

## CHAPTER III

### INDIVIDUALISM IN FROST'S POETRY

#### I The Positive Side of Individualism

"Every poem of his, he said, was based on an actual experience."<sup>1</sup> This is Sidney Cox writing about Robert Frost. Going back to the years before he was recognized as a chief interpreter of his country, Robert Frost spent most of his time suffering from poor health, struggling against obstacles and literary failure. Still he persisted in his effort to be accepted as a serious poet. Recognition came with the publication of A Boy's Will in 1913; he continued to write and the next year, North of Boston, one of the most intensely American books ever printed, came out with greater success. He called this collection of his poems "a book of people." It is no mistake to say that through his works Frost gives a wide view of what he himself has experienced. Louis Untermeyer comments that Frost has written on almost every subject and

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<sup>1</sup>Sidney Cox, A Swinger of Birches: A Portrait of Robert Frost (New York: New York University Press, 1957), p. 21.

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, and walk about, and converse, and tell their stories with the freedom of common speech.<sup>2</sup>

Robert Frost is not a radical poet who presents the negative side of what he has seen, although he endured hardships in his early years. He once said: "I like the middle way, as I like to talk to the man who walks the middle way with me."<sup>3</sup> He tries to give both negative and positive pictures. He seems to suggest that defeat brings more experience which helps a person to go on struggling, hoping for success; he says in "New Hampshire":

... I'm what is called a sensibilitist,  
Or otherwise an environmentalist.

...  
I make a virtue of my suffering  
From nearly everything that goes on round me...<sup>4</sup>  
(p. 206)

Frost also says that:

I never dared be radical when young  
For fear it would make me conservative when old.  
(p. 407)

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<sup>2</sup>Robert Frost, Come In and Other Poems (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1943), p.18.

<sup>3</sup>Lathem, op. cit., p.48.

<sup>4</sup>All references of Robert Frost's poetry are quoted from: Complete Poems of Robert Frost (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1949).

So from his writing a reader will recognize him as a moderate poet who has the courage to be himself, and to write on many subjects, and who refuses to be limited by any forces except his personal experiences and consciousness. "Always a moderate - Frost was fond of emphasizing that he considered himself neither radical nor conservative - he searched for an ideal reconciliation between the opposing claims of the individual and the group."<sup>5</sup>

On the other hand, Frost claims to be a universal, not a regional poet. In his long poem entitled "New Hampshire," he says:

... Because I wrote my novels in New Hampshire  
Is no proof that I aimed them at New Hampshire.  
(p. 206)

Apparently, Frost meant to be universal; for he classifies himself as a "synecdochist," who prefers "... the synecdoche in poetry - that figure of speech in which we use a part for the whole."<sup>6</sup> Still, his readers will have the impression that the characters, and his choice of subject-matter, as well as the general background of most of his

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<sup>5</sup>Philip L. Gerber, Robert Frost (New York : Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1966), p.146.

<sup>6</sup>Louis Untermeyer, Modern American and British Poetry (New York : Harcourt, Brace and Company, Inc., 1942), I, p. 207.

poems, are concerned with America. In "Record Stride," a poem which records where the poet has been travelling, wearing a certain pair of shoes, the poet remembers:

On one I can taste Atlantic,  
On the other Pacific, salt.

One foot in each great ocean  
Is a record stride or stretch.

...

And I ask all to try to forgive me  
For being as over - elated  
As if I had measured the country  
And got the United States stated.

(pp. 381-382)

As this poem suggests, Frost tends to write about America. Undoubtedly, his devoted readers are aware of his use of America as literary background and moreover what he expresses through his characters reveals the characteristics of that particular nation - America.

It is said that

Frost's passion for individuality has marked all great poets from Shakespeare and Keats to Dylan Thomas. He has refused to be seduced by passing literary fashions. In an age of dogmas, he stands alone and his integrity is reflected again and again by his poetry.<sup>7</sup>

Looking carefully at his poems, one will see that:

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<sup>7</sup>Radcliffe Squires, The Major Themes of Robert Frost (Michigan : The University of Michigan, 1963), remark on the dust wrapper.

There is the background of his material, the environment and character which belong to a special community.... he found ... that real artistic speech was only to be copied from life...{and} he discovered this in the character of ... man...<sup>8</sup>

As was mentioned in Part I, the American people are what Jean de Crèvecoeur called "a new people" who came to the new land individually. One characteristic of them is that they are not bound by traditional ideas which, in relation to their experience and thinking, seem unreasonable. For example, in his well-known poem "Mending Wall," a poem of two men going out to repair their walls, Frost presents two contrasting New England characters - a questioning man and his conservative neighbor who limits himself to what he has heard and accepts it without question. He merely keeps saying: "Good fences make good neighbors," and "He will not go behind his father's saying." Being a questioning man, Frost raises a new question through the character "I": "Why do they make good neighbors?" Opposed to his neighbor's belief he suggests:

... Something there is that doesn't love a wall,  
That wants it down.

(p. 48)

To him, it seems that walls separate individuals physically and mentally and that wall builders are not

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<sup>8</sup>Lathen, op. cit., pp. 3-4.

but "fools," as he says in "The Cow in Apple Time":

Something inspires the only cow of late  
To make no more of a wall than an open gate,  
And think no more of wall-builders than fools.  
(p. 157)

Before him, no one had asked such a question. In fact, "Mending Wall" can be read as a plea for breaking down traditional barriers, past conventions which no longer seem useful. In Frost there is often a self-confident and self-reliant man who is curious to know his surroundings well and to accept things only for good reasons. In "The Mountain," the same situation is given as in "Mending Wall." A stranger poses a question for a dreamy old man, who has lived near the mountain for his whole life and has heard that there is a spring on the top of it, but has never tried to see it himself. He says:

... there's no doubt  
About its being there ...  
(p. 58)

... I've always meant to go  
And look myself, but you know how it is:  
It doesn't seem so much to climb a mountain  
You've worked around the foot of all your life...  
(p. 59)

To the old man, that question - whether there is really a spring on the top of the mountain - is unexpected; he believes the spring is there. He does not understand

why he should have climbed up and seen it himself. Being surprised, he says to the other man: "... But all the fun's in how you say a thing." To the stranger, that assumption is unreasonable and he will not accept it. Again in the conversation between a Yankee man and a girl in "The Generations of Men," the man sets up a question about the importance of ancestry:

... What will we come to  
With all this pride of ancestry, we Yankees?  
I think we're all mad...

(p. 97)

Consequently, they pretend to be their ancestors and finally get the answer that it is the "ideals" of their families that they are proud of. Here the ideals can be interpreted as courage, bravery, hard work, achievement, and skill. In "Skeptic," Frost presents a "skeptic," a man who questions his surroundings.

... I put no faith in the seeming facts of light.

I don't believe I believe you're the last in space,  
I don't believe you're anywhere near the last,  
I don't believe what makes you red in the face  
Is after explosion going away so fast.

The universe may or may not be very immense.  
As a matter of fact there are times when I am apt  
To feel it close in tight against my sense  
Like a caul in which I was born and still am wrapped.  
(p. 549)

In "The Tuft of Flowers," the poet asks himself whether men work together or apart. Finally, seeing a mower, with a kindred spirit he helps him and gives the answer:

'Men work together,' I told him from the heart,  
'Whether they work together or apart.'

(p. 32)

This is another theme of Robert Frost. He wants man "to be with people," as he questions: "Why do [fences] make good neighbors?" Similarly, "A Hundred Collars" presents two contrasting characters: a seemingly great man who returns home with success and looks down on other people, particularly when he has to share a room with a drunken old man. As a scholar, he has learned about people and the world only from his books. The old man, though not well educated, is more worldly. It is quite clear that Frost is sympathetic with the old man. He has learned about the world from his experiences, his work in which he deals with all kinds of people, as he says proudly:

'...My business is to find what people want:  
They pay for it, and so they ought to have it.  
...'

'You see I'm in with everybody, know'em all.  
I almost know their farms as well as they do.'

'You drive around? It must be pleasant work.'

'It's business, but I can't say it's not fun...'  
(p. 65-66)



It seems that Robert Frost does not like the merely intellectual way of trying to understand the world. As George W. Nitchie says:

Frost is, and isn't, anti-intellectual; that is, he is anti-intellectual in an intellectual sense.... More commonly, however, the anti-intellectual tendency is recognized, without squirming. Percy Boynton, praising Frost, observes that 'his convictions have not grown so much from what he has thought as from what he has felt.' And Robert P. Tristram Coffin recalls Frost 'once having told him, 'how much he was afraid a boy who had it in him to write poetry might be hurt by college. It might blight his natural knowledge of people's nature, and of nature itself, and substitute knowledge of too many books and too many ideas at second hand.'<sup>9</sup>

For example, he says in "The Death of the Hired Man" that he does not respect merely bookish persons. The conversation between Mary and Warren reveals the character of the hired man, Silas, who spends a lot of his time teaching a young college boy simply how to work on a farm.

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<sup>9</sup>George W. Nitchie, Human Values in the Poetry of Robert Frost (Durham, N.C. : Duke University Press, 1960), pp. 84-85. The first quotation is from: Percy H. Boynton, "Robert Frost," English Journal, XI, (Oct., 1922), 462. The second is from: Robert P. Tristram Coffin, New Poetry of New England: Frost and Robinson, (Baltimore: Russell and Russell, 1958), p.91.

... He said he couldn't make the boy believe  
 He could find water with a hazel prong -  
 Which showed how much good school had ever done him.

...  
 'He thinks if he could teach him that, he'd be  
 Some good perhaps to someone in the world.  
 He hates to see a boy the fools of books...  
 (p. 51-52)

In "The Ax-Helve," in which the title stands for ordinary experience, personal understanding of work and of the world, Frost again praises the experienced man whose "ax-helves" reveal how he has gained experience from hard work and struggle against hardships. Like Silas, Baptiste tries to put what he has known into the head of the inexperienced. The first time that they see each other, the poet is chopping unskilfully with his "... bad ax-helve someone had sold [him]." Baptiste

... caught my ax expertly on the rise,  
 When all my strength put forth was in his favor,  
 Held it a moment where it was, to calm me,  
 Then took it from me - and I let him take it...  
 (p. 228)

Later Baptiste asks the poet to come to his house:

Do you know, what we talked about was knowledge?  
 Baptiste on his defense about the children  
 He kept from school, or did his best to keep...  
 (p. 230)

As "Yvor Winters bluntly observes, Frost 'is satirizing the intelligent man from the point of view of the unintelligent.'"<sup>10</sup> "To a Thinker" expresses Frost's anti-intellectualism:

A reasoner and good as such,  
 Don't let it bother you too much  
 If it makes you look helpless please  
 And a temptation to the tease.  
 Suppose you've no direction in you,  
 I don't see but you must continue  
 To use the gift you do possess,  
 And sway with reason more or less.  
 I own I never really warmed  
 To the reformer or reformed.  
 And yet conversion has its place  
 Not halfway down the scale of grace.  
 So if you find you must repent  
 From side to side in argument,  
 At least don't use your mind too hard,  
 But trust my instinct - I'm a bard.

(pp. 431-432)

In "Wild Grapes," the story of a girl who learns how to climb up a tree, Frost means to say something about experience. At first the girl thinks she "had the tree," but

... It wasn't true.  
 The opposite was true. The tree had me.  
 ...  
 It caught me up as if I were the fish  
 And it the fishpole.

(p. 241)

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<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p.86.

The quotation inside is from : "Robert Frost: or, The Spiritual Drifter as Poet," Sewanee Review, LVI, (Autumn, 1948), 573.



For Mary, Silas deserves kindness and sympathy and she persuades her husband to be kind. Not as sensitive as his wife, Warren questions:

'Silas has better claim on us you think  
Than on his brother?  
....  
Why doesn't he go there? His brother's rich,  
A somebody - director in the bank.'  
(p. 53)

With her knowledge of people, Mary knows that, being proud and self-respecting, Silas wants neither charity nor dependence. He would never ask any help from his brother even if he wanted to claim something from him. Still he would keep it within himself. This is what Mary tells her husband:

'... Do you think  
If he had any pride in claiming kin  
Or anything he looked for from his brother,  
He'd keep so still about him all this time?'  
....  
Worthless though he is,  
He won't be made ashamed to please his brother.'  
(p. 53-54)

Frost expounds on the same idea in his poem entitled "Brown's Descent," which tells the story of a man who strongly believes in himself and does not care what others say about him. Despite resistance, he does not stop doing what he thinks is correct. At a certain time, his neighbors see him walking across the walls and

farms (Frost does not state clearly why he has to do this) and on one occasion he is blown down the hill by the strong wind. Still he will not let himself give up or be defeated in his attempt to cross the farms in the stormy weather.

He reeled, he lurched, he bobbed, he checked;  
 He fell and made the lantern rattle  
 (But saved the light from going out.)  
 So halfway down he fought the battle,

Incredulous of his own bad luck.

...

And came down like a ~~passing~~ child.

(p. 174)

Frost remarks, finally, that



Yankees are what they always were.  
 Don't think Brown ever gave up hope  
 Of getting home again because  
 He couldn't climb that slippery slope;

Or even thought of standing there  
 Until the January thaw  
 Should take the polish off the crust.

(p. 175)

This poem not only exemplifies a self-respecting character but also a tough and a hard one which has a strong will to fight against suffering and hardships. Again in "Snow," Brother Meserve, a strong-minded character, decides to go out in the heavy snow storm though everyone tells him not to. Nobody understands why he has to do such a thing. But he explains:

'Well, there's - the storm. That says I must go on.  
That wants me as a war might if it came,  
Ask any man.'

(p. 189)

This shows what he is: he is strong and will not change his mind because of outer forces. What his neighbors think of him indicates his character:

'What is he doing out a night like this?  
Why can't he stay at home?

'He had to preach.'

'It's no night to be out.'

'He may be small,  
He may be good, but one thing's sure, he's tough.'

(p. 182)

In "The Black Cottage," a poem dealing with an old lady who is left alone without family because her husband and her children go to war and die, the conversation gives the reader the picture of a lady who is independent in her thinking; Frost says, "She had her own idea of things, the old lady." For example,

... One wasn't long in learning that she thought  
Whatever else the Civil War was for,  
It wasn't just to keep the States together,  
Nor just to free the slaves, though it did both.  
She wouldn't have believed those ends enough  
To have given outright for them all she gave.  
Her giving somehow touched the principle  
That all men are created free and equal.

(p. 75)

This is a picture of an individual who expresses what she believes, which in this case is rather extreme; for this old lady has lived conservatively. According to Frost,

... White was the only race she ever knew,  
 Black she had scarcely seen, and yellow never.  
 But how could they be made so very unlike  
 By the same hand working in the same stuff?  
 She had supposed the war decided that ...  
 (p. 76)

Her belief comes from what she has experienced and she will not abandon it even if it ceases to be true for the public; for

... It will turn true again, for so it goes.  
 Most of the change we think we see in life  
 Is due to truths being in and out of favor...  
 (p. 77)

Sometimes, Frost's poems demonstrate a vision of a strong-willed man who, with his pride and determination will not accept his downfall without making any resistance. In other words, he keeps struggling to the end. Here, Frost seems to say that whenever man faces problems, what he should do is have a belief in his ability to deal with them before he gives up. This is Frost's idea of struggling. Sometimes, he describes a man fighting against hardships, unfruitful land, and cruel nature, but in "West-Running Brook," he simply compares a man, who tries to keep fighting and will not easily accept defeat, with a brook



which strangely runs west. The poem is merely a conversation about the brook:

... It must be the brook  
Can trust itself to go by contraries  
The way I can with you - and you with me ...  
(p. 327)

and

...In that white wave runs counter to itself...  
(p. 328)

This scene is a symbol of the idea that Frost expects man to raise himself up at least a little before falling down, in the same way the brook tries to get back to its source. It does not mean that Frost will not accept fate but that man should make his life something; otherwise his life will be useless, worthless and empty.

Another characteristic of Frost's poetry is that very often his characters appear to be contrary to each other. One will be more practical, less imaginative and sensitive, while the other will be the opposite. It is no mistake to say that the first represents a type of American. For example, Frost contrasts two characters in "The Star-Splitter." The man who burns his house down for the fire insurance and buys a telescope is much more imaginative and sensitive than his neighbors, who consider this behavior nonsense. With complete self-assurance, he supports what he has done by saying:

...  
 'The best thing that we're put here for's to see;  
 The strongest thing that's given us to see with's  
 A telescope. Someone in every town  
 Seems to me owes it to the town to keep one.  
 In Littleton it may as well be me.'  
 (p. 219)

As a moderate poet, Frost "... is reluctant to indicate with any sort of finality what that final goal is."<sup>11</sup> For after his house has been burned down, and "... laughter went about the town that day"; still his neighbors tolerate what he has done. Consequently, they see no reason

... to be too hard on Brad  
 About his telescope...  
 (p. 219)

What they decide is:

... we reflected  
 If one by one we counted people out  
 For the least sin, it wouldn't take us long  
 To get so we had no one left to live with.  
 For to be social is to be forgiving.  
 Our thief, the one who does our stealing from us,  
 We don't cut off from coming to church suppers,  
 But what we miss we go to him and ask for.  
 He promptly gives it back, that is if still  
 Uneaten, unworn out, or undisposed of.  
 ...  
 Well, all we said was  
 He took a strange thing to be roguish over.  
 (p. 219)

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<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p.149.

One of the two men in "The Self-Seeker" illustrates the attitude of the typical American toward life - the character of the "self-seeker" Willis, who tries to protect his friend's interests. Willis believes that a man should be adequately rewarded for his work or compensated for his losses: he believes that justice can and must be done. In the poem, Willis' friend accepts his end indifferently. This is not an American characteristic, as he should have tried his best before coming to the end. After he has an accident, he thinks his life is finished and accepts some money the lawyer pays to him, saying:

...  
 'I told you, Willis, when you first came in.  
 Don't you be hard on me. I have to take  
 What I can get. You see they have the feet,  
 Which gives them the advantage in the trade.  
 I can't get back the feet in any case.'

'But your flowers, man, you're selling out your  
 flowers.'

'Yes, that's one way to put it-all the flowers  
 Of every kind everywhere in this region  
 For the next forty summers - call it forty.  
 But I'm not selling those, I'm giving them,  
 They never earned me so much as one cent:  
 Money can't pay me for the loss of them.  
 No, the five hundred was the sum they named  
 To pay the doctor's bill and tide me over.  
 It's that or fight, and I don't want to fight-  
 I just want to get settled in my life,  
 Such as it's going to be, and know the worst,  
 Or best - it may not be so bad ...

(pp. 119-120)

Willis, a typical American, believes that what man deserves results from his doings. His encouragement shows that he is not so passive as his friend. He is not a compromising man and is seeking for what his friend should have received. The sum of money is insufficient, considering what has happened to his friend. This idea appears again in "The Trial By Existence." The poet begins his poem with the picture of God's creation of man.

This of the essence of life here,  
 Though we choose greatly, still to lack  
 The lasting memory at all clear,  
 That life has for us on the wrack  
 Nothing but what we somehow chose;  
 Thus we are wholly stripped of pride  
 In the pain that has but one close,  
 Bearing it crushed and mystified.

(p. 30)

It is "we" who choose what we have had; though somehow we forget it. In other words we are responsible for what we have done. "The Housekeeper" reflects the picture of a man who is helpless and irresponsible; "...he's made up his mind not to stand/ What he has got to stand." He does not dare to marry Estelle, his housekeeper, because marriage means responsibility and duty to him. As a result, she leaves him and marries someone else. This is what he deserves, Frost says. Again in "The Road Not Taken," Frost points out that once we have made a decision we are responsible for it. The speaker in the poem is faced with

two diverging roads; surely, he cannot take both. From his experience, he decides to take one and keeps saying to himself: "Oh, I kept the first for another day!"

But at the sametime he knows well that:

...way leads on to way,  
I doubted if I should ever come back.

I shall be telling this with a sigh  
Somewhere ages and ages hence:  
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I -  
I took the one less traveled by,  
And that has made all the difference.

(p. 131)

This means that it is "we" who decide ourselves and we are responsible for what will come - failure or success.

## II The Negative Side of Individualism

As has been mentioned before, Robert Frost is a moderate poet. In his poetry, he very often praises the value of individualism, but he shows its dangers too.

It has been said that

... for Frost all values, both positive and negative - at least the most important ones - are ultimately defined in terms of relationships of individual to individual... or, to extend the principle, of

the individual to himself or to his natural environment, not of the individual to society.<sup>12</sup>

In some of his poems, Frost displays the negative side of "rugged individualism." For example, in "Mending Wall": this is a poem about two farmers who go out to repair their walls and through one of them Frost sets a question:

'Why do they make good neighbors? Isn't it  
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...  
(pp. 47-48)

Frost himself seems not to understand why there must be "walls." The argument between the two farmers illustrates the American concept of "rugged individualism." It is the price that is paid for a society which is based on individuality. "There are walls enough between individuals in a world already imposing solitary existence without one's erecting unnecessary barriers."<sup>13</sup> No one knows exactly why and when the "walls" were set up, but they have thoughtlessly been accepted for a long time and never been questioned. On the other hand, individual separation leads

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<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p.124.

<sup>13</sup>Gerber, op. cit., p.150.

to a larger problem; that is, the individuals do not understand each other. A "wall" is something physical they build themselves to keep their individuality but simultaneously it stands for spiritual separation and lack of understanding among them. The character in "A Servant to Servants," points out the failure of communication among individuals, as he says:

...It seems to me  
 I can't express my feelings any more  
 Than I can raise my voice or want to lift  
 My hand (oh, I can lift it when I have to).  
 Did ever you feel so? I hope you never.  
 It's got so I don't even know for sure  
 Whether I am glad, sorry, or anything...  
(p. 82)

"The Code" shows the value of hard work but at the same time builds up a picture of how separate the Americans are when they work. "Whether apart or together, men exist as individuals. They coalesce as individuals, not as groups."<sup>14</sup> Negatively, this poem reflects an extreme individual case in which the poet nearly kills his boss when the boss pushes him to work harder because to him,

The hand that knows his business won't be told  
 To do work better or faster...  
(p. 91)

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<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 147.

Moreover it is

... the easy job  
 For the man up on top of throwing down  
 The hay and rolling it off wholesale,  
 Where on a mow it would have been slow lifting.  
 You wouldn't think a fellow'd need much urging  
 Under those circumstances, would you now?  
 But the old fool seizes his fork in both hands,  
 And looking up bewhiskered out of the pit,  
 Shouts like an army captain, "Let her come!"  
 Thinks I, D'ye mean it? "What was that you said?"  
 I asked out loud, so's there'd be no mistake,  
 "Did you say, Let her come?" "Yes, let her come."  
 He said it over, but he said it softer.  
 Never you say a thing like that to a man,  
 Not if he values what he is.

(p. 92)

Considering that this job is his responsibility, the poet feels that his boss interferes in his business, though the boss might have had good reasons. Still the poet is not willing to take advice because he thinks himself to be an experienced man who can do it alone. They lack understanding of each other. This theme is repeated in "Home Burial." The husband, a very practical and extremely hard-hearted character, misunderstands his wife, who is sensitive and imaginative, and deeply touched by the death of their child. According to her, he is a "blind creature" and she cannot help him though he asks for it, as he says:

' Help me, then.'

Her fingers moved the latch for all reply.

'My words are nearly always an offence.  
 I don't know how to speak of anything



So as to please you. But I might be taught  
I should suppose I can't say I see how.

...  
Tell me about it if it's something human.  
Let me into your grief. I'm not so much  
Unlike other folks as your standing there  
Apart would make me out. Give me my chance...  
(p. 71)

His wife accuses him of indifference and of being too practical. They cannot share the grief which more than anything else in their experience should make them one in feeling. Instead they feel apart. At the end, they don't understand each other at all:

'There, you have said it all and you feel better.  
You won't go now. You're crying. Close the door.  
...

'You - oh, you think the talk is all. I must go -  
Somewhere out of this house. How can I make you -'

'If - you - do!' She was opening the door wider.  
'Where do you mean to go? First tell me that.  
I'll follow and bring you back by force. I will -'  
(pp. 72-73)

"A Hundred Collars" also illustrates individual separation, in this case between two men who, even if they have to share the same bed, seem to have a "wall" between them. The first man thinks himself a great scholar, a great man and looks down on an ordinary country man who is apparently unsuccessful. Frost gives a picture of the first man, who will not let himself be involved with the latter, though the second man is friendly; this second man asks

'... what makes you stand there on one leg like that?  
You're not much furtherer than where Kike left you.  
You act as if you wished you hadn't come.  
Sit down, or lie down, friend; you make me nervous.'

The Doctor made a subdued dash for it,  
And propped himself at bay against a pillow.

'Not that way, with your shoes on Kike's white bed,  
You can't rest that way. Let me pull your shoes off.'

'Don't touch me, please - I say, don't touch me,-  
please.

I'll not be put to bed by you, my man.'

(p. 64)

Individualism does not only cause a lack of understanding but also a feeling of isolation and loneliness. To be an individual is to be independent and self-respecting and so, to a certain extent there will be "walls" between individuals. Here "walls" can be interpreted as a lack of understanding and a feeling of loneliness and isolation. Philip L. Gerber says: "As Frost ponders the lot of individual man, he stresses the human being as an entity. One among many, man yet remains single and alone with his fate." "That man is alone, Frost never forgets."

If [men are] drawn together, it is love and need that motivate. The need is that of sharing fears and frailties held in common. The love is that of individual human companionship.... Loneliness and the fear of loneliness are entrenched in the human heart. They are lodged there by man's knowledge of his isolation.... There is the search for warmth

and illumination from a spark of light,  
all to drive back into the dark woods  
the knowledge that man stands alone.<sup>15</sup>

For example, in "Mending Wall," the feeling of loneliness is explicitly spoken of by Frost himself. He knows that individuals are cut off from one another though they live together in society; as he says:

...He [Frost's neighbor] moves in darkness as it seems  
to me,  
Not of woods only and the shade of trees...  
(p. 48)

In "An Old Man's Winter Night," the image of an old man, with his lamp who scares the outer night as he clomps here and there in his empty house is presented. The old man is left alone with his memory of the past; the poet says:

...A light he was to no one but himself  
Where now he sat, concerned with he knew what,  
A quiet light, and then not even that.  
...  
The log that shifted with a jolt  
Once in the stove, disturbed him and he shifted,  
And eased his heavy breathing, but still slept.  
One aged man - one man - can't keep a house,  
A farm, a countryside, or if he can,  
It's thus he does it of a winter night.  
(p. 135)

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., pp. 139, 149, 147-148.





Five lyrics gathered in the poem "The Hill Wife" give a picture of an isolated woman who is very conscious of fear, loneliness and isolation, though she is with her husband:

It was too lonely for her there,  
 And too wild,  
 And since there were but two of them,  
 And no child,

And work was little in the house,  
 She was free,  
 And followed where he furrowed field,  
 Or felled tree.

So, one day she runs away and

He never found her, though he looked  
 Everywhere,  
 And he asked at her mother's house  
 Was she there.

(p. 162)

In the volume called West-Running Brook, there is a poem entitled "Acquainted with the Night" in which the poet deals with the feeling of loneliness. The poet who has been walking late at night in "... the furthest city light" feels lonely and isolated, saying:

I have looked down the saddest city lane.  
 I have passed by the watchman on his beat  
 And dropped my eyes, unwilling to explain.

I have stood still and stopped the sound of feet  
 When far away an interrupted cry  
 Came over houses from another street,

But not to call me back or say good-by...

(p. 324)