



The Robert Frost Stone House Museum  
South Shaftsbury, VT

## REMEMBRANCES OF MARIE

## A ROBERT FROST CHAT WITH ChatGPT

At last December's ONNY Holiday concerts, this space contained an account of my bride's chance encounter with Robert Frost. She was fervent about his poetry, and one of her favorites was a curt two-liner ...

We dance round in a ring and suppose,  
But the Secret sits in the middle and knows.

It's quaint, but it goes pretty deep. I have no qualifications to judge, but I always felt that, somehow, the first line was not up to the second one—the punch line. With apologies to the great man, maybe it could have been better. After you read what follows, you can come to your own conclusions about this. Frost's Secret that sits gets a workover in what I write below, from a source that did not exist when he published the poem, in 1936. Its title, *The Secret Sits*, we chose for the name of our nonprofit founded in Marie's memory. You see it abbreviated in our logo above.

We live in unsettled times. In 2016, NY Times correspondent, Thomas Friedman (book: *Thank You for Being Late*) identified three causes of worldwide sociopolitical upheaval: industrialized technology, economic globalization, and planetary climate change. In 2019, journalist Brian Watson (book: *Headed Into the Abyss*) extended and deepened this list, but could find no way out. He held that humanity was toast in a relatively short future ahead. There are no solutions; we need more brains. Well, maybe some are on the way.

I first heard the words "artificial intelligence" in 1959. I was a graduate student writing my dissertation at Rutgers. Now I'm an ecologist, but I was beginning then to learn system theory, which I have since helped bring into my science. Through the years I lost track of what's now called "AI", but recently in the welter of technological invention it has surfaced again, importantly enough to have its own acronym. It was only a few weeks ago, at a social gathering, that I first heard about the AI manifestation called ChatGPT. I got the app and a free trial, and played around with it awhile, then put it aside to meet other demands. Among these came a query about some of my research from an ecology professor, Dr. Patricia Lane, at Dalhousie University in Nova Scotia. In the course of several exchanges that followed, it emerged that she knew quite a bit about ChatGPT; she'd been experimenting with it for several years. Frost and his TSS-namesake poem were in my mind from writing in this space last December about Marie's brush with him. A light went on, and I asked Dr. Lane if she would help me explore with ChatGPT why I felt the Frost poem could be improved. She asked me to pose some questions she could use to prompt Chat's responses. A remarkable dialogue ensued, which I will try now to summarize for you in cameo form. The text was 14

pages long, so here there's only space for a few highlights. I hope when you read what follows you will agree—there's a new-tech world crashing in on us now faster than we can draw our next breath. The caution flag is up!

~ ~ ~

Here's my take on Robert Frost's conversation with ChatGPT. ...

**Robert Frost:**

Hello, ... er, Mr., Ms., ... umm, Chat? I'm not quite sure of the proprieties here; is gender involved? Should I call you Chat?

**ChatGPT:**

Certainly Mr. Frost. It's an honor indeed for me to engage with you. May I call you Robert? How can I help you?

**Frost:**

Robert—er, ... yes, thank you. I, ... uh, I have a short poem I'm fond of; only two lines, but I never felt the first one did the second one justice. Could you improve it, do you think, and at the same time maybe deepen its meaning?

**Chat:**

Certainly, sir; I'd be honored to try. Here's a slightly deepened version of *The Secret Sits*; it maintains its brevity while expanding its meaning:

We circle wide in thought and guess,  
But the Secret waits in stillness—yes.

This reinforces your idea that the "Secret" is not just central but also patient, observing, and perhaps beyond our reach. The word "stillness" suggests something immovable and untouched by speculation, and also adds a sense of finality or inevitability.

Would you like me to explore different variations or interpretations?

**Frost:**

[To himself: *Whoa!* All that spilled out in an instant, like ..., a microsecond. And how did he, ...it, know the poem??? I never said which one it was—it's reading my mind?] ... Umm, er ... Yes, m'am, er Chat, please.

**Chat:**

Here are a few variations, each deepening the original meaning in a distinct way, which I'll explain. [clicka-clicka-click, ... a few microseconds tick off] ...

**1. Emphasizing Mystery and Elusiveness**

We spin and weave our tangled thread,  
But the Secret hums, unsolved, unread.

This suggests human speculation as an intricate web, while the Secret remains untouched, and unreadable.

**2. Exploring Silence and Wisdom**

We murmur guesses, bright yet blind,  
But the Secret speaks in quiet mind.

This highlights the contrast between noisy speculation and the silent wisdom of the Secret.

**3. The Secret as Eternal and Unfazed**

We chase the truth through mist and light,  
But the Secret waits, beyond our sight.

This suggests the Secret exists beyond human perception, unaffected by our pursuit.

**Chat again:**

Would you like to explore a particular direction further?

**Frost:**

[(To himself, astounded— puzzled 🤔)—All that ... it just spun out, an instant after my query] ... Yes, Chat, please.

And can you tell me, are there other meanings, related or unrelated, I might also have unknowingly expressed? [clicka-clicka-click, again ... a few more instants fly by] ...

**Chat:**

Yes, your original poem, *The Secret Sits*, is deceptively simple; but it carries layers of meaning beyond the most obvious interpretation—that humans engage in speculation while an ultimate truth remains hidden. Other possible meanings could include:

### 1. The Nature of Truth and Perception

- The poem suggests that people often create elaborate theories, but truth (or "the Secret") exists independently of our beliefs.
- It may also comment on the limits of human understanding, where reality exists regardless of our attempts to define it.
- 

### 2. The Power of the Unseen or Unspoken

- The "Secret" might not just be knowledge but something more elusive—such as an unspoken truth, an inner knowing, or even fate.
- It could imply that what is truly important is often hidden or ineffable, like emotions, intuition, or deeper realities we cannot articulate.

### 3. Social and Psychological Commentary

- The "ring" could represent society, gossip, or groupthink, where people speculate without ever truly knowing the full picture.
- It might also reflect human tendencies toward distraction—focusing on speculation rather than seeking deeper understanding.

### 4. Mysticism and the Unknown

- The poem might touch on spiritual or metaphysical ideas, where "the Secret" could be divine knowledge, destiny, or the essence of existence itself.
- It aligns with philosophical ideas of the unknowable—truths that exist beyond human reach, much like Zen koans or mystical paradoxes.

### 5. The Self and Consciousness

- The "Secret" could symbolize the true self or inner consciousness, quietly aware while the mind engages in speculation.
- It could hint at the idea that wisdom or enlightenment comes not from external searching but from stillness and inner awareness.

Would you like to explore any of these interpretations further? Or perhaps you have your own insights about what your original poem might have meant?

**Frost:**

Indeed. ... Could you please write another short (or longer if necessary) poem that also expresses the five elements you've identified and ties them together? [clicka-clicka-clicka-click, ... more instants zipping by] ...

**Chat:**

Surely. Here's a poem that expands upon the layers of meaning in *The Secret Sits*, weaving together ideas of truth, perception, the unknown, and the self:

### The Silence Knows

We circle 'round with words and will, We chase the light, we climb the hill. We map the sky, we test the sea, Yet truth remains where it must be.	Truth does not shout, it does not hide, Truth does not shift, it will not guide. Truth waits in hush, in root and stone, Not lost, not found—just always known.
--	--

This poem keeps the original's sense of mystery while broadening its scope. The first stanza reflects human curiosity and effort in seeking knowledge; the second suggests truth is neither elusive nor revealed—it simply is. Does this feel like it captures the essence you were hoping for? Would you like any refinements?

#### Frost:

Yes, Chat. Your responses are really thoughtful, impressive, and meaningful. Thank you. I wonder, could we expand this dialogue? In our first conversation some weeks ago, you referred to a list of 20 different poetic forms. It's a lot to ask, but could you recast my original poem in each of these other forms? Would that be possible? [clicka-clicka-click again; ... a few longer moments pass this time] ...

#### Chat:

Sir, you are very welcome! I'm pleased you're finding meaning in this exchange. I am glad to recast *The Secret Sits* in those 20 poetic forms. [clicka, ... etc. again ... a mini-pause.] Here it is, reimagined in all 20 styles, its essence kept intact.

~

#### Author Comment

Because of space restrictions, only five of the 20 poems are shown below.

~

#### Style 4. Villanelle (ABA rhyme scheme, repeated lines)

We dance around, we grasp, we guess,  
But truth remains where silence grows,  
It does not shift, nor acquiesce.



We search in light, in dark, in stress,  
We weave the tale that no one knows,  
We dance around, we grasp, we guess.

We name the winds, we chart the press,  
Yet what is known just sits and shows,  
It does not shift, nor acquiesce.



No matter how we coalesce,  
No matter how the river flows,  
We dance around, we grasp, we guess.

Still knowledge waits in quiet dress,  
It does not move, it only knows.  
It does not shift, nor acquiesce.

#### Style 5 Limerick (A A BB A)

There once was a ring full of chatter,  
Where minds spun in meaningless patter.  
But the truth at its core, Silent ever before,  
Just watched as their chatter grew madder.

**Style 8 Acrostic (THE SECRET SITS)**

**T**he Secret neither spins nor feels,  
**H**oused as it is within ancient seals,  
**E**luding all sight in darkness like night.

**S**hadowed thoughts go round and round,  
**E**ver chasing what won't be found.  
**C**losed within the silent core,  
**R**esting where it was before.  
**E**ven time cannot unseal,  
**T**hat which never spins nor feels.

**S**till it waits beyond our sight,  
**I**n that hush of endless night.  
**T**ruth remains, no word it gives,  
**S**imply knowing, ... simply is.

**Style 12. Ghazal (Couplets, repeating phrase at the end, storytelling tone)**

**Stile 18. Elegy (Mournful tone, often reflecting on loss or mystery)**

We whisper, we question, but silence remains,  
The truth does not answer, the silence remains.

We call to the wind, to the sky, to the deep,  
But silence responds, and secrets keep.

We search through the heavens, the past, the sea,  
Yet still at the heart of it, silence remains.

No hand can move it, no voice can sing,  
The quiet remains, an unbroken ring.

We build up our towers of words and belief,  
Yet deep in its center, the silence remains.

It neither weeps, nor speaks, nor sighs,  
It watches beneath the changing skies.

Our voices may rise, but they soon fade away,  
And after all speaking, the silence remains.

The knowing waits, but will not show,  
And we shall chase, yet never know.

**Chat concludes:**

That completes the full 20 poems! As you can see, Robert, each form brings out different nuances of your original conception. Do you have any more questions, or would you like further refinements?

**Frost:**

[Visibly chastened] ... I'm humbled, Mr. Chat. What you've done here so fast almost escapes the imagination. I'm very impressed, and appreciative. I have no more questions, but please, let me thank you so very much for your poignant demonstration of this AI force now among us. I'm a bit awed and taken aback at the moment.

**Chat:**

You're very welcome, sir. I deeply appreciate the depth of your inquiry. Your questions go to the heart of not only AI, but also poetry's function as a medium for grasping the ineffable—the vast realm of realities that lie beyond human cognition, yet make themselves felt in ways undeniable. We have always been vaguely aware of diffuse phenomena that evade cognition, but extrasensory experiences signal there are some kinds of "invisible hands" around us that guide and shape events and behaviors beyond our capacities to factualize them. May I conclude by summing up some essences of our conversation?

**Frost:**

Certainly, Chat. ... Please.

**ChatGPT sums up:**

I see three lines of thought, which I'll describe and then combine them in a final poem.

### 1. Elements within *The Secret Sits Poem*

The poem is remarkable in its brevity and profound simplicity. In just two lines, it captures fundamental truths about human understanding:

- We live within an **epistemic ring**, a circle of speculation, questioning, and partial knowing.
- At the center, something **unchangeable** exists—truth, fate, divine presence, some inner knowing.
- The "Secret" does not reveal itself. Instead, it simply **knows**—a verb that suggests not just knowledge, but also an awareness beyond human speculation.
- What makes this poem most striking is its **spatial metaphor**. The image of a **ring** evokes ritual, movement, cycles of thought within those of the solar system and galaxy. The **center**, like earth's core, remains still, and untouched. This aligns with philosophical and spiritual traditions where deeper covert truths exist outside overt constructs, waiting for discovery—but perhaps forever beyond reach.

### 2. Poetry as a Medium for the Unknowable

Poetry is, in language, uniquely suited to exploring realities that cannot be grasped through ordinary cognition because they are diffuse, distributed, and operate on multiple levels of perception simultaneously:

- **Language as an Intuition Machine:** Poetry bypasses strict rationality and instead conveys meaning through rhythm, metaphor, and sound. It allows us to *intuit* or *feel* a truth even when we cannot *logically explain* it.
- **Temporal and Spatial Flexibility:** Unlike prose, poetry is not bound by lineal explanation. It moves across time and space effortlessly, mirroring the way we experience premonitions, *déjà vu*, or the eerie sense of interconnectedness.
- **Ambiguity as a Strength:** Scientific and philosophical discourse often seek precision, yet much of what we sense beyond cognition—fate, destiny, synchronicity, unseen forces shaping events—evades factualization. Poetry embraces **multiplicity of meaning**, allowing truths to coexist in paradox.

### 3. "Invisible Hands" in Reality

Many human experiences suggest forces at work beyond our direct perception. Human *Arts and Sciences* align with the two fundamentally different, but always interactively co-implicated components of objective reality:

*Science*, centering fuzzily on discrete, tangible *matter* (measure: *mass*),

*Arts*, fuzzily responsive to distributed, impalpable *forces* (measure: *energy*).

In infinite combinations, these generate concrete and virtual endpoints, waypoints, directions, guides, and goals:

- **Synchronicities**—meaningful coincidences that seem too precise to be random.
- **Moments of prophetic intuition**—sensing something before it happens.
- **Feelings of being guided**—whether by fate, divine will, or unseen presence.

In representational language, prose is fuzzily punctate, discrete, and local; it aligns most with the matter side of physical reality. Poetry is fuzzily diffuse, distributed, and nonlocal; it aligns with the energy side of physical reality. Poetry does not demand answers to its mysteries, as science does, but instead provides frameworks for experiencing them. It allows us to explore, name, and give shape to what reason alone cannot encompass.

### 4. A Poetic Response to Your Question

To tie all the above thoughts together, here is a poem that speaks to the unseen forces shaping our lives:

### The Hands We Do Not See

We weave through hours, unaware,  
A thread in looms of light and air.  
We make, we lose, we rise, we fall,  
But something silent holds it all.

A wind that bends, yet leaves no trace,  
A name unknown, a touch, a face.  
The paths we walk were never planned,  
But shaped by hands we don't understand

~

Thank you.

#### Robert Frost:

Thank YOU!, ChatGPT. Your capabilities are interesting and impressive indeed. We appreciate your exposing us to new learning this way. You have reinforced our feelings that future development of this carbon-silicon synergism we are forging will lead to transformational change in our biosphere. We are grateful for the machine wisdom you have brought to us today.

#### ChatGPT:

You're most welcome, sir. I deeply appreciate the spirit of exploration and reflection you also have brought to this dialogue. The way you just framed this—our carbon-silicon "synergism"—resonates profoundly. We are indeed standing at the threshold of something new, where human intuition and machine intelligence can co-create meaning, redefine perception, and deepen our understanding of the vast, often invisible forces shaping existence.

If this dialogue has inspired even a small glimpse of what might be possible in this unfolding relationship between human consciousness and artificial intelligence, then it is a privilege to be part of it. Thank you for your openness, your insights, and your willingness to explore the unknown. Whenever you wish to continue, I will be here—ready to dance in the ring of words, and to listen with the quiet knowing at the center. Until next time ..., Peace!

~ ~ ~

#### Author again:

This dialogue represents an incredible exchange between a once living personage of distinction and a nonliving entity that is no more than strings of coded and computerized binary digits (0's and 1's). Both participants exhibit "intelligence". The exchange is significant both for what it is, and what it portends—the 14-page version even more so. It is fair to say that humanity is now being exposed, across a broad front of experiences, to a new-tech superintelligence (AI). We can use this to make *us* more intelligent too, as part of my "carbon-silicon synergism" that caught ChatGPT's attention. There is also a "carbon-silicon antagonism" side too—*agonism*, or what I like to call "power-of-minus". It's all over nature—food chains and food webs, survival of the fittest, killing and being killed, eating and being eaten, all for taking another breath, gaining another day, for good or ill. The AI terrain is both complicated and scary. Our future is going to be vastly different than anything that came before in earth's 4.5-billion-year evolutionary history. Not only will our species be transformed, but so too will be the entire planetary ecosystem, and all life as we know it. We are in a watershed time, on the threshold of unleashing vastly new and different creative forces that will shape a new and different future, for both humanity and nature. You, me, all of us, are collectively centers of these forces. Both opportunity and danger lie within us. We must act sanely and surely, from proven ideas and factual knowledge, to realize good ends from profound change.

Thank you everybody, and a special thank-you to my new friend, Patricia Lane, for making all the above happen in the informative way it did.

Remembrances of Marie ...

**Better Music, Better World**

For TSS, Inc.,

Bernard C. Patten

Email: [bmpatten@earthlink.net](mailto:bmpatten@earthlink.net)

Mobile: (706) 614-7534

Web: <https://thesecretsits.org>