although he clearly favoured Darwin, he paid tribute to the greatness of vision and power of Karl Marx, who came right after the evolutionist, and successfully challenged the established Darwinian metaphor, “The survival of the fittest.” Frost rose against the Marx metaphor first as he’d risen against Darwin’s. Secondly, he realised that the Marx metaphor had a psychological advantage over Darwinian, who pictured society as men struggling against each other, like animals in the jungle of nature, within the competitive life of civil society.

The Marxist offered temporal salvation and economic security in exchange for political freedom. Spiritual freedom they dismissed as an opiate of the people. It was clear that secure shelter could only materialise by giving complete monopoly of political, economic and social power to the state under the communist party so that the strife and competition between individuals, classes and nations might be totally eliminated. The Marxists envisioned that there would be universal peace under a communist utopia. This was a mere delusion on their part. (Stanlis,244.)
Frost, on the other hand, was in favour of individual freedom. He feared that under any controlled Utopian collectivist society, peace would be imposed only after each individual and nation was reduced to nothing, and enslaved. For him life is a constant struggle for survival and improvement. A man could learn by observing the fact that many animals have the ability to take care from the time of birth. He assumed that it was the same in case of man too. The value of self-reliance is as great for the nation as it is for an individual. Change for him is constant and unavoidable. This is the way it is with human beings and with nations, so why deplores it?

Frost was a great believer and “on the side of adversity”. According to him, if there is no freedom there is no growth into responsible citizenship. He was against parents who were afraid to give their children some of the hardships of life that are necessary to ripen their judgement to become responsible citizens. In an interview in 1949, Frost readily admitted that he would hate a new brave world in which his security was guaranteed from cradle to grave. He called himself a natural gambler who did not want the uncertainties taken out of life, and amongst his countrymen he wished to see the largest possible number of responsible citizens. He strongly felt that the only progress is in “conflict”. (Stanlis, 248) What kind of fraternal ties does one expect when security is guaranteed to all from the cradle to the grave? There is no provision for free lunch; the people have humbly succumbed to the whims of the state. It is only when one struggles for survival, one has a feeling of empathy for the other and so he helps his fellow being in times of need, thus building on a new hope for life. Just like in the arts, we want all the differences we get, the more the hues the better the piece of art is. The highest freedom and individualism to Frost was freedom of the spirit. Good fraternal ties can only be maintained when one is free in spirit. (Stanlis, 248)
One may quote him to the effect, “Something there is that does not love a wall, but I’m sure he’ll prefer the other, “Good fences make good neighbours.” One does not need an organisational force like the United Nations if one respects the privacy of others. Good relations with one’s neighbour, without encroaching on their personal space is actually the need of the hour.

Frost’s poems show a deep appreciation of the natural world and sensibility about human aspirations. His images – woods, stars, and houses are taken from everyday life. Using a conversational style, with smooth flowing language, colloquial words and phrases, he deals with every human relationship in a simple but subtle manner. His poetic style is so masterly that underneath the apparent simplicity one cannot ignore the profound analyses of the complex ways in which the human heart works. He takes everyday situations, evolving attachments and conflicts in human relationships, whether good or bad. Not only this, Frost also explores the tension between the different urges in the human heart, and while revealing the innermost reality of these tensions, conflicts and dramas, he talks of the relationship that one shares with the other. It is this that should be cherished, for after reading his poems and getting a clear picture of the fragility and vulnerability of the relationship one gets a better understanding on which road to take.
Works Cited


_________. “The Individual and Society” 222.

_________. 223.

Stanlis. Peter J., Robert Frost: The Poet as Philosopher. Interviews, 142. (In 1959, Untermeyer noted that Frost had been consistent throughout his life about how an Individual should save himself from being compromised by the demands of modern urban life: “He still believes that the only way to be saved is to save yourself; two of his favourite books are Robinson Crusoe, the self-sustaining castaway, and Walden, the document of a man who cast himself.”) The Letters of Robert Frost to Louis Untermeyer, 378. “The Individual and Society.” 227.

_________. 229.


_______. Robert Frost: Life and Talks-Walking, 310.


Interviews, 190. In September 1962, during Frost’s trip to Russia, the poet was asked whether Russian poets were known in America, and he replied: “The chief one seems to be Pasternak.” The reporter of this incident noted: “There was an instant hush. The Russians were shocked and embarrassed. The late Boris Pasternak, one of Russia’s foremost poets, is still a name that frightens many Russians. He was hounded by Soviet authorities after his book Dr. Zhivago was published in the west. It is highly critical of the communist regime and has not been published in Russia.” (Interviews, 289.)


_______. Interviews, 76.

_______. 240.
