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Between translation and interpretation: "Paul's Wife" and "Maple" by Robert Frost

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ABSTRACT

This thesis delves into the translation and analysis of two poems, "Paul's Wife" and "Maple," from Robert Frost's collection *New Hampshire*. These two poems were chosen specifically for their shared themes. Detailed analysis will reveal, in fact, that both highlight a profound connection between nature and womanhood, as well as intricate dynamics of power within male-female relationships.

The first chapter provides an introduction to the collection, contextualizing the selected poems within Frost's broader body of work, with particular interest in the collection from which the two poems are taken, *New Hampshire*.

The second chapter presents the Italian versions of the poems. This part will be accompanied by an elucidation of the translation process, with notes and explanations as to why specific choices were made, with the goal of obtaining a final version that is as closely related as possible to the original.

A detailed examination of the thematic and stylistic elements of "Paul's Wife" and "Maple" is undertaken in the third chapter. Here, the poems will be compared, their similarities and differences will be highlighted, and interpretations of their most thought-provoking segments will be offered.

In the fourth chapter, Frost's penchant for invoking classical tropes and interweaving them with American contemporary traditions is explored. Here parallels will be drawn to the story of Pygmalion and other themes from ancient mythology. Concentrating specifically on “Paul’s Wife,” the American *tall tale* will be explored, delving into the story of Paul Bunyan.

The final chapter offers a feminist analysis of the two poems, scrutinizing themes of gender roles and relationships within Frost's verse. The works of Romantic poets like Coleridge and Keats will be used to explore the influence over men attributed to magical feminine creatures in literature.

Through this multi-faceted exploration, the thesis aims to shed new light on Frost's poetry and its relevance in contemporary literary discourse.

INTRODUCTION

In translating and interpreting “Maple” and “Paul’s Wife,” two poems from the collection *New Hampshire* by Robert Frost, the goal of this dissertation is to shed light on the important, yet overlooked process of literary translation, and at the same time, to bring further attention to the author’s work and discuss its continued relevance in contemporary literary discourse. The themes he deals with – which will be thoroughly analyzed in this thesis – include references to American folklore, which reflects Frost’s regionalist tendency, inspiration from other literary traditions, such as the myths of ancient Greece or the more recent Romanticism, with authors like John Keats and Samuel Taylor Coleridge. The topics he chooses deal with human beings, men and women who interact with each other, giving birth to interesting dynamics that reflect the ones that can be found in real life. His goal, as will become clear, is to reflect on the human condition and perfectly represent it in his poetry, as a way of offering his readers something they can see themselves in. Lastly, the ever-present theme is nature. Nature serves as a setting for the stories he tells, and sometimes it even acts as a protagonist. In his poetry, he analyzes the influence nature has on human beings, and the influence they have on it.
Offering a translation, instead of simply an analysis, has the goal of signaling how Frost’s poetry – even the more narrative and discursive kind represented by “Maple” and “Paul’s Wife” – is still relevant. Translation is a powerful means for connecting cultures and traditions, and it serves Frost’s own purpose of offering to as many human beings as possible a mirror where they can see their own reflection.

Chapter 1, titled “*New Hampshire* (1923),” offers an introduction to the collection from which the two poems that will be analyzed in this thesis are taken. This provides a more precisely defined context for the poems, at the same time giving essential information about the author, useful to comprehend his work. The collection’s major themes are presented, and from this introduction nature and the human condition – and mostly the interaction between the two – emerge as the most favored topics in this collection. This will be confirmed by the deeper analysis of the poems offered in the following chapters.
Chapter 2 is entirely dedicated to the translation of the two poems. A brief introduction to the art of translation and to its – often overlooked – importance is offered at the beginning of the chapter, immediately followed by the first of the two translations. “Maple” and “La Moglie di Paul,” the Italian versions of Frost’s poems, are accompanied by a detailed account of what the process of translating them consisted of. Obstacles and points of interest are included, so as to give the reader a better understanding of what poetic translation entails. Mostly, the goal is to explain the weight of certain decisions, as well as the amount of research needed for such a task.
In Chapter 3, the two poems are analyzed, first singularly, and after that a comparison is made between the two. From a close reading of the poems, the similarities and differences between the two emerge, offering interesting starting points for further reflection for the reader, some of which will be treated in the following chapters. “Maple,” with its inspiring female protagonist in constant search for meaning, and “Paul’s Wife,” with its interesting couple

dynamics and female magical presence, represent interesting cues for sparking the reader's interest in Frost and his evident interest in the human condition.
Chapter 4 concentrates solely on "Paul's Wife." Its numerous external influences are certainly in need of clarification, which will be offered in this chapter. Frost's decision to use an already existing character taken from American folklore – Paul Bunyan – will be analyzed, hopefully giving a better understanding of this character in general, and of the reason behind the author's choice to include his story in his poem. Other than Paul Bunyan, the clear connection with Ovid's *Pygmalion* will be addressed, looking at what Frost kept from it, and what he decided to change in order to fit the myth to the goals he had in mind when writing "Paul's Wife."
The last chapter, titled "Feminine Influence and Gender Dynamics in Frost," hopes to provide the reader with a reflection on womanhood and how Frost deals with it. Examples from Romanticism will be offered, specifically from "La Belle Dame Sans Mercy" by Keats and "Christabel" by Coleridge, in order to show how the trope of a powerful woman able to influence her male counterpart has continued to be present in literature. At the same time, the hope is to show how it has changed, even in Frost himself. Moving from "La Belle Dame Sans Mercy," through "Christabel," to "Paul's Wife" and finally to "Maple," something changes, and this will be at the center of further analysis in the chapter. Having this evolution in mind, issues of power in male-female relationships in Frost's poems will be analyzed, highlighting, once again, how important it is for Frost that his poetry should reflect on the human condition.

CHAPTER 1: *NEW HAMPSHIRE* (1923)

> "In honoring Robert Frost, we therefore can pay honor to the deepest source of our national strength. That strength takes many forms and the most obvious forms are not always the most significant. ... Our national strength matters; but the spirit which informs and controls our strength matters just as much. This was the special significance of Robert Frost." (President J. F. Kennedy quoted in Poetry Foundation)

These are the words President John F. Kennedy used in 1963 to describe Robert Frost. The occasion for this great show of respect and admiration by a greatly loved former president was the dedication of the Robert Frost Library in Amherst (Massachusetts).
Thinking about American poetry, Robert Frost is certainly one of the first authors that come to mind, especially if one thinks about themes directly connected to what it means to be an American. This thesis will delve deeply into the life and works of this author, highlighting those characteristics that make his legacy still highly relevant even 150 years after his birth.

1.1 A profound love for New England: regionalism in Robert Frost's *New Hampshire*

Robert Frost can certainly be defined and considered as one of the greatest American poets, but with some deeper knowledge about his entire body of works, it seems clear that it would be more precise to define him in a more specific way, that is, as a New Englander.

Among his wide body of work, *New Hampshire* emerges right from the first poem as a collection that embodies the spirit of the region its author called home. In reading and analyzing this collection, one is invited to admire and immerse oneself in the rustic landscapes of the region, to encounter its inhabitants and appreciate its dwellings, both when populated and when deserted or abandoned. While approaching this collection, the reader directly experiences, both geographically and emotionally, a region that the author is evidently fond of.
Of course, his profound interest in the region comes directly from it having been the place he called home for most of his life. Having navigated between Massachusetts, New Hampshire and their neighboring states and having taken them as residences, workplaces, and summer dwellings, he certainly came to know the place, its people and its territory. All this knowledge and affection transpire from the poems he included in this collection, right from the very first one. The collection begins with the title poem, "New England," a long poem seen by some as a "statement of Frost's philosophy of regionalism [where] the poet finds in local life symbols for common human experience." (Linneman, p. 52)
In this poem, as he continues to do in the whole collection – and as he had done in previous ones – Frost utilizes themes, elements, and symbols he knows firsthand to expand on the general topic of what it means to be human and to experience life as such.
In his work, there are many instances where he does this, endeavoring to convey general messages starting from specific experiences that originate from what he personally

experienced. One way to explain how he does this could be by considering his use of language. In writing the poems that make up this collection – mostly "New Hampshire " and the ones in the section he called *Notes* –Frost does not use highly lyrical or difficult language. He tries to characterize the region by using its words, its tones, its dialects. This could be seen by some as yet another proof of regionalism, and maybe, one could argue, it partially is, but when he does this, he is not speaking solely to the people he is representing. He speaks to the entirety of human beings living their normal lives, speaking their normal languages, doing their regular activities. Talking about a specific place does not necessarily mean excluding everywhere else from the discourse.
Language in general is not strictly tied to where it comes from, and the activity of translation is clear proof of this. Translating something means transporting not only the same words but also the same tone and context from one language to another. Professor Mridula Nath Chakraborty, an expert in translation and in English, stated: "If humans only translate what is known within their own four walls, or what is familiar to them within the boundaries of their own imaginations, something essential is lost both to translation — and to the profligate tongues that proliferate our humanity" (Nath Chakraborty). This perfectly demonstrates how some words and ways specific to a place can be translated and brought in some way to have the same meaning somewhere else, for completely different people. This is not only possible, but also an opportunity to enrich oneself and be enriched. Of course, sometimes something may need further explanation, or deeper interpretation – as will be evident in Chapter 2, where I will tackle the translation of two of the poems from *New Hampshire* – but what this means is that an experience, however small and specific it might be, can always be amplified to encompass human experience in general. By using language and tones that are specific to the place he lived in for most of his life, Frost is effectively talking to those who perfectly understand what he is talking about because they have shared in his experience. At the same time, though, he is showing all his other readers – those who, coming from somewhere else, have experienced slightly different lives – that all around the world people share one thing: their humanity.

This is not to say that the only kind of language Frost employs in his poems is exclusively plain and simple language. And most of all this is not to say that Frost's poems are all straightforward and easy. Literary critic and Frost connoisseur Richard Poirier described him as someone who is "[p]roposing himself as a master of common as much as of poetic tongues" (Poirier, p. 10). Proof of this can be found in *New Hampshire* itself, in the way it is divided into three parts, the first being the already mentioned opening poem, then a section called *Notes* and finally the *Grace Notes*. The *Notes* include a series of thirteen long poems, mostly written in blank verse, where he typically uses vernacular to make poetry. The third section is made up of shorter and more lyrical poems, where form becomes stricter and interpretation less straightforward. What does not change is the author's use of the language used by common people. Again, Poirier's comment on this matter is pertinent when he writes: "New England speech is not elevated by this process into poetry; it is shown to *be* poetry" (Poirier, p. 12). This perfectly sums up what Frost wants to achieve, which is not to embellish the real, but to show how it can be used unaltered to make something beautiful. By doing so, he is also sending a clear message that encourages his readers to appreciate life as it is.

Another interesting observation on language, made by Frost himself, is offered by William R. Linneman in his article "Robert Frost's 'New Hampshire'." There, he includes part of a conversation he had with Frost himself, in which they talked about how one specific word choice can be one of the main reasons why people appreciate one's work:

> "My Rhetoric classes at the University of Illinois seemed to enjoy it, and I told this to Frost, mentioning that they especially liked the lumberjack.
> Frost thought a minute and then observed: 'They like it because I swear.'
> I agreed. Then he went on: 'Tell me this, young man: don't you think I accomplish more with that one cuss word than these fellows who fill up whole pages with them?'
> I agreed again, thinking of such then popular novelists as James Jones and Norman Mailer. This conversation has illustrated for me what Frost meant by "prude" or "puke." He was no prude afraid of swearing, but since he did it so rarely (in poetry, at least) he was no puke. Consequently, the swear word has more impact." (Linneman, pp. 58-59)

What one has to pay attention to when reading this passage is how clearly, according to Frost, even when a poem is not highly lyrical, or extremely metrical, word choice is still incredibly important, and can result in changes in the way the poem might be perceived. When he adds this piece of his conversation with the poet, Linneman is doing it in the context of explaining Frost's regionalist philosophy. He elucidates on how it was Frost himself in "New England" who explained the way regionalism seemed to him the only choice between New Humanism, which he found too fancy, and Naturalism, too vulgar a current for him. (Linneman, p. 57)

1.2 Nature: a mirror for the human condition

Frost's regionalism is tied to one of the themes that characterize *New Hampshire* the most, the use of nature. In this collection, this topic is seen from many points of view, and many aspects of it are explored.
Some tie to nature can be found in almost every one of the poems that make up the collection. Sometimes, it might be something as simple as a small reference to a flower, a tree, a landscape – in other words, a reference with no apparent deeper meanings. Other times, instead, Frost puts nature at the center of his poems, making it the sole protagonist, or having it share the main spot with something – or someone – else. In some of these cases, nature serves as a means to an end – that is, to communicate something more. Sometimes he talks about specific elements of Earth nature, other times he talks about the Earth in general. Sometimes he describes unaltered nature, the pure side of it, and other times he makes the coexistence of nature and humanity evident. Interaction between human beings and nature is, in fact, a central theme in this collection.

When reading the pages of New Hampshire, readers find themselves immersed in a world where the dynamic interaction between nature and humanity is regarded with complexity. Throughout the collection, Robert Frost skillfully navigates the intricate relationship between these two forces. He does so by presenting scenarios where humans assert their dominance over the natural world while also acknowledging nature's inherent power and resilience, its ability to take back what humans have taken from it – or *her*, as Frost himself refers to it in "On A Tree Fallen Across The Road".

In certain poems, Frost portrays instances where human perseverance triumphs over the challenges posed by nature's forces. Whether it be farmers cultivating the land, lumbermen taming the forests, or farmland being turned into city, there are moments when humanity appears to assert its control and harness the resources of the natural environment to its advantage. A good example of this can be found in "A Brook In The City," where Frost describes the unforgiving effects of mankind over nature. These poems celebrate the human spirit's ability to adapt, conquer, and make a place for itself and its needs within the landscape.

Conversely, in other poems within the collection, Frost shifts the focus to nature's indomitable force and its capacity to assert its dominance over human endeavors. Here, the formidable power of the natural world and its incredible resilience take center stage. This happens, for example, in "The Need of Being Versed In Country Things," where an abandoned house gets quite literally re-taken by nature. This reminds readers of humanity's inherent vulnerability in the face of larger cosmic forces.

In essence, the theme of nature in this collection serves as a way to portray the complicated relationship between humanity and the natural world, exploring the delicate balance that exists between the two.

All the poems in *New Hampshire* that deal in one way or another with rural life are an example of how nature can be tamed, controlled, and used by humans in order to obtain whatever they need from it. As already mentioned, though, there are a few interesting cases where nature is the one that seems to prevail, or to somehow express its power. They are examples of abandoned or deserted houses, or human-made dwellings, where once, perhaps, people used to live, and that have been retaken – or are being retaken – by nature. There are several poems that deal with this in different ways. "A Fountain, A Bottle, A Donkey's Ears, And Some Books," for example, is one of them. It is a long narrative poem, a conversation between a former guide and a younger friend who go on an adventure with the goal of finding an old fountain. During this adventure they come upon a deserted house. The interesting part is what they are able to understand of its previous owners simply by looking at the objects left behind. Their findings, namely their finding of poems written by the woman that once lived there – a poetess – serve as the spark for a deeper reflection on how literature remains, natural events and time passing notwithstanding.

Another interesting example is the poem that concludes the collection, "The Need of Being Versed In Country Things." Here, the theme of abandonment is quite literal, with the subject of the poem being an abandoned home, destroyed and taken over by nature, which, according to Tim Kendall, seems not to care at all about human things. He writes:

> "Frost does not strain to mock the vanity of human wishes; his target is our habit of understanding (or, rather, *mis*understanding) the natural world as sympathetic to our own desires and defeats. […] The birds delight in their own habitation, indifferent to the destruction of the human residence. The poem's voice is caught between a keenness to find signs of sorrow in the natural world and a realization that nature does not share that sorrow." (Kendall, pp. 335-336)

Once again, Frost is using nature and its interaction with products of humanity to reflect on wider themes. In this instance, though, the topic is quite closely tied to nature itself.

This subject of abandoned houses is not a new one for Frost, but, according to Poirier, the novelty in this collection with respect to the previous ones lies in the way he is dealing with it. He believes that the bleakness that comes with their desolation, starting from *New Hampshire*, is treated in a way that makes the narrator appear "disengaged and relatively dispassionate. The houses are discovered by accident, and it is implied that the viewer is somebody who wonders less in a search for signs and embodiments than to amuse himself with the possibility of their existence." (Poirier, p. 155) What he is saying here is that there does not seem to be any intention in these findings, they are not willfully looked for. What he is not saying, though, is that the signs and symbols that are tied to these findings are unimportant. They remain a very useful tool to expand and reflect on human experience as a whole. This is, for example, what he does in "Good-By And Keep Cold," where one can find a "charming but chilling comparison between a freezing, dying orchard and a freezing, dying friend." (Poirier, p. 193) He starts from nature to build up on something more.

This relationship, then, is not portrayed by Frost only to show who might prevail, or only as a source of writing material. According to Poirier, Frost uses nature as a source of symbols and metaphors. He argues that his landscapes can be read as symbolic spaces where deeper truths about human experience are revealed. In the first and introductory chapter of his book "Robert Frost: The Work of Knowing," Richard Poirier clearly states: "We are made to care as much or more for a highly personalized human voice responding to a specific situation." (Poirier, p. 18) This clearly can be applied to this deep and entangled relationship between humans and nature, and to the reason why Frost is so concerned with it. In Frost's *New Hampshire*, talking about nature is a means to a clear end: highlighting existential dilemmas faced by his characters, so that he can expand on what he is really interested in: exploring the human condition. A clear example of this can be found in one of the two poems that will be analyzed in this thesis: "Maple." Here, a woman, who has been given a very specific and rare "natural" name, spends her entire life trying to make sense of it, and asking herself if there is a reason behind it. As Tim Kendall states in his analysis of the poem, "'Maple' examines how metaphor can govern a life […] *nomen est omen*" (Kendall, p. 265).
It is from Kendall's analysis of "Maple" that the idea of working on an analysis of "Maple" and "Paul's Wife" stemmed. What he writes about metaphors in "Maple" made the first connection between the two poems very clear, and very interestingly ironical: "A woman is not

literally a tree, although three poems later in *New Hampshire*, 'Paul's Wife' playfully resists that statement of the obvious by making a woman out of a tree. In a figurative sense, Maple is also made from a tree" (Kendall, p. 266). This simple and somewhat obvious connection originated a series of analyses and thoughts that finally led to the writing of this thesis, where these two poems will be translated into Italian (Chapter 2), closely analyzed, and compared to one another (Chapter 3) and to other significant literary works and literary interpretations (Chapters 4 and 5).

CHAPTER 2: "MAPLE" AND "PAUL'S WIFE" – TRANSLATION

2.1 An introduction to the art of translation

On every occasion characterized by the presence of people who speak different languages, translation is necessary. Translation is, in fact, the essential bridge that makes communication possible when people do not share a common language. Without translation, the exchange of ideas, information, and cultural nuances would be severely hindered, leading to misunderstandings and a lack of effective communication. People resort to simultaneous translation to communicate, but they also use it to exchange expertise on various topics, ranging from scientific research and technological innovations to medical advancements and educational methodologies. Furthermore, translation plays a crucial role in the dissemination of literature, cinema, and other forms of art, allowing people from diverse linguistic backgrounds to appreciate and understand artistic expressions from different cultures. This not only enriches individuals' experiences but also fosters a greater sense of global interconnectedness and cultural appreciation. Thus, translation serves as a vital tool in our increasingly globalized world, facilitating collaboration, learning, and cultural exchange across linguistic barriers. According to translation theorist Susan Bassnett, the current era is more in need of efficient translations than ever. Considering the current state of things, she thinks that today "it is surely more important than at any time in the past for there to be greater awareness of cultural differences and a greater need for intercultural understanding" (Bassnett, p. 1). Talking about translation in an article for *The Guardian*, American author, critic and translator Jennifer Croft states: "we [translators] are the ones who control the way a story is told; we're the people who create and maintain the transplanted book's style. Generally speaking, we are also the most reliable advocates for our books, and we take better care of them than anybody else. Covers simply can't continue to conceal who we are" (Croft). These are some observations made on the importance of translation by experts in the field. They argue in favor of translation in an era in which, according to them, the job of the translator is not given its due value.

Considering the author being translated in this thesis once stated: "poetry is what gets lost in translation", a short reflection on the topic is needed. The art of poetic translation is undoubtedly a very difficult one. Translating poetry presents unique challenges that go beyond the mere conversion of words from one language to another. One of the primary obstacles lies in capturing the lyrical quality and metrical structure of the original poem. Poetic rhythm, rhyme schemes, and the overall musicality of the verse are often deeply tied to the specific language in which they were created. Successfully preserving these elements while ensuring that the translation sounds natural and retains the original's emotional impact is a formidable task. And the trouble does not stop there. Poet Laureate Charles Simic does not, by any means, disagree with the general idea of poetic translation as being incredibly hard. However, he offers an alternate point of view, and a very interesting one at that: "Even in this claim that to translate poetry is impossible, I find an ideal solution. *Poetry itself is about the impossible*. All arts are

about doing the impossible. That's the[ir] attraction. How does a poet take an experience, big or small, and convert it into 14 lines? But it's done." (qtd. in Urschel, italics mine) This is a very pertinent and interesting observation in general terms, but even more so when applied to Frost and his poetry. It has been established in Chapter 1 how one of his main goals is to speak about the human experience as a whole, a goal he decided to achieve by writing poetry about specific experiences, small occurrences of quotidian life, that can somehow be extended to encompass humanity. This is exactly what Simic was talking about in his final appearance as U.S. Poet Laureate Consultant in Poetry. What Frost does is already almost impossible, so translation of poetry – an already impossible art in and of itself – should be regarded as yet another impossible art. In his speech, Simic also clarifies that the impossibility of poetic translation mostly applies to lyric poetry. When dealing with narrative poems such as the ones tackled in this thesis, the level of difficulty decreases considerably. This happens because of the elimination of tight metrical schemes and complicated rhetorical figures.

Another point to consider when approaching translation is how fundamentally different it is from creating a piece of literature from scratch. This difference pertains to the nature of the work involved and the distinct goals each activity seeks to achieve. The author's goal is to find the right words to convey their own ideas, whether it is a story they have invented or a theory they wish to share. In contrast, the translator's goal is to convey another person's ideas and words into a different language, typically their first language.
Walter Benjamin explores this topic in his essay "The Translator's Task," where he employs a striking metaphor. He compares language to a forest and explains the difference between the tasks of an author and a translator based on their respective positions relative to the forest. According to Benjamin, the author is inside the forest, freely selecting words from their language to express their ideas. The translator, on the other hand, views the forest from the outside, attempting to find equivalent expressions in their own language to convey the same concepts (Benjamin, p. 159). This perspective highlights the increased difficulty of the translator's work, as their intention is not "spontaneous, primary" but rather "derivative" (Benjamin, p. 159). The translator cannot create, but must instead grasp another person's ideas, however complex, and render them in a different language, each with its own unique nuances of meaning.
Benjamin's stance might be considered radical, as it emphasizes the inherent challenges and intricacies of translation. It is important to note that this perspective does not imply that translating the poetry of Robert Frost, for instance, is a more difficult or valuable endeavor than composing his original works. However, it offers a refreshing and insightful viewpoint on the art of translation. Many would agree that translation deserves greater recognition and appreciation for its role in bridging linguistic and cultural divides. Understanding these differences enriches our appreciation of both the original literary creation and the intricate art of translation.

2.2 "Maple"

La certezza della sua insegnante che dovesse essere Mabel

Fece sì che Maple notasse per la prima volta il proprio nome.
Chiese a suo padre e lui le disse: “Maple[1]–
Maple è giusto.”

“Ma la maestra ha detto alla scuola
Che non esiste un nome del genere.”

“Gli insegnanti non sanno tanto quanto 5
I genitori sui figli, dillo alla maestra.
Dille che è M-A-P-L-E.
Chiedile se conosce un certo acero.
Ecco, tu ti chiami come un acero.
Tua madre ti ha dato il nome. Tu e lei vi siete viste 10
Solo di passaggio nella stanza di sopra.
Una da questa parte entrando nella la vita, e l’altra
Dall’altra parte uscendo della vita – sai?
Quindi probabilmente non ricordi molto di lei.
Ti stava guardando da un bel po’. 15
Ti mise un dito nella guancia con così tanta forza
Che ti deve aver lasciato quella tua fossetta lì, e disse,
‘Maple.’ Lo dissi anch’io: ‘Sì, come nome.’
Annuì. Quindi siamo sicuri che non ci siano errori.
Non so che significato volesse dargli, 20
Ma sembra come una parola che ha lasciato per raccomandarsi
Di fare la brava – di essere come un acero.
In che senso come un acero lo dobbiamo capire noi.
O lo deve capire una bimba prima o poi.
Non ora – almeno non dovrei provarci così tanto adesso. 25
Piano piano ti dirò tutto quello che so
Sui diversi alberi, e anche qualcosa
Su tua madre che forse potrebbe aiutare.”
Parole pericolose di auto-riflessione da seminare.
Per fortuna tutto ciò che voleva dal suo nome allora 30
Era usarlo per sgridare la sua maestra il giorno dopo,
E spaventarla da parte di suo padre.
Qualsiasi informazione in più sarebbe stata sprecata,
O così suo padre cercava di pensare per non sentirsi in colpa.
Se ne sarebbe dimenticata. Lei quasi se ne dimenticò. 35
Ciò che seminò in lei dormì un sonno così lungo,
E arrivò così vicino alla morte nel buio degli anni,
Che quando si svegliò e tornò in vita,
Il fiore era diverso dal seme da cui proveniva.

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[1] Maple = acero, in Italian

Tornò vagamente un giorno allo specchio, 40
Mentre era in piedi e diceva il proprio nome ad alta voce,
Scandendolo dolcemente attraverso i suoi occhi abbassati
Per farlo andar bene con il suo aspetto.
Cosa aveva di strano il suo nome? La sua stranezza stava
Nell'avere troppo significato. Altri nomi, 45
Come Lesley, Carol, Irma, Marjorie,
Non significavano niente. Rose poteva avere un significato,
Ma alla fine non ce l'aveva. (Conosceva una Rose.)
Questa differenza dagli altri nomi era
Ciò che faceva sì che la gente lo notasse – e notasse lei.
(O lo notavano, o lo sbagliavano.) 50
Il suo problema era scoprire cosa pretendesse
Dalle vesta o dalle gesta della ragazza che lo portava.
Se potesse crearsi una qualche idea di sua madre –
Cosa aveva pensato fosse carino, e positivo.
Questa era la casa d'infanzia di sua madre; 55
La casa con un piano davanti, tre piani
Nel lato che mostrava alla strada.
(La sistemazione creava un seminterrato piacevole.)
La camera di sua madre era ancora quella di suo padre,
Nella quale poteva vedere la foto di sua madre sbiadirsi. 60
Una volta trovò come segnalibro nella Bibbia
Una foglia d'acero che pensò fosse stata messa
Lì in sua attesa. Lesse ogni parola
Delle due pagine tra cui era schiacciata
Come se fosse sua madre a parlarle. 65
Ma dimenticò di rimettere la foglia mentre chiudeva
E perse il punto e non lo lesse mai più.
Era sicura, però, che non ci fosse niente.

Quindi cercò se stessa, come tutti
Cercano se stessi, più o meno dall'esterno. 70
E questa ricerca di se stessi, anche se incostante,
Potrebbe comunque essere stata ciò che la portò a leggere,
e a pensare un po', e a studiare in città.
Imparò la stenografia, qualsiasi cosa la stenografia
C'entrasse – si chiedeva certe volte. 75
Dunque, finchè non si trovò in un posto strano
Considerando che vi è stata portata dal nome Maple,
Prendendo appunti su un pezzo di carta,
E nelle pause quando alzava gli occhi
guardando fuori da una finestra del diciannovesimo piano 80
Una navicella che si muoveva con un movimento non molto da nave

E un vago e fastidiosissimo rumore sul fiume
Oltre la città più alta costruita con le mani.
Qualcuno stava dicendo con un tono così naturale,
Che quasi si appuntò le parole sul ginocchio, 85
"Sai che mi ricordi un albero–
Un acero?"

"Perchè mi chiamo Maple?"

"Non è Mabel? Pensavo fosse Mabel."

"Sicuramente hai sentito l'ufficio chiamarmi Mabel.
Devo farmi chiamare come vogliono loro." 90

Erano entrambi scossi dal fatto che lui avesse intuito
Senza il nome il suo mistero personale.
Faceva sembrare che ci fosse qualcosa
Che lei stessa doveva essersi persa. Così si sposarono,
E si portarono a casa questo strano evento e si fecero guidare da esso. 95

Una volta andarono in pellegrinaggio da suo padre
(La casa con un piano davanti, tre piani
Nel lato che mostrava alla strada)
Per vedere se ci fosse qualche albero speciale
Che lei potesse non aver notato. Non ne trovarono nessuno, 100
Nemmeno un singolo albero per l'ombra,
Figuriamoci un boschetto di alberi da zucchero.
Gli disse della foglia d'acero come segnalibro
Nella grande Bibbia, e tutto ciò che si ricordava
Del punto che segnava – "Offerta agitata, 105
Qualcosa sull'offerta agitata, diceva."

"Non hai mai chiesto direttamente a tuo padre, vero?"

"Si l'ho fatto, e ha evitato di rispondere a volte, credo."
(Questo era il suo ricordo sfocato del modo in cui
Una volta molto tempo fa suo padre si era frenato da solo.) 110

"Perché non per dire ma potrebbe essere
Qualcosa tra tuo padre e tua madre
Che non ha affatto a che fare con noi."

"Che non ha a che fare con me?
Dove sarebbe la giustizia di darmi 115

Un nome da portare per tutta la vita, senza mai
Saperne il segreto?”

“Oppure potrebbe essere
Qualcosa che un padre non potrebbe spiegare a una figlia
Bene quanto una madre. O ancora 120
Potrebbe essere stato il loro unico salto nell’eccesso
Per cui sarebbe un peccato farlo sentire in colpa
Tirandolo fuori con lui quando è troppo vecchio.
Tuo padre ci sente che lo accerchiamo con il suo domandare,
E ci allontana inutilmente, 125
Come se non sapesse quale piccolo dettaglio
Potrebbe portarci a una scoperta.
Era quanto più personale possibile
Per come vedeva fosse con te
Dire che tua madre, se fosse vissuta, condividerebbe 130
La distanza tra la sua nascita e la tua.”

“Solo un’altra occhiata tenendo a mente quello che dici
E mi arrendo”; l’ultima occhiata in questione non portò a nulla.
Ma, anche se ora avevano rinunciato per sempre alla ricerca,
Si aggrappavano a ciò che uno aveva visto nell’altro 135
Per ispirazione. Provava che c’era qualcosa.
Allontanavano i propri pensieri da quando gli aceri
Stavano uniformemente in dei cesti, e il vapore
Di linfa e neve rotolava giù dallo zuccherificio[2].
Quando fecero la connessione tra lei e gli aceri, 140
Parlavano dell’albero che il fuoco dell’autunno attraversava
E spogliava delle sue foglie di pelle, ma ne lasciava la corteccia
né bruciata, né tantomeno annerita dal fumo.
Andavano sempre in vacanza in autunno.
Una volta trovarono un acero in una radura, 145
In piedi solitario con braccia lisce portate in alto,
E ogni pezzo di fogliame che avesse mai indossato
Giaceva scarlatto e rosa pallido ai suoi piedi.
Ma la sua età impedì loro di considerare quest’albero.
Venticinque anni fa quando a Maple venne dato il nome, 150
Poteva essere a malapena una piantina con due foglie
Che una mucca qualsiasi potrebbe aver brucato al pascolo.
Poteva essere un altro acero come quello?

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[2] The original version uses the word “sugar house,” which more closely translates to “casa dello zucchero.” This translation would be odd, hence the decision to translate it as “zuccherificio.” the sugar house, though, is not to be intended as a modern sugar factory, but as a traditional and homely wooden house where artisanal maple syrup is produced.

Rimasero lì attorno per un momento vicini alla scoperta,
Abbastanza metaforico da vedere il simbolo, 155
Ma senza abbastanza fede da pensare che qualcosa potesse significare
La stessa cosa nello stesso momento per persone diverse.
Forse una diffidenza filiale gli ha in parte impedito
Di pensare che potesse essere una cosa così nuziale.
E comunque era arrivato troppo tardi per Maple. 160
Usò le mani per coprirsi gli occhi.
"Ora non vedremmo il segreto neanche se potessimo:
Non lo stiamo più cercando."

E così un nome con un significato, dato alla morte,
Aveva portato una ragazza al matrimonio, e comandato la sua vita. 165
Non importa se il significato non fosse chiaro.
Un nome con un significato può crescere un figlio,
Portare il figlio via dalle braccia dei genitori.
Meglio un nome senza significato, direi,
Così da lasciare più spazio alla natura e alle fortunate coincidenze. 170
Date certi nomi ai figli e vedete cosa combinate.

Tackling a poem like "Maple" was not an easy task. During the process of translation, many factors must be taken into account, including cultural nuances, idiomatic expressions, and the original tone and style of the text, all the while keeping in mind the main goal: achieving a result that reflects as closely as possible the original product.

The first choice that presented itself in this specific case had to do with the title itself. maybe this first choice was an easy one to make, but this would dictate the translation of the poem as a whole. The title being the name of the protagonist, and her name and its significance being at the very center of the poem, posing the question of whether to translate it or not was the bare minimum. Of course, translating "Maple" into Italian as "acero," other than being really terrible to read, would not have given justice to the *Maple-Mabel* confusion. The only reason why I posed the question was for the importance of the actual connection between the name and the tree in the poem. The solution for this was obvious: the name had to be kept in English, with the addition of a footnote with the translation, for context.

The next point that caused some reflection was at lines 10-13: "You and she just saw / Each other in passing in the room upstairs, / One coming this way into life, and one / Going the other out of life". The difficulty here had to do with "coming this way into" and "going the other out of" life. At first try, I could not quite render the subtle repetition of these two parts, since the

word "coming" already implies that one comes "this way" and the same is valid for the word "going" and "out of." This happens because in English both words imply directionality. Due to these doubts, my first translation was not impactful enough, since I had originally eliminated the repetition. The solution, finally, was to keep the repetition as much as possible, and that is how I obtained this final version: "Una **da questa parte entrando** nella la vita, e l'altra / **Dall'altra parte uscendo** della vita".

As for the next obstacle I found, this time it had to do with correctly comprehending the text. At line 40, "It came back vaguely at the glass one day", I could not seem to grasp that the mentioned glass was really a mirror. What helped in the end was reading literature on the poem, and specifically these lines from an article by Cecily Parks: "she stands at the mirror with lowered eyes – she is not-quite-looking at herself, but also her not-quite-closed eyes put Maple in a perceptive position that allows her oblique access to her thinking self and to her physical self." (Parks, p. 18) I chose to include this error in this description of my process of translating the poem because it speaks to the importance of consulting critical work. During translation, it can help one to better understand and finally better translate the piece. Had I not read about the poem more thoroughly, the final result probably would not have reflected what Frost originally meant.

Trying to keep the same images that the author used was the toughest part in the process. This characterizes the next obstacle as well. At line 81, Frost writes: "An **airship** laboring with **unship-like** motion". Here, the challenge had to do with maintaining somehow the repetition of the word "ship," while still keeping the meaning as close as possible to the original. In Italian, the word "airship" is translated as "dirigibile," which would completely eliminate the wordplay with the next part of the verse. At the end, the perfect mediation seemed to be the use of the word "navicella," which is not really the perfect translation, since it has a somewhat alien-y connotation, but it allows for the wordplay to be kept in the Italian version as well: "Una navicella che si muoveva con un movimento non molto da nave".

The next obstacle proved to be the toughest, and the reason is that its difficulty had to do both with how to translate it and how to understand it in context. The part I am referring to is in the passage about the Bible that Maple found in her mother's bedroom. When talking to her husband about it, she disclosed what she remembered was in the pages signaled by the maple leaf: "She told him of the bookmark maple leaf / In the big Bible, and all she remembered / Of the place marked with it – 'Wave offering, / Something about wave offering, it said." (ll. 103-106). In order to translate it properly, first of all I needed to understand what it referred to, and I found an article by Michael Karounos entirely dedicated to interpreting these verses and the mention of the mysterious "wave offering." According to him, "the depth and subtlety of his knowledge is nowhere better evidenced than in his poem 'Maple,' in which he uses an obscure theological term to describe the naming of a child." (Karounos, p. 265), thus giving credit to Maple's first theory that her mother did not leave the leaf there by chance – it was a real message to her regarding the meaning of her name.

Many other critics attributed the reference to the wave offering to Numbers 5:25 and have interpreted it as being a sign of infidelity on the part of the mother. Among such critics, Katherine Kearns, who believes this specific offering was made "when a woman was thought to have been unfaithful to her husband" (qtd in Kendall), a theory that would be confirmed in the image of the scarlet leaves at the foot of the maple tree a little further on in the poem. Kendall's comment on the matter is that this interpretation is "as unprovable as it is irrefutable" (Kendall, p. 267), thus remaining vague on the matter and not taking a clear position. Karounos' analysis, instead, concentrates on the incorrectness of Kearns' interpretation, by offering an alternative view. Before entering his theory on how to correctly interpret this difficult reference, Karounos offers a logical explanation on why, even without thoroughly analyzing the Bible, this interpretation does not make a lot of sense. He states: "Typically, people don't commemorate sins by marking biblical passages; they especially don't memorialize the fact of adultery with the use of a leaf whose name is synonymous with a beloved child and the memory of a beloved wife who died in childbirth." (Karounos, p. 269) What he means is that, even though probably it is worth researching where exactly that Bible reference came from, it is also possible to apply logic to the matter. A more thorough reflection on how to interpret this Bible quotation in connection with the mother will be offered in a dedicated section in Chapter 5.

According to Karounos' study, there are three words in the Old Testament that can be translated as "offering," and they are *minhah*, *qorban*, and *terumah*. The first is a present given from one person to the other in the sense of paying a kind of tribute to their importance. The second term is more of an offering to God. The latter, according to Vine, "was used in the early period to refer to 'contributions' or 'gifts' which consisted of the produce of the ground, reflecting the agricultural character of early Israel." He also adds that "such 'offerings' were raised high by the priest in some sort of motion as it was placed on the altar." (qtd. in Karouos, p. 269) It is precisely the mention of this motion that prompted Karounos to believe *terumah* to be the right origin for Frost's "wave offering," and this is the reason why I translated it as "offerta agitata."

Finally, the last and hardest part of the poem, both to interpret and to translate: "It was as personal as he could be / About the way he saw it was with you / To say your mother, had she lived, would be / As far again as from being born to bearing." This passage, described by poet and translator Rachel Hadas as having "sort of a Henry Jamesian subtlety and syntax but Frostian diction," has proved very challenging precisely for this reason: its very complex and intricate syntax. Clearly, it has to do with the central mystery of the poem, being found in a longer passage where Maple's husband suggests there could be "[s]omething a father couldn't tell a daughter / As well as could a mother" (ll. 119-120) behind her name. When asked about this passage, poet Robert Crawford and translator of poetry Carla Buranello both suggest the husband is implying the possibility of Maple being pregnant at this time. To make this suggestion, Crawford underlines the use of the word "bearing," and Buranello connects the initial "it" with "to be," and the latter with "about," creating the phrase "to be about," which would suggest something impending. This, connected to "the way he saw it was with you," meaning her current condition, could be an implication of her pregnancy. These are some very interesting observations that helped put an order to things and reach the final translation: "Era quanto più personale possible / Per come vedeva fosse con te / Dire che tua madre, se fosse

vissuta, condividerebbe / La distanza tra la sua nascita e la tua." The meaning would imply that they not only share their condition of pregnancy, but also the age. These two poets also helped to unveil a possible reason behind the choice of Maple's name, which will be better explored in Chapter 3.[3]

2.3 "La Moglie di Paul"

Per mandare via Paul da qualsiasi campo di taglialegna
Bastava semplicemente dirgli,
"Come sta tua moglie, Paul?" – e lui spariva.
Alcuni dicevano che era perchè non aveva una moglie,
E odiava che lo prendessero in giro su questo argomento. 5
Alcuni perché era giunto a un pelo
O quasi dall'averne una, e poi era stato mollato.
Alcuni perchè ne aveva avuta una un tempo, una buona,
Che era scappata con qualcun altro e poi l'aveva lasciato.
E altri ancora perchè ora ne aveva una 10
Che appena gli ricordavano di lei, –
Era tutto per lei in un secondo:
Doveva subito scappare via per cercarla,
Come a dire, "Ah è vero, come sta mia moglie?
Spero non stia combinando qualcosa." 15
Nessuno aveva una gran voglia di liberarsi di Paul.
È sempre stato l'eroe dei campi montani
Da quella volta che, solo per dimostrarglielo, aveva sfilato
La corteccia per intero da un larice intero
In maniera pulita come fanno i ragazzi con un ramoscello di salice 20
Per fare un fischietto di salice una domenica
d'aprile vicino a calmi ruscelli in una radura.
Sembrava che glielo chiedessero solo per farlo andare via,
"Come sta tua moglie, Paul?" e se ne andava sempre.
Non si è mai fermato ad ammazzare nessuno 25
Che abbia fatto questa domanda. Semplicemente spariva –
Nessuno sapeva in che direzione,
Anche se di solito non passava molto tempo
Prima che sentissero parlare di lui in un nuovo campo,
Lo stesso Paul e le stesse vecchie abilità da taglialegna. 30
La domanda che tutti si facevano era sul perché Paul dovesse
Avere problemi con chi gli poneva una domanda normale –
Un uomo a cui si poteva dire qualsiasi cosa

[3] The suggestions included here and in the following chapters made by Carla Buranello, Robert Crawford and Rachel Hadas come from private communications on a Facebook discussion thread on the two poems.

Eccetto parole scontrose. Ecco le risposte.
E ce n’era un’altra non così carina nei confronti di Paul: 35
Che Paul avesse sposato una donna che non era al suo pari.
Paul si vergognava di lei. Per essere all’altezza di un eroe,
Avrebbe dovuto essere un’eroina;
Invece era una qualche pellerossa mezzosangue[4].
Ma se la storia raccontata da Murphy era vera, 40
Lei non era niente di cui vergognarsi.

Si sa che Paul poteva fare magie. Tutti hanno
Sentito di come frustò i cavalli per un carico
Che non si spostava fino a quando semplicemente non forzarono
La loro bardatura di pelle non conciata dal carico fino al campo. 45
Paul disse al capo che il carico sarebbe stato a posto,
“Il sole ti porterà il carico” – e lo fece –
Accorciando la pelle fino a lunghezza naturale.
Ed ecco ciò che viene detto forzatura. Ma credo che
Quella di quando saltò in modo da atterrare 50
Coi piedi contemporaneamente sul soffitto,
Per poi atterrare ancora sano e salvo nel verso giusto,
Di nuovo per terra, sia la verità o quasi la verità.
Questa è un’altra storia strana**.** Usando una sega, Paul tolse sua moglie
Da un ciocco di pino strobo. Murphy era lì, 55
E, come si suol dire, vide la nascita della signora.
Paul ha lavorato a qualsiasi cosa nella produzione di legname.
Era a testa bassa a portare via delle assi
Per – mi dimentico – l’ultimo segantino con l’ambizione
di voler scoprire se potesse continuare a caricare 60
Il legname su Paul fino a fargli implorare pietà.
Avevano tagliato la prima lastra dal toppo di base,
E il segantino aveva sbattuto il carro indietro
Così da farlo sbattere ininterrottamente contro i denti della sega.
A giudicare dalla loro espressione 65
Quando videro cos’era successo al tronco,
Probabilmente sapevano di avere la colpa e si aspettavano

[4] Frost’s original version is “half-breed squaw,” which is a derogatory phrase to talk about Native American women, hence the use of an Italian outdated and almost equally derogatory phrase as “pellerossa mezzosangue”. Looking for more information on the term “squaw,” Ives Goddard’s explanation to a reader asking about the term was especially elucidating: “I have always tried to emphasize that *squaw* is now generally considered disparaging, as current dictionaries rightly indicate. Everyone would regard its use to refer to a Native American woman as demeaning (or colossally ignorant) […] In its historical origin, however, the word *squaw* is perfectly innocent, as current dictionaries also correctly indicate: *squaw* comes from a language of the Algonquian family in which it meant ‘woman.’” (Goddard)

Che qualcosa sarebbe andato storto data la loro confusione.
Qualcosa aveva lasciato una larga striscia nera di grasso
Sul legno nuovo per l'intera lunghezza del tronco 70
Tranne, forse, un piede a entrambi i capi.
Ma quando Paul mise il dito nel grasso,
Non era affatto grasso, ma una lunga fessura.
Il tronco era cavo. Stavano tagliando legno di pino.
"Prima volta che vedo un pino cavo. 75
Ecco cosa succede ad avere Paul nei dintorni.
Non credo ai miei occhi," disse il segantino.
Tutti dovevano dargli un'occhiata,
E dire a Paul cosa ne doveva fare.
(Lo trattavano come fosse suo.) "Prendi un coltello a serramanico, 80
E allarga l'apertura, ed ecco che hai un incavo
Tutto scavato per andarci a pescare dentro." A Paul
L'incavo sembrava troppo ben strutturato e pulito e vuoto
Per aver mai ospitato uccelli o bestie o api.
Non c'era un ingresso perché riuscissero a entrare. 85
Gli sembrava un qualche nuovo tipo di incavo
Con il quale pensava che avrebbe fatto *meglio* ad usare un coltello.
Quindi quella sera dopo il lavoro tornò
E tagliandolo ci fece entrare abbastanza luce
Da vedere se fosse vuoto. Lì dentro distinse 90
Una sottile lunghezza di midollo, o era midollo?
Potrebbe essere stata la pelle che un serpente aveva mutato
E lasciato attaccata all'interno dell'albero
Quei cent'anni durante i quali l'albero deve essere cresciuto.
Dopo aver tagliato un altro po' lo aveva nelle sue mani, 95
E, muovendo lo sguardo dal midollo allo stagno lì vicino,
Paul si chiese come avrebbe reagito all'acqua.
Non tirava un filo d'aria, ma solo l'alito
Che lui emetteva camminando lentamente verso la riva
Una volta lo soffiò via dalle sue mani e quasi lo ruppe. 100
Lo poggiò sul margine dove poteva bere.
Al primo sorso frusciò e divenne molle.
Al sorso successivo divenne invisibile.
Paul passò le sue dita nelle acque poco profonde per cercarlo,
E pensò che si dovesse essere sciolto. Era sparito. 105
E poi oltre l'acqua più profonda, offuscata dai moscerini,
Dove il mucchio di tronchi era schiacciato contro la barriera,
Lentamente emerse una persona, emerse una ragazza,
I capelli bagnati pesanti su di lei come un casco,
La quale, poggiata su un tronco guardò verso Paul. 110
E ciò portò Paul a girarsi a sua volta

Per vedere se ci fosse qualcuno dietro di lui
Che lei stesse guardando al suo posto.
Murphy è stato lì a guardare tutto il tempo,
Ma da un capanno dove nessuno dei due lo poteva vedere. 115
Ci fu un momento di incertezza nella nascita
Quando la ragazza era sembrata troppo piena d'acqua da sopravvivere,
Prima che facesse il suo primo respiro con un sussulto
e ridesse. Poi piano piano si resse in piedi,
E si incamminò parlando tra sè e sè o con Paul 120
attraverso i tronchi come schiene di alligatori,
Paul seguendola attorno allo stagno.

La sera dopo Murphy e alcuni compagni
Si ubriacarono, e rintracciarono la coppia su per il Cantamount, 125
Dalla cui cima brulla c'è una vista
Su altre colline lungo una valle morenica[5].
E lì, ben oltre il tramonto, lasciatelo dire a Murphy,
Videro Paul e la sua creatura a casa insieme.
Era l'unico piccolo sguardo che chiunque 130
Avesse avuto di lei e Paul da quando Murphy li vide
Innamorarsi al laghetto del mulino.
Più di un miglio nella natura,
Sedevano insieme a metà strada verso la cima di una rupe
In una piccola nicchia creatasi al suo interno, la ragazza 135
Luminosa, come se una stella giocherellasse sul luogo,
Paul scuro, come la sua ombra. Tutta la luce
Proveniva dalla ragazza, però, non da una stella,
Come risultò chiaro da cosa accadde dopo.
Tutti quei gran mascalzoni unirono le proprie gole, 140
E fecero un grido forte, e lanciarono una bottiglia,
Come grezzo pegno di rispetto alla bellezza.
Ovviamente la bottiglia mancò di un miglio,
Ma il grido raggiunse la ragazza e spense la sua luce,
Si spense come una lucciola, e basta. 145

Quindi c'era chi poteva testimoniare che Paul fosse sposato,
E non con qualcuno di cui vergognarsi.
Tutti si erano sbagliati nel giudicare Paul.
Murphy mi ha detto che Paul si dava tutte quelle arie
Riguardo sua moglie per tenersela per sé. 150

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[5] Here, Frost mentions a "kettle valley," which, as poetry translator Carla Buranello suggested, can be interpreted as what in Italian we call "valle morenica" or "pianura sedimentaria," which both describe the valley created trhough the accumulation of sediments. (From private discussions on a Facebook thread) The choice ended on "valle morenica" simply because it keeps the original "valley."

Paul era ciò che chiamiamo un possessore terribile.
Avere una moglie con lui significava possederla.
Lei non riguardava nessun altro,
Né per farle complimenti, e nemmeno solo per nominarla,
E avrebbe ringraziato le persone per non pensare a lei. 155
L'opinione di Murphy era che un uomo come Paul
Non avrebbe accettato che gli si parlasse della moglie
In alcuna maniera nella quale il mondo sapesse parlare.

"Paul's Wife" proved unexpectedly easier to translate than "Maple." This is not to say that it did not have its obstacles or points where more reflection was needed, but contrary to initial expectations, other than having to research a great many specific terms that have to do with lumbering, trees and nature, there were not many other obstacles, most of all interpretation-wise.

The first choice that I had to make was, once again, whether to translate the title or not. In this case, the choice was quite immediate: it had to be translated, and that is simply because it is not a name, or something that only makes sense in English – as was the case in "Maple" which, other than being a name, was the central wordplay and mystery of the poem.

In "Paul's Wife," most points that required some thought had to do with trying to keep in Italian the same – or as similar as possible – wordplay or repetition that Frost skillfully created in his original poem. The first of such occasions was at line 19: "The bark of a whole tamarack off whole". My first instinct was to translate it as "la corteccia da un intero larice senza romperla," which, perhaps, would have been smoother, but more of a paraphrase, and, more to the point, it would not have kept the repetition of the word "whole." Since the main objective in the process of translating these two poems is to obtain something that is as close as possible to Frost's original, for my final translation I opted to keep the repetition, sacrificing the fluidity of the sentence: "La corteccia per intero da un larice intero".

Another choice worth mentioning is found in lines 42-49:

> "You know Paul could do wonders. Everyone's
> Heard how he thrashed the horses on a load
> That wouldn't budge until they simply **stretched**
> Their rawhide harness from the load to camp.
> Paul told the boss the load would be all right,
> 'The sun will bring your load in' – and it did –
> By shrinking the rawhide to natural length.

That's what is called a **stretcher**. […]"
(Frost, p. 179, bold mine)

Here, there is an interesting wordplay with the words "stretched" and "stretcher." The former, used by Frost in line 44, would normally translate to a declination of the verb "allungare," to stretch. However, since the meaning of the sentence at line 49, "That's what is called a stretcher," is clearly an ironical way for Frost to describe such a surreal situation, "stretcher" here would be more like "forzatura" in Italian, something that must be stretched to be believable. For this reason, I thought using a declination of the verb "forzare" in line 44, with the meaning of pushing with strain, would be particularly fitting, in order to keep both meaning and wordplay:

Si sa che Paul poteva fare magie. Tutti hanno
Sentito di come frustò i cavalli per un carico
Che non si spostava fino a quando semplicemente non **forzarono**
La loro bardatura di pelle non conciata dal carico fino al campo.
Paul disse al capo che il carico sarebbe stato a posto,
"Il sole ti porterà il carico" – e lo fece –
Accorciando la pelle fino a lunghezza naturale.
Ed ecco ciò che viene detto **forzatura**. […]

The last noteworthy difficulty was in the last lines of the poem, specifically when the narrator presents Murphy's idea of Paul's relationship to his wife describing him as a very possessive husband. Specifically, there were two lines that were quite hard to translate for the intricate way Frost put them in English: line 155 and the very last line of the poem, which demands more attention just for this reason.
Line 155, "And he'd thank people not to think of her" was difficult firstly because of its intricacy, but mostly because of the beautiful wordplay between "thank" and "think." Of course, my initial intention was to try and keep this nice assonance, but with no good results. Despite trying to find two similar words in Italian with the same meaning of "think" and "thank," I was unfortunately unable to, and resorted to translating "literally" as "E avrebbe ringraziato le persone per non pensare a lei," thus obtaining a verse with good meaning, but without keeping the original stylistic choices. It is interesting to include this passage in my analysis since it is important to remember, when translating, that in order to preserve the same meaning – which is ultimately the most crucial aspect – certain elements may need to be sacrificed. In this case, the sacrifice was style, which had to be adjusted to ensure that the core message and intent of the original text were accurately conveyed.

The last three lines of the poem describe how, according to Murphy, Paul thought nobody should even talk about his wife: "Murphy's idea was that a man like Paul / Wouldn't be spoken to about a wife / In any way the world knew how to speak." (Frost, p. 182) As Tim Kendall notes in his analysis of the poem, this passage speaks of Paul's wife, this mystical creature, as

something so pure even words would taint her: “He refuses to stand by as others contaminate the identity of his ‘wife’ with language […] he ensures her freedom by keeping her apart from a society and a language that would name and claim her.” (Kendall, p. 289) My first translation of the last two lines was the following: “Non avrebbe accettato che gli si parlasse della moglie / In alcun modo conosciuto al mondo.” Considering the importance of such a line, and the importance of the message behind it, my final translation aims to highlight the language aspect, and therefore was changed into the final version above: “Non avrebbe accettato che gli si parlasse della moglie / In alcuna maniera nella quale il mondo sapesse parlare.”

Offering an analysis of the process of translating these two poems serves multiple valuable purposes. Firstly, it highlights the significance of the art of translation, a discipline that often goes unnoticed despite its crucial role in bridging linguistic and cultural gaps. By delving into the intricacies of translating poetry, one can understand the meticulous effort and skill required to transform a work from one language to another while keeping its essence.
Secondly, this analysis emphasizes the challenging nature of the preparatory work involved in translation. Before even beginning the translation process, the translator must undertake an in-depth examination of the original text. This involves understanding not just the literal meaning of the words, but also the cultural context, the nuances of tone, and the stylistic elements that give the poem its unique character. Translating poetry, in particular, demands an appreciation of the original’s rhythm, meter, and sound patterns, all of which contribute to its aesthetic and emotional impact. The translator must decide how to convey these features in the target language, which often involves creative problem-solving and a deep understanding of both languages' poetic forms.

Furthermore, this analytical phase is crucial for making informed decisions about what aspects of the original work can be preserved and what might need to be adapted. This is because, in many cases, direct translation might not convey the same emotional weight or cultural significance as the original. Thus, a translator must weigh the importance of maintaining certain stylistic elements against the need to faithfully represent the original meaning.
By showcasing the detailed process of translating these poems, the hope is that the reader can better appreciate the translator's role as a mediator who brings the beauty and depth of one culture's literary creations to another. Through such an analysis, the translator's craft is acknowledged as a vital component of literary production, deserving of the same respect and recognition as the creation of original works.

CHAPTER 3: “MAPLE” AND “PAUL’S WIFE” – ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

After a deep immersion into the Italian version of “Maple” and “Paul’s Wife” through an analysis of the process of poetic translation, this thesis wishes to offer a similarly deep analysis of the original version of the same poems, which will include insight into the themes Frost chose to tackle through them.
As emerged from Chapter 2, these two poems, though distinct in their settings and narratives, share thematic threads that intertwine with the author’s interest in exploring identity, relationships, and their connection to nature as the landscape of human life. Starting from this consideration, in this chapter, we embark on a journey of analysis and interpretation, unraveling meanings embedded within "Maple" and "Paul's Wife."
Through close reading, literary analysis, and critical interpretation, the goal is to highlight both similarities and differences between the two poems, in order to understand why and how it is that continue to captivate readers to this day.

3.1 “Maple”

“Maple” is the fifth poem Frost included in his *New Hampshire* collection, a collection divided into three parts: the introductory poem, “New Hampshire,” the *Notes*, and the *Grace Notes*. “Maple” is the fourth poem in the *Notes* section. This part of the collection is made up of quite long pieces, mostly narrative ones, where the author reflected on the deep connection that exists between human beings and nature. As clarified in Chapter 1, Robert Frost’s main goal with this collection is to use specific examples, common instances of ordinary life, situations in which humans interact with nature and each other, to expand on them and actually reflect on a broader theme – what it means to be a human being and to live life as such. Written in iambic pentameter – the meter that most closely resembles natural English speech – the poems in this section are examples of real life turned into poetry.
“Maple” is a clear example of these characteristics, being a metaphorical poem about how “a name with meaning, given in death, / Made a girl’s marriage, and ruled in her life.” (Frost, p. 173) Here, the author used the unique experience of a woman, to reflect on the much broader themes of naming and identity.

The poem begins *in medias res*, with the third person narrating voice introducing, right in the very first two lines, the central “problem” of the story: the little girl, whom the reader will see become a married woman, possibly pregnant, has difficulties understanding the meaning – if there is one – behind her name: “Her teacher’s certainty it must be Mabel / Made Maple first take notice of her name.” (Frost, p. 168) Something quite interesting about this initial couple of lines is how the great interest in understanding more about her own name did not come from an innate need, one that came from within. This need was instead fueled in Maple from the outside, from other people’s certainty that her name was another. Before then, she had never taken notice of this, of its peculiarity. This speaks volumes to how life is a continuous

interaction with others, without which, many of the experiences that make one's life what it is, would not even happen. For instance, in this case, her need to find an explanation behind such a different name guided her entire life, built it and modified it, governing every single one of the choices that brought her to adulthood (who to marry, for example, or what to study). Maybe, though, if nobody had ever pointed its strangeness out to her, her life would have taken a completely different course.

From this point forward, the poem traces Maple's life, a life dedicated to making sense of herself through her name, the one given by her late mother, who died giving birth to her. Therefore, it is right from the beginning of the poem that Frost introduces one of his most valued themes: making sense of the human condition. According to Poirier, Frost's process of writing poetry is comparable to the processes that happen in life when someone is trying to make sense of it: "Frost is anxious to suggest that the ordinary sense-making processes are very much like poetic ones, that the making of sense in ordinary activities is analogous, as an art, to the writing of a poem." (Poirier, p. 8) This general observation made by Poirier is quite fitting when applied to "Maple". In this poem, the processes of making sense of the world and making poetry overlap perfectly. Frost is literally using the story of someone who is trying to make sense of herself and her life in his process of making poetry. In the following page, Poirier moves on to writing: "The exercise of the will *in* poetry, the *writing* of a poem, is analogous to any attempted exercise of will in whatever else one tries to do." (Poirier, p. 9) What he means by this is that poetry and life, while not being the same thing, are on the same level. They need the same amount of "will," the same decision-making and sense-making processes. They are not the same, but function very similarly. This is very interesting because this is how Frost obtains what he wants from his poems, and what he wants is for his readers to feel included both in the story he is writing, and in the process of writing itself: "We come closest to the spirit of Frost's work whenever as readers we get into the action, the performance of the poem" (Poirier, p. 26).

The whole poem is a metaphor, and all of it revolves around its main character being named after a tree, a maple tree. This metaphor, as already stated, entirely governs the protagonist's life, making her wonder throughout her entire life how she should understand it, or whether it even has any hidden meanings: "Her problem was to find out what [her name] asked / In dress or manner of the girl who bore it." (Frost, p. 170)
By really thinking literally about what a metaphor is, one remembers – obviously – that it is a rhetorical figure where an image or a symbol is used for its ability to evoke a more general meaning, for it being able to send a more general message starting from something more specific. This is something that characterizes Frost in general – one of his main goals being the use of specific situations to reflect on the human condition in general.
This use of a metaphor to start from the specific and move to the general is what he does in "Maple" as well. According to Tim Kendall, this poem "comes filled with clues about stories hidden beneath stories." (Kendall, p. 266) What he is referring to are a couple of lines in the poem, which Frost includes twice using almost the same exact words. In these lines the narrator describes Maple's childhood home, her mother's house, where her father still lives: "This was her mother's childhood home; / The house one story high in front, three stories / On the end it

presented to the road." (Frost, p. 181) According to Kendall, in this passage Frost is trying to send a precise message – that what is presented to the eye of the public is not always to be taken as the truth or the entirety of the truth. This motif of not revealing everything is ever-present in the poem, which starts with Maple as a child, first asking about her name, and with her father's promise of an explanation. A promise never fulfilled. This lack of an explanation, of a clue to connect to what her mother might have wanted her name to mean, is what will accompany Maple throughout her life. This transformed her life into a life of wondering not only about the meaning of her own name, but about a mother that she has never had the opportunity to meet or even get to know secondhand through stories since her father, from lack of desire or ability to do so, never told her much.
Thinking about metaphors, hidden meanings, and things unsaid, a passage by Poirier comes to mind:

> "Many of Frost's poems of nature are written as if by someone who suspects that someone else has been there before him working the same turf, leaving 'something' for him to find. […] it is never possible to know just what it is that has been left behind in the 'things' we see and hear in flowers, pools, the wind in the trees, bundles of logs, or the play houses of children. Indeed it may be 'nothing.' But if it is imaginably 'nothing' then it is also possible that it is 'something' or 'anything'." (Poirier, pp. 336-337)

This analysis is very interesting if applied to "Maple." In an earlier paragraph, this thesis mentioned how in Frost's poetry – and in this poem specifically – the process of writing poetry and of making sense of the world go hand in hand and move alongside one another. In this passage, Poirier explains how Frost's approach to nature and hidden meanings can be applied – once again – to his process of making poetry, and at the same time, to the specific story he is telling with this poem. He writes about nature – Poirier states – as if someone before him had already done so, leaving him room to elaborate on the same topic. In "Maple," he uses the meanings "left behind" in the gesture of her mother giving her this very peculiar name. Maple's life is a continuous wondering whether this gesture is "nothing" or whether it might be "something."

Another hidden meaning inside this poem is Frost's rare use of his own biographical elements. When Maple is seen looking at herself in the mirror and reflecting on the strangeness of her name, the narrator gives examples of names that do not have any specific meanings: "Other names, / As Lesley, Carol, Irma, Marjorie, / Signified nothing." (Frost, pp. 169-170) These are the actual names of Frost's surviving children (Kendall). This is something unique on Frost's part, being a poet who "believed that experience had to be transformed into metaphor in order to make poetry." (Kirsch) Frost believed elements pertaining to his real life should only serve as starting points in order to expand on them and offer something that can be shared by as many people as possible. According to Frost, "metaphor [is] the whole of thinking." (qtd in Kirsch) According to Cecily Parks, his use of his children's names is a way to give himself a pat on the back for not having burdened their lives with a constant search for meaning (Parks, p. 21). This

is possible, but it seems a simplistic way of looking at something that goes so far from Frost's usual way of dealing with his own private life.

As readers of this poem, we can interrogate ourselves further on the meaning behind this name, and maybe arrive at hypotheses that the character never completely understood. Robert Crawford and Carla Buranello[6] both believe – with no complete surety, of course – that the real meaning behind Maple's name is the fact that she was conceived under a Maple tree. This idea in both cases stems from a passage toward the end of the poem:

> "They hovered for a moment near discovery
> Figurative enough to see the symbol,
> But lacking faith in anything to mean
> The same at different time for different people.
> Perhaps a filial diffidence partly kept them
> From thinking it could be a thing so bridal."
> (Frost, p. 173)

This interpretation is quite believable, mostly if connected to a previous passage, where the husband gives the hypothesis that her father maybe finds it hard to talk to her about such things, suggesting something sexual behind the actual meaning. However, as the passage above indicates, Maple came "near discovery / Figurative enough to see the symbol," but ultimately never got there, maybe because "she loses faith in given meanings," (Parks, p. 24), or because of a "filial diffidence" to hear about such themes from a parent.

Living with such uncertainty is without a doubt a very intense experience, but can it become a burden? Or can it somehow even be a gift? There can certainly be differing views on the matter. For instance, Tim Kendall states: "Maple need not allow her identity to be subsumed into her name." (Kendall, p. 267). What he is expressing is his belief that the poem is a sort of warning to what doubt on one's name can do to one's identity. Frost expresses this particularly with the last eight lines of the poem:

> "Thus had a name with meaning, given in death,
> Made a girl's marriage, and ruled in her life.
> No matter that the meaning was not clear.
> A name with meaning could bring up a child,
> Taking the child out of the parents' hands.
> Better a meaningless name, I should say,
> As leaving more to nature and happy chance.

[6] The suggestions included here and in the previous chapters made by Carla Buranello, Robert Crawford and Rachel Hadas come from private communications on a Facebook discussion thread on the two poems.

Name children some names and see what you do."

(Frost, p. 173)

According to Kendall, having provided the reader with the description of the entire life of a person living in such a situation, the author is stating that "[n]ames *should* signify nothing" (Kendall, p. 268). Kendall's analysis of Frost's message seems somewhat negative or bleak. It can almost be interpreted as a warning to something really negative that can come from living with no assurances over one's name. However, he also believes, as other critics do, that this waiting-to-be-filled void could even be taken as an opportunity.
Cecily Parks, in a very detailed analysis of the poem for *The Robert Frost Review* writes: "She knows what a maple tree is and she knows (as much as anyone can know) who she is; in negotiating the gap between those two objects of attention, Maple accumulates a collection of ideas that connect in some way to her notion of who she is and of that for which she has been named" (Parks, p. 25). Her view is that, though certainly having some negative aspects, the fact that Maple does not have certainty over her name – and therefore her identity – is to be taken as an opportunity. It can be an opportunity for her to look for meaning, to fill that void that her mother's death and her father's inability to give an explanation have left. Having the possibility of being the one who gives meaning to and *chooses* the meaning of her own life is a special gift, not a burden. Quoting Judith Oster, Parks adds: "the poem, as Judith Oster recognizes, offers the possibility that 'to search for meaning creates a more meaningful life, whether one finds the correct meaning or not.'" (Parks, p. 16) Even not agreeing with it being a gift, Kendall agrees with Parks to an extent. In fact, he states: "Maple pursues a myth of origins which allows her to select her own meanings, until those decisions lead her to a shockingly erotic image from which she must retreat." (Kendall, p. 268) What transpires from this statement is that, yes, he agrees this condition gives Maple the possibility to choose the interpretation of her own name, or to even stop pursuing meaning when she is dissatisfied with what she is finding. Both Parks and Kendall recognize the possibility this void leaves Maple, but while Parks only attributes to it positive, meaning-making consequences, Kendall points out how self-servient such a possibility can be, to the point that she can choose to ignore the interpretations she does not like, and choose the one she likes the most.

The search starts with Maple asking her father for an explanation, which he fails to give. Here, the void that needs filling is created. According to Parks, without her father's reticence in offering her an elucidation on the matter, maybe her life would not even have been dedicated to this search. After not receiving what she wanted from her father, she decided to look for meaning herself, starting from searching for clues in what she knew, for example her own house. Parks, again: "I read the details about the house (its relation to the road, its cellar) as allowing Maple's mind to use the objects she knows as stable points from which to take steps toward something (and someone) she barely knows." (Parks, p. 22) Here, what she is suggesting is that in having been where her mother had lived, the house could help her get closer to her and possibly understand what she meant. This did not prove useful, since she only found a maple leaf inside a bible, a symbol with doubtful meaning, as anticipated in Chapter 2.

After that, she continues the search which characterized her every move, consciously or not. According to Parks, her choice of learning shorthand was nothing other than a manifestation of her lifelong search; it is in fact a "writing technique that uses symbols to stand in for common words: [it] is what Maple has been doing her whole life, mediating the gap between sign and signified." (Parks, p. 23) This very interesting observation points out how deeply this conditioned her in her every move, even guiding her to her husband, whom she only noticed because somehow, without any prior knowledge of her and her life, he thought she was called Mabel but still said she reminded him of a maple tree:

> "'Do you know you remind me of a tree –
> A maple tree?'
> 'Because my name is Maple?'
> 'Isn't it Mabel? I thought it was Mabel.'
> […]
> They were both stirred that she should have divined
> Without the name her personal mystery."
> (Frost, p. 171)

By telling Maple's story, therefore, Frost achieves his goal of reflecting on the process of making sense of life through his poetry. In "Maple," he builds a narrative where the main character embarks on a lifelong journey of understanding and self-discovery, mirroring the universal human quest for meaning. He writes a poem that not only tells the story of an individual's search for meaning but also resonates with readers on a broader level, inviting them to reflect on their own experiences and sense-making processes. Through Maple's journey, Frost transforms a personal narrative into a powerful poetic exploration of life's complexities. By doing so, he reaffirms the role of poetry as a medium for exploring and articulating the intricate ways in which people constantly strive to make sense of their existence.

3.2 "Paul's Wife"

"Paul's Wife" is included in *New Hampshire* only a couple poems after "Maple," so, just like the latter, it is part of the *Notes* section of the collection. Other than sharing a close spot in the collection, these two poems have multiple characteristics in common. At the end of this chapter, the goal is to provide a clear view of these.

Written in blank verse – as is typical of Frost especially in this section of *New Hampshire* – "Paul's Wife" is a long narrative poem that tells the story of a lumberjack named Paul and his mystical tree-wife. This is a poem about nature, about the contraposition between the old and the new, and about them metamorphosing into a merging of the two, just as Paul's wife metamorphoses from a tree into a woman.

In this poem, what Frost does is take a classical trope – that of women as mysterious creatures connected to nature who have power over men – and translate it into American folklore.
Frost, of course, was an American poet from New England, and this poem unquestionably characterizes him as such. In "Paul's Wife," in fact, he uses one of the most widespread American tall tales, the story of Paul Bunyan. This character is a formidable and indestructible lumberjack, able to overcome the most unimaginable obstacles thanks to his mythical strength and cunning. Paul Bunyan tales, as will be thoroughly explained in Chapter 4, are incredible, totally lacking in verisimilitude. For this reason, it is very interesting to look at how Frost presents such a story to his readers. This poem's language, according to Tim Kendall, is "plain even by Frost's standards." (Kendall, p. 287) This can be seen throughout the whole poem, which is structured as a re-telling of a few stories told by someone who witnessed them happening.
Nobody who lived these experiences firsthand is involved in the process of the telling. Frost is using a narrator who is relaying what he was told by Murphy, a lumberjack who claimed to have known Paul and seen the moment when his wife was born out of a tree. This of course raises issues of reliability, but what is clear is that Frost's use of a very down-to-earth kind of language has very much to do with making it fit the person who was telling it – a probably uneducated lumberjack.
Furthermore, according to critics, Frost had another goal in mind when he chose to simplify his language even more than usual, and that is, in Kendall's words, to "make the impossible seem credible." (Kendall, p. 288)
The gossipy and matter-of-fact tone of the poem makes such an unbelievable story seem somehow more plausible. What Hoffman compliments in this poem as a style that is "Frost's alone" and calls "conversational tone" ("Robert Frost's Paul Bunyan", p. 17) is, according to him, what makes this poem work. Such a story, a tall tale, about the pith of a tree that quite magically turns into a woman, told in highly lyrical and refined language, probably would have worked as well, but it would have produced a completely different outcome. That kind of poem would have made the reader focus on entirely different parts and retrieve entirely different meanings. Here, Frost's goal is to use something very mystical and mythical to tell a deeply American story. The contrast that is created between style and content contributes to creating the desired effect.

When reflecting on Frost's goal with this poem, Daniel G. Hoffman interrogated himself over which values Frost found in this lumber camp story that are "congenial to his own ideas" ("Robert Frost's Paul Bunyan", p. 13). He asked himself what there was in Paul Bunyan's story that made it so interesting that he decided to include it in his poem. He wondered what could be so interesting about it to make Frost use a story he hadn't invented himself. And to these questions, he found this answer: "The poem refashions a popular legend to restate Frost's most constant theme – the sanctity, dignity, and inviolability of the individual." ("Robert Frost's Paul Bunyan", p. 18).

Individuality interpreted as being able to make it on your own, is in fact closely connected to the very American ideology of the self-made man. This theme is widely explored by Ralph Waldo Emerson in his essay "Self-Reliance." This essay addresses several themes that can also

be found in "Paul's Wife." These include individualism and self-trust, to which Emerson attributes great importance. According to him, in life it is essential to trust one's intuition, avoid conformity and follow one's unique path. Proceeding from this, he states that in order to achieve greatness, nonconformity is vital. He writes: "the great man is he who in the midst of the crowd keeps with perfect sweetness the independence of solitude." (Emerson qtd in Caplan) This is something that the figure of Paul in Frost's poem perfectly embodies. He can be seen, in fact, moving on with his life, apparently uncaring of judgement or simple commentary made by his fellow lumbermen on his attitude toward his wife. His only aim seems to be to accomplish his tasks in the best and fastest way possible and go home to his wife, a mysterious being to whom he gives his love and protection. He trusts himself to know what his priorities are, and only works in order to achieve those goals. This behavior perfectly follows Emerson's idea of self-reliance and self-trust: he has faith in himself to know what is really important for him and to know the best way to reach his goals.
This is very interesting if connected to an interesting point Kirsch made in an article for the Harvard Magazine. He wrote: "Frost was a great Emersonian—in a late essay, he writes of having grown up "under the auspices of Emerson"—and all the while he was practicing his own quiet version of self-reliance. […] In that spirit, Frost trusted himself enough to know what experiences and environments would nourish him as an artist, and which would thwart him." (Kirsch) Looking at the figure of Paul Bunyan from this point of view, one could even see some type of parallel between him and the author: they are both highly American, self-reliant and self-trusting people, doing whatever they can to reach their goals. For this reason, too, then, can "Paul's Wife" be called an American poem, one that deals with traditional American lore and ideology.

An additional important element in this poem is the figure of the wife. "Paul's Wife" starts with the narrator talking about "the hero of the mountain camps" (Frost, p. 179), introducing him as this incredible individual who is somehow able to tackle the impossible. From the very beginning of the poem, this unique character is presented as a married man, as having someone waiting for him at home. Furthermore, this unknown someone, is introduced as having an air of mystery: everybody wonders why it is that Paul leaves the camp whenever his wife is mentioned. The narrator offers some of the speculations that other lumbermen have birthed, slowly building up to the main story, the center of the poem, that is, Murphy's story of having witnessed the impossible.

The actual story of Paul's wife is defined by the narrator as a "stretcher," (Frost, p. 179) referring to its unbelievable characteristics. The story is told in great detail, and it presents her as an indefinite being who was born out of a pine tree:

> "The log was hollow. They were sawing pine.
>
> […]
>
> So after work that evening he came back
>
> And let enough light into it by cutting
>
> To see if it was empty. He made out in there

> A slender length of pith, or was it pith?
> […]
> More cutting and he had this in both hands,
> And looking from it to the pond nearby,
> Paul wondered how it would respond to water.
> […]
> He laid it at the edge, where it could drink.
> At the first drink it rustled and grew limp.
> At the next drink it grew invisible.
> Paul dragged the shallows for it with his fingers,
> And thought it must have melted. It was gone.
> And then beyond the open water, dim with midges,
> Where the log drive lay pressed against the boom,
> It slowly rose a person, rose a girl,
> Her wet hair heavy on her like a helmet,
> Who, leaning on a log, looked back at Paul."
> (Frost, pp. 180-181)

Through these lines, Frost has the narrator introduce a very vague being, an undefined one, that evokes something magical or mythical, in such a regular way that one simply takes it to be true. As Kendall suggests in his analysis of the poem, even elements as simple as the choice of pronouns contribute to giving the effect that Frost wanted. According to him, the multiple and heavy use and repetition of the pronoun "it" helps build up to that sudden change into "her," paired with such words as "person" or "girl." This sudden yet incredible move from inanimate to animate, from tree to person is, according to Kendall, understated. This moment of metamorphosis from nature to person is highly significant in highlighting once again the strong tie that Frost sees between nature and humanity. Throughout his writing, he is constantly reminding the reader of how intricate and undeniable this link is.

In his 1960 article "Thoreau's 'Old Settler' and Frost's Paul Bunyan," Daniel G. Hoffman argues that it is clear both from his making her come from a tree, and from his use of Murphy as the one who saw it happen, that in writing "Paul's Wife," Frost used *Paul Bunyan Comes West* by Ida Virginia Turney. In another article written ten years earlier, Hoffman goes deeper in explaining this inspiration. He writes about how this book was only the second ever published in America about the story of Paul Bunyan. He states: "As the other Bunyan material in print at that time consisted only of a few scattered contributions to lumbering magazines and Western newspapers, a short notice in The Nation by Constance Rourke, and an academic article by Professor Homer Watt, we may conclude that Mr. Frost was attracted to Paul Bunyan by Miss Turney's tales alone, and not by any prior fame of their hero." (Hoffman, p. 15) According to him, since it was one of the only written pieces of information about his story, it

can undoubtedly be concluded that it was his main source of inspiration. Apart from this logical deduction, the fact that he directly used information on the story that was only present in Turney's version is also proof of this. Hoffman explains how it was precisely the delicate and mystical description of the birth of his wife that appealed to Frost:

> "A feller by the name of Murphy tells 'bout how Paul found his wife in the heart of a great white pine an' didn't never let no one see her but 'tain't so. Paul's wife wuz regular falks an' she never sat in no moonlight spoonin' with Paul…. She cooked for 300 men, usin' a donkey boiler with the top tore off to boil beans in when the extra hands wuz needed." (Turney qtd in Hoffman, p. 15)

This information notwithstanding, he believes another piece of literature served as inspiration for Frost's poem, that is Thoreau and his description of the old settler who, just like Paul Bunyan in many tall tales, has contributed to the creation of actual pieces of land. These unbelievable feats, though, are not included in Frost's interpretation of Paul Bunyan. In the poem, his incredible strength and abilities are only applied to the world of lumbering, not to anything more. For this reason, according to Hoffman, it is not the resemblance between Paul Bunyan and the Old Settler that has him believe in Frost taking Thoreau as inspiration, but another similarity between the two works. ("Thoreau's 'Old Settler' and Frost's Paul Bunyan", pp. 236-237) In Thoreau's work there is, in fact, a seemingly magical female being, very similar to Paul's wife:

> "An elderly dame, too, dwells in my neighborhood, invisible to most persons, in whose odorous herb garden I love to stroll sometimes, gathering simples and listening to her fables; for she has a genius of unequalled fertility, and her memory runs back farther than mythology, and she can tell me the original of every fable, and on what fact every one is founded, for the incidents occurred when she was young. A ruddy and lusty old dame, who delights in all weathers and seasons, and is likely to outlive all her children yet.
>
> […]
>
> Hebe, cup-bearer of Jupiter, who was the daughter of Juno and wild lettuce, and who had the power of restoring gods and men to the vigor of youth. She was probably the only thoroughly sound-conditioned healthy, and robust young lady that ever walked the globe, and wherever she came it was spring." (Thoreau quoted in "Thoreau's 'Old Settler' and Frost's Paul Bunyan", p. 237)

While not the exact same, this excerpt clarifies the similarity between the two female beings, making Hoffman's theory a very interesting one.

The female being Frost includes in his version of this story is undefined. The reader is in fact given very little information about her: she is a girl, she is a person, she has wet hair, and she laughs. Nothing more is shared about her magical origin, but understanding that she is a kind of mythical creature is very easy nonetheless. The magical and mystical elements are, in fact, present from the moment of her birth. Critics have called her in different ways. Hoffman, for instance, describes her as a "naiad wife [that] appears to represent Nature's beauty." ("Thoreau's 'Old Settler' and Frost's Paul Bunyan", p. 236) Katherine Kearns describes her as both Paul's "lovely nymphet wife" (Kearns, p. 59) and as his "dryad wife" (Kearns, p. 98). Naiads, nymphs, and dryads all originate from ancient Greek mythology. According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, naiads are defined as "any of the nymphs in classical mythology living in and giving life to lakes, rivers, springs, and fountains." Nymphs, more broadly, are described as "any of the minor divinities of nature in classical mythology represented as beautiful maidens dwelling in the mountains, forests, trees, and waters." Dryads, on the other hand, are "spirits that live in the forest." These definitions indicate that while there are slight differences, all three terms – naiads, nymphs, and dryads – generally refer to similar beings. They all describe feminine creatures of divine origins who live in close contact with nature, particularly near natural features such as bodies of water and forests.
The figure of the nymph wife is very important because it allows Frost to address another one of his most cherished themes, that is talking about the human condition and human emotions. In "Paul's Wife," the reader is introduced to a very interesting couple dynamic. As the creature appears, Paul is seen immediately "taking after her around the pond," as if nothing else was possible, as if magically drawn to her. Power dynamics enter into play immediately after their first meeting. Towards the end of the poem Paul is defined as a "terrible possessor," as one who thinks his wife "wasn't anybody else's business." (Frost, p. 182) According to Kearns, he "falls absolutely, possessively, in love" and that happens because "she is the very embodiment of an eroticism so absolute as to be interdicted, for to speak of her is to extinguish her." (Kearns, p. 104) In this passage, she is referring to the last three lines of the poem: "Murphy's idea was that a man like Paul / Wouldn't be spoken to about a wife / In any way the world knew how to speak." (Frost, p. 182) Here, what he means is that she is so perfect, so innocent, so pure, that any known way of speaking would irreparably taint her. According to this interpretation, Paul's being protective and possessive over her can, therefore, be seen under a somehow positive light.

3.3 "Maple" and "Paul's Wife": a comparison

As anticipated in Chapter 1, the idea for the choice of these two specific poems came from an observation made by Tim Kendall in his analysis of "Maple": "A woman is not literally a tree, although three poems later in *New Hampshire*, 'Paul's Wife' playfully resists that statement of the obvious by making a woman out of a tree. In a figurative sense, Maple is also made from a tree" (Kendall, p. 266). This remark encapsulates the first of many similarities and features that these two poems share: the use of trees.

The first and most evident similarity, in fact, has very much to do with one of the most cherished themes for Frost – nature. In both cases, he makes connections that are deep and strong between the human characters of his poems and nature. In "Maple," the image of the tree is so powerful as to be the one element that governs and guides Maple's entire life. This shows how much nature, even though humans try to tame it, is ultimately the one that exercises power over mankind, whether they want it or not.
This is even more evident in "Paul's Wife," where Paul is a lumberjack, the very image of man trying to subdue nature and use it for personal gains. In this instance, Paul's power over nature is undeniable, but ultimately, the one with the power to create life, the one with powers that are almost magical or divine, is nature, in its being able to literally give birth to a person.
The female protagonists of these two poems, then, can be said to have very close relationships with nature – as do almost all the characters in *New Hampshire* – but they experience this situation very differently. Kendall points out this difference: "Whereas Maple was named after a tree, and lived with the burden of that name, Paul's wife is born out of a tree – the vaginal 'hollow' or 'opening' in the pine through which the pith is first glimpsed – but manages to void any name which would fix her identity." (Kendall, pp. 288-289) What he gives light to is how Maple's tie to nature was more conceptual than that of Paul's wife, who was born out of it, and yet the one who was influenced the most by it ultimately was Maple. Maybe the reason behind this lies in the unsaid and in how much living with an unanswered question can condition one's life. From Kendall's statement, another reflection came. His calling the hole in the pine tree from which Paul's wife emerged a "vaginal hollow" associates once again nature to femininity, as Frost himself explicitly did in "On A Tree Fallen Across The Road," where he refers to it as *her*, giving it the power of motherhood.

Other than the connection between humanity and nature, these two poems share another theme, that of human relationships, specifically male-female ones. Marriage is an important theme for Frost; he explores it in many of his poems. Poirier even describes him as "a great poet of marriage, maybe the greatest since Milton." (Poirier, p. 22) According to Amanda A. Wynn, who wrote a thesis titled "A Study on Marriage Relationships in Selected Poems of Robert Frost," "[o]ne of the important attitudes which is necessary for a meaningful relation is the dependence on, and the recognition of a special rapport that exists between a man and woman" (Wynn, p. 6). She divides her thesis into a few chapters, two of them being "Meaningful Relationships" and "Unsuccessful Relationships." In the former, she includes both "Maple" and "Paul's Wife." In the case of Maple, it is easy to see how the marriage portrayed can be seen as a positive and successful one. The couple, in fact, seems to be brought together by destiny, and to always move simultaneously. Their love story begins from her surprise at his understanding her life quest without knowing anything about her, and from then on, he is seen constantly supporting her and helping her through this hard and frustrating search. In "Paul's Wife" the success of the relationship perhaps is less evident, mostly because the reader is not presented with facts about their life together. The couple is in fact only shown at the beginning of their marriage and not much more is described. What Frost includes, though, is the description of a husband who recognizes the value of his wife and tries to protect her (whether this is to be considered positive or somewhat negative will be further analyzed in Chapter 5) from whatever may taint her innocence.

Furthermore, these two poems are good examples of some of Frost's most specific thematic choices. "Maple" offers a clear example of the author's habit of starting from specific stories to expand on more general themes. As already thoroughly described, Frost's poetry aims at talking about the human experience at large. In Chapter 1 his regionalism was explored, and while it is true that he draws inspiration from life as he knows it – New England life – what he wants is to make the observation that there are no experiences that are only specific to a restricted group of individuals: human beings share similar experiences and situations in their striving to make the best out of the life they are given.

"Paul's Wife," on the other hand, explores another of Frost's typical characteristics, that is, using classical tropes and transporting them to the US using typically American subjects. In this poem, he uses a mythical figure such as the nymph and connects it to an American folklore character, Paul Bunyan. This connection, even though through a different path, is able to make him reach the same goal, of talking about a shared human experience. By reutilizing themes that are far both in place and in time from the modern United States, he sends the message, once again, that there is no human experience that cannot find replications or similarities in a different place and at a different time.

CHAPTER 4: POEMS, MYTHS AND TALL TALES

After a thorough analysis of the two poems considered in this thesis, an exploration of external themes connected to "Paul's Wife" will be offered in this chapter. A long narrative poem that recounts the story of an incredibly strong lumberman witnessing his mythical wife being born out of a pine tree, "Paul's Wife" offers multiple connections that are worth looking into.
Chapter 4 will present the main character of the poem, Paul, understanding exactly the tradition from which Frost took inspiration, exploring its origins, how it changed over time and how "Paul's Wife" positions itself in this tradition. Following this, the myth of Pygmalion will be connected to the figure of Paul's wife, highlighting the similarities and the differences between the two.
At the end of the chapter, the goal is for the reader to have a deeper understanding of the intricacies that originated two unique and interesting characters such as Paul and his wife.

4.1 The American Tall Tale: Paul Bunyan

> "Folklore's funny that way. Everybody knows it, but most of us aren't sure how we first heard it, and nobody seems to know where it comes from." (Edmonds, preface)

In the vast and diverse landscape of American folklore the tall tale stands out as a distinct form of storytelling, known for its exaggerated characters and improbable events. Born from frontier life and the process of American expansion to the Wild West, these often exaggerated narratives have captivated audiences for generations with their caricatured characters, improbable feats, and humorous exaggerations. With such characteristics, the tall tale has served as both a celebration of American ingenuity and a reflection of the nation's ever-evolving identity. Through tales of colossal lumberjacks, unstoppable locomotives, and mythical creatures, the tall tale has always let people discover profound parts of the American spirit. This kind of storytelling is culturally very significant in the way it shapes the collective consciousness of the nation.
According to Joyce Bynum, this is in fact a typically American-dominated field, followed closely only by Australia. In trying to explain the reason why such a genre is mainly specific of these two countries, which are situated on opposite sides of the world, she suggests: "Perhaps this came about because the first visitors to the Americas and to Australia brought back to Europe fantastic stories" (Bynum, p. 81). According to her, the reason why these places precisely are such perfect landscapes for the development of the tall tale is the need they felt at first to tell their people back home about these mysterious and exotic places. It certainly makes a great deal of sense, since one of the main traits of the American tall tale is to describe almost impossible feats achieved by its people.
Using the word "lies," according to multiple authors, is key to describing accurately the American tall tale. In an article in *Western Folklore*, the author talks about how tall tales are typically full of lies and personal enrichments. In the context of offering an example of tall tale,

they write: “That was the climax of his story, which had required two hours in the telling - two hours of magnificent, incomparable lying, complete with little asides and digressions, all of them apt, each adding some small refinement, and authenticity, to the main narrative” (“Tall Tales.”, pp. 274- 275). This offers an already clear overview of how typically a tall tale is created – everything starts from something, partially interesting, that might even have really happened, but then it develops into a story worth listening to, and especially worth remembering. This is achieved through arbitrary embellishment, which can be more or less exaggerated. Joyce Bynum offers an even more complete explanation of what the tall tale really is, especially if compared to other kinds of typically oral storytelling:

> “Throughout the world there are people who are gifted liars. [...] Sometimes their ‘lies’ are believed by listeners, and if the story is widely believed to be a true account of person, place or event, folklorists would refer to it as a ‘legend.’ If a legend is later shown to have been contrived and to be utterly false, it is of course called a ‘hoax.’ In American folk tradition, lies told for amusement are often called ‘tall tales,’ [...] and have been highly valued” (Bynum, p. 81)

According to her, then, tall tales differ from legends and hoaxes because they are intentionally told with the goal of amusing listeners who do not care about the truth. They are a socially accepted form of lying, justified by their intention of providing pure entertainment. Additionally, according to her, lies are something Americans are quite passionate about. Some of them have even gone so far as to create clubs or associations with the sole goal of gathering or competing to tell lies. The two examples she mentions are the Wisconsin Liars Club and the Burlington Liars Club (Bynum, p. 82).

It can be said, then, that America is the perfect fertile ground for a genre of storytelling such as the tall tale, one that thrives on people’s need for amusement and entertainment at the expense of the truth.

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Having introduced the American tall tale, it is now time to move to the specific tall tale of interest, the one Frost chose to use as the skeleton of one of his poems – “Paul’s Wife” – and that is the story of Paul Bunyan. This character is a legendary figure in American folklore and is particularly associated with the lumberjack tradition of North America. According to the first tales, he is depicted as a lumberjack with surreal abilities, able to achieve goals no other lumberjack would be able to in half the time. His story has later evolved and, as typical of every tall tale, been enriched with incredible details that have transformed a particularly strong and efficient man into one of extraordinary strength and size, often accompanied by his trusty blue ox named Babe. Some of these stories even became creation myths, making Paul Bunyan responsible for creating some parts of the great United States. This is evident in a Disney cartoon from 1958.

The cartoon, titled “Paul Bunyan,” depicts the protagonist’s incredible feats, accompanied by Babe the blue ox – a more recent addition to the story. In this reinterpretation, Paul Bunyan is responsible for creating various natural places of interest in the United States, namely the Land

of 10,000 Lakes, the Missouri river, Pyke's Peak, the Grand Teton mountain range, and the Yellowstone Falls. Right from the beginning of the cartoon, it becomes clear that the intention behind it is to give an idea of truth in this story. This can be seen in the way this story is shown to be taken from a book titled *American Folklore*, which also includes other American myths, thus making it something serious and to be believed (Clark). This is how, as Joyce Bynum wrote, a story becomes a legend – by telling it so matter-of-factly that it becomes easy to think of it as the truth.
Going back to the analysis of "Paul's Wife" in Chapter 3, the reader will remember that this can also be said of Murphy's story, and of the way it is relayed by the narrator. The presence of a fellow lumberjack narrator is another point that Frost's take on the famous tall tale and Walt Disney Productions' share. In the former there is Murphy, a lumberjack who has witnessed some of Paul's feats, most importantly the creation-birth of his nymph wife. In the latter, there are three lumberjacks who have met Paul Bunyan at different moments of his life. What these narrators have in common is a profound admiration for Paul and his story, and the clear belief in its truth.

In more modern takes on the legend, Paul Bunyan's power clearly goes far beyond the power depicted in the first stories, those that originated in the logging camps of North America during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. In these new takes the intent is that of celebrating the American frontier spirit, the conquest of the West and the prowess of those who conducted it. As Michael Edmonds states at the very beginning of his book *Out of the Northwoods: The Many Lives of Paul Bunyan*, he is a "conveniently vague symbol pressed into service to exemplify the American spirit. He means different things to different vested interests [...] his fate illustrates how grassroots culture was appropriated and co-opted by commercial interests. A similar process transformed Native American warriors into cigar store Indians, and black rhythm and blues music into Elvis Presley hits." (Edmonds, pp. 4-5)
Just like the strength of Native Americans and the traditions of Black people, he was later used for economic or ideological ends, to spread a traditional masculine idea. About this, Edmonds states: "These are, of course, core values of traditional masculinity not only in working-class occupations in the United States but across many nations and cultures. Physical strength, vocational skill, personal courage, and heavy drinking have always been the public measures of male worth, from the factory floor to the locker room." (Edmonds, p. 49) The strong appeal of the strong masculinity depicted in this story makes this story – or new versions of it – appreciated and widespread to this day.

Originally, Paul Bunyan stories were simple and traditional logging tales, tall tales to be precise, because they were completely and utterly full of lies and exaggerations. They were told to entertain, to build on the masculine figure of the logger. They were not dissimilar to today's locker-room stories, where men tell often exaggerated stories of sexual prowess. According to what Edmonds writes in his book, they were even used in competitions such as those that still exist described in a previous section: "Some informants described bunkhouse competitions to see who could tell the yarn about Paul Bunyan that met with the best reception around the camp stove." (Edmonds, p. 62)

This kind of stories – legends and tall tales – are so interesting because everyone who hears them, even knowing they are full of lies, has the strong belief that they at least originate from some kind of truth. This can even be said about Paul Bunyan. His story, too, is believed to have an element of truth in its origin – he must have existed at a certain time. Edmonds writes about "[s]ome of the early Bunyan researchers" (p. 30) who believed that in order to originate such a widespread tale, there must have been an original and real Paul Bunyan. Later in his book he clarifies that many interviewed loggers swore they knew him, or of him, while others denied even having heard the name. Nonetheless, what makes these stories worth listening to for people is not the certainty of their truth, but the verisimilitude of some parts of it, and most of all, the fact that they are so widely known and appreciated, that they must, in some way, be true.

Having thoroughly introduced and described the figure of Paul Bunyan, it is now time to try and understand why Frost chose to use him in his poem. The first point that needs mentioning is the fundamental change that he brings to his version. Frost's narrator is not a lumberjack himself; he is telling something that he has in turn heard from Murphy, who really is a lumberjack. According to Huffman, this is a sign that Frost is distancing himself from the story that is being told:

> "But in comparing Bunyan's feat to what boys do on April Sundays 'by subsiding meadow brooks,' Frost puts himself completely outside the story. The oral tales were always told as though the raconteur had known Paul Bunyan, […] But the narrator of "Paul's Wife" is no lumberjack. The tale is told by someone who learned it from Murphy, the only man who saw Paul find his bride." (Hoffman, p. 16)

In this passage, Hoffman is drawing attention to the fact that Frost takes these feats and draws similarities to something that happens outside of the lumber camps. He compares what Paul Bunyan does to something kids – normal kids – do in the fields. This is very interesting because it speaks, once again, to one of Frost's main goals with his poetry, that is, reaching people, telling them that our experience as humans is a shared one.
By telling his version of Paul Bunyan's story, he is saying that no story will ever be too absurd to be shared at least by other people.

4.2 "Paul's Wife" and Pygmalion: mythical origins

The myth of Pygmalion originates from ancient Greek mythology. According to the best-known version – Ovid's in *Metamorphoses* Book X – Pygmalion was a talented sculptor who lived on the island of Cyprus. He dedicated himself entirely to his art, spending countless hours in his studio crafting statues of unparalleled beauty. Pygmalion came to observing flaws and imperfections in mortal women, which led him to grow disillusioned with the idea of love and marriage. Instead, he poured all his passion and creativity into his sculptures, seeking perfection in his creations. Because of this, he decided to sculpt the perfect woman, a pure

entity, free of the flaws that, according to him, characterized human women. When he finished his project, the result was so exquisitely perfect and beautiful that, by slowly and tenderly working on it, he fell in love with it. His love was so strong that he started asking for a miracle. He started praying to Aphrodite for a real woman who resembled his statue in every detail. The goddess, moved by Pygmalion's devotion, decided to answer his prayers, and gave life to the statue. Later, Pygmalion was astounded to find her awake, warm, and tender – alive. (Chaliakopoulos)
This story – certainly a love story but also one that speaks of the powers of creation in art, and of the power of men over women – became legendary. For this reason, the myth of Pygmalion has inspired countless adaptations in literature, art, and theater, each one exploring themes of beauty, desire, and the quest for perfection.

Certainly, the reader can find a strong similarity between this mythical and ancient legend and the story told by Frost in "Paul's Wife." They undoubtedly share a similarity in their focal point, the one that involves transfiguration. In Ovid's myth, the transformation regards the statue coming into life, while in Frost's poem, it has to do with Paul's wife coming alive out of a tree. This similarity, however, is only a superficial one, since what they really have in common is a display of the power of creation intrinsic in art.
Pygmalion is an artist, and through his art – with the intermediation of Aphrodite – he is able to produce life. Paul, even though in a less straightforward way, is an artist in his field. Just as Pygmalion was the best sculptor of his time, Paul Bunyan was such an amazing lumberjack that he became the protagonist of one of the most widely known American tall tales. His artistry, then, allowed him, just like Pygmalion, to produce – or rather, obtain – life.
Tim Kendall writes:

> "Frost adds and adapts the story of Pygmalion the sculptor who fell in love with his statue of a female form, and whose prayers were answered when Venus took pity and brought it to life. Frost dispenses with any divine intervention but keeps the sensual metamorphosis, as Paul becomes the artist who must (literally) live with the consequences of his act of creation." (Kendall, p. 287)

He highlights a difference between the two works. Frost, in fact, decided not to keep the divine intervention. In doing so, he gives even more value to the transformative and creative powers of art, because there is no divinity that makes it happen. In Frost's poem, at lines 75-77, the narrator quotes the comment of a sawyer who witnessed Paul finding the hollow pine tree. In commenting on this event, he presents it with such excitement as to make the reader understand it is a once-in-a-lifetime experience, or even rarer: "'First time I ever saw a hollow pine. / That comes of having Paul around the place. / Take it to hell for me.'" (Frost, p. 180) With this, the reader understands the power and the uniqueness attributed to Paul. According to those who knew him, something like this could only ever have happened to him, as he was so special. This can be interpreted as a power he has achieved through being such an artist in his field, which gained him the respect and admiration of all those around him.

The fact that this extraordinary power is in both cases attributed to men who, through their art, "generate" a woman with whom they will move on to entertain a romantic relationship – or more specifically, a marriage – speaks loudly to issues of power balance between the two parties in male-female relationships. In both cases, the woman is described as a pure and mythical creature, who fundamentally comes alive and pleases the man. Galatea – a name not originally attributed by the Greek author, but first used by Jean-Jacques Rousseau in his *Pygmalion* (Chaliakopoulos) – is created by Pygmalion to obtain a being even more beautiful than natural human women, but mostly to create a creature that is purer than what the artist has convinced himself actual women are. Paul's wife, in a very similar way, is described as a woman so pure and fragile even words would taint her, as can be seen from the last few lines of the poem.

Of course, in Ovid's legend, Galatea is quite literally the result of his desire, while in Frost's poem, Paul's wife comes as a surprise to everyone, him included, and certainly not as an answer to his prayers. This difference, at first glance, would make Frost's version of the story a more "open-minded" one, more evolved in some way. What the reader discovers by continuing to read, is that Paul is later described as a "terrible possessor," thus making the fact she was not created as a response to his request a less powerful change from the original. A more detailed analysis of the power imbalances between the male and female members of this couple will be offered in the following chapter.

In history, as already explained, there have been multiple reworkings, reinterpretations and adaptations of this story. There have been so many that naming all of them here would be tedious and would not even be useful. Some of them are worth mentioning, though, to clarify the point I am about to make.

Let us look at the difference between two stories that are in different ways connected to the original myth: George Bernard Shaw's *Pygmalion* and Collodi's *Pinocchio*.

In his book, George Bernard Shaw uses the trope of having an artist shape someone through his art, at the same time keeping even the male power over a female character. He very clearly not only takes inspiration from Ovid, but takes the whole story and rewrites it to fit the point he wants to make, that is more of a commentary on class, having a flower girl transformed into an upper-class refined lady. The entire story is centered on this act of modifying her – *creating* her.

In Collodi's *Pinocchio*, something different happens. Here, Geppetto incarnates the artist who can give life. Pinocchio comes alive and a father-son relationship begins between them. In both these cases, the authors have taken Pygmalion's story as inspiration, but Collodi's story is not centered on this, it is only the starting point. The story is then all about Pinocchio and his own desire to become a real child. This is similar to what happens in Frost's poem. His is more of a citation, a homage to Ovid's myth. He uses his transfiguration trope to fortify his message, which speaks of the power of nature, and – more indirectly – of the power balance that exists between men and women.

In "Paul's Wife," Frost uses both a more contemporary and a classical story to make his point, thus making the old and the new coexist in a poem which, once again, reflects on the close

connection between humans and nature, and among humans themselves, particularly men and women.

CHAPTER 5: FEMININE INFLUENCE AND GENDER DYNAMICS IN FROST

“Maple” and “Paul’s Wife” present fascinating female protagonists, who are portrayed in all their humanity and mystique. Both stories center around relationships, specifically marriages, where the men are deeply captivated by these enigmatic women. This chapter will delve into the dynamics of power and influence within these male-female relationships, examining how women can exercise varying degrees of control over men through different means.
To explore this theme, we will start by drawing comparisons with similar examples from Romanticism, focusing on feminine and mystical creatures created by poets like John Keats and Samuel Taylor Coleridge. By comparing these Romantic figures to Maple and Paul’s wife, we can observe how the portrayal of powerful and enigmatic women has evolved over time and across literary traditions. These Romantic examples will provide context for further analyzing Frost’s characters, allowing us to see how the theme of female influence in male-female relationships has been a persistent and evolving motif.

5.1: Feminine power: from Romanticism to Frost

“Maple” and “Paul’s Wife” present two compelling female characters who, despite their different circumstances and characteristics, exercise significant influence over the men they marry and profoundly impact their lives.

In “Paul’s Wife,” as we will see happens in the Romantic examples we will explore, the strength of the woman comes primarily from some kind of magic within her. Paul’s wife is such an incredible being that Paul cannot but be completely and utterly taken by her. When he sees her being magically born out of the pine tree, he is overwhelmed by her beauty, and immediately follows her, as if enchanted, as if there were no other possibility – he found himself “taking after her around the pond” (Frost, p. 181) after having only seen her for a few minutes. From there, her influence over him only grows. The reader is offered the story of what Murphy witnessed from afar, that is, “[…] Paul and his creature keeping house.” (Frost, p.181) From this sentence, the reader understands that they got married, or started to live as such. Their love story evolves and, as Paul sees other people interact – even from a distance – with his precious wife, he becomes so protective of her to become “a terrible possessor” (Frost, p. 182).
An example of what brings Paul to be so very protective of his wife can be found toward the end of the poem, when she is described as a being that, quite literally, could light up the space she was in: “[…] the girl / Brightly, as if a star played on the place, / Paul darkly, like her shadow. All the light / Was from the girl herself” (Frost, p. 182). Clearly, she is the center of attention, she is everything Paul revolves around. She is bright, while Paul only follows her, “darkly, like her shadow.” He is unimportant if compared to her. She is so great and so unique that everybody else, even her husband, becomes secondary, a shadow. After this image the

reader gets of her, somehow an even grander one than her first introduction, Frost has the narrator tell the event that made Paul a "terrible possessor":

> "All those great ruffians put their throats together,
> And let out a yell and threw a bottle,
> As a brute tribute of respect to beauty.
> Of course the bottle fell short by a mile,
> But the shout reached the girl and put the light out.
> She went out like a firefly, and that was all."
> (Frost, p. 182)

About this passage, Kearns writes: "For Frost, she really *does* […] go out like a firefly […] when the words used to bespeak her are insufficient." (Kearns, p. 188) This event, which is a sign of her grandiosity but at the same time of her frailty, has the result of making his life completely centered around her, so much so that, at the beginning of the poem – even before she is introduced to the story in all her glory – his only goal seems to be to accomplish what he must do at work and go back to her every single time he is somehow reminded of her existence: "To drive Paul out of any limber camp / All that was needed was to say to him, 'How is the wife, Paul?' – and he'd disappear" (Frost, p. 178)

The kind of power displayed by this figure is unbelievably great, so powerful as to influence entirely another person's life purpose. This level of power can be found in other interesting feminine characters in literature, all imbued with some type of magic that they use to exercise power over people. Prime examples of this can be found in "La Belle Dame Sans Merci," by Keats, and in "Christabel," by Coleridge.

John Keats' ballad "La Belle Dame Sans Merci," written in 1819, tells the story of the encounter between a lady and a knight. The poem is a conversation in which the knight tells his story to an unknown interlocutor. It begins with the knight found in pitiful conditions, "Alone and palely loitering […] so haggard and woe-begone" (Keats, p. 282). The interlocutor asks him what might have happened to leave him in those conditions, and he starts telling the story of how he met a very beautiful woman, a "faery's child" (Keats, p. 282) – a fairy, that is. He immediately became interested in her and they started spending time together, during which she enchanted him, making him believe she loved him. After a while, in a disturbing dream, he understood the trick. He saw "pale kings and princes," as well as "pale warriors" (Keats, p. 283), all of whom appeared to be deathly and warned him that he had been bewitched by the beautiful lady. When he awoke, he found himself abandoned "on the cold hill side" in a distraught state.

Clearly, a first and evident similarity between the feminine creature found in Keats' poem and in the one by Frost lies in their magical features. Paul's wife was magically born out of a pine tree and Keats' being is, quite literally, a fairy. Certainly, a fairy's tie to magic is much more

literal since fairies are so commonly known to be possessors of magical powers. In the case of Paul's wife, instead, her magic is a little more subtle, and has more to do with the kind of influence she is able to exercise over her husband.
This brings us directly to the second and more important similarity between the two beings – their ability to influence men, both in their feelings and in their actions. On the one hand, the fairy in "La Belle Dame Sans Merci" very directly uses her magic to enchant the knight, she performs magic in order to subdue him. Paul's wife's powers, on the other hand, are much more subtle since they do not directly come from using magic – her undeniable magical birth notwithstanding. According to Kearns, she is a "dryad, […] taken literally from inside a tree and brought alive through immersion in a pond, […] so seductive that Paul falls absolutely, possessively, in love; she is the very embodiment of an eroticism so absolute as to be interdicted, for to speak of her is to extinguish her." (Kearns, p. 104) Here, Kearns is referring to the ending of the poem, where the narrator explains how Paul is the kind of man who needs to protect her even from people talking about her. Her powers, we understand, come from being a creature so immaculate, so pure, so unbelievably sexual and sensual that he cannot but follow her in her every wish and in her every move. Kearns writes that her "erotic potency resides in her transitory and inaccessible nature." (Kearns, p. 59) It is her being unattainable that renders her so attractive.
There is yet another difference to be mentioned between Frost's and Keats' magical feminine entities, and this is an even subtler one. It has to do with the intention behind their influence over men. While the fairy in Keats' poem – as the knight is revealed in his dream – regularly uses her powers to subdue men, undoubtedly with malevolent intentions, Paul's wife does not seem to have any of these negative intentions behind her actions, at least not from what the reader is told in the poem. She is seen, in fact, simply being born and influencing Paul with her innate magnetism. There do not seem to be any hidden goals behind her actions and her behavior.

The significative distinction just made between Paul's wife and Keats' fairy can be applied to another Romantic female being characterized by magic – Geraldine, a sinister and magical being written by Samuel Taylor Coleridge in his long narrative ballad "Christabel."
The poem tells the story of the innocent Christabel, who, while praying in a forest, encounters the beautiful, mysterious, and seemingly distressed Geraldine. Christabel brings Geraldine to her father's castle, offering her shelter and comfort. As supernatural occurrences unfold, Geraldine's sinister nature becomes increasingly apparent to Christabel. At first, while certainly confused by those events, she remains unaware of the danger she is in. In Part II, she slowly becomes progressively more worried and aware of the situation. Despite her attempts to warn her father, Sir Leoline, she is rendered powerless by Geraldine's spell. The next morning, Sir Leoline, unaware of Geraldine's true nature and captivated by her presence, warmly welcomes her, thus heightening the tension. (Coleridge) The ending is abrupt because the poem itself is unfinished, so, unfortunately, the real intentions behind Geraldine's scheme are never entirely revealed, but one can only suppose – based on how she acted toward Christabel – they were not benevolent.
Once again, then, an example of a woman with supernatural powers who chooses to use them for her personal gain at the cost of other people.

At first glance, the situation in this poem seems a little different. Geraldine, in this case, does not use her powers directly on a man, but on a fellow woman. It is Christabel, in fact, who is the object of her enchantments, the one her spells are directed at. By looking at the story more closely, though, one may ask: who is the one, even though not enchanted, she is really keen on taking advantage of? Christabel, here, is not the final goal. At the very beginning, she is a means to an end, the one that Geraldine needs to influence by inciting compassion. However, as soon as she gets what she wants – that is, entering the castle – Christabel suddenly becomes an obstacle to overcome. As she starts to become aware of what Geraldine really is, the mysterious woman's magical influence over her increases. All the while, the real goal remains that of influencing Sir Leoline himself. The one she can exploit is him, not his daughter.
The power of this magical feminine creature is used once more to subdue a man, to use him, to obtain something from him. As was the case in Keats' poem, the intent behind Geraldine's actions is not a benevolent one. Even though we are not told the ending of the story, it is very difficult to imagine she went through all that for anything other than to take advantage of Sir Leoline, a man in power. In both Keats and Coleridge then, but also in "Paul's Wife," there are powerful men – a knight, a lord, and an unbelievably strong and famous lumberjack – who inevitably fall under the influence of a magical woman. In these poems, one could say, we find examples of *femmes fatales*, women so powerful as to lead to the dismay of the men they encounter. As Mario Praz demonstrates in his book *La carne, la morte e il diavolo nella letteratura romantica*, in this genre the concepts of beauty and womanhood are often connected to the themes of death and decay. In his book, he brings to light a Romantic fascination for the sublime and the macabre. In making these reflections, he highlights how many Romantic authors use women as the points of origin of these disastrous consequences. (Praz)

In "Maple," the reader is offered quite a different situation. In this case, the woman is already described as someone with a large and secure personality. Maple is seen moving through life with a precise goal in mind: finding the meaning behind her name. She is described as a strong individual, certainly very intriguing, and definitely someone who knows what she wants. This is, in her case, what captivates her husband. In this poem, the protagonist's journey of self-discovery and personal growth not only shapes her own identity but also affects her husband's, reflecting a dynamic where her own inner strength and resilience guide their relationship. Her influence is subtle, yet very powerful. Obviously in this poem there are no supernatural elements, there is no sign of magical powers used to influence her husband into loving her, following her, or helping her, as is the case in the other poems examined. In this case, it is her evolving understanding of herself and her place in the world that drives the narrative forward, and at the same time, that drives the marriage forward. The reader is in fact told a good deal about their love story, their marriage, the way they move through life together, and every one of the instances presented have to do with him helping her and supporting her through her journey – which becomes *their* journey. He is seen encouraging her, trying to offer his point of view, but never forcing her. Her influence over him is much stronger than the other ones portrayed because it involves no magic: it is completely real, and completely true. According to Kearns, in Frost "women are perceived to be always on the verge of transition from wife to hill wife" (Kearns, p. 145), but this is not the case in "Maple." This poem could be seen as a more modern take on this Romantic staple he had already reinterpreted in "Paul's Wife." A

new version of the same structure that began with Paul's wife, where he removed the malevolent intention behind her use of magic, and was finalized in Maple, whose power is the power of attraction a strong woman can have over men.

5.2: Powerful women: sexuality and relationships in "Maple" and "Paul's Wife"

"[…] by Frost's terms one might just as soon cage a tree or a hill and expect it to become rational as confine a woman to cure her (intrinsic) madness. Woman is, in any event, more cause than effect, more symbol than significance; how could one, in short, immobilize and contain a woman?"

(Kearns, p. 110)

According to Kearns, women in Frost are most often dryads, witches, and hill wives. What all these beings have in common is a strong power that comes – directly or indirectly – from nature itself. We have seen time and time again the importance attributed to nature by Frost. Once again, we must repeat this same concept, this time, applying it to his description of women.
They are usually powerful characters in his poems, and this was explained clearly in the first part of this chapter, but they do not stop there. Their strength lies in the fact that they are uncontrollable. Men – specifically – are unable to tame them, and to impose control over them. This is the case primarily because women are very different beings that function in a very different way from them. According to Kearns, men "dutifully transform organic form to geometric" (p. 88), meaning that they are more organized, thus predictable. Women, again according to Kearns, are the complete opposite. They are flexible, so they "do not disintegrate under pressure but metamorphose." (Kearns, p. 88) According to her – somewhat stereotypical – analysis, it seems that in Frost, men are too rigid to endure difficulty: they are at risk of breaking. Women, on the other hand, do not break, but bend, transform. In Frost's poetry, women have the ability to change themselves – literally or metaphorically – in order to deal more efficaciously with the situation at hand. This transformative power is bound up with their strong and close tie to nature, from which they gain their unique characteristics.

This connection is evident both in "Maple" and in "Paul's Wife." Both poems, generally speaking, have a strong and preponderant natural presence, with "Maple" having the name of a tree as the literal title and "Paul's Wife" narrating the story of a lumberjack whose wife is born out of a pine tree. When applied to the women in the poems, this connection becomes even more evident.
Paul's wife's uniqueness, attractiveness and magic are all centered around her being a nymph, and around her being magically born out of a pine tree. The connection here is clear, very explicit. The same cannot be said of "Maple." While, of course, the natural theme of the poem is immediately recognizable to the reader, it is not for its protagonist. Maple does not see this connection herself, she only sees it through the help of an outside viewer – her husband: "Significantly, while Maple does not recognize her kinship with the trees, the man who marries her feels it powerfully." (Kearns, p. 102) What is incredible is that he does not learn of this connection when he gets to know her and marries her, he notices it the very first time he sees

her. On that occasion, he points out that she reminds him of a tree, specifically a Maple tree. It is this precise moment that gives birth to their love story – the way he incredibly "divined / Without the name her personal mystery." (Frost, p. 171) The strength of her tie to nature is so great that it becomes perceptible by her future husband without even a little knowledge of her. This speaks clearly of the power nature can give to people – specifically women – according to Frost. This power sometimes becomes so strong that men come to fear it, or rather, fear their inability to control it or tap into it. At the same time, though, it is precisely this grandiosity that incites their attraction.

Women and nature are also tied by something sexual, erotic. In Frost, nature is often portrayed as a woman (as we have already mentioned a couple of times, he even personifies nature as a woman in his poem "On A Tree Fallen Across The Road"), and a sexual and sensual one at that, and elements of this can be found in both poems examined in this thesis. According to Kearns, Frost even goes so far as to talk "of the earth as a lover." (Kearns, p. 29) If one thinks about it, this is exactly what happens in "Paul's Wife." In this poem, Paul falls blindingly, overwhelmingly in love with this being as soon as he lays his eyes on her for the first time. Of course, she has human form, but would it not be correct to call her a direct personification of nature? She was originally part of nature itself. Being the pith inside a pine tree, she had been there for "The hundred years the tree must have been growing" (Frost, p. 181), and then, following contact with water – yet another natural and often-associated-to-creation element – she metamorphosed into a beautiful and alive human-like creature. So, if we consider her as the personification of nature, we can confirm that Frost – at least in this poem – quite literally talked of the earth as a lover.
Perhaps in a more metaphorical way, he does so in "Maple" as well, having her husband fall in love with a woman so strongly tied to nature that she has been named after a tree, with a woman whose life has been completely governed by this.

It has already been clarified how sexuality in "Paul's Wife" is a theme that is very much present, but in a way that is strongly connected to nature itself. According to Kearns, the first sexual element we encounter in this poem can be found in the description of how Paul slips the bark of a tamarack: "He'd been the hero of the mountain camps / Ever since, just to show them, he had slipped / The bark of a whole tamarack off whole." (Frost, p. 179) According to her, "this action is a flagrantly sexual undressing" (Kearns, p. 104). Of course, this can only be said if we read this passage while already having the knowledge of what is about to happen further down the poem. This scene can only be seen as a sexual undressing if we see the tamarack as an anticipation of Paul's wife. This interpretation makes a great deal of sense since she has originated inside a tree, stayed there for hundreds of years, and then come out of it as she would have come out of a mother's womb. The hollow Paul and his fellow lumberjack find in the pine tree could, in this interpretation, be associated to a vaginal opening, thus making nature the actual mother, creator of this being. Of course, Paul participates in this birth, by opening the hollow and helping the pith to water, thus facilitating her birth. His role, though, is only marginal, because it is nature that prevails, since it has already intended for her to be born this way, and in possession of the kind of power she immediately starts to show and impose over Paul himself.

In “Maple,” the theme of sexuality can be found throughout the poem, but it is not evident; it needs some analysis in order to be noticed. According to Michael Karounos, it can first be found in the name itself:

> “Frost is an inveterate punster and if we think of the homonym "maypole" and its association with the fertility holiday of May Day, the significance of a "springtime passion for the earth" sheds light on both the agricultural aspect of t'rumah, as well as on the import of her naming. The maple tree yields produce of sweet syrup in the spring when a springtime passion is not for earth alone.” (Karounos, p. 271)

Karounos – a strong believer in a non-adulterous interpretation of the Bible passage used by Frost in this poem – underlines how the very word “maple” has a tie with a holiday that clearly evokes the sensual and sexual aspects of fertility. He alludes to how, in springtime, it is not only nature that renews itself – or *her*self – but also people.
Sexuality is also present as a theme in the story of her mother, yet another powerful woman connected to nature. She is first introduced as a woman who died in giving birth to her child. However, not before exercising the symbolic power of naming. She named her child and this act, according to Karounos, is yet another reference to the power and magic of creation. Frost wrote: “she put her finger in her cheek so hard / It must have made you dimple there, and said, / ‘Maple.’” (Frost, p. 169) According to him, in poking her finger and leaving a permanent dimple, what she is doing is “dropping a seed into the hole” and at the same time “‘planting’ Maple and planting her name.” (Karounos, p. 270) This woman is clearly seen as very important from the very beginning of the poem, as the power of creation is attributed to her – symbolically one of the strongest powers that exist. For these reasons, she is understood by the reader as a strong individual, who, even in death, has had an enormous influence over her child’s life. She conditions her life by making it revolve around the constant search for meaning, for what she might have intended when she named her Maple.
Along this journey – during which Maple has been constantly and loyally accompanied by her husband – they encountered a maple tree:

> “Once they came on a maple in a glade,
> Standing alone with smooth arms lifted up,
> And every leaf of foliage she’d worn
> Laid scarlet and pale pink about her feet.
> But its age kept them from considering this one.
> Twenty-five years ago at Maple’s naming
> It hardly could have been a two-leaved seedling
> The next cow might have licked up at pasture.”
> (Frost, p. 172)

Even though they do not see it for many reasons, the significance of this tree is evident even just from its age. Karounos writes: "the twenty-five year old tree is emblematic of the mother who was twenty-five when she bore Maple, even as Maple is now twenty-five." (Karounos, p. 273) The age shared by all three of them is too great of a coincidence not to be a sign. Maple's mother's connection to nature is, then, strengthened by this literal association to a maple tree, which symbolizes at the same time her and her daughter.

It is from this image that Kearns starts her reasoning on how to interpret the "wave offering." According to her, the scarlet leaves – dead ones – at the foot of the tree are a sign that symbolizes the sin of adultery she has committed. Her interpretation of the Bible passage signaled by the maple leaf which Maple reads while searching for meaning behind her name confirms it. While according to Karounos – following logical and etymological reasoning[7] – this cannot be interpreted as a sign of an adulterous relationship on the part of her mother, according to Kearns it is precisely so. While she mentions that "at its most general and benign level the allusion suggests the waving boughs of the maple tree, a figure of the 'good,' sanctified maple the father wishfully envisions" (p. 20), she believes the reference in Numbers 5:12-31 to be a more valid interpretation: "the most extended reference […] details the 'jealousy offering' made when a woman was thought to have been unfaithful to her husband. Made by priests to drink bitter water, […] the accused must prove her purity. After drinking, she is divested by the priest of the poisonous 'jealousy offering,' which he then waves before the Lord." (Kearns, pp. 20-21) In this interpretation, Maple's mother's wildness, her being transformed into a tree, is a sign of her sin. Her sexuality and sensuality give her power but, at the same time, make her a sinner.
As Tim Kendall writes, we can never know for certain what the meaning Frost wanted to give this biblical citation is. One thing, though, is certain: the maple leaf left inside the Bible to indicate this precise passage is not a coincidence. It is clearly a message from Maple's mother to her, and probably it has something to do with the meaning of her name, and the reason why her father does not know or does not know how to tell her about it: "it may have been / Something a father couldn't tell a daughter / As well as could a mother." (Frost, p. 172)

According to Kearns, "in Frost's poetry almost all male-female bonds are problematic" (p. 16). This is very true of both poems examined in this thesis.
In "Maple," the dysfunctional relationship is not the one between the protagonist and her husband, which is portrayed as a balanced and empowering one for both. The complicated relationship in this poem is the one between the protagonist's parents. There are evident issues of power at play between them. They represent a relationship where, even after death, the mother remains the more influential one in the life of their daughter. As Kearns writes, in this poem "paternal power is […] eviscerated by the mother" (p. 63). The mother is the one who gives power to the daughter, by giving her a goal to pursue throughout her life. The father, on the other hand, while still being physically there, is not even able to give her an explanation on what his mother might have meant. It seems almost as if he did not know his own wife, even when she was still alive. She gives her her name, she plants Maple and plants her name, as

[7] See a more detailed reconstruction of Karounos' theory in 5.2.

Karounos wrote – she is clearly portrayed as the sole creator of her child, her power completely overcomes her partner's. It is clear, then, how power is not, by any means, equally distributed between the two parties in this relationship, leaving the father to be almost an invisible figure in his daughter's life.

A similar distribution of power can be found in "Paul's Wife." In this poem, though, the male party is not described as uninfluential – as in the case of Maple's father. Paul is, in fact, a very powerful and well-respected lumberjack who displays unnatural strength and capability in his area. He is associated with incredible feats and abilities, and stories are told about him repeatedly in the lumber camps. This is what one knows about him after having read the first lines about him, but from the start, he is also presented as a married man, with a wife who, for some reason, is able to influence his actions whenever she is – even barely – mentioned. Later, once the reader discovers the truth about his wife, it becomes clear how, even with his being such a strong character, in the couple's dynamics it is she who has the power. His life, from the moment he met her, became a life oriented toward her, so much so that it changed his character as well, transforming him into a "terrible possessor." While being possessive in a relationship is never encouraged and never positive – since it can lead to terrible consequences we unfortunately witness all too often – in this case it is precisely her power that renders him so. He recognizes in her a beauty and a purity so unique, that he must do everything in his power to protect her and keep her safe.

Great issues of power come into play in these two poems, and through them, Frost once again achieves his goal of providing readers with vivid examples of real human dynamics in which they can recognize themselves. According to Mario Praz, "Di donne fatali ce ne sono state sempre nel mito e nella letteratura, poiché mito e letteratura non fanno altro che rispecchiare fantasticamente aspetti della vita reale, e la vita reale ha sempre offerto esempi più o meno perfetti di femminilità prepotente e crudele."[8] (Praz, p. 165) As explained in the introductory chapter, Frost's goal is precisely the one Praz writes about in this passage – to reflect on the human condition through his poetry. He consistently succeeds in this endeavor, portraying complicated relationships, powerful women, and subdued men. Each of these interactions is set against the backdrop of the incredibly powerful and ever-present force that is earthly nature. Frost's poems are rich with intricate depictions of human emotions and struggles, which reveal his profound understanding of the complexities of life. By grouping these elements together, Frost invites readers to explore the nuances of their own experiences and the world around them, and at the same time reaffirms his place as a master in observing and commenting on the human condition.

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[8] "In myth and literature, there have always been femmes fatales, since myth and literature are nothing but fantastical reflections of aspects from real life, and real life has always offered more or less perfect examples of aggressive and cruel femininity."

CONCLUSIONS

This thesis was written with the goal of using "Maple" and "Paul's Wife," the two poems chosen from the broad spectrum of Robert Frost's work, to shed light on his continued importance in the literary realm. By providing the reader with analyses that range from general contextualization to precise interpretations of specific passages and words used by the author, the aim was to provide further knowledge on the less lyrical and more narrative poems written by Frost, such as the ones that make up the *Notes* section of *New Hampshire*. As we have seen, in these two long, narrative poems, Frost introduces the reader to some of the themes he is most fond of, like nature, and a profound desire to reflect on the human condition as a shared experience, something that puts every single human being on the same level.

"Paul's Wife" is a poem whose tie to nature is quite literal and evident, involving every character that is part of it. Its two main characters symbolize the two principal ways in which nature and human beings can interact. Paul is a uniquely strong and capable lumberjack, thus being an example of one of the human activities that symbolically – as well as quite literally – represent the power humans can exercise over nature. His wife, on the other hand, is the product of nature itself, being literally born from it with the innate ability of influencing Paul in his every decision from the moment he first sees her. One could argue that, ultimately, Frost recognizes human beings' power while still concluding that nature, at last, always prevails. In this poem he combines the American folklore of Paul Bunyan's story, Ovid's myth of Pygmalion and the Romantic trope of powerful magical feminine creatures to create a powerful story that has the reader reflect on nature, its power, and how it intertwines with and influences human beings and the way they interact with each other.

With its story centered around the significance of a name coming from a plant, "Maple" offers its readers the opportunity to interrogate themselves on what it means to give names, and on what it means to live a life in search of identity, with continuous doubts over it – an experience surely shared by many. The protagonist of this poem, Maple, is an example of strong womanhood, of moving through life with a precise goal in mind, of being so sure in her search for herself as to influence those around her – namely her husband. This poem presents starting points for reflection on many themes, with the main one being how delicate the power balance within a male-female relationship is. Both Maple's relationship with her husband and her own parents' relationship offer examples of how women can be strong and powerful in marriages without the use of supernatural forces, which was the case in "Paul's Wife." With these examples, Frost has the reader reevaluate traditional power dynamics.

In both poems, women are seen as powerful, strong characters, able to exercise power over their husbands just as *real* women can do in *real* life. Frost is, once again, depicting reality, using what he sees and what he knows to create his art. In doing so, he provides his readers with something written, something concrete, that tells them that the human experience is a shared one, that – even though maybe with slight differences – life on Earth is the same for everybody, and every experience can be extended to humanity as a whole.

In providing the Italian version of "Maple" and "Paul's Wife," and by explaining the precise steps involved in reaching the desired final result, the goal of this dissertation was to give even more resonance to Frost's word. His word being one that speaks of common experience, of humanity as a group, and of togetherness. Comprehending this has always been and will always be essential, and it is especially so at a time when people seem to have lost sight of this. The value of humanity as a shared condition, according to Frost – and according to me – is one of the most sacred concepts to understand. For this reason, the hope is that this dissertation may provide the reader with an interesting point of view through which to read these poems – and Frost's work in general: by reading them as the pure representation of a shared human experience.

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