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DANIELA LAPOLI

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MESTRE EM LETRAS

Opção Inglês e Literatura Correspondente



-----  
Dra. Leonor Scliar-Cabral  
COORDENADORA



-----  
Dr. Sérgio Luiz Prado Bellei  
ORIENTADOR

BANCA EXAMINADORA



-----  
Dr. Sérgio Luiz Prado Bellei  
ORIENTADOR



-----  
Dra. Susana Bornéo Funck  
EXAMINADORA



-----  
Dra. Anelise Corseuil  
EXAMINADORA

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# SEXUALITY AND NATURE IN ROBERT FROST'S LYRICS

DANIELA LAPOLI

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Supervising Professor: Sérgio Luiz Prado Bellei

## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this dissertation is to analyze the presence of human sexuality in Robert Frost's poetic production, through the analysis of twenty-three nature lyrics. Taking as theoretical basis the method proposed by the French Semiotician Michael Riffaterre in the book *Semiotics of Poetry* (1980), this study analyzes the game of poetic language in the texts, showing that although at the mimesis level they seem to be about nature, they deal with eroticism in the semiosis level.

In the first chapter we provide the reader with an introduction to the semiotic method we propose to consider, as well as to the traditional criticism on Robert Frost. The second chapter analyzes lyrics which deal with associations between a part of nature and female sexuality, and with the speaker's erotic projections into nature. The final chapter presents those lyrics which deal with an erotic invitation to a listener, and

with the account of positive and negative erotic experiences. The conclusion shows that human sexuality is strongly present in Robert Frost's works, not only in his narrative or dramatic poems, but also in his apparently innocent nature lyrics.

## RESUMO

Este trabalho se propõe a analisar a presença da sexualidade humana na lírica de Robert Frost, através do estudo de vinte e três poemas sobre a natureza. Tomando como base teórica o método proposto pelo Semiótico francês Michael Riffaterre no livro *Semiotics of Poetry* (1980), este estudo analisa o jogo da linguagem poética mostrando que, ao mesmo tempo em que estes poemas líricos parecem recriar o real-natureza, apresentam também o tema do erotismo no nível semiótico da linguagem.

O primeiro capítulo apresenta ao leitor uma introdução ao método semiótico que se propõe considerar, bem como os argumentos da crítica tradicional de Robert Frost. O segundo capítulo considera os poemas que lidam com associações entre um elemento da natureza e a sexualidade feminina, e com projeções eróticas do eu lírico na natureza. O capítulo final analisa os poemas que apresentam convites eróticos e experiências eróticas positivas e negativas. Conclui-se que o tema da sexualidade humana está fortemente presente na produção de Robert Frost, não apenas nos poemas dramáticos ou narrativos, mas também nos inocentes poemas líricos sobre natureza.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER I	
Sexuality and Nature in Robert Frost's Lyrics	01
CHAPTER II	
Associations Between Nature and Male/Female Sexuality	35
CHAPTER III	
Erotic Invitations and Experiences	81
CONCLUSION	133
WORKS CITED	140

## CHAPTER I

### SEXUALITY AND NATURE IN ROBERT FROST'S LYRICS

Robert Lee Frost's presence in the history of American letters is undoubtedly one of the most powerful and controversial of the twentieth century. He achieved an incredibly high popularity during his lifetime, receiving honorary degrees by a number of universities (he was twice nominated a Master of Arts, three times a Doctor of the Humanities and twelve times a Doctor of Letters), four Pulitzer prizes, the gold medal from the National Institute of Arts and Letters and even an official citation from the Senate of the United States to honor the poet in his seventy-fifth birthday. In January 1961, Frost was invited to read his work during John F. Kennedy's presidential inauguration. When he read the line "The land was ours before we were the land's" from "The Gift Outright" (348), he was already the most widely known poet of American history. Whether this has to do with the poet or with the myth is a difficult question to answer. His poems surely testify that he is a great poet. On the other hand, as Philip Gerber observes, "...the nation created Robert Frost in the image its need most desired," that is, Frost "symbolized the peaceful, self-knowing, and independent citizen whom every American dreamed /of becoming" (01/02). His

image was the one of the good grandfather, the wise old man who typified the dream of simple life and "rural innocence", and it is almost impossible to know whether Frost's popularity is a result of the poet's achievement or of the mythification of his image.

It is already known that Robert Frost spent his literary career trying to fit the portrait of the sweet grandfather, cautious and full of proverbs, because of the great popularity this portrait could give him. And it was precisely the intense popularity he achieved what kept him from belonging to the category of the "great poets" of the twentieth century. It is assumed by the literary canon that, because of the apparent simplicity of theme, vocabulary and geographical setting of Frost's poetry, he is more easily read than are T. S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, Yeats and others. And while this assumption survives, a reductionist lack of intensity is brought to his poetry, at the expense of the loss of the great subtlety his work offers us.

In fact, rural scenes and bucolic images are the very raw material of his poetry. This is added to sharp observation of outer reality and to the straightforward structure of his narratives. As James Potter observes:

His sentence structure is generally direct and uncomplicated, his diction relatively plain. There are no purple passages, indeed little rhetoric; he leans toward understatement, if anything. It is a commonplace that his style is conversational. Similarly, his prosody uses common meters like iambic tetrameter and pentameter, and follows unelaborate or loose rhyme schemes. We find little free verse, few exotic experiments in prosody. (70)

It is obviously an exaggeration to consider Robert Frost an innovator in terms of form. While the modernist literature of the twentieth century was marked by experimentation, Frost's poetry surely remains in the traditional mode of technical versification. On the other hand, his critical stature, as well as the constant labels that critics and readers attributed to his work certainly need revision. It is worth mentioning Cleanth Brook's remark that "much of Frost's poetry hardly rises above the level of the vignette of rural New England" (106), and the remark made by George Nitchie which diminishes Frost as a poet because he is "not very much concerned with developing a philosophically consistent concept of nature" (13). These are obviously the results of simplistic views of Frost's work which do not consider the fact that behind the apparent simplicity of his poetic production we can find deeper levels of complexity both in terms of formal style and theme. As Richard Poirier points out,

...engaging yourself critically with Frost is like taking a trip with an old neighborhood friend and discovering under the stress of travel that he can on occasion be altogether more mysterious than you'd bargained for.... (06)

The extent to which Frost's work has been constantly misunderstood may be felt in the two questionable labels most commonly attributed to him: realist and conservative. The latter adjective is closely related to Frost's relation with the modernist movement, more particularly to the relation between Frost's work and the work of his contemporaries Eliot, Pound,

Stevens and Williams. Frost was considered for a long time a resistance both to the enterprise of Making it New and to the imagist movement. In his article "Frost and Modernism", Robert Kern attacks this assumption saying that Frost represented an old-fashioned way to be new and that his newness basically consisted of his "radical renewal and revision of the Wordsworthian project of appropriating the language of everyday life for poetry"(03).

Frost's particular rebellion against the bookish rhetoric that modernism was sought to avoid was the creation of a theory called "the sound of sense", through which he raised American oral language to the stature of literary language. In many of his letters we have glimpses of his beliefs in relation to this theory, as when he writes in a 1913 letter to John Bartlett: "The sound of sense, then. You get that. It is the abstract vitality of our speech. It is pure sound - pure form" (Selected Letters of Robert Frost, 80). The central idea of this theory is explained in another letter addressed to John Bartlett one year later:

I give you a new definition of a sentence.  
A sentence is a sound in itself on which other  
sounds called words may be strung....  
They are apprehended by the ear. They are  
gathered by the ear from the vernacular and brought  
into books. (111)

In other letters Frost insists upon this idea, adding that the sentence-sounds say more than words and that they may even convey (as in irony) "a meaning opposite to the words"(113). This is the basic difference between what he calls

the "grammatical sentence" and the "vital sentence"(140). Whereas the imagists (considering language a group of clichés that had lost their original communicative power) were seeking to capture images for the eyes through their art, Frost was uniting these images for the eyes with images for the ear, also focusing the issues of voice and sound. In Robert Kern's view, Frost was not "opposing imagism so much as attempting to redefine it, to extend its limits" (12). Frost's narrative poems, in fact, provide good examples of this application to the sound of sense into poetry. When one reads "Home Burial", for instance, one has to be aware of the different tones of voice in the dialogue between husband and wife. We could even say that the narrative operates on two levels: the level of dialogue and the level of physical movement according to different tones of voice. As Elaine Barry affirms, "Almost all of his poems are experiments in tones of voice, ways of saying a thing" (11). The setting of most of his poems is New England; his characters are mostly Yankee farmers; his theme, human beings. Besides, he incorporates the fresh sentences "apprehended by the ear" into poetry, creating authenticity and innovation.

There is another important aspect of Frost's poetry that strengthens his inclusion in the category of "modern poet": his modern view of nature. Critics have assumed for a long time that Frost is a typical "nature poet" in the version of Emerson, Thoreau and Wordsworth, the one who advocates the superiority of nature as the "great teacher", or as the background that provides the framework for transcendental experiences. In "Confusion and

Form: Robert Frost as Nature Poet", Donald Greiner says that Frost distinguishes between two ideas of nature. Whereas in the first (western idea) human beings should master nature, in the second (eastern idea) human beings should look for a saviour, because nature is too much for them. Frost is included in the second category, while Emerson and Wordsworth are clearly in the first. As John Lynen puts it, "whereas Wordsworth sees in nature a mystical kinship with the human mind, Frost views nature as essentially alien" (145). Most of Frost's poems (almost one third of them) present a very dark view of nature, with complex metaphorical implications for the winter, the snow, the nights, the woods. If Frost's common device is the outer-inner metaphor between seasons and human beings' psychological states, we must conclude that the superiority of the terror over the rebirth proclaimed by Emerson and Wordsworth places Robert Frost's attitude toward nature into a different category. The mention of the terror in Frost's poetry was first made by Lionel Trilling in 1959, during a speech for the celebration of Frost's birthday. It caused a generalized shock in the audience, as well as numerous protests throughout the country. Trilling was merely arguing the obvious: Frost's work presents the terror of human beings' loneliness in the world. In his own words, "the universe he conceives is a terrifying universe" (Robert Frost: An Introduction, 155).

In "Frost and the American View of Nature", Clark Griffith explains that American writers experienced one single attitude toward nature for over two centuries - from the Puritans to Emerson and Thoreau. This attitude included an assumption that

nature was the supreme teacher, whose teachings would elevate the human observer. Frost shares this point of view with Emerson and the Puritans since he builds bridges between outer and inner realities in an Emersonian sense. If we read Emerson's *Nature* looking for connections with Frost, we immediately feel that when Emerson says that "Particular natural facts are symbols of particular spiritual facts" or that "Nature is the symbol of spirit" (20) he seems to be referring to Frost's analogy between outer weather and inner mood, natural facts and human life. On the other hand, as Griffith advocates, Frost also shares with Emily Dickinson and Herman Melville the notion that nature may be a teacher but, most of the times, when one goes to nature looking for answers, one comes back with empty hands. Besides, Frost still holds a position typical of a twentieth century writer - he does not feel indignation or anger (unlike Dickinson and Melville) when he realizes that his journey into nature is useless. According to Griffith, "As a twentieth century writer, imbued with twentieth-century skepticism, he has been far enough removed from the Emersonian point of view not to be outraged when it failed him" (36). In fact, Frost neither loves nor fears nature. He is aware of its presence, but knows he can ask very little of her. In this sense, his attitude is clearly "unromantic", unlike those of Emerson, Thoreau and Wordsworth. From this same attitude comes the "terrifying universe" of human beings' loneliness.

In relation to the other label Frost received - realist - when one reads Frost's poems one may feel that what he

basically does is to use everyday language and concrete facts of nature to talk about a great variety of larger issues. As he himself points out in the essay "The Constant Symbol", poetry is metaphor, "saying one thing and meaning another, saying one thing in terms of another, the pleasure of ulteriority" (24). He clearly writes on multiple levels of meaning, implying analogies between portrayals of rural scenes or events and feelings or experiences people face. When he talks about concrete things, he also talks about something else. As Reginald Cook observes, "he knows that by refining a thought to its essentials you multiply the levels of meaning." (*The Dimensions of Robert Frost*, 102).

When Frost talks about external realities of the world, his descriptions suffer an alchemic transformation in which, at the end of the poems, we have the impression that the words achieve a higher level of significance. The words seem to move from their surface meaning to another level of discourse, in the same way that the objects, scenes and events described reach the level of metaphor or synecdoche. So much so that Frost's recurrent structural tendency has been defined as a movement from "sight" to "insight" ("*Frost's Synecdochism*", 379). In Frost's own words, a poem begins in "delight" and ends in "wisdom", in a "momentary stay against confusion" (*Selected Prose of Robert Frost*, 18). That is why the persona who, on the surface level, stops by "the woods on a snowy evening", experiences, on a deeper level of significance, a much larger and complex encounter: the awareness of death, with its peaceful, soundless, "dark and deep" sleep, and the awareness of the many "Promises to keep" in the "miles to go" before this final rest. By the same token, the

persona who chooses between two roads diverging "in a yellow wood" is facing the problem (or the usefulness) of decisions, suspecting that "sigh" and decision are intrinsically linked with the traveler that cannot take two roads being the same traveler. Isn't the traveler suggesting that the human being never chooses only one road, but is forever marked by the sigh of the "Road not taken"? This justifies Frost's comment during his lecture in 1960, at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill: "... they're not nature poems, much. They're really human, all of them" (1960). This also justifies Robert Diyanni's observation that

To read Frost's poetry is to plunge into works whose significance deepens, whose meanings reverberate, on subsequent readings. Later readings exhibit the rippling effect achieved by throwing a stone into a pool of water. The widening concentric circles mirror the way in which Frost's poetic symbols expand in implication." (196)

And yet, critics and readers in the past failed to see the wide complexity related to the significance of Frost's poems, and chose to believe in the notions that Frost was a conservative, realist poet.

One field of research that certainly needs inquiry, as a significant part of Frost's transcendental realism is the sexual element in Frost's work. There is a good number of interpretations of Frost's narrative poems, in which he presents men and women in complex relationships, facing the problems of marriage, trying to communicate with each other in spite of their differences, and, most of all, in which he presents a very

realistic view of women. In poems such as "The Witch of Coos", "Home Burial", "The Fear", "The Hill Wife", "A Servant to Servants" and "The Housekeeper", Frost portrays women either totally dominated by men's violence or in their way to madness, which would be the only solution to the frustration of their lives. The sexual element in these poems is notably strong, especially in "Home Burial" where we find everywhere evidences of sexual threat.

On the other hand, very little has been said about the sexual overtones in Frost's lyrics. Critics have preferred the comfortable stance of analyzing Frost's lyrics simply as "nature lyrics", perhaps because such analyses would not threaten the portrait of the good grandfather of American literature. Moreover, if we concentrate our analyses on the "concentric circles" of the poems' significances, the sexual element will be inevitably there. John Sears (1989), Richard Wakefield (1985) and Richard Poirier (1990) have focused their attention on this particular field of research, and produced good analyses of some of Frost's lyrics. Although Poirier uses sexuality in Frost's work as a metaphor for the making of poetry, he allows the sexual overtones of the poems to develop during his readings.

In this dissertation I intend to analyze the sexual and sensuous elements in Robert Frost's lyrics, concentrating my analyses only on those lyrics which deal with nature at the mimetic level. Due to the impossibility of a chronological study of human sensuality in Robert Frost's work (he wrote most of the sensuous lyrics before the publication of his first book and selected them throughout the later ones), this will be a thematic

study divided into two main parts:

A) Associations between Nature and Male/Female  
Sexuality

-Associations between Nature and Female Sexuality

1- "The Rose Family"

2- "Good-by and Keep Cold"

3- "Never Again Would Birds' Song Be the Same"

4- "Unharvested"

5- "The Telephone"

- Speaker's own sexuality projected into Nature

6- "Moon Compasses"

7- "Ghost House"

8- "To Earthward"

9- "A Dream Pang"

10- "Waiting- Afield at Dusk"

ii- "Reluctance"

B) Erotic Invitations and Experiences

- Invitations

i- "The Pasture"

2- "A Line-Storm Song"

3- "A Prayer in Spring"

4- "Putting in the Seed"

- Experiences

1- "In a Vale"

2- "Rose Pogonias"

- 3- "Going for Water"
- 4- "All Revelation"
  
- 5- "The Strong are Saying Nothing"
- 6- "The Subverted Flower"
- 7- "Wind and Window Flower"
- 8- "Devotion"

The choice of the critical approach in the analyses of the poems was made taking into consideration Robert Scholes' definition of the basic difference between fiction and poetry, which

...is based on the notion of poetry as monumental, fixed in the words of the text and therefore untranslatable; while fiction has proved highly translatable because its essence is not in its language but in its diegetic structure."  
(173)

It seems to me that the best approach regarding Robert Frost's canon is the one which is totally based in the poem as a closed entity. Searching for different "ways of saying a thing" Frost's movement is clearly from sight to insight, from "matter to spirit". His poems clearly present a "detour" that must not be explained with external data but within the realm of the text. Moreover, critics in general have preferred to use biographical data, in spite of the evident necessity of interpreting Frost's poetry pursuing significance in the poetic discourse of the text.

I will apply the semiotic approach to poetry

proposed by Michael Riffaterre in the book *Semiotics of Poetry* (1980) because it basically considers the concept of poetry as inseparable from the concept of text (as a closed entity); and yet, the theory is elastic enough to consider the literary phenomenon to be "a dialectic between text and reader"(01). This theory takes into account the facts that are "accessible to the reader and are perceived in relation to the poem"(02). Through the restrictions of these two postulates, I believe Riffaterre's theory may give a precise account of the characteristic shift from sight to insight, so recurrent in Frost's poetry.

Riffaterre sees "indirectness" as poetry's basic feature. All poetry talks about one thing through another. Thus, when one faces poetry one has to bear in mind that it is an activity that happens in at least two levels. On the one hand, we have the "literary representation of reality", or "mimesis", as Riffaterre puts it (02). At this level every word is directly related to the thing it stands for (language is referential) and meaning can be apprehended. Since reality is in itself something quite complex, at the mimesis level the text constantly shifts focus and multiplies details in order to encompass this natural complexity. Variation and multiplicity, thus, are the basic characteristics of mimesis. On the other hand, we have that "something else", that other level of discourse in which we can apprehend the "significance" of the poem. The reader can perceive many poetic signs in a poem that point to that "something else", as these elements form a particular kind of unity, different from the variation of mimesis. Riffaterre says that poems are, in fact, characterized by formal and semantic unity. So, he

defines "significance" as "this formal and semantic unity, which includes all the indices of indirection" (02).

The indices of indirection (or ungrammaticalities) are all the signs that, in one way or another, threaten the mimesis. Riffaterre numbers three possible ways of semantic indirection: Displacing (when one sign changes from one meaning to another - as in metaphor and metonymy), distorting ("When there is ambiguity, contradiction and nonsense") and creating (when the space of the text is the agent for the creation of signs out of elements which are devoid of meaning outside the context - as in symmetry, rhyme, assonance, etc.) (02). In addition to semantic indirection, mimesis can also be threatened by inconsistency with verisimilitude or with a frustration of the reader's expectations. In one way or another, the reader perceives that the ungrammaticalities of the mimesis level are integrated into another system, another paradigm, and that this other system alters the meaning of the poem. The "integration of signs from the mimesis level into the higher level of significance is a manifestation of semiosis" (04). The semiotic process is nothing more than the movement of signs from one level of discourse to another.

According to Riffaterre, this process always happens during a second stage of reading. In a first-stage of reading (heuristic) the reader decodes the meaning of the poem, apprehending all the facts that are stated at the mimesis level, as well as the presence of the ungrammaticalities that somehow threaten this mimesis. This reading goes from top to bottom of

the page, and the reader uses as input his linguistic competence (his ability to understand the referentiality of language, identifying tropes and ungrammaticalities) and his literary competence (familiarity with descriptive systems, with themes, with his society's mythologies and with other texts). In the second (retroactive or hermeneutic) reading, the reader reviews and compares elements, performing a structural decoding, as he becomes aware of the structures that generate the text. At this stage the reader perceives that the ungrammaticalities of the mimesis level are "variants of the same structural matrix"(06).

The matrix is a semantic given, visible only through the ungrammaticalities of the mimesis level. As Riffaterre explains, "The text functions like a neurosis: as the matrix is repressed, the displacement produces variants all through the text, just as suppressed symptoms break out somewhere else in the body"(19). It is worth mentioning that the text is nothing more than the transformation of the matrix (a word or sentence) into more elaborate forms. The matrix is hypothetical, it is merely the actualization of a structure. It is as if "significance is shaped like a doughnut, the hole being either the matrix of the hypogram or the hypogram as matrix"(i3). The first actualization of the matrix in the poem (ungrammaticality) is called "model" and will govern all the other actualizations. So, matrix, model, and text are variations of the same structure. If the text is merely a transformation of the matrix into more elaborate forms, it functions like a periphrasis.

The common misinterpretation of poems result from the confusion between meaning and significance. Whereas meaning

is the semantic apprehension of the mimesis level of a poem, significance is related to the reader's ability to perform the "liturgy of a ritual - the experience of a circuitous sequence"(12). Significance is generated by a "detour" the text makes, as it moves from mimesis to semiosis. The greater the distance between these two levels, the more developed the text. In any case, the ungrammaticalities of the mimesis level are always the keys to the perception of significance. It is important to observe that before significance is apprehended, the ungrammaticalities look like a series of inappropriate semantic data, making the text look like a generalized catachresis. On the other hand, as the text becomes more deviant and ungrammatical, the reader feels that the arbitrariness of language diminishes. This is due to the concept of "overdetermination", defined with precision by William Beauchamp:

Overdetermination refers to multiple motivations of language: it is the intersection in a single sign of two or more associative chains, such that the sign has not only one reason for being actualized, but two or three, or five. To the normal, linguistic links between words (governed by grammar and lexical distribution) are added the additional links of stylistic and prosodic structures, as well as those connecting the matrix and its variants: thus signs in poems seem, despite their frequent obscurity, especially appropriate and necessary. (42)

By making signs strongly motivated, overdetermination is responsible for the exemplariness of literary discourse, compensating for the text's catachresis. Being aware of these concepts, the reader may conclude that significance is generated by two semiotic operations: sign

production (the transformation of mimetic signs into poetic signs) and text production (the transformation from matrix to text). Let us begin with the former.

The first operation always occurs through hypogrammatic derivation; that is, the sign is poeticized (it becomes relevant to the poem's significance) when it refers to a preexistent word group, to a paradigm elsewhere (what Riffaterre calls "hypogram"), being, at the same time, a variant of the text's matrix (otherwise, the sign would be only a stylistically marked lexeme or syntagm). The hypogram is "already a system of signs comprising at least a predication"(23), and it may be potential (observable in language) or actual (observable in a previous text). By the same token, the poetic sign may be an idiolect (observable within the context of the text) or a classeme (observable regardless of the given text). Hypograms are classified into three types: Semes and presuppositions, clichés (or quotations), and descriptive systems.

The hypogram is formed "out of a word's semes and/or presuppositions" when the poetic sign actualizes some of the semes and/or presuppositions of the kernel word of the hypogram, and this word may be in the text or not. As Riffaterre explains, "The sememe of the kernel word functions like an encyclopedia of representation related to the meaning of that word"(26). These actualizations saturate the verbal sequence, presenting what we could have gathered from a single word. Riffaterre gives the example of the word "flute" which presupposes a flutist, entails an audience, and contains semes

such as "melodiousness", "rusticity" (one kind of flute was Pan's), etc. He also explains that in the neologism and in the revived archaism, the new or conspicuous word repeats the semes and presuppositions of its hypogram, the word in the standard lexicon. These words are not perceived only as words, but as a relationship between two forms: one marked (the neologism or archaism), and one unmarked (the synonym or homologue).

Stock epithets also fall into this type of hypogrammatic derivation. A stock epithet is a "permanently or conventionally poetic word that can be analysed as a hypogrammatic derivative, e.g. fleet-footed Achilles or rosy-fingered Dawn"(27). A historical esthetic system determines the selection of these words, as well as their interpretations. So, unlike common adjectives, stock epithets are words which already embody an ideological ethos. Their poeticity comes from a special relationship between epithets and nouns: their meaning, contrasting with the meaning of common adjectives, are not accessory or context determined, but a permanent feature. That is why stock epithets are poetic, no matter what noun they modify. Their literary function is that of a positive or negative marker, instead that of adding meaning to a word. They already imply a hypogram, usually a descriptive system, and the adjective usually actualizes the semes and presuppositions of the nuclear word of the descriptive system. As Julio Pinto exemplifies,

When modifying the noun "coluna", for example, the adjective "ágil" is the echo of a timeless metaphor, the one depicting Greek columns as maidens (caryatids), whose standard description usually involves graceful slenderness. The hypogram is thus a descriptive system, some of the

presuppositions of which are actualized in the adjective, making it function as a meliorative sign. (22)

Riffaterre says that the linkage between the poetic sign and the hypogram is stronger in the case of words that actualize the semes of the nuclear word of the hypogram, since the semes are "the very core of a word's meaning"(31). This is the basic process through which words that are usually perceived as "ordinary words" become poetic in the text. Besides, since these words actualize semes, they become a metonym of the kernel word, making the connection between poetic signs and hypogram even stronger.

Clichés are "already actualized in set forms within the reader's mind"(39), being part of our linguistic competence. As Riffaterre exemplifies, the collocation of "fleur" and "abime" belongs to this category of hypogram, because of the stereotyped image of the flower on the edge of the abyss, which achieved high popularity during the romantic era, because of its antitheses. This hypogram is characterized by strong contrasts such as littleness X immensity, delicate X rude, beauty X horror, charm X danger, etc. Thus, clichés also have the mechanism of seme actualization.

A descriptive system is a "network of words associated with one another around a kernel word, in accordance with the sememe of that nucleus"(39). The linkage between these words is the kernel word's sememe, which they all share. According to Julio Pinto, the descriptive system around "window", for example, "comprises the ideas of opening, wall, view, etc.,

and entails the oppositions of in X out, smallness X vastness, imprisonment X freedom, and so on"(24).

The second semiotic operation responsible for the generation of significance is the transformation from matrix to text. Since the matrix itself is never actualized per se, the text will try to exhaust the possibilities of variation in order to emphasize the linkage between what is implied and what is stated. The operation of text production is governed by two rules: conversion and expansion. "Expansion transforms the constituents of the matrix sentence into more complex forms"(48). Its most common examples are the periphrasis, the extended metaphor, and the simple repetitive sequences (the *amplificatio*), which would be in itself a sign symbolizing high emotional tension, motion, progress, etc. Expansion always transforms one sign into several equivalent signs. In most cases, there are grammatical changes in the constituents of the model sentence, since pronouns turn into nouns, nouns into groups and so on. In the *amplificatio*, the constituents of the expansion sequence "grow longer and longer and more and more complex, heading for a spectacular climax"(51). This process makes the reader aware that the sequence forms a textual unity. It is worth mentioning that allegory, transforming simple components into complex representations, is a visual form of expansion. According to Riffaterre, expansion is also the principal agent operating to remove arbitrariness from the more abstract language forms, especially "from the grammatical connectives", transforming them into images. The most common "substitute transformation of

abstract into figurative signs is the metonym"(58). Expansion, thus, is much more than an enlargement of a lexeme into a syntagm. It is also responsible for the detour the reader has to follow in order to be aware of the invariance in the variance.

Conversion "transforms the constituents of the matrix sentence by modifying them all with the same factor"(63). Since a hypogram always has a positive or negative orientation, conversion transmutes the hypogram's markers (from positive to negative or vice versa), changing the constituents of the matrix sentence. Therefore, instead of creating a detour, conversion creates a formal unity. We can find the most common example of marker permutation in irony, which does not involve, besides the marker permutation, the semantic transfer that occurs in the metaphor and metonym. Riffaterre gives the example of conversion in a Baudelaire prose poem in which the mimesis of maternity (normally positive) is presented in a code of minus sign, representing sorrow. When conversion affects descriptive systems, it permutes the marker of the kernel word, producing therefore, the transmutation of all the other words of the system. When conversion is combined with expansion, it is not related to an external hypogram. In such cases, conversion regulates the more complex forms of expansion, which is limited "to those more complex forms that also repeat features characteristic of the matrix"(75). There is marking without permutation, since there is no external hypogram to oppose.

Riffaterre devotes an entire chapter of his book to the concept of "Interpretant", one of the most important concepts related to the shift from mimesis to semiosis. He quotes the

definition of interpretant from the American philosopher Peirce, who brought forth the idea:

A sign stands for something to the idea which it produces, or modifies... That for which it stands is called its object ; that which it conveys, its meaning; and the idea to which it gives rise, its interpretant. (81)

Riffaterre restricts the term, applying it only for signs whose function is "to guide the reader in his comparative or structural reading"(81). They are signs which represent the equivalence of two "signifying systems", working like puns, pertinent to "two codes or texts". He also classifies interpretants into lexematic and textual. Textual interpretants are mediating texts, "either quoted in the poem or alluded to"(81). These texts contain a model, laying down the rule of the poem's idiolect. Lexematic interpretants (or dual signs) are mediating words, which generate "two texts simultaneously within the poem (or one text that must be understood in two different ways), or else they presuppose two hypograms simultaneously"(81). The dual sign may be understood as an "equivocal word situated at the point where two sequences of semantic and formal associations intersect"(86). In either case, the other text to which the dual sign also points to is very close at hand, since "the sequence is mixed with the one in which the equivocal word rightly belongs"(86). The appropriateness of the dual sign may be due to homophony with another word elsewhere, or it may be due to a coincidence between the dual sign and the other word both in sound and morphology.

In some cases, the "ghost text" is fleshed out in

the poem: a derivation takes place "that actualizes as description or narration the two competing meanings, one after the other, or alternately"(91). In other words, if this derivation did not exist, the dual sign would lose its effect. So, to exist, the dual sign generates a text. In other cases (in the cases of hypogram generating dual signs), the ghost text (the word's other reference) must be deduced by the reader. It is usually a potential cliché which is part of the reader's competence. In this case, the dual sign refers to a hypogram inferred by the reader.

A title can also be a dual sign. The role of the title is "to inform the reader and facilitate access to the text by stating its subject, its genre, or its code"(100). When the title, at the same time, introduces its own poem and refers to another text outside the poem (explaining where the significance of its own poem is located), it is functioning like a dual sign. Dual titles can point to another text which shares the same matrix of its own poem, or even point to a text not as a text, but as a code ( a repository of lexicon and grammar of a conventional discourse). In the case of the textual interpretant, "instead of being symbolized by a word referring to the text in which the reader is to find his hermeneutic clues... the interpretant is a fragment of that text actually quoted in the poem it serves to interpret"(109), as for example, an epigraph.

At this point, it is clear that, although at the mimesis level the poem seems to add informations to informations (meaning is apprehended through the position of words), at the level of significance we have the same information being

repeated. As Riffaterre puts it, "the mimetic text is syntagmatic, the semiotic one is paradigmatic"(89). It also seems clear that the reader's role is the most important in the semiotic transfer from mimesis to semiosis. The whole process happens in the reader's mind, and it is the reader who perceives the semiotic circularity characteristic of poetic texts. Although he performs a structural decoding of poetic language, he still perceives the ungrammaticalities as stumbling blocks and still tends to read the poem obedient to mimesis to get rid of distortions. That is why poems are "endlessly rereadable and fascinating"(166). They are constantly being resolved and unresolved. Besides, the fact that "any ungrammaticality within the poem is a sign of grammaticality elsewhere"(164) leads to the fact that poetic language is like a game. It is also important to observe that since the semiotic unit is the text itself, the reader's decoding of the text is limited because of the poem's saturation by the semantic and formal features of its matrix (165). This contrasts with the many possible interpretations of poems at the mimesis level.

The poetic language as a "word game" also presupposes the presence of the author, the sender of a message. In the case of poems characterized by nonsense, one common type of relationship between hypogram and text is called "scrambling". In such cases, the words, phrases or sentences of the hypogram are found in the text with their orders changed. This is a typical case which confirms the intention of the author, a strong participation in the word game.

In his final chapter Riffaterre analyses some mechanisms of reader-perception which are typical of poetry. He analyses the perception of a text as member of a genre (and illustrates the point with the prose poem), humor as a text-formant, nonsense as an artifact, and genre induced obscurity (that is, when obscurity results "from an interference of the genre's structures")<sup>150</sup>. Since these analyses are not directly relevant to the present dissertation, I will not be concerned with them.

Riffaterre provides the reader with many examples of the application of his theory to fragments of French poems. Due to the difficulty to perceive subtle semiotic processes in the translations of the poems, I have chosen to illustrate Riffaterre's method with William Beauchamp's analysis of a poem by Emily Dickinson. Beauchamp's analysis is based on Riffaterre's theory.

Ended, ere it began -  
The title was scarcely told  
When the preface perished from consciousness,  
The story, unrevealed.

Had it been mine, to print!  
Had it been yours, to read!  
That it was not our privilege  
The interdict of God.

With the absence of the initial orientation provided by a title, Beauchamp begins his analysis by listing the data we perceive at the mimesis level: various ellipses, a series of semantically related words (title, preface, story, print, read), a series of antitheses (ended/begun, mine/yours,

privilege/interdict) and the presences of a first-person narrator (mine) and of an addressee (yours). He also calls our attention to some ungrammaticalities: something cannot end before it begins, the mystery of the addressee's identity, and the unexplained fact of the story being under interdict.

The two most important questions ("What ended before it began?" and "Why did it end"?) are answered in our second-stage reading - more precisely, in lines 2, 3, 4 and line 8 respectively. The pronoun "it" of the first question is easily associated with the "title", "preface", and "story" (the first two nouns are components of the third). In fact, all of them are components of "book", which is actualized in its semes and presuppositions. Thus, every line of the poem contains a seme or presupposition of book (it) and all of them are systematically negated. The story of the poem does not have a beginning nor an end; its title - instead of announcing, identifying the book - is barely told; its preface does not explain or introduce, and the story is not a revelation, but it is "unrevealed". Besides, the book receives an interdict instead of a permission.

The real clue comes when two antitheses are linked by the reader: mine/yours and print/read. The first presents the speaker and the addressee, and the second transforms them into a writer/sender and a reader/receiver in an unrealized act of communication. Beauchamp comments that

...given what we know is one of the common tenors for which communication images serve as vehicles; and given the long literary tradition of committing a special type of emotionally charged message to collections of lyric poems (books with

title, preface...) that are addressed to a special other - we are led to conclude that the story in question is a love story. The speaker is a lover; the addressee, a beloved. A love story in book code. (41)

Beauchamp goes on saying that the love story is overdetermined by the fact that we have a strong prohibition of this act of communication. Since in literary tradition (notably in that of the Romantic nineteenth century) the most common subject of interdiction is impossible love, the love in this poem is condemned by taboo, a love that needs to remain unrevealed. Beauchamp puts all this data in Riffaterre's terms:

The matrix of the poem is something like "forbidden love". The model is "story", expanded by various metonyms, which make it a functional synonym of book, unwritten because unauthorized. The poem is based on two hypograms: the first is formed from the semes and presuppositions of "book", saturating the poem from beginning to end. As Beauchamp points out:

In our poem, it is as if the word "book" were logically dissected, first into its material, sequential parts: the title, the preface, the story itself; then into its social aspects: the writing, the printing, the reading. (43)

The second hypogram refers to the cliché "love story", which generates the matrix (love) and the model (story). These hypograms are thus responsible for the production of poetic signs. As for the textual production, this poem presents "expansion" and "conversion". On one hand, the poem clearly expands the matrix "forbidden love" into more elaborate forms (lines 2, 3, 4, for example, restate what is stated in line

1). The effect of expansion is also felt in the transformation from abstract to figurative forms (the non-expression of the abstract love is expanded in terms of a concrete, figurative book, whose existence is denied, making it a figurative form for the absence of the expression of love). Conversion is responsible for the inversion of markers which transforms the components of the book-hypogram from real to non-existent, from book to non-book. It converts the components of the book-hypogram, thus, with negative markers.

Beauchamp concludes his analysis by stating that the poem actualizes an act of communication between speaker and addressee, which is about another act of communication that was not actualized, because it was the expression of a forbidden love. And yet, the questions spotted at the mimesis level still remain, showing that poetic language is really a word game. Because of that, the aim of the semiotic analysis is not to establish the meaning of the poem but to establish "the structure of meaning - the way significance is generated and produced within a reader's encounter with a text"(46). That was what Beauchamp tried to do.

Frost's poems also offer intense word games, operating on the two levels of discourse. In fact, one cannot read poems such as "A Prayer in Spring", "The Pasture", "All Revelation", and so many others without a departure from the mimesis level. As Normand Holland observes, Frost manages "great unmanageable unknowns by means of small knowns" ("The Brain of Robert Frost", 367). As an example of the procedures of the semiotic readings of this study, I will analyze one of the most

intense poems, and perhaps the most beautiful, concerning sexual overtones.

#### PUTTING IN THE SEED

You come to fetch me from my work tonight  
When supper's on the table, and we'll see  
If I can leave off burying the white  
Soft petals fallen from the apple tree  
(Soft petals, yes, but not so barren quite,  
Mingled with these, smooth bean and wrinkled pea;  
And go along with you ere you lose sight  
Of what you came for and become like me,  
Slave to a springtime passion for the earth.  
How Love burns through the Putting in the Seed  
On through the watching for that early birth  
When, just as the soil tarnishes with weed,  
The sturdy seedling with arched body comes  
Shouldering its way and shedding the earth crumbs.

Our heuristic reading of this sonnet is primarily oriented by the title, which leads us to a context of country labor. At the mimesis level, we have a persona - probably a farmer - working during a spring evening, burying soft white petals from an apple tree. As the reader feels that it seems quite inappropriate to bury petals fallen from the tree, the persona hurries to explain that, although there is no reason for their presence under the earth, they are mingled with "smooth bean and wrinkled pea", maintaining our focus in the act of planting. He tells his beloved that when she invites him to dinner later, they will see if he will be able to stop burying the seeds, but, curiously enough, not to go to dinner, but to go with her until she forgets why she came. This is the situation presented in the octave.

The sestet begins with a marked change in tone, when the persona describes the act of planting and the seedling

"shouldering its way" through the earth. Nothing in the octave (from lines 1 to 8) threatens the mimesis. But when our eyes run through line 9 the word "passion" suddenly brings another dimension to the poem. Passion goes out of the context of natural labor in which the title and the octave were included, especially when the persona is caught in a state of slavery to this passion.

The same happens with the words "Love" and "Putting in the Seed" (with capital letters) in line 10. In line 11, the word "birth" also challenges the reader to a possible double meaning for the poem, which continues in line 13 with the image of the seedling as an arched "body", and culminates in line 14 when we see this body "shouldering" its way and throwing off earth crumbs. The reader finishes the poem with a good idea of the process that happens at the mimesis level, and with a suspicion that it also involves slight ungrammaticalities produced by displacement (some signs clearly change from one meaning to another).

In the retroactive reading, many features that passed unnoticed become more pertinent. The speaker describes a process of losing oneness into passion that will happen at night, at supper time, when he is burying white petals, not "barren", mingled with smooth bean and wrinkled pea. Now, the word passion immediately reveals its significance: it brings something intrinsically human to the context, guiding the direction of the reader's decoding of the text. Then, the way "Love burns through the Putting in the Seed" is coherent with the passion for the earth. The speaker is clearly speaking about human conception

throughout the whole text. When his beloved arrives, they will see if he can resist the planting of the not "barren" petals from an "apple" tree (with its biblical connotations of sin), mingled with bean and wrinkled pea (the rich seed), going with her until she forgets why she went there, becoming, like him, a slave to that passion sexual activity involves. And from the beginning of line 9 on, all the indices of indirection point to a potential hypogram, which is the descriptive system around human conception composed by the sexual act ("Love" burning in the "Putting in the Seed"), the wait for the "birth", and finally, the child who comes with arched "body", "shouldering" its way through the earth. Not coincidentally, this line is very interesting also in terms of the prosodic scheme of the sonnet. "Putting in the Seed" is a variation of the English sonnet in terms of rhyme. Although the English sonnet has three quatrains and a couplet with seven rhymes (ABABCDCD EFEF GG), Frost's poem presents only five rhymes (ABAB ABAB CDCD EE). Line 9 belongs syntactically to the octave, although its rhyme puts it in the sestet, as Elaine Barry observes (86). It embodies (formally) the fusion of the two levels of discourse, in the same way that human fecundity fuses a series of oppositions in the poem: speaker x beloved, burial x birth, smooth x wrinkled, white x tarnished. And although the rhyme scheme of "Putting in the Seed" is the same of a typical English sonnet, it presents the development of thought of an Italian one; that is, it develops one idea in the octave and offers a specific example in the sestet. The speaker invites his love to go with him until she becomes a slave to the "springtime passion for the earth", and

illustrates his intentions describing the process of human conception through the code of planting. Thus, the matrix of the text would be "erotic invitation", and the model is the title "Putting in the Seed", which establishes the metaphorical association between the code of planting and human fertility. All the poetic signs are *classemes* (they have their meaning regardless of the given context) since the words "passion", "love", "to burn", "Putting in the Seed", "birth", "body", and "shouldering its way" carry their erotic meaning regardless of the context of the given text. They compose a descriptive system and also belong to the cliché association between planting and human fecundity - two activities which are closely related to the human wish of overcoming the passage of time. Planting and having children are culturally stated ways of overcoming death. Finally, the transformation from matrix to text is made by expansion, since the whole text is an extended metaphor of "Putting in the Seed" and human fecundity.

After the semantic transfers, the iambic pentameter sonnet describes something more than a night of planting in the speaker's life. It is actually a night of conception, of fecundity for human bodies. Love will burn during the sexual act, as well as during the wait for the child, and during the child's birth. At the end of the poem, the way the seedling is presented, as an arched body "shouldering its way", places the birth of a child as the result of human sex. We arrive, thus, at the intertext, where the poetic signs (which are textually ungrammatical) become coherent in the semiotic grid.

Among the many interpretations of this poem, Richard Poirier's, Elaine Barry's and Daniel Barne's emphasize the decoding of the text through the strong sexuality of its imagery. Daniel Barne even comments that Frost may be exploiting the "sympathetic magic", a folk custom ("which survives in some parts of the United States") of "having intercourse in a freshly sown field in order to insure success of the crops" (02).

And yet, perhaps because of the narrative structure of this sonnet, or perhaps, as Riffaterre puts it, because we want to get rid of the distortions of the poem, we still tend to decode the text obedient to mimesis, demonstrating that the "series of revelations" the poem brings are always temporary, frail, beginning again with each rereading.

## N O T E S

1 Poems A2, A3, A4, A5, A7, A8, A10, A11, B1, B3, B4, B7, and B9 were taken from *Selected Poems of Robert Frost* (1963); and poems A1, A6, A9, B2, B5, B8, and B11 were taken from *The Poetry of Robert Frost* (1979).

2 According to Julio C. M. Pinto a sememe is a "semantic unit in a given semantic field, whereas semes are semantic markers". The sememe "cat" is opposed to the sememe "dog", for example, because of the seme "feline", absent in the sememe "dog". (Notes, i7)

## CHAPTER II

### ASSOCIATIONS BETWEEN NATURE AND MALE/FEMALE SEXUALITY

It is not easy or comfortable to analyze the sexual element in Frost's poetry. In a way, readers and critics have constantly expected innocence in everything Frost wrote, as if he had the obligation to teach a moral to his grandchildren, or to write great things about his huge and promising country. He did all that, of course, but he also wrote about men, women, bodies and sex. Sometimes, explicitly. At other times, as an artist who felt at home with the game of literary language. In both ways, he wrote beautifully and subtly about one of the strongest issues his personae faced in his poems.

In this chapter I intend to analyze those lyrics which deal with associations between nature and male/female sexuality. I will begin with the lyrics which present an association (made by the male speaker) between nature and female sexuality, and then I will proceed in the analysis of the lyrics which present the speaker's own sexuality projected onto nature. "The Rose Family" is a good poem to open the first group, since it represents the category in its purest sense.

#### THE ROSE FAMILY

The rose is a rose,  
And was always a rose.  
But the theory now goes  
That the apple's a rose,  
And the pear is, and so's  
The plum, I suppose.  
The dear only knows  
What will next prove a rose.  
You, of course, are a rose -  
But were always a rose.

In our heuristic reading of this poem, the first line seems to echo Gertrude Stein's famous line "a rose is a rose is a rose..." and we see the persona playing with the word "rose", following the same defamiliarization process used by Stein. After the definition that "A rose is a rose", the persona makes unusual associations such as "the apple is a rose", "the pear is a rose" and "the plum is a rose", making the reader feel that nonsense is created through the distortion of the associations among different sememes from lines 3 to 8. Line 9 suddenly takes us back to the ground when the voice associates his beloved with a rose. At this point we conclude that the voice is a "he", since literary tradition does not allow the association man/rose.

In our hermeneutic reading, the process of defamiliarization of language somehow fades away as we pay attention to the dual title "The Rose Family". Besides introducing its own poem, the title also points to another text, where the reader finds clues to the reading of the poem. This text is obviously the botanical definition of the rosaceae family, a group of plants which have a five-petaled corolla. Among the different sub-families belonging to the rosaceae

family we may find not only the rose itself, but also the apple tree, the peach tree, the plum tree, the pear tree, the cherry tree, and others. Thus, all the ungrammaticalities from lines 3 to 8 are perfectly consistent once we are aware of the actual hypogram (the rosaceae family's definition) since apple, plum and pear are merely co-hyponyms which share this same superordinate (the rosaceae family). Now what seemed to take us to the ground suddenly reveals itself as the true ungrammaticality: "You, of course, are a rose". It is interesting that the feeling of familiarization is made stronger by the words "of course", which contribute to mask the only association that doesn't belong to the hypogram. Line 9, thus, brings another dimension to what seemed to be a game with the idea of roseness. According to the voice, the association beloved/rose is the only one which bears the same credibility as the association rose/rose, since the speaker works with a contrast between what he considers to be essential roses (rose and woman) and accidental roses (apple, plum and pear). Whereas the essential roses were considered to be roses for a long time, the accidental (false) roses are presented as strange innovations of modernity. In spite of that, beloved/rose should be the association which could cause strangeness in the reader, for it is incredible that a woman may be a rose (woman does not belong to the rosaceae family). And yet, it is surprisingly true.

At the prosodic level, line 9 is also different from all the others in metrical terms. The poem is basically composed of anapestic dimeter lines (pure in lines 2, 3, 4, 5, 8, and 10). Lines 1, 6, and 7 are composed by one iamb and one

anapest, whereas line 9 is composed by two trochees and one anapest. It is definitely a turning point both in prosody and in the development of the poem. What this line suggests is the cliché hypogram formed by the association woman/rose, so strongly maintained by tradition. It would be impossible to number the poets who somehow worked with this idea throughout the different times of literary history, although the cliché itself is still hardly exploited. The result of this strong tradition is the feeling of familiarization we have when we read lines 9 and 10. But what does this hypogram have to do with sensuality?

If we observe that this cliché hypogram is based on seme actualization, we will notice that in the metaphor woman/rose, the semes related to the sememe rose (beauty, delicacy, softness, perfume) are also related to the sememe woman, making the connection a sensuous one. These semes are actually related to the senses, instead of being related to the intellect or to emotion. The beloved of this poem, as the beloved of so many other poems, is primarily a beloved to see, smell, touch. The poem is transformed in front of our eyes into a love lyric, whose matrix is something like "You are sensual" or "You are beautiful". This matrix has two hypograms: one potential (the cliché woman/rose) and one actual (the rosaceae family). The transformation from matrix to text occurs by expansion, since the voice begins with rose/rose, moves on to apple/rose, pear/rose, plum/rose, to finish with his true association beloved/rose, and by conversion, since we have a conversion of markers (woman, which is an essential rose does not

belong to the rosaceae hypogram, while pear, plum, and apple are accidental roses which belong to the hypogram). The title, as we have seen, is a dual sign (an interpretant), responsible for the understanding of the poem.

Although R. F. Fleissner considers the purpose of the poem to "satirize Stein", he calls our attention to the importance of the number five in the text. We have 10 lines (multiple of five), five botanical elements, five words in lines 1 and 10, a composite six and four and then the reversal four and six in lines 2, 3, 4, and 5 (which result in five words each) concluding that line 9 (six words) "goes beyond the requisite bounds we have established". He also says that the dash at the end of the line provides an open-ended effect, so that the number of words of this line is unimportant (211). The use of the number five, as he suggests, serves to build an image of a flower with five petals (a component of the rosaceae family) united by the only rhyme of the poem. Among the other critics of this poem, John D. Sweeney and James Lindroth observe that "through the final statement, the poem becomes a beautiful love lyric" (56). As we have seen, the persona links woman and rose, showing that the association between female sexuality and nature may be implicit in a cliché as simple as "You are a rose".

#### GOOD-BY AND KEEP COLD

This saying good-by on the edge of the dark  
And the cold to an orchard so young in the bark  
Reminds me of all that can happen to harm  
An orchard away at the end of the farm  
All winter, cut off by a hill from the house.  
I don't want it girdled by rabbit and mouse,  
I don't want it dreamily nibbled for browse

By deer, and I don't want it budded by grouse.  
(If certain it wouldn't be idle to call  
I'd summon grouse, rabbit, and deer to the wall  
And warn them away with a stick for a gun.)  
I don't want it stirred by the heat of the sun.  
(We made it secure against being, I hope,  
By setting it out on a northerly slope.)  
No orchard's the worse for the wintriest storm;  
But one thing about it, it musn't get warm.  
"How often already you've had to be told,  
Keep cold, young orchard. Good-by and keep cold.  
Dread fifty above more than fifty below."  
I have to be gone for a season or so.  
My business awhile is with different trees,  
Less carefully nurtured, less fruitful than these,  
And such as is done to their wood with an ax-  
Maples and birches and tamaracks.  
I wish I could promise to lie in the night  
And think of an orchard's arboreal plight  
When slowly (and nobody comes with a light)  
Its heart sinks lower under the sod.  
But something has to be left to God.

In "Good-by and Keep Cold" the presence of female sexuality is much more subtle, and the title introduces a poem which deals with a parting. At the mimesis level we have a persona who says good-by to an orchard (probably an apple tree, since he's so concerned about the damages caused by the heat), and is reminded during his parting of many different things which may cause harm to this special orchard, "cut off by a hill from the house". In four negative sentences, the speaker states what he does not want to happen to the tree: he does not want it to be either threatened by rabbit, mouse, grouse, or transformed into browse. He also does not want it to be "stirred by the heat of the sun", and explains that the tree has to, above all, keep cold. He explains his necessity to go, but emphasizes the special place this orchard has in his mind. He wishes he could think about it every night, but concludes that this is the role of God. The poem, composed by anapestic tetrameter lines, seems to be

clear and plain, not involving temporal or spacial dislocations. In spite of that, the reader feels that some ungrammaticalities slightly threaten the representation of reality.

When we first read lines 9, 10, and 11, we feel that some linguistic signs are distorted in order to produce nonsense. It is certainly a nonsense to "summon" animals and warn them to stay away from a tree. By the same token, line 18 makes us uncomfortable, even though we are informed about the appropriate weather condition to the survival of the tree. "Keep Cold" is aggressive, without any apparent reason. Lines 27, 28, and 29 also seem to belong to another level of discourse, as if we are dealing with a much more serious subject.

In our hermeneutic reading many things which passed almost unnoticed become relevant to our decoding of the text. The first five lines already clarify that the context seems to be one of a parting related with death. The speaker says good-by "on the edge of the dark", which may mean both the proximity of night or the proximity of the darkness involving the dead person under the earth. Besides, the speaker says good-by to someone "so young" that he ends up remembering "all that can happen to harm" this person. This is obviously a peculiar feeling for those who experience the early death of a loved one. Like these people, the persona states what he fears to happen during the winter. Rabbit, mouse and grouse function here like representations (as in allegory) of all the signs which deal with destruction and decay. The dead person should not be confined, nibbled or budded under the earth. Only functioning as representations, these animals

can be summoned by the desperate speaker.

As the speaker shows his concern with the isolation of the dead one during the winter, he's also concerned with the "heat of the sun", and mentions that the place chosen for this body was on a "northerly slope". Now we understand why the next lines produce strangeness, even though they are perfectly coherent in a tree context: We usually think about people getting warm during the winter, and actually hope they can manage to do so. The wish of the speaker that this person may "keep cold" is aggressive to us before we decode the text in a death context. This shows that in our first reading we already decode the tree as a representation of a human being, although we are still not aware that this human being is actually dead. The speaker, then, talks about his business with "different trees", implying that his life will go on, that he will meet and relate with other people throughout his life. He also mentions the fact that he will be away for "a season or so", using the euphemism of the comparison between journey and death. The other trees are "less carefully nurtured" and less fruitful than this one. The speaker gave this person a special treatment in the past. If this speaker is a man (and literary tradition points out that he is), the dying person may be his Annabel Lee, whose heart sinks lower under the earth, although the persona of our text cannot be compared with the speaker in Poe's poem (364/365), since they develop different responses to the death of their beloved. But their devotion to their beloved in life was quite similar. The other trees that are contrasted with the orchard are not fruitful ones ("maples and birches and tamaracks"), and line 23

presents a suggestive open ended dash when talking about a man working in "their wood with an ax-". These signs seem to make clear the connection woman/orchard, which is strengthened by the speaker's macho wish to warn the animals "with a stick for a gun", protecting the rest of his beloved. It also justifies his wish to promise that he would think about her before going to sleep. But, of course, the speaker cannot do anything else but trust God, who will be responsible for her in the future.

In Riffaterrean terms, the text contains, from beginning to end, parts of the descriptive system around "death". We have sadness, we have the act of saying good-by, the dead person, the concerns (lamentations), the euphemism, and finally, the comfort of putting the dead one in the hands of God. The hypogram, thus, is a potential descriptive system. The matrix is obviously "death of a loved one", and the model is the allegorical relationship between woman and orchard. The ungrammaticalities are created through distorting (lines 9, 10, and 11), and displacing (in line 18, and from 27 to 29 we have the shift of meaning from orchard to woman). The poetic signs, since they belong to a potential hypogram, are classemes. The transformation from matrix to text occurs through expansion, since allegory is the predominant device in the poem.

Critics interpret this poem in different ways. George Nitchie, for example, considers it to be a poem which means merely that "one cannot always think about everything" (59), while William Moynihan sees it as a poem dealing with the "chilled dread of loss, or of the restrained devotion that

whelms up at a parting" (350). Richard Poirier is the one who comes closer to what I have shown, since he mentions the comparison between a dying orchard and a dying loved one (193). Although Poirier ends up considering the text as a "jocular and sly insider's view of God's justness" (195), he manages to decode appropriately the last five lines of the poem.

In my reading of the poem I would like to point to the connection between dead women and sexuality. It is a fact that women have been associated with death for a long time in our culture, beginning with Eve and the original sin. If sexual intercourse is a kind of temporary death, death and sex are intrinsically linked. So, culturally speaking, a dead lover represents the culmination of love, since love implies a strong desire to be one with the other. The linkage between eroticism and death is so strong that the death of a loved woman is a common literary motif in our culture. In this particular poem, the dead woman also represents the cultural association between woman, death and sex. Thus, the cultural sexual undertones also make "Good-bye and Keep Cold" a sensuous poem. The linkage between death and sexuality is also made stronger by the allegorical relationship woman/orchard. It is a fact that statements dealing with sexuality are often repressed and semantically indirect. The substitution of woman for orchard shows clearly that something must be said by indirection, indicating that what is really being said has something to do with cultural taboos. So, sexuality in this poem must be expressed through the allegorical association nature/female sexuality.

## NEVER AGAIN WOULD BIRDS' SONG BE THE SAME

He would declare and could himself believe  
That the birds there in all the garden round  
From having heard the daylong voice of Eve  
Had added to their own an oversound,  
Her tone of meaning but without the words.  
Admittedly an eloquence so soft  
Could only have had an influence on birds  
When call or laughter carried it aloft.  
Be that as may be, she was in their song.  
Moreover her voice upon their voices crossed  
Had now persisted in the woods so long  
That probably it never would be lost.  
Never again would birds' song be the same.  
And to do that to birds was why she came.

"Never Again Would Birds' Song Be The Same" also presents allegorical relationships between characters and elements of nature. A first reading of this English sonnet reveals that the text deals with the myth of the Garden of Eden. We also notice that a speaker talks about someone's opinion in which the birds of the garden were influenced by Eve's tone of meaning, and incorporated this influence in their song. At the end of the poem, we have the information that Eve actually came into the world to change the song of the birds. It is interesting that, although we are aware of the presence of a "He" whose belief is being described, we feel as if the speaker is actually stating his own opinion. There is no distance between speaker and he in the mind of the reader. It is also during this first reading that we raise some questions: Who is He? What is Eve's tone of meaning without the words? Is it possible for birds to add someone's song to their song?

In a second stage of reading we already notice that all ungrammaticalities are produced by a frustration of our

expectations; that is, the myth is not being told in its standard way. We have someone's opinion about a process which is supposed to have happened in the garden of Eden, but which we have never heard of. So, we have a typical case of semantic indirection produced by displacing and distorting. The first clue comes in lines 6, 7, and 8 when, through synesthesia, Eve's eloquence is described as "soft", achieving its apex when "call or laughter carried it aloft". It is clear that call or laughter here are related to a sexual experience: to the erotic encounter of Adam and Eve. This also explains Eve's "tone of meaning" without words, which would be an erotic intention. Their love is also being described in line 10 when we have the statement that "her voice upon their voices crossed". Although the alliteration in V may be alluding to the noise of the wind, this crossing of voices clearly points to the male/female encounter. At the end of the poem, the fact that Eve came into the world with the role of erotic initiation is emphasized clearly enough. "He" is not only Adam, but all men, and Eve could be described as all women. The whole poem is actually about the changes experienced with erotic initiation. After Eve, birds' songs won't be the same.

The matrix of the poem is, thus, erotic initiation. The hypogram (sex) is potential, actualized in semes such as "softness", "crossing", "call", and "laughter". These poetic signs are idiolects (observable in the context of the given text), the model is Eve's tone of meaning, and the text is generated by expansion, since the whole sonnet is an expansion of the sentence "erotic initiation". We also have allegory since birds and Adam

actually represent men, and Eve represents women. It is interesting to observe that the sememe "song" is only applied to "birds", never to Eve, although her eloquence is soft and her voice was incorporated into the birds' song. The word "song" seems to suggest the innocence that existed in birds before erotic initiation, and this explains the mark of resentment in the last line ("And to do that to birds was why she came"). When the voices crossed, the desires fused in the sexual act and, through erotic experience, nature was humanized. It was precisely because of this humanization, though, that nature was corrupted, losing its romantic qualities of purity and innocence. It is also interesting to observe that, although the persona tries to detach himself from Adam, he's also a man, knowing exactly what changes the presence of Eve brought to his own song. That is why it is so difficult for the reader to separate the speaker from Adam ("He"). As Dennis Vail points out, the poem is "obviously about love and the way it transforms one's awareness of everything" (57).

Although Robert Kern sees the poem as a "meditation on origins" (both linguistic and poetic), he emphasizes that Eve came into the world to humanize nature (16). Richard Wakefield brilliantly observes that Eve's tone of meaning may be related to the "sound of sense", and adds that this sound of sense is "something of which the man can be aware only by having known the woman" (195). Richard Poirier is, again, the one who best summarizes what we have seen in our decoding, concentrating his attention on the discovering of Adam and Eve, "whose intercourse included the call or laughter" (169). The poem is

brilliantly developed from a connection made by the narrator between the presence of female sexuality in erotic initiation and one aspect of nature (the birds' song). Through allegorical relationships between men, women and characters from the myth of the Garden of Eden, a male persona talks about the changes which are produced in the world by the erotic presence of the women.

#### UNHARVESTED

A scent of ripeness from over a wall.  
And come to leave the routine road  
And look for what had made me stall,  
There sure enough was an apple tree  
That had eased itself of its summer load,  
And of all but its trivial foliage free,  
Now breathed as light as a lady's fan.  
For there there had been an apple fall  
As complete as the apple had given man.  
The ground was one circle of solid red.

May something go always unharvested!  
May much stay out of our stated plan,  
Apples or something forgotten and left,  
So smelling their sweetness would be no theft.

References and images of the biblical Eden are also found in "Unharvested", which may be characterized as a text of successive surprises. At the mimesis level, a persona walking on a "routine road" feels a "scent of ripeness from over a wall". He stops and looks for the object of that smell and sees an apple tree which had eased itself of its apples and heavy foliage. He mentally compares the tree with a lady's fan because the tree seems to be very light, breathing free from all "but its trivial foliage". He sees many apples on the ground forming a

"circle of solid red", and mentions that this apple fall was so complete "as the apple had given man". He wishes that something may always go unharvested, as apples or some other fruit, so that people can smell their scent of ripeness without stealing it from someone.

The constant features that can be isolated from the multiplicity of mimesis are sememes that suggest the myth of the Biblical Eden (apple tree, apples, fall, theft), linked with some signs which suggest an erotic hypogram ("scent of ripeness, lady's fan, circle of solid red, sweetness). In the first three lines we have a persona who leaves a routine road, not because of an image or a scene, but because of an ephemeral "scent of ripeness". Something related to one of his senses suddenly makes him "stall" and look for where that odor comes from. Then we have an apple tree eased of its fruit, flowers and heavy foliage, breathing "as light as a lady's fan". This simile could have been made between tree and fan, but the word "lady" indicates that the presence of a woman (linked with an apple tree) is very important here. In the scene of our poem we also have an "apple fall", so complete "as the apple had given man". The word "complete" suggests total decay and a sense of wholeness related with the biblical fall. The speaker knows that because of an apple, human beings got acquainted with sex and death (the most important taboos in our culture, which are frequently associated with sin). In this scene we also have a "circle of solid red" on the ground (formed by the apples) which strongly reminds us of blood related with sex and death. The speaker does not want the apples. Someone did not want them

either. These apples are unharvested, forgotten on the ground to remind the speaker that his own erotic desire (note the words "scent", "lady", "solid red") must go unharvested too, remaining out of his stated plan. The speaker only smells their scent without taking the apples, inverting the logical structure of the myth. And he feels comfortable with the feeling that "smelling their sweetness is no theft".

The poem seems to talk about an unharvested erotic desire the speaker feels, which takes him out of his routine road. He does not have any purposes related to this desire, leaving it, like the apples on the ground, useless in practical terms. The "scent of ripeness" is the only visible and enjoyable part of it, and the speaker feels satisfied with this ephemeral odor. It is important to observe that there is no frustration in the speaker as he resists his sudden physical need. He seems happy to be away from sin (which is undoubtedly linked with sex here), and at the end of the poem, he states his wish that "may something always go unharvested", out of our "stated plan", so that we need not sin for it (the act of stealing is mythically related to sin). Thus, the matrix of our poem is "sexual resistance", actualized in many signs such as the act of leaving the routine road, the scent of ripeness without the taking of the apples, the unharvested fruit, and the circle of solid red. These signs belong to the actual hypogram "Garden of Eden", although the myth appears with its logical structure inverted. The transformation from matrix to text occurs through conversion, since all the features related to the garden of Eden have their

signs changed (from positive to negative and vice versa). Whereas in the myth an act of stealing is responsible for human fall, in our poem there is a resistance to stealing the apples. Since the matrix is "sexual resistance", the text presents the actualization of those signs of the hypogram which are coherent with this matrix. It is worth mentioning that we also have the potential hypogram "eroticism", responsible for our decoding of the speaker's sexual desire.

Although we do not have a direct association between woman and a specific part of nature, female sexuality is undoubtedly associated with the apples, the tree, and the scent of ripeness. Richard Poirier mentions the presence of the "seductiveness of an Eve" in the "lady's fan" comparison (261). Although Mordecai Marcus believes the main impetus of the poem is to demonstrate "how unplanned things have their own sweet radiance and warn us against the dangers of too much planning" (155), he mentions the sexual undertones, as well as the inversion of the biblical Eden, which are so outstanding in the text. These sexual elements are actually the matrix of the poem, actualized through the Garden of Eden hypogram.

#### THE TELEPHONE

"When I was just as far as I could walk  
From here today,  
There was an hour  
All still  
When leaning with my head against a flower  
I heard you talk.  
Don't say I didn't, for I heard you say -  
You spoke from that flower on the window sill -  
Do you remember what it was you said?"

"First tell me what it was you thought you heard."

"Having found the flower and driven a bee away,  
I leaned my head,  
And holding by the stalk,  
I listened and I thought I caught the word -  
What was it? Did you call me by my name?  
Or did you say -  
Someone said 'Come' - I heard it as I bowed."

"I may have thought as much, but not aloud."

"Well, so I came."

Another poem which presents strong sexual undertones is the apparently innocent "The Telephone". This short dialogue poem has often been considered by the critics as an example of a "we" poem, which combines, as Judith Oster states, "passion with domesticity" (109). Frank Lentricchia goes a little further and reads the poem in terms of the importance of the power of the will. In fact, it seems that the voice, as he says, "transforms a landscape in his desire to overcome isolation" (183). What we see in our first reading is a dialogue between two lovers, probably at the end of the day, when the speaker returns from a walk which began in the morning. We imagine the speaker as a man, perhaps because culturally, the woman is the one who waits at home while the man is away. The speaker tells his lover that at a certain point of his walk, there was an hour "all still", which may mean "at noon", as Laurence Perrine suggests (12) when he felt an intuition that his beloved wished him to come back to the place of his departure (here). He elaborates the story, saying that he drove a bee away from a flower and heard his beloved talking from it. He even adds

the information that she was talking from a flower at her window sill. He seems reluctant to give a precise account of what he heard, asking her if she can remember it. Since she returns the question to him, he says that "Someone said Come". Then, she agrees that she may have thought that, "but not aloud". He points out that that was the reason for his return, and the poem ends with an atmosphere of harmony and romanticism. But the whole poem is obviously inconsistent with verissimilitude, since it is built upon a fiction created by the man. He plays with his fantasy, making two flowers operate like telephones, through which he hears what he wishes.

In our retroactive reading we become more suspicious with the dramatic interplay between the lovers. The five dashes of uncertainty and the only two lines attributed to the woman suddenly become more relevant, threatening the harmonious atmosphere of the mimesis. We clearly have a speaker and a desire. We also have a strategy for a desire to come true. The speaker walks alone, thinks about his lover and goes back to where she is. But he wants his wish to be felt also by his beloved. In a way, we can feel he carries his discourse with a certain aggressiveness when he tries to induce his lover to take the role he designed for her. When he first says that he heard her, he immediately orders: "Don't say I didn't, for I heard you say -". Thinking that she understood, he says from where she spoke and asks her if she can remember the words. She obviously can't, she doesn't know yet what he is talking about. Then, he describes his acts of leaning his head, driving a bee away, and holding the flower by the stalk. These signs suggest

his latent sexual desire, since he leans his head to the flower (with all its attributes of softness, delicacy, fragrance, etc.), he holds it by the stalk (by its body), and drives a bee away (which was enjoying the sweetness of the flower). His wish is clearly a sexual one, and he tries to put it into practice in a most convincing way: He romanticizes it, transforming it into a language in which she will respond. But he is not sure of what would be the best message, and tries to figure it out by her reactions. First, he simply asks her what it was; then, he asks her if she called his name; finally, he decides for a simple and meaningful message: "Come". But he plays with his beloved saying that "Someone said Come". If she denies it she will have to admit that she has a rival in love. Her agreement, thus, is a very weak one: "I may have thought as much, but not aloud". Wouldn't it be simpler for her to say "Yes"? It seems she has to agree with him, but is not willing to. Yes, she may have thought it, but not for herself. Thus, "The Telephone" is a much more intriguing poem than it seems. The dramatic interplay shows evidence of sexual induction, instead of being a romantic and playful fantasy. In semiotic terms, the matrix of the poem is "sexual desire", actualized by signs such as the flower (the model), followed by the bee, the stalk, and finally clarified by the message "Come". All signs belong to the hypogram "sex", and this hypogram is the cliché associations flower/woman, bee/man, stalk/body. The cliché hypogram is potential and the poetic signs are classemes. The poem is generated by expansion, since we have the transformation of the matrix into many signs throughout the

text. It is relevant to observe that the title, instead of introducing a text about the telephone, introduces a text in which one human being (the man) tries to communicate with another (the woman), which is associated with a flower. In this sense, the flower may be a telephone, since it was the object which made the linkage in the mind of the speaker.

Lawrence Ferrine would not agree with this reading, considering the poem a "love poem", regardless of the absence of the conventional strategies of love poetry (praise of the beloved, kisses, promises, etc.). He also explains the connection flower/telephone by stating that "early telephones were comparable in shape to daffodils" (i2). On the other hand, Mordecai Marcus observes that a possible tension between the lovers is implied throughout the poem (69). After our structural decoding we cannot fail to see the subtle undertones of sexual desire guiding "The Telephone", since we have again the association woman/flower, which is developed here into bee/man, and stalk/body. Eroticism is highly present in the text, making it one more example of association between a component of nature and female sexuality.

All these five poems develop the same pattern: through an association of a part of nature with female sexuality, the personas describe a desire, a comment, a comparison or a wish. In "The Rose Family" we have female sexuality linked with a rose, in "Good-bye and Keep Cold" the linkage is woman/orchard; in "Never Again Would Birds' Song Be The Same", female sexuality is linked with the change in the birds' song; in "Unharvested", a strong association is made between woman and apple tree; and in

"The Telephone" there is a subtle link between a flower (the telephone) and a woman. The basic difference between these texts and the next ones lies in the fact that, although the male persona expresses his wishes and desires in these five poems, he does not project them into nature. What he does is a mere association between what he sees and female sensuality. In the next texts, as we will see, the persona will see nature and will project his own desires onto the scene, regardless of the female presence.

#### MOON COMPASSES

I stole forth dimly in the dripping pause  
Between two downpours to see what there was.  
And a masked moon had spread down compass rays  
To a cone mountain in the midnight haze,  
As if the final estimate were hers;  
And as it measured in her calipers,  
The mountain stood exalted in its place.  
So love will take between the hands a face....

In "Moon Compasses" a speaker stops in a dripping pause "between two downpours", at midnight, and sees the moon spreading "compass rays" to a mountain, exalting it by the light of the rays. The speaker observes that the rays have the exact diameter of the mountain, as if the moon itself were a caliper. He compares this exaltation through rays to the exaltation of a beloved's face between the hands of the subject who loves it. We also notice that both the title and the mention of "compass rays" remind us of John Donne's compass image in "A Valediction Forbidding Mourning,"

making the title function like a dual sign, since it points to where significance may be found. Although the mimesis of the poem presents many details and shifts, we perceive, in our retroactive reading, a constant sign in the variation.

The first thing we notice is that the moon and the first two lines present a speaker located in a dripping pause, between two downpours (the rays), being himself exalted in his place. Then we have the image of the mountain illuminated by the moon, and then a face illuminated by two hands. The downpours, the light of the moon and the hands work like compasses, since they surround an object, like a cone, with their rays. Another interesting detail is mentioned in line 6, when the speaker imagines the moon measuring the mountain like a caliper. This brings another instrument to the context, which somehow contrasts with the compass. The caliper basically measures the distances between surfaces or the thickness of objects, whereas compasses work with circularity. It seems that in "Moon Compasses" the compass is mentioned because of its form when its legs are partially open, reminding us of a cone; and not because of its basic function. The caliper, on the other hand, is the instrument whose function is appropriate in the poem. The size of the rays in the three images appear as if they were measured by a caliper in the haze of the night. It seems that, although both Donne's "A Valediction Forbidding Mourning" and Frost's "Moon Compasses" work with measuring instruments, they develop different ideas about love.

In Donne's text, the concept of circularity is used to illustrate the roles of two persons who live a "refined love".

The woman does not seem to move (she is the fixed foot), but moves a little when the man moves (he is the other foot of the compass). The firmness of the woman, as in the compass, makes the man complete a circle, ending where he begins. So, their refined love does not fear absence and separation. Their souls are one, and they do not need to miss "eyes, lips and hands". The lovers do not care if they are apart, because their love is not made of sensory pleasures. Their spiritual love makes them stand physical separation, and their souls work united in a compass of love (91).

In "Moon Compasses", on the other hand, we see a love in terms of two hands which touch a face. Like a caliper, these two hands measure the extension and width of the face, while exalting it, in the same way the moon and the downpours measure the extension of the mountain and of the speaker. Love in this text is visibly physical, it does not exist in separation, and it is epitomized "at midnight", when the two lovers embrace each other. We can decode, then, the ellipsis at the end of the poem as a continuation of the parts of the body, and the word "face" as a synecdochic word for the whole body. "So love will take between the hands a face", an arm, a body. And here is where the matrix is decoded. The text is really about "sensuous love", and the matrix is actualized in many poetic signs: downpours/speaker, moon/mountain, hands/face. These signs are idiolects (they are meaningful just in the context of the text) and they all belong to the hypogram "compass rays", which is actual (the compass is observable in Donne's text). The hypogram is formed by

its presuppositions, since rays presuppose a sender (downpours, hands, moon) and a receiver (speaker, mountain, beloved). The model is the pair speaker/downpours and the transformation from matrix to text occurs through expansion, since we have a group of images which culminate in the main one, which is face/hands. And what would be, thus, the role of Donne's text in our poem? It seems it is the one of providing an illustration of the different roles of the compass images in the poems. The title "Moon Compasses" is a dual title because it explains, in a different way, the place of the significance of its own poem through the location of the compass in Donne's text. In "Sub Rosa: Frost's Five-Petaled Flower" R. F. Fleissner argues that Frost obliquely appropriated Donne's image in his poem (209). Roger Slakey disagrees with Fleissner, and ridicules his statement that the final ellipsis would stand for "as with Donne". For Slakey, the speaker moves through three stages: from a mere observer of a scene, to the perception through metaphor of the rays transforming the scene, and finally, to the perception of "the transfiguring power of love" (23). Mordecai Marcus sees the speaker, "possibly after having made love", seeing the moon and the mountain, which may "connote the bestowal of worshipful status of a female figure by a dominating male one" (15i).

Our decoding of the text shows that many important signs passed unnoticed to the critics. Frost's poem is totally different from Donne's in terms of different attitudes about sensuous love. In "A Valediction Forbidding Mourning", sensuality is partially neglected through the

glorification of spiritual love. "Moon Compasses" shows a speaker who sees in two images of nature an analogy with sensuous love. It is worth noticing that the matrix is actualized in three variants (the three images). At the prosodic level, the poem is also built with three rhyme groups. What the speaker basically does in this text is to project his concept of true love into two ephemeral images of nature, demonstrating the importance of sensory pleasures in this particular point of his life.

#### GHOST HOUSE

I dwell in a lonely house I know  
That vanished many a summer ago,  
And left no trace but the cellar walls,  
And a cellar in which the daylight falls,  
And the purple-stemmed wild raspberries grow.

O'er ruined fences the grapevines shield  
The woods come back to the mowing field;  
The orchard tree has grown one copse  
Of new wood and old where the woodpecker chops;  
The footpath to the well is healed.

I dwell with a strangely aching heart  
In that vanished abode there far apart  
On that disused and forgotten road  
That has no dust-bath now for the toad.  
Night comes; the black bats tumble and dart;

The whippoorwill is coming to shout  
And hush and cluck and flutter about:  
I hear him begin far enough away  
Full many a time to say his say  
Before he arrives to say it out.

It is under the small, dim, summer star.  
I know not who these mute folk are  
Who share the unlit place with me \_  
Those stones out under the low-limbed tree  
Doubtless bear names that the mosses mar.

They are tireless folk, but slow and sad,  
Though two, close-keeping, are lass and lad, \_  
With none among them that ever sings,  
And yet, in view of how many things,

As sweet companions as might me had.

"Ghost House" is a poem which strikes us for its rich imagery and simple diction. The mimesis level presents a persona dwelling in "a lonely house" that doesn't exist anymore. It disappeared in a certain summer, and the cellar walls are the only remaining part of it. The persona comments that the daylight falls and the wild purple raspberries grow in it. We are also informed that grapevines grow over the "ruined fences", the woods are all over the place, the orchard tree grew one copse, the woodpecker chops, and the footpath to the well is restored. It seems that this context is not the most appropriate for a ghost house. Flowers, trees and birds are acting as if they are enjoying a beautiful spring day. In the next two stanzas we have the presence of a "forgotten road", black bats and of a whippoorwill, but even these characters belong to a context of life and movement, since they are predominantly performing acts such a tumbling, darting, hushing, clucking and fluttering about. It is only in the fifth stanza that we get to know that "mute folk" share the place with the speaker. They are described as "tireless folk, but slow and sad", and although the speaker cannot read their names, he assumes they are a man and a woman, viewing the so many sweet companions they had in life.

The first thing we realize in our hermeneutic reading is that the rich imagery actually serves to provide a contrast to the elements which embody a ghost atmosphere. The birds, flowers, plants, the daylight, the star (although it is dim, it is a summer star), and the restored footpath to the well

all belong to a context of life, harmony, synchronism and fertility, and they contrast with the speaker and the mute folk, who are in a context of death, stagnation and decay. It is interesting that the speaker is the true ghost, since he represents a state of complete stagnation. Whereas all the other elements are moving and fertilizing, the speaker dwells in the ghost house "with a strangely aching heart". His solitude is such that he even projects his desire, supposing that the mute folk are a man and a woman, "close-keeping" under the earth (the lass and the lad are visible even at the prosodic level of the poem, since each stanza is composed by two intercalated rhyme groups). His desire is obviously a sexual one, since this desire is the one to integrate himself in the context of fertility his surrounding represents. At this point, the hypogram of stagnation to which the speaker and the mute folk belong is perfectly visible. They are the only constant features of the ghost house among the changing multiple details of the mimesis level. This potential hypogram is composed of semes and presuppositions, since decay, sadness, death and slowness are semes of the stagnation sememe. Besides this hypogram, we have two important details that lead us to conclude that this stagnation is related with absence of sex: First, we have the fact that the way to the well (with its implications of renewal) is restored; then, we have the supposition that the dead people are man and woman. The speaker is a ghost because he is not experiencing one aspect of his masculinity: he is not living his sexuality, he is not fertilizing like the other elements of nature. The matrix, thus, is the desire for fertility the speaker projects onto the scene.

The matrix is transformed into text through expansion, which transforms the matrix signs into several semiotic signs in the text. The model is the first line of the poem, which presents the persona living in a lonely house.

Mordecai Marcus sees the speaker projecting himself onto a distant scene, probably retrieved by memory. He says that the scene is permeated with grief, fertility and evanescence, and considers the lass and lad as representations of the speaker and his lover as they were not very long ago, before experience brought friction" (23). Since we do not have textual elements confirming the statements above, it is better to restrict ourselves to the textual evidences pointed out in our decoding. Richard Wakefield says that the poem is about "the movement of nature to reclaim an abandoned house" (152), and he mentions the fact that the speaker imbues the dead people with presence, supposing that "they are capable of sexual love"(152). For Wakefield, the poem presents human death counterpoised with nature's vitality. Although his reading of the poem is based on close observation of textual signs, he fails to give a precise account of the semiotic structures of the poem. "Ghost House", like "Moon Compasses", presents a projection of the speaker's desire onto a scene full of nature elements. In this particular poem, this desire is a desire for fertility which may be fulfilled by sexuality.

#### TO EARTHWARD

Love at the lips was touch

As sweet as I could bear;  
And once that seemed too much;  
I lived on air

That crossed me from sweet things  
The flow of \_ was it musk  
From hidden grapevine springs  
Down hill at dusk?

I had the swirl and ache  
From springs of honeysuckle  
That when they're gathered shake  
Dew on the knuckle.

I craved strong sweets, but those  
Seemed strong when I was young;  
The petal of the rose  
It was that stung.

Now no joy but lacks salt  
That is not dashed with pain  
And weariness and fault;  
I craved the stain

Of tears, the aftermark  
Of almost too much love,  
The sweet of bitter bark  
And burning clove.

When stiff and sore and scarred  
I take away my hand  
From leaning on it hard  
In grass and sand,

The hurt is not enough:  
I long for weight and strength  
To feel the earth as rough  
To all my length.

Frost's comment that "everything is a gamble, a texture of purposes" (1960 Lecture, Harvard University) is quite appropriate to describe the plurality of images and turbulent rhythm of "To Earthward". In fact, the text has been defined by the critics as one of the most emotional of Frost's poems. At first sight, the rich multiplicity of mimesis makes the poem look like a reservoir of purposes, a literary gamble between text and reader. We see the mimesis presenting a speaker

(probably an old one) looking back and analyzing the changes time has produced in his personal taste. When he was young, he enjoyed the sweetness of a kiss ("Love at the lips"), the musk of grapevine springs, the sprays of honeysuckle, and the petal of the rose. The first four stanzas deal entirely with his early preferences, and it is only in the fifth stanza that we are informed that "Now no joy but lacks salt / That is not dashed with pain". The poem might be divided in two parts, since the first half (the first four stanzas) focuses on the sweetness of the speaker's life and the second half (the last four stanzas) on the presence of bitterness, which transformed sweetness into bittersweet. Now the speaker craves "the stain / Of tears", and seeks the mixture of pleasure and pain when he leans his hand in grass or sand in an earthward movement. The most striking feature of the mimesis, thus, is the constant contrast between sweet and bitter, which achieves its apex in the oximoron "The sweet of bitter bark". We also notice in our first reading that in each stanza the first three lines are Iambic trimeter lines and the last one is an Iambic dimeter line. The rhyme scheme is also regular, presenting the pattern ABAB, CDCD, EFEF... until the last stanza OPOP. We also have a series of alliterations such as "Love at the lips", "Down hill at dusk", "strong sweets", "Seemed strong", "bitter bark", and "stiff and sore and scarred", which make the reader feel the strong musicality of the text. The whole text is harmonious and surprising for its rich imagery. We also notice that the title describes the movement from sweet to bitter in the speaker's life, which culminates in the last stanza

when the speaker states that he longs "for weight and strength" to feel the earth (earth contrasts with the statement "I lived on air"). He performs an earthward movement in the sense that, changing his preference from sweet pleasures to bitter pleasures, he seems to be nearer the earth.

The basic decodification which takes place in our retroactive reading is the observation that this earthward movement is not happening in a generalized way. It is a movement that happens in one field of the speaker's life. We notice that the first half of the poem begins with the word "Love" and in the second half (stanza 6) the speaker mentions again the word "Love", explaining that now he seeks the tears, which are the aftermark "Of almost too much love". The earthward movement clearly presents a change in his way of facing love. In the beginning of the poem "Love at the lips was touch" as sweet as he could bear. This "Love at the lips" (a love expressed through the senses) was the sweetness, the strong sweets he craved in his boyhood. He lived the sensuous pleasures of his sexuality entirely for their sweetness (the musk of grapevine springs, the sprays of honeysuckle, the kiss, the petal of the rose). Then, he began to enjoy the pleasures dashed with pain, with their "sweet of bitter bark". We notice that, among the multiplicity of images on the mimesis level, the words "Love", "sweet" and the nouns which belong to the "bitter" hypogram (pain, weariness, fault, stain, tears, bitter bark, clove, sore, hurt, rough) are the recurrent signs of the text. We also notice that we are dealing with two basic hypograms: bitter (presented above) and sweet (kiss, grapevine springs, sprays of honeysuckle, the petal of the

rose), which are fused to describe the evolution of the speaker's love. This love, which was primarily a sensuous one, is now transformed into a desire for being one with the other. The speaker experiences a movement toward the earth, he wants to feel it to all his length. The last stanza clearly talks about death, which is the last stage in the development of the speaker's sexuality. He seeks different kinds of sensuous pleasures throughout the text (notice that all linguistic signs lead us to a context of sensuous love) and this evolution ends up with the "sweet of bitter bark" of death. The matrix of the text is the title itself or a more specific one: "Toward death". The potential hypograms "Sweet" and "Bitter" (or Pleasure and Pain) are actualized in their semes and presuppositions, and the transformation of matrix to text is made through expansion, since the matrix is literally expanded into multiple images until its apex in the last stanza.

John Robert Doyle Jr. mentions in *The Poetry of Robert Frost: An Analysis* that the first half of the poem presents "breathless young love" whereas "maturity" characterizes the second half (177). He also mentions that the speaker presents "physical aspects of love" (180) and affirms that the poem seems to say that "so pure and intense a love is generated by genuine and full living that embraces all experience, even if it has to be viewed through wet eyes" (181). Mordecai Marcus says that the poem "hovers between sensuous presentation and metaphorical resonances" (108) and that "the speaker's desire to have his body fully pressed against the earth suggests an experience so intense

that it may be a promise of complete fulfillment in death" (109). On the other hand, Lawrence Thompson says that the text shows the "close bond between human love and the transference of that love to beauty in nature" (Eire and Ice: The Art and Thought of Robert Frost, 185). Louis Untermeyer sees "a less physical and almost unearthly passion" speaking in "To Earthward" (159) and Donald Sheehy links the experience of the lover with the development of the poet (219). As I have said, the text is undoubtedly so intense that it seems a reservoir of meanings. Even after our decoding, the mimesis still tends to lead us in a different direction, although we are aware that, in the circuitous sequence of semiosis, a speaker talks about his desire for the culmination of his love, performing a movement toward death. In this sense, the speaker projects his desire onto nature, using elements of the natural world to illustrate different phases of his sexuality.

#### A DREAM PANG

I had withdrawn in forest, and my song  
Was swallowed up in leaves that blew away;  
And to the forest edge you came one day  
(This was my dream) and looked and pondered long,  
But did not enter, though the wish was strong:  
You shook your pensive head as who would say,  
"I dare not \_ too far in his footsteps stray \_  
He must seek me would he undo the wrong."

Not far, but near, I stood and saw it all,  
Behind low boughs the trees let down outside;  
And the sweet pang it cost me not to call  
And tell you that I saw does still abide.  
But 'tis not true and thus I dwell aloof,  
For the wood wakes, and you are here for proof.

In "A Dream Pang" the basic conflict of death as

culmination of sexual love is much the same. The hybrid sonnet (a mixture of Italian and English) presents a narrative structure in which a persona describes a dream when he withdraws into a forest and is followed by his beloved. The beloved, though, comes as far as the edge of the forest and does not enter. The speaker, as an omniscient narrator, says that although her wish to enter is strong, she decides not to go far in his footsteps, since he is wrong in going away from her. The speaker, hidden "Behind low boughs" sees the whole scene and feels an intense wish to call her, but decides not to do that, feeling a "sweet pang". He concludes the text saying that the incident was not very significant since they are together as the morning rises.

Our retroactive reading is marked by the title "A Dream Pang" which functions like an interpretant (dual title), pointing to a context of dream, where the significance of the poem may be found. In the language of dreams, language is intrinsically symbolic, as it is in Frost's canon. Many critics (Frank Lentricchia, for example), directed their attention towards the poetic landscapes considered as recurrent symbols in Frost's work, notably exploiting the functions of the brook, the house, the flowers, the birds and the woods. According to Lentricchia the act of going into the woods (the opening scene in our text) is an act of going "deeper and deeper into a limitless world" (87). More than an Emersonian encounter with the self, the woods are to Lentricchia, "a metaphor of the irrational" which sometimes radiates "the destructive urges of self"(88). We are immediately reminded of poems such as "Stopping by Woods on a

Snowy Evening" or "The Demiurge's Laugh" in which the persona either refuses to enter into the woods and is saved or encounters a powerful evil force deep into them. In "A Dream Fang" the woods also symbolize the "destructive urges of self" in the sense that it represents the speaker's desire for a complete fusion with the beloved, which would only be possible through death. The lovers are in bed, and the speaker dreams that he goes away from her, entering the woods. It is interesting that we see this entrance as a positive act, as Dennis Vail observes:

The odd phrase "in forest", with no article, suggests a universal category rather than a locatable object(. . .). The feeling is reinforced by the speaker's failure to say that he has "withdrawn" from (the implication is "from everything else"). This puts the emphasis on what he has withdrawn to, and the act of withdrawal is made to look forward, rather than backward, and so given its own positive value. (61)

The first two lines by Dennis Vail obviously relate to the fact that the woods function symbolically in the poem, representing a state of "not me", of "absence of self" which could happen in death. This justifies the feeling of progress the withdrawal arises in the reader, since death means both a diminishment of self and the culmination of the fusion with the other. When the speaker enters the woods his song is "swallowed up in leaves" and blows away (death is absence of voice). Then, his beloved goes to the edge of the woods, wondering if she should follow his footsteps or not. The speaker seems to be extremely concerned with her hesitation, since "she" was the only reason for his act of losing himself. He knows she decides not to enter into the woods because he is wrong and he must go back to

where she is (in a dream context his omniscience is complete, allowing him to decode her signs). He sees it all and feels a "sweet pang" because he doesn't call her, which means both the pang of not fusing completely with her, and the sweetness of the continuation of their human sexuality. He says that he did not dwell aloof because when the "wood wakes", she is with him, in bed, proving that although they did not achieve total union, they are still united in their human condition. His dream was, thus, characterized by many symbols which suggest the confrontation life/death or self/self and other (note the oppositions beloved/speaker, song/silence, forest edge/forest, reality/dream). The potential hypogram life/death (a hypogram of symbols) represents the speaker and his beloved deciding whether they should remain in their natural solitude of two different human beings or seek the fusion and culmination of love in death. Since the speaker's only solution (after his lover's refusal to enter the woods) is the reverse of the withdrawal, the matrix of the poem is something like "impossibility of a total union through sex" or "total union in death". In their human condition the characters can only experience the "Unknowable" that Roland Barthes defines in *A Lover's Discourse*:

I am caught in this contradiction: on the one hand, I believe I know the other better than anyone and triumphantly assert my knowledge to the other ("I know you \_ I'm the only one who really knows you!"); and on the other hand, I am often struck by the obvious fact that the other is impenetrable, intractable, not to be found; I cannot open up the other, trace back the other's origins, solve the riddle. Where does the other come from? Who is the other? I wear myself out, I

shall never know. (i34)

The matrix "total union in death" is transformed into text by expansion, and many symbols function like complex representations of human values.

Although the symbolic reading of a recurrent image in Frost's poetry should make our decoding of the text easier, critics in general read "A Dream Pang" in terms of separation in the woods rather than on the contrary. Richard Wakefield, for example, mentions the speaker struggling "to find the right distance from his lover, the range at which he can be involved but not subsumed" (49). Dennis Vail ends up considering that the speaker "pictures a state of separation as only something dreamed, something that might happen . . . and yet, a very real threat (62). George Nitchie peculiarly sees the poem as a remote echo of Adam's and Eve's brief separation immediately before the fall" (77), whereas Richard Poirier exploits the connections between sexual love and poetic making (64). The basic problem, it seems, is the confusion between separation in and outside the woods. When the lovers are outside, they experience the limited union of sex; when they are in the woods, they may be one in a mixture of self and other, although they have to give up their human lives to feel the "destructive urges of self".

#### WAITING - AFIELD AT DUSK

What things for dream there are when specter-like,  
Moving along tall haycocks lightly piled,  
I enter alone upon the stubble field,  
From which the laborers' voices late have died,

And in the antiphony of afterglow  
And rising full moon, sit me down  
Upon the full moon's side of the first haycock  
And lose myself amid so many alike.

I dream upon the opposing lights of the hour,  
Preventing shadow until the moon prevail;  
I dream upon the nighthawks peopling heaven,  
Each circling each with vague unearthly cry,  
Or plunging headlong with fierce twang afar;  
And on the bat's mute antics, who would seem  
Dimly to have made out my secret place,  
Only to lose it when he pirouettes,  
And seek it endlessly with purblind haste;  
On the last swallow's sweep; and on the rasp  
In the abyss of odor and rustle at my back,  
That, silenced by my advent, finds once more,  
After an interval, his instrument,  
And tries once \_ twice \_ and thrice if I be there;  
And on the worn book of old-golden song  
I brought not here to read, it seems, but hold  
And freshen in this air of withering sweetness;  
But on the memory of one absent most,  
For whom these lines when they shall greet her eye.

We also deal with a context of dream in "Waiting -  
Afield at Dusk", when a speaker waits for the girl he loves, and  
dreams about sounds and lights in a mowing field. The poem begins  
when the persona ("specter-like") walks among piles of haycock  
and enters into a stubble field, considering that the laborers'  
voices "late have died". The stubble and the absence of the  
laborers' voices emphasize that the speaker is in a place of work  
(a daily place) at night, which lead us to conclude that his  
reason for being there is not a practical one. He mentions the  
"antiphony" of darkness and light of afterglow and rising full  
moon, and sits among haycocks all alike, losing himself in the  
scene. This fusion with the scene or with the natural world may  
be an indication of the dream context, since the speaker's  
language and actions are symbolic. Then he dreams about "the

opposing lights of the hour / Preventing shadow until the moon prevail", and lists many sounds and beings which, in his dream, people the natural scenery. He dreams of the nighthawks with their "unearthly cry", and their movement of "plunging headlong with fierce twang afar"; of the bat's "mute antics" and their purblind pirouettes; of the swallow's sweep; and of the rasp and its alternance of sound and silence. Finally, he mentions his dream of "the worn book of old-golden song" that he brought there to freshen it in the "withering sweetness" of the air, and his most important dream, the dream of the "memory of the one absent" for whom he dedicates the lines of his own poem.

In a second stage of reading we become aware of certain elements that, in the symbology of dream, compose the unity of a hypogram. First we have a daily place in a night context; then, the "antiphony of afterglow" which is an antiphony of the opposition sun/moon (which symbolically represents the male and the female elements); and finally, among the many beings and sounds, we have an emphasis on the dream of his absent beloved. The fact that the speaker mentions a worn book of an "old-golden song" which he intends to freshen in that sweet air of the natural world is also important, since it suggests a proximity of poetic sound with natural sound. What these elements suggest is not only a hypogram of "Waiting" (as the title of the poem also points out), but a hypogram of "erotic waiting". All the symbols mentioned above carry an erotic implication of place, atmosphere and action. The desert mowing field at night seems an appropriate place for an erotic encounter. The image of the antiphony between sun and moon has a strong impact on the reader

in terms of the encounter between the male and the female. He certainly waits for his beloved (the rising full moon), but waits for her with a book of poetry (a worn book) which will be freshened with natural sounds. His love is very earthly and sensual, and he refuses the platonic love suggested by the old book of poetry. The matrix of the poem is "Waiting for his lover" and the hypogram "erotic waiting" is formed by symbols which work in the dream context of the poem. The first actualization of the matrix is the mention of the place (the stubble field) and the matrix is transformed into text by expansion, since we are dealing with symbols and their complex representations.

"Waiting" is not read with its peculiar characteristics by the critics. Richard Wakefield is one who sees the poem as a possibility of conciliation between two separate lovers in which it is "the man's desire to return and explain that/ gives rise to poetry" (192/193). Mordecai Marcus talks about "the only blank-verse poem in *A Boy's Will*", saying that the speaker "dreams most on the absent beloved, for she could fulfill or at least share the dreams in which he indulges in her absence" (29). Although Marcus does not explain his statement, he affirms that the book of old-golden song is Frances Palgrave's *Golden Treasure* (29). Richard Poirier is the only one who emphasizes the dream context (although he does not decode the symbols of the dream) mentioning that the book of poems is an "allusion to poetic sound" among the natural sounds of the scenery, which is emphasized by the speaker (66). "Waiting" is a rich text precisely because of its symbology of eroticism,

which needs to be decoded in the dream context of the poem. As "A Dream Fang", the poem is also a projection, since the speaker dreams of an erotic waiting for his beloved, using elements of nature as symbols to express his sexuality.

#### RELUCTANCE

Out through the fields and the woods  
And over the walls I have wended;  
I have climbed the hills of view  
And looked at the world, and descended;  
I have come by the highway home,  
And lo, it is ended.

The leaves are all dead on the ground,  
Save those that the oak is keeping  
To ravel them one by one  
And let them go scraping and creeping  
Out over the crusted snow,  
When others are sleeping.

And the dead leaves lie huddled and still  
No longer blown hither and thither;  
The last lone aster is gone;  
The flowers of the witch-hazel wither,  
The heart is still aching to seek,  
But the feet question "Whither?"

Ah, when to the heart of man  
Was it ever less than a treason  
To go with the drift of things,  
To yield with a grace to reason,  
And bow and accept the end  
Of a love or a season?

"Reluctance", the concluding poem of *A Boy's Will*, is remarkably musical. According to Elaine Barry, the speaker is a "youthful romantic" in the traditional manner, and that's why he sings instead of talking (22). This explains, to Barry, the archaic diction ("I have wended", "Ah, when", "Lo", etc.) (23), as well as the traditional images and the regularity of the rhymes. The poem, mainly composed by anapestic lines, presents in

each stanza five lines with three beats and the last line with two beats. At the mimesis level, this romantic speaker describes the end of a journey, mentioning that he walked through fields, woods, over walls, climbed "the hills of view", looked at the world "and descended". When he goes home, "it is ended". This "it" is immediately connected with the imagery of the next stanza. He describes the leaves on the ground ("Save those that the oak is keeping" and which will disturb the sleep of the others in their time to fall), the crusted snow of winter, the last aster that is gone, and the withered flowers of the witch-hazel. In the last stanza, the speaker says that it is a treason to the heart to accept with grace the end of "a love or a season". In the first stage of reading, it seems that the poem combines theme with prosody in the sense that each stanza (with its final line of two beats) presents a shortening in the same way the speaker talks about the end of a season of warmth and vitality. It is only in the last line that another context is introduced with the word "Love", expanding our comprehension of the text. The word is introduced casually, almost imperceptibly, as a simple illustration the speaker makes. In spite of that, we immediately feel that its importance is much greater in semiotic terms.

With this new level of discourse unveiled, we start reading the text as a double-leveled construction that talks, on the mimesis level, about the end of a season; and on the semiotic level, about the end of a love. Considering that a human problem was brought up to the context, the first stanza talks about

movements made in a state of love. The speaker walked through fields, woods, and climbed walls achieving "the hills of view" of humanity. He looked at the world with loving eyes but "descended". Now, "it is ended". We note that the "it" mentioned in our first reading referred to something not clearly specified by the speaker. Now we can decode it as if it refers both to an ended season and an ended love. All the images presented in the next two stanzas suggest the end of fertility (absence of flowers, dead leaves) and the image of "crusted snow" suggests, according to Dennis Vail, "a congealed impenetrability that cuts off contact with the earth, the source of life" (76). All these signs obviously belong to a hypogram of "fertility", although they appear with permutation of markers; that is, each sign of fertility appears with a minus sign ("dead" leaves, "crusted" snow, the lone aster "is gone", and the flowers "wither"). This potential hypogram is the cliché association between fertility in nature and human fertility. Now, in the last stanza, the speaker concludes that it is a treason to "go with the drift of things" and to accept the end of a love or of a season. The matrix of the poem may be the title itself ("Reluctance") or the more specific one ("Reluctance in accepting the end of a sexual activity"). It is important to observe that the end of a love is described in terms of lack of fertility and not in terms of the speaker missing his beloved as a particular special person. The model is the fall metaphor in which the speaker shows his reluctance to accept the end of summer. The transformation of matrix into text is made by expansion combined with conversion, since we have a succession of images of fertility converted with

a minus sign.

Dennis Vail is the only critic who talks about the erotic dimension the word love brings to the poem (76), although Elaine Barry says that "the real emotional pivot of the poem is not the end of a season at all but the end of a love" (24). Mordecai Marcus says that the scene and the actions "represent human relations as well as feelings for nature", (39) and John Doyle Jr. sees the text as a "quiet dramatization of man's unwillingness to accept that which is" (66). Lawrence Thompson sees the main focus of the poem the analogy between "the futility of trying to revive a dead fall or a dead love" (*Eire and Ice: The Art and Thought of Robert Frost*, 103). George Nitchie, on the other hand, affirms that the poem suggests "the departure from paradise" (77). As we can see, the mimesis level of "Reluctance" suggests different readings, and it is only by following the circuitous sequence of semiosis that we can apprehend the two levels of poetic discourse.

"Reluctance" closes the second group of lyrics of this chapter, since it also represents a projection of the speaker's sexuality into nature. As in the early poems, nature functions like a screen in which the speaker's sexual desires are designed. In "Moon Compasses" nature illustrates the presence of sensuous love in the speaker's life. In "Ghost House" natural elements provide the speaker with a contrast of life and fertility. In "To Earthward" the speaker talks about the changes time produced in his way of facing love; and in "A Dream Pang" and "Waiting" speakers project in dreams sensuous desires

in relation to their lovers, using nature as their metaphorical source. All these poems, fusing the simple and the subtle, show sexual undertones which have been decoded through the awareness of what texts say by "indirection", which is the basic principle we have to consider when we analyze the game of poetic language.

## CHAPTER III

### EROTIC INVITATIONS AND EXPERIENCES

Much more intriguing and intense than the poems about erotic associations and projections are the ones which deal with eroticism in terms of invitations and experiences. They are usually so simple and direct that we end up thinking that eroticism was an obvious concern in Frost's poetry, and the few studies on the subject show us how difficult it is to change the stereotyped image of Frost as a nature poet. Frost's apparent realism is so strong that, even though his literary production is full of images concerning human love and human sexuality, his poems were often read with the main focus on nature and its synecdochic implications to some of human beings' psychological problems. But as the analyses of the last two groups of "nature lyrics" will show, as soon as we unveil the subtle movements from mimesis to semiosis we realize how richer and more complex Frost's lyrics may be.

The first group of poems analyzed in this chapter is the one which deals with erotic invitations made by one lover to another, and the opening poem of the group is "The Pasture" - a poem which appears on page 1 of *North of Boston, Complete Poems, and Selected Poems*. "The Pasture" is considered by the

majority of critics as an epigraph both to Frost's pastoral poetry and to his process of poetic making.

#### THE PASTURE

I'm going out to clean the pasture spring;  
I'll only stop to rake the leaves away  
(And wait to watch the water clear, I may):  
I shan't be gone long - You come too.

I'm going out to fetch the little calf  
That's standing by the mother. It's so young  
It totters when she licks it with her tongue.  
I shan't be gone long.- You come too.

The eight iambic pentameter lines that compose "The Pasture" present a monologue between a speaker and a silent listener, in an extremely simple language. In the first stanza a speaker informs the listener that he is going to clean the leaves of a pasture spring and adds that he may wait to "watch the water clear" in this pasture. Then, he says that he won't be gone long and asks the listener to go with him. In the second stanza he says he's going to fetch a little calf "that's standing by the mother", and, according to him, this calf is so young it totters when his mother "licks it with her tongue". He repeats the statement that he won't be gone long, and asks the listener one more time to go with him. Even in a first reading of this short lyric we already realize that the poem is an eager invitation to a listener, who is perhaps a little hesitant to respond. As we know, repetition in language usually works like a virus, adding extra possible meanings to the words uttered. The repetition of "I shan't be gone long.- You come too" makes us feel that invitation, no matter how many mimetic facts are presented, is

the main purpose of the poem. At the same time, this repetition puts an emphasis on the invitation itself and not on the activities the speaker is about to perform.

If we read the poem focusing on its structure, we will see that both stanzas present indications of a strategy to convince the listener to go with the speaker. In the first stanza the speaker says he's going to clean a pasture spring and adds that he will "only" stop to rake the leaves away. The sememe "only" indicates two factors in this situation: the listener may be afraid to go with the speaker, and the speaker really wants the company of the listener. Then the speaker says he "may" also wait to watch the water clear in the pasture, but states he won't be gone long. He is certainly concerned about assuring the listener he/she doesn't have to worry about a possible delay when they are in the pasture, and this actually brings into the context a possible erotic dimension to the poem. The speaker also states he will fetch a very young little calf from its mother, adding the information that the calf, because of its youth, totters when the mother licks it. After the statements of his plans, he emphasizes that he won't be gone long and asks the listener: "You come too." It is interesting that, as John Sweeney and James Lindroth observe, we have dashes before each invitation, indicating "hesitation and expectancy" (16).

Since "The Pasture" was placed by Frost as an introductory piece to his work, it seems logical that it is a statement from the author addressed to the reader, which aims to convince this reader to join the poet in his country activities.

This is also emphasized by the first activity the poet is about to perform, since it reflects Frost's tendency to manage abstract phenomena through provincial facts. The poet wants us to "clean the pasture spring", and rake away the leaves of the mimesis to "watch the water clear" and see the deep "truth" of significance that is beyond the surface of the water. Thus, we are invited to watch the "momentary stay against confusion" in the clearing of the pasture spring in a statement that works as a perfect example of the typical bridges in Frost's work between nature and spirit. What seems relevant here, though, is the strategy of seduction we find in the poet's language, which is visible through the concern with the time (sememes "only", "may", and "I shan't be gone long"), and the repetition of the sememe "You come too" at the end of both stanzas. These poetic signs lead us to a potential erotic hypogram formed by the words' semes and presuppositions, and this hypogram makes the matrix of the poem (which would be "invitation") be extended into "erotic invitation". Its transformation into text occurs by expansion, since the poem presents amplificatio (repetitive sentences) and two stanzas which have the purpose of leading the listener to an action. The model is the sememe "only" and the poetic signs are all idiolects. Thus, we may perceive that through his discourse the poet tries to seduce the reader to join him in country activities and in the game of poetry.

Given the importance Frost gave to this lyric throughout his books, "The Pasture" has received great critical attention, and it is often read as an epigraph to Frost's style as a poet. William Freedman sees the poem as "an invitation

to Frost's pastoral world" (01) and relates the pasture spring to nature as source of the poet's art; the leaves with his poetic inheritance (which he wants to get rid of); the wait to see the water clear with poetic vigilance for the fruit of his labor; the water with the crystallization of nature in the imagination; the invitation as addressed to the reader; and the little calf with youth and innocence, which are feelings we have after reading a poem (02). James Potter also considers "The Pasture" a direct invitation to the reader by a poet's voice (75) and Frank Lentricchia agrees with Freedman about the invitation to the pastoral world, but adds the sexual implication in the twice repeated "You come too", which asks for human union, as if the speaker wanted to "become as open, as transparent as the cleared pasture spring; as innocent and accepting as the little calf" (25). Fritz Dehlschlaeger gives the poem a total reconsideration guided by the fact that Frost cannot be considered a pastoral poet in the classical sense. He thinks the poem may be read as a response to the invitational Renaissance pastorals: Marlowe's "The Passionate Shepherd to His Love", and Sir Walter Raleigh's "The Nymph's Reply to the Shepherd". Among the good evidence found in his reading, he says that the clearing of the pasture may be taken allegorically "as a search for renewed poetic energy, imaginative release" (04). In relation to the invitation to the listener he concludes that it is "a call to love sweetened by sexuality" (06), and he also says that the act of fetching the calf represents (as the cleaning of the pasture itself) an "intrusion in the natural process by the poet-farmer rather than

a return to Edenic harmony with nature" (08). Reuben Brower, on the other hand, sees "The Pasture" as a "hint of multiple intentions" in which an invitation to seeing and doing country things is extended to an invitation to the reader and to a special listener to "a kind of poetry and to love" (ii). John Sweeney and James Lindroth affirm that the poem presents ambiguity as its effect, although we can detect strong desire in the speaker's invitation (i6). Lawrance Thompson, who said in *Eire and Ice: The Art and Thought of Robert Frost* that the poem is an invitation which "gains intensity because of its compression" (128), presents the lyric in his Frost biography as one of the most famous poems inspired by moments of lovemaking at Derry farm (*Robert Frost: A Biography*, 132). Avoiding to fall in the sin of intentional fallacy, I would like to illustrate this critical survey with Frost's own comment about "The Pasture", in a radio program called *Listen America*:

You see that has in it the same theme -- clarification -- "Watch the water clear"-- And I'm going out for the clarification. I'm interested in the clarification, but YOU COME TOO! (*Listen America: Interview with Robert Frost, 1953*)

Composed by four octaves of iambic tetrameter and iambic trimeter lines, "A Line-Storm Song" is also an invitational song involving a speaker and, again, a silent listener.

#### A LINE-STORM SONG

The line-storm clouds fly tattered and swift.  
The road is forlorn all day,

Where a myriad snowy quartz-stones lift,  
And the hoofprints vanish away.  
The roadside flowers, too wet for the bee,  
Expend their bloom in vain.  
Come over the hills and far with me,  
And be my love in the rain.

The birds have less to say for themselves  
In the wood-world's torn despair  
Than now these numberless years the elves,  
Although they are no less there:  
All song in the woods is crushed like some  
Wild, easily shattered rose.  
Come, be my love in the wet woods, come,  
Where the boughs rain when it blows.

There is the gale to urge behind  
And bruit our singing down,  
And the shallow waters aflutter with wind  
From which to gather your gown.  
What matter if we go clear to the west,  
And come not through dry-shod?  
For wilding brooch, shall wet your breast  
The rain-fresh goldenrod.

Oh, never this whelming east wind swells  
But it seems like the sea's return  
To the ancient lands where it left the shells  
Before the age of the fern;  
And it seems like the time when, after doubt,  
Our love came back amain.  
Oh, come forth into the storm and rout  
And be my love in the rain.

The controlling imagery of the poem is that of a violent storm as it is presented in the first stanza: clouds fly swiftly, the road is desert, the "snowy quartz-stones lift", hoofprints vanish, and the flowers are wet. The speaker describes the storm scenery and concludes the description with an invitation to his lover: "Come over the hills and far with me/ And be my love in the rain". The second stanza shows that the birds are silent, and elves occupy the scene. The world of the woods is in "despair" and its song is "crushed" like a "shattered rose". At the end of the stanza the speaker repeats the

invitation for the listener to be his love in the wet woods. In the fourth stanza the speaker describes the wind carrying their song, the waters afluttering with the wind (and bringing his lover's gown), and talks about the change of an artificial brooch for a goldenrod. Then, in the last stanza, the speaker compares the east wind with the sea's return to the ancient land, "before the age of the fern", and with their renewed love after a doubt. He ends the poem emphasizing the invitation for the listener to go into the storm and be his love in the rain.

Although the rich imagery of this lyric constantly throws our attention in different directions, we can perceive, besides the constant and clear repetition of the speaker's invitation for his lover to go with him into the wet woods, some constant features at the mimesis level. The wild storm which is described contains semes of violence that remain throughout the whole poem. We know that the clouds "fly", the stones "lift", hoofprints "vanish", the woods are in "despair", the song of the woods is "crushed" like some easily "shattered" rose, we have a "gale" carrying their song, the waters "aflutter" with wind, and the "whelming east wind swells". This potential hypogram of violence is linked with some images that suggest another potential hypogram of infertility (the flowers being too wet, "expand their bloom in vain", the road is desert, and the birds are silent). In the first two stanzas the two hypograms fuse completely, and we have the domination of violence and infertility in the scenery. In the last two stanzas, though, the violence hypogram will interact with a potential hypogram of

fertility (the wind will "bruit" their song; the water will bring the lover's gown; they will wet their shoes; a fresh goldenrod will wet the lover's breast; the sea will return, pregnant of new life, as in the ancient land before the age of the "fern"; and the storm will be as strong as a love renewed after a doubt). In these last two stanzas the couple's erotic activities seem to replace the scenes of stagnation and infertility of the beginning of the poem. The images of birth and renewal are so strong here, that it seems impossible not to think of them as the result of a wild sexual activity. The speaker's invitation is clear enough: "Be my love in the rain". More than describing a storm, the speaker describes his own violent sexual desire, alluding to images of infertility and fertility while inviting his love to go with him. The three potential hypograms of the poem (violence, fertility, and infertility), with its classic poetic signs, are all composed by the words' semes and presuppositions, and they are responsible for our decoding of the matrix "erotic invitation". But here, this erotic invitation loses its semes of softness and delicacy which characterized the one in "The Pasture". This invitation is violent as the storm, and engulfs both speaker and listener as a whelming east wind. As the last two lines of the lyric say, the speaker wants his lover to go into the storm and "rout", being his love in the rain. Even at the prosodic level, the intercalation of iambic tetrameter lines with iambic trimeter lines, as well as the rhymes ABABCDCD..., alludes to the fusion of two different elements in a turbulent rhythm. Finally, the transformation from matrix to text occurs by expansion, since the matrix is expanded in repetitive

sentences, semes, and sememes throughout the poem, starting from the model (the presentation of the line-storm clouds).

George Nitchie sees more details in this lyric, stating that it "records a powerful but ambivalently felt love experience, touched with a hint of sentimental romantic sadism" (66). Richard Wakefield says that the speaker sees in "continent-shaking geological forces" a parallel to his desire, since "the strength of passion is specifically equated with the return of the world to a more primitive, more chaotic state" (174/175). He also decodes the imagery of wasted fertility suggested by the absence of pollination in the flowers, and comments that, in spite of the force of the poem, we have no hint of the lover's response (175). Dennis Vail also mentions the violent language and semes of the poem, saying that

It is precisely the violent (though temporary) destruction of the controlling spirit, the tyranny of normalcy, a kind of entrenched death, that permits the pair, through the exercise of human volition, to enter the scene, to become its center of attention, and to appropriate it to their own needs, and so makes possible the renewal of the higher life of "love". (65)

Vail also explains that the presence of the elves is a consequence of the absence of birds; that the hoofprints that vanish leaves the pair with "a temporal and geographical tabula rasa" (65), and that the singing of the couple replaces the song of the woods. He mentions the fact that the wind rises in the east, "the direction of origins", and goes to the west, "the direction of new discoveries" (65). To Vail, although the purpose of the speaker is to commit himself to a situation "where

reticence is of no avail and there is... contact between the individuals (or pair) and the elemental forces" (66) the invitation may be addressed to the reader without semantic violence. Even though he fails in decoding the erotic signs of the text, his good point is the conclusion that "the upheaval in nature is identified with the internal upheaval that is the couple's need" (65). Among the poems which deal with erotic invitations, "A Line-Storm Song" is undoubtedly the most explicit concerning the speaker's intentions. As we shall see, erotic dimensions in "A Prayer in Spring" are much more subtle.

#### A PRAYER IN SPRING

Oh, give us pleasure in the flowers today;  
And give us not to think so far away  
As the uncertain harvest; keep us here  
All simply in the springing of the year.

Oh, give us pleasure in the orchard white,  
Like nothing else by day, like ghosts by night;  
And make us happy in the happy bees,  
The swarm dilating round the perfect trees.

And make us happy in the darting bird  
That suddenly above the bees is heard,  
The meteor that thrusts in with needle bill,  
And off a blossom in mid air stands still.

For this is love and nothing else is love,  
The which it is reserved for God above  
To sanctify to what far ends He will,  
But which it only needs that we fulfill.

At the mimesis level we seem to have a speaker and a prayer addressed to God ("Oh, give us...", "And make us..."). In the first stanza, the speaker wants to find pleasure in the present, enjoying flowers in the springing of the year, without

thinking about the "uncertain harvest" of the future. In the second quatrain, he mentions the pleasure he wants to feel because of the orchard white, which is extremely beautiful during the day, and like ghosts (because of the white flowers) by night. He also wants to be happy because of the "happy bees", whose swarm go around "perfect trees". In the third quatrain he mentions a darting bird that flies above the bees and thrusts his bill into a blossom (making us conclude that it is a hummingbird), and then, in the final stanza, he concludes that "This is love and nothing else is love". He thinks that, regardless of what God's plans for the future are, he needs to enjoy the magic moments of the springing of the year. As in Frost's "Carpe Diem", we seem to hear a voice ordering "Be happy, happy, happy, / And seize the day of pleasure" (335/336) throughout the four stanzas of the poem. As Richard Poirier observes, "There is, first, an evocation of a fortuitous moment of extraordinary natural beauty," and the metrical harmonies of the poem seem to "teach us something about harmonies in nature" (210). In fact, the four quatrains of iambic pentameter lines and the regular rhyme scheme seem quite appropriate to the delicacy and equilibrium of the springing time, as well as to the serenity of his prayer to God.

In a second stage of reading, though, we feel that certain signs suggest another level of discourse in which the prayer to God gives place to an argument addressed to a woman. As we know, spring in Frost's poetry often points to fertility and sensuality, and as in this lyric, the spring imagery seems to

unveil a strong sensual appeal. In the first stanza, we are informed that the speaker seeks pleasure in "the flowers today", regardless of the uncertain harvest of the future, since he is totally seduced by the "springing of the year". In the second stanza, the images of the "orchard white", and of the "happy bees" whose swarm go dilating around the trees are coherent with the sensuous spring hypogram. It is in the third stanza, though, that the hypogram achieves its apex, presenting the strongest image of eroticism in the darting hummingbird that, like a meteor, "thrusts" his "needle bill" into a blossom. As Poirier points out, "Immediately following this image is the direct assertion that this is love and nothing else is love" (212). In fact, it seems clear that human sexuality is the main point here, and, as Poirier observes, the word "this" may stand for the "human participation in the springing, in moving toward creation and recreation of body and soul" (212). The last three lines end with the speaker's argument that God is the one who will choose what to sanctify and what to dismiss, and the words "it only needs that we fulfill" suggest that to resist the flowers, bees, and the springing is a sin for those who should enjoy this special time of the year. As Richard Wakefield concludes, the plea directed to the woman says that

all results from our actions are so uncertain  
that to dwell upon uncertainty is to cut ourselves  
off from pleasure and, as the poem argues later,  
from God's plan. (173)

The speaker of "A Prayer in Spring" uses the spring metaphor and words that seem to be addressed to God to convince his lover, as in Andrew Marvell's "To His Coy Mistress", that

they should look for pleasure in the flowers of the present, when their souls transpire "at every pore with instant fires", satisfying their desire while they may, "like amorous birds of prey". Although in "A Prayer in Spring" the speaker does not seem to be concerned about the future (he does not want to think about the uncertain harvest), he admits that its uncertainty (as in Marvell's poem) is a good reason for them to enjoy the present. In this sense, the speaker in Frost's poem also hears "Time's winged chariot hurrying near" (140/141).

Through the potential erotic hypogram formed by the semes and presuppositions of the sememes related with spring (pleasure in the flowers, springing of the year, orchard white, happy bees, swarm dilating, and the darting bird thrusting his needle bill into a blossom) we are aware that the poem is also an argument to convince a probably "coy" lover, being also a periphrasis of the matrix "erotic invitation". The poem is formed by expansion, since each stanza presents a different image related to the erotic hypogram and with the invitation which is the matrix. We also have repetitive structures and sememes, which expand the matrix into the poem and unify it through the same imagery.

George Nitchie thinks the poem reflects an Eden situation, being a prayer "for dwellers in Paradise" (77), and Mordecai Marcus, reminding us that the explanation made by Frost to this poem was "He discovers that the greatness of love lies not in forward-looking thoughts", considers the lyric to be celebrating "an immediate fullness made poignant by limitations

that create a framework" (27). Richard Wakefield throws some light into the sememes "uncertain harvest", explaining that

...it is a venerable Puritan metaphor, and it is an immediate concern for the farmer or the orchard keeper, and it is a matter of considerable worry to a maiden wondering how to respond to her lover's advances. It works solidly and convincingly on all three levels in this poem. (i73)

Richard Poirier, talking about the different ways through which Frost and Hopkins celebrate spring, concludes that Hopkins would never talk about spring in terms of sexual union, while Frost suggests that

...springing exists in us, and in two senses: first, in the man and woman who fall in love and who fulfill nature by "putting in the seed" and watching for birth; and second, in the "us" who are poets, ... wherein is to be found the renewal of the body and of that innocence necessary to a renewal of the soul. (2i2)

And since a poem is never totally covered by the critics' languages, there is still a mystery pointed by Frost in a lecture in 1954, commented by Reginald Cook: "I noticed someone saying/ the other day: the hummingbird is the only bird that can fly backward. They were first. That's interesting - very interesting!" (55/56). Whether Frost was merely playing with the audience or whether this ability of the bird is really relevant to a more complete covering of the text is something still to be considered.

As we have seen, these three poems, whose matrixes are "erotic invitations", as well as "Putting in the Seed"

(analysed in chapter 1), which also presents a tone of an erotic call, are all addressed to a silent listener by an eager speaker who, in a certain way, uses nature imagery to give hints of a strong sexual desire, trying to induce his lover to an act of consent. Although other lyrics such as "A Late Walk" (8/9) and "Flower Gathering" (12/13) also present overtones of an erotic appeal through the act of offering a flower to the beloved (an attempt to overcome the environmental lack of fertility) this group of poems is composed of lyrics which present a direct invitation to the beloved, either by inviting the listener to go for a walk in the pasture, inviting her to go to the wet woods, or praying to the beloved for the pleasure of spring. The next poems, beginning with "In a Vale", will deal with different responses of lovers who face or think about facing erotic experiences.

#### IN A VALE

When I was young, we dwelt in a vale  
By a misty fen that rang all night,  
And thus it was the maidens pale  
I knew so well, whose garments trail  
Across the reeds to a window light.

The fen had every kind of bloom,  
And for every kind there was a face,  
And a voice that has sounded in my room  
Across the sill from the outer gloom.  
Each came singly unto her place,

But all came every night with the mist;  
And often they brought so much to say  
Of things of moment to which, they wist,  
One so lonely was fain to list,  
That the stars were almost faded away

Before the last went, heavy with dew,  
Back to the place from which she came -  
Where the bird was before it flew,

Where the flower was before it grew,  
Where bird and flower were one and the same.

And thus it is I know so well  
Why the flower has odor, the bird has song.  
You have only to ask me, and I can tell.  
No, not vainly there did I dwell,  
Nor vainly listen all the night long.

The mimesis level of this lyric presents an almost transcendental experience lived by a speaker when he was young. He tells us that at that time they lived in a vale where a misty fen had strange noises because of mysterious maidens that left garments "across the reeds to a window light". Faces appeared in blooms in the fen and he listened to voices in his room that seemed to come from the outer darkness. These activities used to happen every night when the mist dominated the place, and the speaker tells us that these voices had many things to say. In fact, the voices thought that since he was so lonely he was happy to listen to them. In the fourth stanza the speaker mentions that these faces and voices came from a place where "the bird was before it flew", "the flower was before it grew", and where they were "one and the same". According to him, since he listened to them he knows why "the flower has odor, the bird has song" and, because of that, he did not waste his time listening to these creatures many nights. At the end of the poem we are almost sure that it talks about a transcendental experience in which a speaker learns from mysterious entities (who appear in voice and bloom-face) things from the world. But as soon as we link some poetic signs that appear from the beginning to the end of the text, we perceive that this experience the speaker faces

is actually a very different one.

In the first stanza we have the description of the transcendental experience and the presentation of "maidens pale", which immediately remind us of the romantic pattern of female beauty. This is followed by the popular cinematographic erotic scene of the garments the faces leave from the reeds to a window light, arousing the speaker's (and the reader's) curiosity. In the second stanza we are informed that the blooms of the fen were transformed into female faces and that a voice sounded in the speaker's room from the outer darkness. It seems relevant that each face had a time to go to the room and that all faces went there every night "with the mist". They stayed with the speaker until the stars "were almost faded away", leaving his room "heavy with dew". The place from which they came is even more interesting, since it presents intriguing images such as the bird before it flew, the flower before it grew, and bird and flower as "one and the same". This fusion of male and female elements undoubtedly reminds us of a sexual fusion, which is strengthened by the other erotic sememes of the poem. In the last stanza the speaker explains that because of this experience with the maidens he knows well "why the flower has odor, the bird has song". It seems that his experiences with mysterious maidens provided him with a deep knowledge of male and female natures. Now he knows why the flower has odor ( a provocative image) and the bird has song ( which may suggest an attempt of proximity to the flower). When the speaker ends the poem stating that he didn't "vainly" listen all night long, we are reminded of a typical boy's statement about erotic learning. All the sememes

listed above ("maidens pale", "garments trailing", "bloom/maidens", female voices in the speaker's room, bird/flower as one and the same, and flowers "heavy with dew") remind us of an almost cinematographic potential cliché hypogram of eroticism composed of classemes, and presenting as a model the sememe "maidens pale". Considering the details of the erotic experience, as well as the statements made by the speaker at the end of the poem, the matrix of the text may be "erotic learning", which is transformed into text by an allegorical expansion. Besides having allegory as a major device, each stanza (composed of five iambic tetrameter lines) presents a new detail of the speaker's experience, and they are all coherent with the matrix.

Richard Poirier lists "In a Vale" as one of the poems which illustrates the connections "between sexual love and poetic making, between the sounds of love and a poet's love of sound" (64). Mordecai Marcus, on the other hand, reads it as a mere "allegorical fantasy" about a relationship between speaker and flowers, which he imagines in the shape of maidens and who go to his room "in response to his loneliness, bringing him visions of the creation's source". But as Marcus points out, since the speaker does not reveal the knowledge he states to possess, there is the implication that "its dreamlike source is inexpressible" (29/30). Due to the outstanding erotic power of the scenes described in the poem, perhaps the matrix "erotic learning" is the one which gives a fair explanation of the ungrammaticalities of the text. There is a strong linkage among the sememes which compose the erotic hypogram, making the poem "In a Vale" function

as a true periphrasis of its matrix.

### ROSE POGONIAS

A saturated meadow,  
Sun-shaped and jewel-small,  
A circle scarcely wider  
Than the trees around were tall;  
Where winds were quite excluded,  
And the air was stifling sweet  
With the breath of many flowers -  
A temple of the heat.

There we bowed us in the burning,  
As the sun's right worship is,  
To pick where none could miss them  
A thousand orchises;  
For though the grass was scattered,  
Yet every second spear  
Seemed tipped with wings of color  
That tinged the atmosphere.

We raised a simple prayer  
Before we left the spot,  
That in the general mowing  
That place might be forgot;  
Or if not all so favored,  
Obtain such grace of hours  
That none should mow the grass there  
While so confused with flowers.

"Rose Pogonias" also presents an apparently magic experience lived by a speaker and a probable lover who were picking orchises in a quite mysterious "spot". The poem strikes us for its simplicity of diction and nature imagery, and each of the three stanzas present a different part of the development of the mimesis. The first stanza introduces an almost sacred setting: A meadow is described as "sun-shaped", "jewel-small", a circle surrounded by trees, with the stifling sweet air from the "breath of many flowers" that winds could not spread out. All these sememes seem to point to a holy place, the proper place for the adoration of something sacred, and only the last line ("A

temple of the heat") is felt as an intriguing ungrammaticality of this first group of lines. The second stanza presents a "we" (probably a speaker and a lover) that "bowed" in the "burning" to worship the sun picking a thousand orchises. He adds that although the grass was scattered, every second spear seemed colorful like the atmosphere. Presenting the main action of the plot, this stanza seems coherent with the sememes of the first one, except for the word "burning", which we immediately link with the "temple of the heat". Finally, in the last stanza, the speaker presents the rest of the plot, and we get to know that, besides the picking of the orchises, they performed another act of worship when they prayed for the protection of the place against mowers before leaving the spot. Although it seems contradictory for them to pray against mowers since they picked a "thousand orchises" themselves, we know that they were fully aware of the worshipful way mowers should pick flowers from that sacred place. The speaker ends the poem by stating that if the place could not be fully protected, it should at least not be mowed by anybody who could not perceive the grass so confused with flowers. According to Richard Poirier, the end of the poem may grammatically refer both to the "confusion or mixture of grass and flowers and to our becoming confused and immoderate because of their beauty" (209).

Although Agnieszka Salska states that "the nearly imagistic" work presents such a careful description of a scene that "whatever reflection the poem contains results immediately from our response to the object contemplated" (193), it seems

clear that the poem itself presents a few ungrammaticalities that suggest, besides the holiness of the scene, an erotic dimension. The idiolects "temple of the heat" and "burning", combined with the almost mystical description of the scene certainly bring a sexual implication to the experience. The speaker and his lover seem to feel with their senses the "saturation" of that meadow, whose sun and jewel shape suggest a unique place surrounded by trees in which the absence of wind leads to the "heat" of the breath of the flowers. This heat may also indicate the saturation of the atmosphere with the proximity of their bodies. Then, the act of "bowing" in the burning may suggest both the worship to the sun, the picking of the flowers, and the act of laying down in the earth to feel the grass "tipped with wings of color." Finally, their prayer presents the contrast between different ways of picking orchises, which reminds us of the contrast between different ways of making love. The linkage between holiness and eroticism puts an emphasis on the worshipful way of loving the speaker and his lover had in that special meadow. In this sense, the potential erotic hypogram (formed by semes and presuppositions) unveils the true matrix of the text: "Sacred Erotic Experience". Its first actualization is "temple of the heat" and expansion is responsible for its enlargement into text. It seems that, although the mimesis level of the poem is strongly descriptive, we already feel that the ungrammaticalities point to the erotic hypogram, making us aware that the holiness of the moment and of the place are only realized through the characters' realization of their holiness as human beings capable of a fusion in themselves and in nature. Much more than a special place to

pick orchises, that meadow was the proper place for an act of worship to the sun in a temple of human heat.

Richard Poirier goes a little further and sees the flowers confused with grass as the biblical equivalence of flesh, making the poem a metaphorical equivalence between "the cycle of birth and death in the meadow and the cycles of human life", infused with the heat of "human sexuality" (209). Besides the observation that we can perceive an "everyday voice cutting across a prayerful tone", Reuben Brower points out that in a place "special in shape and size" the speaker "glances humorously at learning reminding us that he wears his priestly role with less than Romantic solemnity", (07) and Mordecai Marcus agrees with Donald Haymes in the point that the poem symbolizes "the esthetic way of life/ and the production of poems that set the speaker apart from the surrounding community"(28/29). More than presenting a simple sexual experience in a country code, "Rose Pogonias" presents a beautiful association between two hypograms ("holiness" and "eroticism") which are normally contrasted, making it one of the most favorable portraits of sexual experience among Frost's works. These two hypograms reappear in "Going for Water", a poem which deals with a moment of intense beauty and isolation of the lovers in Nature, reminding us, as George Nitchie points out, of the constitution of a private world by "Adam and Eve in paradise" (78).

#### GOING FOR WATER

The well was dry beside the door,  
And so we went with pail and can  
Across the fields behind the house

To seek the brook if still it ran,  
Not loth to have excuse to go,  
Because the autumn eve was fair  
(Though chill), because the fields were ours,  
And by the brook our woods were there.

We ran as if to meet the moon  
That slowly dawned behind the trees,  
The barren boughs without the leaves,  
Without the birds, without the breeze.

But once within the wood, we paused  
Like gnomes that hid us from the moon,  
Ready to run to hiding new  
With laughter when she found us soon.

Each laid on other a staying hand  
To listen ere we dared to look,  
And in the hush we joined to make  
We heard, we knew we heard the brook.

A note as from a single place,  
A slender tinkling fall that made  
Now drops that floated on the pool  
Like pearls, and now a silver blade.

The first stanza presents a kind of quest performed by a "we" (either two persons or a group of people) who, because of a dry well, go with "pail and can" to seek water from a brook. The speaker says that they did not want any excuse to stay in the house because the "autumn eve was fair", the fields were theirs and the woods by the brook were there. Then, they ran "as if to meet the moon" and could see the autumn boughs without leaves, birds, and breeze. Reaching the woods, they paused and hid themselves from the moon around the trees like gnomes laughing. Then, "each laid on other a staying hand" and in the "hush" they made they heard the brook. Finally, in the sixth quatrain, the speaker describes the sound of the brook as drops of pearls with "a slender tinkling fall".

Combined with the prosodic simplicity of the six quatrains of iambic tetrameter lines rhyming ABCB, the surface meaning of "Going for Water" seems to be the activity of taking water from a brook enlarged with extra doses of holiness, even reminding us of the mythical quest of the Holy Grail. Although "gnomes" is the only sememe related with magic and myth in the poem, we certainly read the walk from house to woods as something much deeper than a simple physical activity. And yet, we feel that we need to unveil some ungrammaticalities before we can apprehend the direction of the poetic indirection in the semiotic level of discourse.

Beginning with the title, "Going for Water", we find many sememes in the poem that suggest this movement from dryness to wetness. We have the opening scene of a dry well, of people with pail and can seeking for water, and the image of the "barren boughs" without leaves, birds, or breeze. These sememes of dryness and aridity contrast with the brook, which is the one that deals with wetness and is the object of the quest. We have, thus, the domestic aridity contrasted with a source of renewal in the woods, beyond the bounds of the house. Since at a biological level, water is one of the most powerful sustainers of life, the quest, if spiritual, is a desire for something equally important. And the brook, as Frank Lentricchia observes, has a symbolic dimension in Frost's canon for "it signals a desire for openness - a thrust of self toward the experience of integration with itself and with others" (45). In this sense, the "we" of the poem go in quest of both a physical and a spiritual renewal in the brook, and, as Dennis Vail states, the comparison with "gnomes"

("who are supposed to know of hidden treasures and who keep themselves hidden") "emphasizes the quest's difference from the usual sublunary effort and lends it the grotesqueness it will certainly have for ordinary eyes" (63).

In order to unveil the kind of "renewal" the poem talks about we have first to determine who are the "we" that go in quest for the brook. John Robert Doyle Jr. has brilliantly stated that during the second stanza we begin to notice a not yet suspected relationship between a boy and a girl who want to be together, avoiding any excuses to stay in the house to go to the woods (139). It seems relevant that the quest happens at night, and the people run "as if to meet the moon" in the aridity of the first quatrains. Then we can hear their laughter and see them hiding from the moon in the woods. According to Doyle, the fifth stanza reaches the climax of the relationship between these two persons because

The "staying hand" of the first line has three meanings: to stop motion, to check speech and/or laughter, and to join physically. In the silence of the pause, the two "listen" intently. Not "daring to look", the caution of not daring anything, heightens the sense of motionless pause and listening. Even this tense situation is intensified by repetition, "in the hush we joined to make ...". "Joined" has three meanings: joined physically, in that each has laid "on other a staying hand"; joined emotionally, in that each so admonished by the other has become hushed; joined sympathetically with nature, in that the quietness of both agrees with the stillness holding the woods. (139)

Taking into consideration these sememes that reveal the we as a boy and a girl, we begin to suspect that the quest

for the renewal and wetness of the brook has something to do with eroticism. The hypogram of aridity suggests a sterility which is immediately contrasted with the desire for fertility the brook represents ("To seek the brook if still it ran"). Then, the decodification of an erotic hypogram in the quest (actualized by the idiolects "Not loth to have excuse to go", "ran as if to meet the moon", "laughter", "staying hand", and "hush we joined to make") makes clear the connection brook/fertility. In other words, the potential hypogram "eroticism" (formed by the words' semes and presuppositions) leads us to the matrix of the poem, which may be a slight modification of the title "Going for Water" to "Going for Fertility". The model is the title itself and the movement matrix-text happens through expansion, since we have the text presenting different informations that lead to the matrix. It is worth observing that, although "eroticism" is the predominant hypogram in the poem, the minor hypogram aridity X Fertility is also present, even though we can fuse them in the first one.

Finally, in the last stanza, the speaker interrupts his account and concentrates on the sound of the brook, and, as Lentricchia observes, the adverbial modification "now" - "crucially repeated - suggests that the magical time of play has been fully recaptured for the present in a moment of intense affective memory" (43). The whole poem is an account of an erotic activity in the woods, in which the speaker and his lover found the source of renewal for their dry well in the fertility of human love.

Often classified as a "love poem" or a "we poem",

"Going for Water" is seen by Reuben Brower as "a poem in which a moment of acute perception of natural beauty is also a perfect moment of relation between two people" (181). Darrel Abel emphasizes the journey of "married lovers" to a brook in the fields as a "symbolic visit of renewal to the source of life" (205); and Frank Lentricchia says that the physical journey "parallels a journey to the gay play-world in the mind where freedom and psychic wholeness are regained" (41).

Pointed by Reuben Brower as one of Frost's "most symbolic" poems (139) "All Revelation" is what the ordinary reader classifies as "obscure" or "ambiguous" poetry. It seems that the text illustrates quite well Frost's idea that poems should not be seen ahead like prophecies, but felt with surprise "in retrospect", being "a revelation, or a series of revelation, as much for the poet as for the reader" (Selected Prose of Robert Frost, 19). Talking about revelation, the poem also reveals itself for the reader and for the poet who feel it in retrospect, after decoding the deviant discourse of the mimesis, performing the circuitous sequence of significance. Following Frost's definition of poetry, "All Revelation" is a typical example of a poem which

...assumes direction with the first line laid down, runs a course of lucky events, and ends in a clarification of life - not necessarily a great clarification such as sets and cults are founded on, but in a momentary stay against confusion. (18)

#### ALL REVELATION

A head thrusts in as for the view,  
But where it is it thrusts in from  
Or what it is it thrusts into

By that Cyb'laean avenue,  
And what can of its coming come,

And whither it will be withdrawn,  
And what take hence and leave behind,  
These things the mind has pondered on  
A moment and still asking gone.  
Strange apparition of the mind!

But the impervious geode  
Was entered, and its inner crust  
Of crystals with a ray cathode  
At every point and facet glowed  
In answer to the mental thrust.

Eyes seeking the response of eyes  
Bring out the stars, bring out the flowers,  
Thus concentrating earth and skies  
So none need be afraid of size.  
All revelation has been ours.

The four stanzas of five iambic tetrameter lines regularly rhymed present a formal unity that somehow contrasts with the turbulence and obscurity of its content. The first and second stanzas present a head that "thrusts in" for a view by a "Cyb'laean avenue", and is gone before many questions such as "where it is it thrusts in from", "what it is it thrusts into", "what can of its coming come", "whither it will be withdrawn", and "what take hence or leave behind" can be answered. This is faced as a "strange apparition of the mind", and although the questions do not have time to be answered, a geode is entered by a ray cathode and presents its crystals at "every point and facet" glowing in answer to this mental thrust. In the last stanza the speaker says that stars, flowers and the concentration of earth and skies are the result of eyes that seek "the response of eyes", and states that nobody should be afraid of size since "All Revelation" has been ours. At first sight the poem seems to

talk about mind and reality, in the sense that the mind discovers revelations in common things of human existence. In fact, in Reuben Brower's reading of the poem he emphasizes the effects of the relationship between mind and reality, seeing the geode ("a nodule of stone having a cavity lined with crystals or mineral matter") as a metaphor of earth ("ge-ode, earth-like") as well as the Cyb'laean avenue (from Cybele, goddess of earth), and the ray cathode as a metaphor of the mind that makes the geode shine its crystals because of the light of the rays (140). Thus, the image of the head thrusting in for a view may be taken both as a "physical thrusting into a cave", a "birth image", or "an entry of mind into experience" (140). This reading is also based on the notion that the eyes that seek responses "bring out" the stars and flowers, being responsible for (or creating) what they see. Brower says that in spite of this creation of the mind over reality we still have a revelation, but he sees the last line of the poem as an ironical statement asserting that "this revelation is limited" (142). Donald Greiner says that in this poem "Frost illustrates his theme of discovering form which leads to order in life", and thinks the revelation of the poem is the "truth" that "man (he) need not fear relative size" (400). Considering the penetration and withdrawal from enclosed places a possible "echo of Plato's cave" (67), George Nitchie points out that "the sense of a real continuity between the world of human emotion and the world of stars and flowers is clear" in the poem (30). Finally, Peter Hays presents a totally different approach to the text considering Frost's usual method of starting a poem from a natural object. He reads the poem quite literally, seeing

the cathode ray

... illuminating crystals within the geode as an accurate description of a television tube, in which a stream of electrons playing on fluorescent crystals within the mineral hollow of the tube does indeed bring out pictures of stars and flowers. (287)

Trying to provide the reader with negative evidence about the printed analyses of the poem, he considers the text to be a mere "attack on those who take their knowledge of nature indirectly from television" (290), taking into account Frost's skepticism regarding science and his typical irony related to the subject. What seems most relevant in these analyses is the fact that they concentrate either on the surface meaning of the text or in Frost's "conventional" style as a writer. It is difficult to agree that the last two stanzas are ironical statements about partial revelations, for their rich imagery seem to point to an extremely serious and quite immense revelation the human mind can perceive. After linking some poetic signs that form a complete descriptive system of human conception, the text becomes itself a great revelation masqued in a geological code.

Beginning with the first stanza, the head that thrusts for a view by a Cyb'laean avenue is presented as the genesis of an experience that may have strong results, as is implied in the line "And what can of its coming come". As Richard Poirier observes,

Sexuality is simply "there", as it is in so much of Frost's writings - the specific sexual act of "putting in the seed" - but it is syntactically

and in every other way made continuous with the general human thrust toward penetration and creativity. Thus, "what can of its coming come" is kept from being quite as specific as it might sound by the initial uncertainty about whether in the first stanza a phallus is exploring a vagina or a child's head is emerging to look into the world. (22)

If we consider the possibility that the head that thrusts is a phallus (and consequently, the Cyb'laean avenue is the way the sperm takes to arrive at the womb), the questions about human existence ("where it is it thrusts from", "What it is it thrusts into", "what can of its coming come", "whither it will be withdrawn", and what take hence or leave behind") are coherent with the beginning of a new life. In those moments people generally think about "reasons" for the beginning and the end of something so transient that many questions cannot even be answered. In the third stanza, the impervious geode (the woman's womb) is entered and the ray cathode (the sperm) suddenly makes "every point and facet" of the womb shine with its illuminating force. Then, the last stanza can be read in its total power. Only eyes "seeking the response of eyes" (the encounter of two lovers) can bring the stars, the flowers, "concentrating earth and skies" in the holiness of the sexual act. And only if we consider the human possibility of creating a new life can we understand why "All revelation has been ours", although no definite answers can be given to many questions about human existence. Thus, what becomes a revelation in our second stage reading of the poem is a descriptive system - according to Riffaterre "a network of words associated with one another around a kernel world, in accordance

with the sememe of that nucleus" (39) - around "human conception". This potential hypogram is formed by many idiolects in the text (the head thrusting, the Cyb'laean avenue, the ponderations of the mind, the geode of crystals, eyes seeking eyes, the concentration of earth and skies, stars and flowers, and finally, the revelation). Functioning as a perfect model, the "head" is the starting point to all the other sememes of the descriptive system, and all of them take us to the matrix which may be something like "Revelation of the beginning of human life" or "Revelation of the holiness of human conception". The transformation of matrix to text is made by expansion, since we have an allegorical relationship between human fecundation and geological code.

Although "All Revelation" does not directly use Nature to talk about human sexuality, it uses some of its elements (like flowers and stars) to illustrate the revelation human beings may have through love and the sexual encounter between lovers that result in the conception of a new human being. Entering the world through the womb-geode and sperm/ray cathode, this human being is the magic revelation of unmeasurable size. In this sense, the poem presents the same connection between holiness and eroticism we decoded in "Rose Pogonias" and "Going for Water". These poems show a highly positive view of sex and human sexuality, presenting the moment of sex as magic ("Rose Pogonias" and "Going for Water") and as revelations ("In a Vale" and "All Revelation"). All of them portray epiphanic moments in which human beings, through their sexuality, seem to fuse with the cosmos and the great cycles of creation. But in sharp

contrast with these positive portrayals of human sexuality, some poems in Frost's canon deal with the dark side of eroticism in the sense that they focus on the uncertainty of conception, in the domination of the relationships between men and women, or in the animal aspects of sensuality. They present an almost desolate picture of love and sex, and some critics (as Richard Wakefield) speculate to what extent certain facts of Frost's life - his father's violence towards his mother, his mother's supposed pregnancy before her marriage, Frost's close acquaintance with female madness, etc. - made him use the fragility of love and the coercion in loving relationships as strong features in some of his poems. "The Strong are Saying Nothing", for example, is a particularly negative view of love, although it presents thematic and formal similarities with "Putting in the Seed".

#### THE STRONG ARE SAYING NOTHING

The soil now gets a rumpling soft and damp,  
And small regard to the future of any weed.  
The final flat of the hoe's approval stamp  
Is reserved for the bed of a few selected seed.

There is seldom more than a man to a harrowed piece  
Men work alone, their lots plowed far apart,  
One stringing a chain of seed in an open crease,  
And another stumbling after a halting cart.

To the flesh and black of the squares of early mold  
The leafless bloom of a plum is fresh and white;  
Though there's more than a doubt if the weather is  
not too cold  
For the bees to come and serve its beauty aright.

Wind goes from farm to farm in wave on wave,  
But carries no cry of what is hoped to be.

There may be little or much beyond the grave,  
BUT the strong are saying nothing until they see.

The poem begins with a description of an act of planting mixed with the uncertainty suggested by the title. We have the presentation of the rumplings in the soil and the statement that the "approval stamp" of the hoe will only come to a "few selected seed". In the second quatrain we see men working alone in their harrowed pieces, and there is the contrast between the men who string seeds "in an open crease" and the ones who stumble "after a halting cart". The third stanza presents a "leafless bloom of a plum" which will be placed in the squares of the mold, and although it's "fresh and white", there is a doubt about the weather, for it may be too cold for the bees to pollinate. Finally, the last stanza presents the wind going "from farm to farm" and the uncertainty about it carrying any fertilizing materials. Then, the final statement is that there may be "a little or much" after death, but the strong say nothing "until they see".

In spite of the clear rural images and prosodic regularity of the poem (it is composed in heroic quatrains), the last stanza clearly enlarges the framework of the content since it expands the surface meaning from "planting" to the almost philosophical issue of human being's destiny after death. And since human beings were brought into the context, we need to investigate what other "ungrammaticalities" can possibly point to this same direction. As we already saw in "Putting in the Seed", the code of planting carries strong erotic overtones, for it is a

part of the associative cliché planting/sex, which is the union of common ways through which human beings believe they can overcome death. Thus, the code of planting is metaphorically linked with the sexual act in the sense that both of them generate a new life. And from this new perspective unveiled because of the cliché hypogram planting/sex we can go to our second stage of reading, through which we can see the uncertainty of human conception in the first stanza. Although the act of planting is performed, the soil shows "small regard to the future of any weed" since only "a few selected seed" will fertilize. In the second stanza men work "alone" in their harrowed pieces, and we have the image of "a chain of seed" put in an "open crease" which combines, as Mordecai Marcus points out, "realistical description with a metaphor for human lovemaking and the continuity of the race" (150). In the third stanza there is the image of the "fresh and white" plum bloom put in the early mold (with its sensual overtones), although there is the doubt if the bees will come and serve themselves from that beauty. These three images (the rumplings in the soil, the men stringing the chain of seed in the open crease, and the bloom of a plum in the mold waiting for the bees) seem to carry strong erotic markers since they all suggest important moments of the sexual act. In spite of that, the hope of fertility is a permanent doubt, for the weather may be too cold for the moment of fertility. Then, the last stanza shows a comparison between the uncertainty of conception and the uncertainty in the post-death of human existence, and there is the almost naive statement that strong human beings don't say anything about these issues until they can see the

natural development of things. And so we arrive to the matrix of the text, which can be "uncertainty of human life (from conception to death)". Contrasting with the positive portrayals of love, "The Strong are Saying Nothing" seems to state that although human beings are able to have a magic moment of love and sex, the beginning of a new life is something beyond their power, since the approval stamp is reserved for "a few selected seed". The model of the text is its first line (which presents the "soft and damp" rumplings in the soil) and the text is generated by a combination of expansion and conversion. We have expansion since the repetition of images and the presentation of details enlarge the matrix, and we also have conversion because the code of planting (normally positive) is presented with the minus sign of uncertainty. Finally, all the poetic signs are classemes, for they function as an erotic hypogram regardless of the context of the given poem.

Read by George Nitchie as a text about the "practical acceptance of things as they are" (37), and by Mordecai Marcus as a statement that "only the deserving among both plants and people profit from cultivation" (150), the poem surely presents the sexual act as a moment of doubt and uncertainty. Now men work "alone" during the act, missing the "passion for the earth" and the love that should burn through the "Putting in the Seed". These lonely men who silently string the chain of seeds in an "open crease" have no power to know if a new life will result from the sexual act, as they don't know what will happen to what is alive when death comes. More than that,

there is still a "doubt" that the weather will be too cold for pollination, and they wait patiently and silently to see what the future will bring.

Much more desolate and destructive is the image of human sexuality in the almost nightmare presented in "The Subverted Flower". As Margaret Storch observes, the poem was published only fifty years after it was first drafted and after the experience on which it is based was fully absorbed by the poet. According to Storch, Frost said that he did not publish it in an early stage of his career because the poem was "revealingly auto-biographical" and because his wife (dead in 1938) "would not have allowed it during her lifetime" (297). It is assumed by many critics (including Lawrance Thompson) that the poem was based on an incident that happened in 1892, when Frost had an embarrassing encounter with Elinor in which he showed her the urgency of his erotic passion for her. The long delay of its publication suggests both that the text had something to do with Elinor and that, as Richard Poirier points out, Frost did not want to publish it for it would have "altered the portrait of an artist that Frost wanted to project" (58). Often defined as an anomalous work in Frost's canon, the poem deals explicitly with eroticism in a scene that begins "in medias res" when a boy is supposed to have offered a flower to a girl.

#### THE SUBVERTED FLOWER

She drew back; he was calm:  
"It is this that had the power."  
And he lashed his open palm

With the tender-headed flower.  
He smiled for her to smile,  
But she was either blind  
Or willfully unkind.  
He eyed her for a while  
For a woman and a puzzle.  
He flicked and flung the flower,  
And another sort of smile  
Caught up like finger tips  
The corners of his lips  
And cracked his ragged muzzle.  
She was standing to the waist  
In goldenrod and brake,  
Her shining hair displaced.  
He stretched her either arm  
As if she made it ache  
To clasp her - not to harm;  
As if he could not spare  
To touch her neck and hair.  
"If this has come to us  
And not to me alone-"  
So she thought she heard him say;  
Though with every word he spoke  
His lips were sucked and blown  
And the effort made him choke  
Like a tiger at a bone.  
She had to lean away.  
She dared not stir a foot,  
Lest movement should provoke  
The demon of pursuit  
That slumbers in a brute.  
It was then her mother's call  
From inside the garden wall  
Made her steal a look of fear  
To see if he could hear  
And would pounce to end it all  
Before her mother came.  
She looked and saw the shame:  
A hand hung like a paw,  
An arm worked like a saw  
As if to be persuasive,  
An ingratiating laugh  
That cut the snout in half,  
An eye become evasive.  
A girl could only see  
That a flower had marred a man,  
But what she could not see  
Was that the flower might be  
Other than base and fetid:  
That the flower had done but part  
And what the flower began  
Her own too meager heart  
Had terribly completed.  
She looked and saw the worst.  
And the dog or what it was,

Obeying bestial laws,  
A coward save at night,  
Turned from the place and ran.  
She heard him stumble first  
And use his hands in flight.  
She heard him bark outright.  
And oh, for one so young  
The bitter words she spit  
Like some tenacious bit  
That would not leave the tongue.  
She plucked her lips for it,  
And still the horror clung.  
Her mother wiped the foam  
From her chin, picked up her comb  
And drew her backward home.

The first image we have is that of a girl drawing back from the calm boy who suddenly lashes a flower in his open palm. He smiles and she doesn't answer. He looks at her and sees a puzzle instead of a woman, and throws the flower away, presenting "another sort of smile" that cracks his "ragged muzzle". The speaker says that she was standing in "goldenrod and brake", with her hair "displaced", and we see the boy stretching his arms to hold her, since he couldn't "spare/To touch her neck and hair". She thinks he says something about him being the only one who feels that desire, but sees the boy beginning to be transformed into a beast. Now with every word his lips suck and blow, and he chokes like "a tiger at a bone". She, again, leans away, afraid of any movement which should provoke the pursuit that sleeps "in a brute". Then, her mother calls and she addresses a "look of fear" to see if the boy heard her mother and would stop whatever he is doing, but she sees a terrifying scene: through a kind of metamorphosis the boy is literally reduced into a beast and she sees his hand as a paw, his arm like a saw and his snout (as that of a pig) cut in half with a laugh. The

speaker says that the girl could see that the flower was responsible for that, although she could not understand that "her own too meager heart" was also guilty of that nightmare. Then the boy is finally seen as a dog running away, using his hands in the running, and she hears him barking. She utters bitter words to him, also plucking her lips and finally, her mother arrives, wipes the foam from her chin, picks up her comb and takes her home. Even on the surface level of meaning the poem shows a boy attempting to get closer to a girl (giving her a flower, saying things, and trying to hold her) and the girl's refusal at this proximity, which practically causes the boy to be transformed into an animal creature who runs away when the girl's mother appears. It seems clear that these "sensual advances" towards the girl are received with terror and disgust, and as Richard Poirier observes, the tension of the situation can be perceived in the formal level of the text since the iambic trimeter lines are rhymed in a "staggered way that allows sudden accelerations past one fixation, like a nightmare image being recollected..." (57). This "graphic terror", though, may be fully understood in our second appreciation of the text, after our decodification of some ambiguous passages of the mimesis.

The first thing that calls our attention is that the title seems to be pointing to the importance of the flower which is reduced to something "base and fetid", because when it was refused by the girl, it lost its natural role of being an element of proximity between the boy and the girl. It was somehow "subverted" from its natural role, and because of that, some metamorphoses begin to happen. It seems clear that as a complex

symbol developed throughout the text, the flower is a dual sign that can stand both for a real flower or for a phallus. As Mordecai Marcus observes, it may stand initially for the phallus and later for the "woman who has subverted her feelings as well as the man's" (172). Reading it as a phallus, we can understand why the woman draws back and why the man lashes his "open" palm (a sign for openness) with the "tender-headed" flower. Then, he flicks and flung the flower and in the moment she refuses his sexuality, he begins to be transformed into a beast. At the same time, this transformation man/animal may be a product of the girl's imagination, since at many points of the poem we seem to be reading the story from her point of view. Then, a different smile cracks his muzzle and he tries to hold her when he sees her standing in goldenrod and brake, with her hair displaced (in a sign of abandonment). He can't stand to touch only her neck and hair and she "thinks" she hears him saying "If this has come to us/ And not to me alone". But his animal lips already suck and blow, and he chokes with the effort to speak "like a tiger at a bone" (The question about the veracity of the facts or the girl's imagination cannot be answered with any certainty, for the text constantly changes its point of perspective from narrator to girl and then back to narrator). Then the girl leans away, afraid of the boy and of the "demon of pursuit/ That slumbers in a brute", and her mother's call makes her see the worst: his hand works like a paw, his arm works like a saw and an "ingratiating laugh" cuts his "snout in half". As Sharon A. Weltman points out, an arm that works like a saw "is not only inhuman in that it works like

a machine, but it also calls up a masturbatory repetitiveness repugnant rather than persuasive to the sexually naive girl" (75). Seeing the boy in his highest degree of bestiality, wasting his sexuality in these repugnant images, the girl still does not realize that the flower (the phallus) could be "other than base and fetid" and that her own "meager" heart did not accept the natural role of the now "subverted" flower. Then she sees the creature ("the dog or what it was") running away, stumbling and barking, and spits bitter words like a tenacious bit - which, according to Sharon Weltman resemble a bit of food or foreign matter ("the taste of a kiss or of semen") (76) - plucking her lips to utter the words. When her mother comes, at the end of the poem, it is clear that the girl is also a beast who foams (like dogs or horses) and the mother has to act for her, wiping her skin and taking her "backward" home.

The poem is almost explicit about the sexual advances of the boy towards the girl, and the hypogram sex (formed by semes and presuppositions) may be fully recognized if we link the classemes "tender-headed flower", the goldenrod and brake in which the girl stands with her "hair displaced", the boy's movement to hold the girl, his frustration in touching only her neck and hair, his thoughts about his desire, his "pursuit", his arm working "like a saw", the bit in the girl's tongue and the foam in her chin. This hypogram basically provides us with a fair explanation to their transformations into beasts, since only through the refusal of their sexual roles, they move backwards from human beings to animals. Thus, the matrix of the text could be these "metamorphoses of the characters into beasts because of

the refusal of their sexuality", which was first actualized in the model "subverted flower". The text is generated both by expansion (we have a progressive narrative of events with development of plot) and by conversion (all erotic signs have the minus sign of bestiality attached to them). Because the characters fail to understand each other, their languages, gestures, and even human physical appearance are reduced to non-human states.

Although "The Subverted Flower" is considered an uncommon work among Frost's poems, critics in general have been attracted to it, up to the point that some of them present it as one of Frost's most brilliant achievements. George Nitche observes the explicit concern "with sexual pathology" in images that equate "love and cruelty" (103). He affirms that we are never sure whether the "final metamorphosis is a function of the observer's view of the girl" or whether "it represents the girl's sudden vision of herself" transformed by guilt and fear (105). Richard Poirier points out that the "macabre imagery" presents a boy's nightmare about the descent "through sexual repressions of himself and the girl he desires into different forms of bestiality" (57), and reminds us that Frost once said in a "Paris Interview" that the subject of the text was "frigidity in women" (58). Elaine Barry sees the poem as "psychological projections" of the girl, who sees the boy's advances with terror and disgust, transforming him into a beast, and who also becomes reduced to an animal form at the end of the poem, for projections always "throw a light backward as well as forward" (42). Katherine Kearns also

observes the boy's transformations through sexual desire, his servility to the girl who "has the power to madden the man and to make him bestial with her rejection of the sexuality...", and her own transformation through the rejection of her own "role as flower" (209). Reginald Cook reads the text as a "moment of quarrel between two young lovers" because of the girl's repulsiveness about the boy's "physical yearnings" (117) and Richard Wakefield parallels "the man's descent into a beast" with the "girl's movement toward hysteria, the two apparently provoking one another", as the meaning of the flower seems to change to love, woman, lust, and corruption (165). Mordecai Marcus considers the possibility that the man "has actually exposed himself" which would make us see the flower as more than a symbol and which would increase our "sympathy for the girl's hesitance and disgust" (172/173). Roy Scheele concentrates himself on the girl's defenselessness, the boy's transformation and the uncertainty of what the girl sees, which makes the characters be too confused with the moment of discovery they face (93/94), while Margaret Storch considers biographical data in her reading of the text in "Robert Frost's 'The Subverted Flower'". Finally, Sharon Weltman is the one who decodes the central issue of the poem, saying that it

...explores the disillusionment of sex, the ineffectiveness of language, and the impossibility of perception untainted by point of view. It is a poem about reductiveness, about transformation down the evolutionary scale, where both boy and girl become beasts. (72/73)

It is, indeed, a text about the "disillusionment of

sex" and love, in which neither boy nor girl have the ability to understand the strong erotic moment they face. Surprised with a sudden sexual desire, the boy does not know how to deal with that, exposing himself to the girl, who reacts by seeing him as a disgusting animal. But since she was also involved by that erotic moment, she is also a beast who refuses her sexual role as woman, making the boy refuse his role as well. It seems that the text suggests that to know how to deal with one's sexuality is the most important factor in the difference between human beings and animals. Anyway, what the reader sees is an extremely negative erotic experience in which love and sex are faced with horror and disgust. In "Wind and Window Flower" we also have a sudden moment of proximity between two characters who somehow don't know how to deal with their own desires.

#### WIND AND WINDOW FLOWER

Lovers, forget your love,  
And list to the love of these,  
She a window flower,  
And he a winter breeze.

When the frosty window veil  
Was melted down at noon,  
And the caged yellow bird  
Hung over her in tune,

He marked her through the pane,  
He could not help but mark,  
And only passed her by  
To come again at dark.

He was a winter wind,  
Concerned with ice and snow,  
Dead weeds and unmated birds,  
And little of love could know.

But he sighed upon the sill,

He gave the sash a shake,  
As witness all within  
Who lay that night awake.

Perchance he half prevailed  
To win her for the flight  
From the firelit looking-glass  
And warm stove-window light.

But the flower leaned aside  
And thought of naught to say,  
And morning found the breeze  
A hundred miles away.

The seven quatrains of mostly iambic trimeter lines present an allegorical story about the attraction of a winter breeze for a window flower. After their presentation in the beginning of the poem, we know that the wind passed by the flower at noon (when the "frosty window veil" melted and when a "caged yellow bird" sang to her), intending to come again at dark. The speaker says that since "he was a winter wind" he could not know much about love, for he knew about "ice", "snow", "dead weeds" and "unmated birds". In spite of that, everybody who was awake that night could hear the wind's sigh, the sash shaking, and his attempt to take the flower in a flight from her warm environment. But the flower "leaned aside", didn't say anything and the breeze was "a hundred miles away" in the next morning.

A seemingly children's story, "Wind and Window Flower" uses the basic principle of allegory to present a subject in the guise of another. As we can perceive through a careful reading of the poem, all the actions (and even the presentation of the characters) in fact symbolize other actions and other characters. The first two lines of the poem - "Lovers, forget your love/ And list to the love of these," - already makes us see

that the story interests us as human beings, having something to do with us. And we immediately feel that the potted plant and the winter breeze are much more human than natural elements. The wind may be taken as a man who lives in a world of aridity and desolation, since he is concerned with ice, snow, "dead weeds" and "unmated birds". His world is characterized by a hypogram of aridity and lack of fertility, which justifies his eagerness to take the flower (the woman) who lives in a world where the bird sings and the stove and the firelit looking-glass warm the room. Contrasting with the man's world, the woman's is featured through a hypogram of warmth and fertility. It also seems relevant that the wind/man first passes by the flower/woman when the frosty window veil melts and the bird begins to sing. So, the man's movement toward the woman carries erotic markers in the sense that it represents his will to move from the desolation of outside winter to the fertility of the inside warmth. He sighs, shakes the sash, and almost wins the flower, but she does not respond. Perhaps if she did, he would receive the same kind of response we saw in "The Subverted Flower". This flower merely leans aside and can't think of anything to say, showing a complete indifference towards the wind. Then, the wind goes away, being very far in the next morning.

The hypogram formed by the two contrasting worlds of aridity X fertility describe a system in which we can see on one side the classemes "ice", "snow", "dead weeds", "winter breeze", and "unmated birds"; and on the other side the "frosty window veil" melting, the bird singing, the "firelit

looking-glass", and the "stove". This potential hypogram is responsible for our decodification of the erotic reasons for the movement, as well as for the basic reason for the frustration of the wind. The flower refuses to accept the wind's invitation, perhaps because this would imply suffering, changes, and even death to her. Thus, the matrix of the poem is simply the "refusal of an erotic experience" by the flower, arousing the frustration of the wind; and the model is the first line of the poem, which establishes the allegorical relationship between wind/man and flower/woman. And since allegory is the main device used here, we have expansion as the generator of the text.

For Richard Wakefield the poem tells us that "isolation from intense passion may be a way of self-preservation, that love, in its most intense, involves violence and corruption", and he sees the first line of the text as a "warning" to the reader, heightened by the universality of the meaning of the story (153). Mordecai Marcus, on the other hand, observes the clear connection between the characters and human beings but thinks that in the last two stanzas both may "perchance be revealing feelings", since the wind "seems happy in the flight that takes him far away", retaining his freedom, while the flower retains her comfort (26). What seems relevant here is that this happiness the characters feel in remaining in their places implies an absence of movement and a refusal of both spiritual and physical love. More than this, the poem seems to say that the movement towards sex and love may be a frustrating and dangerous one. We can feel this frustration with relative intensity in "Devotion", which presents a speaker's evaluation

about her sexual experiences.

#### DEVOTION

The heart can think of no devotion  
Greater than being shore to the ocean-  
Holding the curve of one position,  
Counting an endless repetition.

"Devotion" is such a short poem that we can hardly think it will be necessary to decode many ungrammaticalities. But as soon as we read this powerful quatrain we realize the text is obscure at first sight, since we already have a geological metaphor for emotional statements. A speaker is talking, as the title says, about devotion, and explains the point through a metaphor: The devotion of a heart may be measured by its ability to be shore to an ocean. This heart would embrace the ocean in its position and would count its "endless repetitions". As Mordecai Marcus explains, "the metaphor of the heart thinking about devotion shows intellectual activity becoming emotional and then, metaphorically, physical" (119). The metaphor is unveiled in our heuristic reading, due to the logical connections of sea with agitation and turbulence, and of shore with stability, strength, and fidelity. We infer the speaker represents a female voice, since the connections female/stability/fidelity and male/agitation/turbulence are much more coherent in cultural terms. This female speaker is devoted to her beloved, and shows her devotion by "holding" her beloved's agitations in trial after trial. There is even an implication that this beloved's agitations are linked with infidelity. At the mimesis level, it

seems the metaphor works well. In spite of that, the last two sentences strike us for their ambiguity.

We feel there's something more than a mere emotional implication to the physical metaphor of the heart. Poetic signs such as "curve of one position" and "endless repetition" also belong to the sex hypogram, working as interpretants (these dual signs generate a text which may be read in two ways). If we concentrate our attention on the sex hypogram, the first thing we notice is that the speaker is talking about a sexual intercourse, in which she is receiving a repetition of movements. As Richard Poirier points out, "It is usually the female who must feel sufficient 'devotion' to stay in the 'curve of one position'" (178). Poirier sees the geological description as a metaphor for one person "holding to someone" or "keeping her or him despite (or is it because of?) countersurgings or agitations" (178). But one point is very relevant to our decoding of the text: we have here a woman who is talking about devotion in terms of her ability to stand sexual movements. For her, the best devotion she may give her beloved is this one: to take part in an activity which is totally unpleasant to her. And so we arrive at the matrix of the poem, which may be represented by "Devotion through sacrifice", or simply, "Sacrifice". The dual signs are classemes and belong, as we have seen, to the potential sex hypogram, which is formed by semes and presuppositions. The transformation from matrix to text occurs through conversion, since the code of sex, which would be normally positive, is presented with negative markers,

representing frustration and sacrifice.

Thus, "Devotion" closes the last group of lyrics analyzed in this chapter. It is clear that sexual love was not only felt as epiphanic moments of revelation and magic, but also as a sacrifice, as a loss of one's identity as human beings, and as a solitary moment of "self-preservation" or uncertainty about the future.

## CONCLUSION

The poetic language of Frost's lyrics presents, as all poetry, a ritual of semantic indirection that we can only grasp through the movement from mimesis to semiosis. And it is precisely this semantic indirection the main factor in the misreadings of Frost's works, for it is rarely seen beyond the confusing multiplicity of mimesis. As we could see in the nature lyrics analyzed in this study, the departure from the mimesis to the other level of discourse is extremely important, since it leads us to where significance (and not the surface meaning) of texts may be apprehended.

In the twenty-three nature lyrics we have seen, the decodification of poetic signs, hypograms, and matrixes all pointed to one direction: eroticism. This makes us realize that human sexuality was an important issue, not only in Frost's narrative poems, but also in the "innocent" lyrics which are often considered to be almost an example of pastoral poetry. We could also perceive that even a thematic division among these lyrics was possible, since we found lyrics which deal with associations between nature and male/female sexuality (subdivided into associations between nature and female sexuality, and presentations of the speaker's erotic projections into nature), and erotic invitations and experiences (positive and

negative). These two groups of lyrics carried strong erotic undertones that could be illuminated through the game of semiotic circularity we performed.

In the first group we could unveil the presence of eroticism in "The Rose Family", when the cliché association woman/rose was decoded; in "Good-bye and Keep Cold", when the association "dead woman/orchard" lead us to the culmination of sexual love; in "Never Again Would Birds' Song Be the Same", with the presence of Eve bringing eroticism to human beings and nature (associated with Adam and the birds' song); in "Unharvested", with the inverted Myth of the Garden of Eden showing us a speaker's sexual resistance (decoded through the association woman/apple tree); and in "The Telephone", when the speaker associates his sexual desire for a woman to a flower from which he thinks he can hear his love calling him. Besides these associations we could also perceive erotic projections of a speaker into nature in poems such as "Moon Compasses", in which the speaker projects his concept of true love (sensual love) in the analogy he makes between downpours surrounding him, moon rays surrounding a mountain and two hands touching a face; "Ghost House", with the speaker projecting his desire for fertility when he presumes that two dead people are "lass and lad"; "To Earthward", which presents a speaker using elements of nature to talk about different phases of his sexuality, until the culmination of love in death; "A Dream Pang", a projection in a dream of the speaker's desire to fuse with his love in death; "Waiting - Afield at Dusk", in which the speaker projects in his

dream an erotic waiting for his love; and "Reluctance", which presents a projection of the speaker's desire to overcome the end of love (and sex) and the end of a season.

In the second group, the erotic invitations strike us for their concise and simple language. The speaker gives us a hint of his erotic intentions when he invites us to clear a pasture spring and to fetch a little calf, showing all his concern with time in "The Pasture"; when he clearly invites his love to go into the storm and be his love in the rain in "A Line-Storm Song", when he uses an apparently naive prayer to God to mask an argument addressed to his love in "A Prayer in Spring", and when he uses the country code of planting to invite his love to burn in the "Putting in the Seed". As for the erotic experiences, "In a Vale" describes a speaker's erotic learning through an allegorical story about voices and "maidens" in bloom face that visited him at night when he was young; "Rose Pogonias" presents a sacred erotic experience lived by the speaker and his love among "a thousand orchises"; "Going for Water" deals with a magic erotic experience of a couple in the woods (where they seek a brook in silence); and "All Revelation" talks about the epiphanic moment of revelation human beings have through the conception of a new life. In contrast with these good portraits of sex and eroticism, other poems present the dark side of human sexuality, as in "The Strong are Saying Nothing", in which the uncertainty of human conception and human death are presented through the code of planting; in "The Subverted Flower", in which the terror dominates a boy and a girl who are transformed into beasts since they don't know how to deal with a moment of erotic

desire; in "Wind and Window Flower", which tells us allegorically of a woman's refusal to accept a man's erotic call; and in "Devotion", which presents a desolate statement of a female speaker about the devotion she has for her love, which forces her to accept sexual intercourse.

Although some of these lyrics present an almost explicit concern with sexual love, the majority of them present an apparently ordinary incident related with nature and with a speaker. The mimesis level of these lyrics, often very rich in language and imagery, suggests that there is really something else to be discovered. But as soon as we perceive the constant semantic ungrammaticalities among the rich multiplicity of the mimesis, pointing to a hypogram elsewhere, we can see all the poetic game of language that poetry invites us to play. As Frost said in a 1954 talk recorded by Reginald Cook, "Our object is to entertain you by making play (symbol and metaphor) with things we trust you already know. By making play! That's the height of it - the apex" (Robert Frost: A Living Voice, 48). Thus, reading Frost's poetry means much more than the simple apprehension of the mimesis level of his poems. In order to perceive his work in all its richness and subtlety, we need to have a pre-disposition to follow the circuitous sequence of their structure, to take part in their semiotic game, and to keep in mind that their language, no matter how simple and clear, is never referential. It is only by understanding that language in poetry is indirect that we can feel where significance may be found. And as soon as we perceive that significance in Frost's

poetry is the result of the "word game" of poetic language, we understand that his typical structural movement is certainly from "sight" to "insight" ("Frost's Synecdochism", 379), from tangible to untangible things.

The awareness of the detour we can find in Frost's poems is, thus, particularly relevant in the linkage between his nature lyrics and eroticism. Although the myth of the good grandfather of American Literature would be more coherent with a surface analysis of Frost's descriptive realism, the departure from mimesis shows us that beyond the visual images of summer and spring (birds singing and thrusting their bills into flowers, flowers presenting their softness and delicacy, the sun burning, bees flying around flowers and trees, farmers putting in the seed in "open creases" of the earth, people picking orchises or seeking mysterious brooks in the woods, and farmers inviting their lovers to clean pasture springs or to "rout" in the rain) we may find poetic signs that also stand for fertility and erotic call, in the same way that images of fall and winter (snow, dead leaves, unmated birds, coldness, and absence of trees) point to a context of dryness and aridity. As Frost wrote in a letter to Sidney Cox, "in Poetry and under emotion every word used is 'moved' a little or much - moved from its old place, heightened, made, made new" (Selected Letters of Robert frost, 141). Frost begins with an accurate description of these nature images and little by little extends their significance to human sexuality, beginning with a provincial argument which is enlarged to deeper levels of complexity. Therefore, the presence of a human speaker and his considerations on the scene or activity he is engaged in

often changes the spotlight from real nature to abstract phenomena. And through this mechanism of transcendental realism, the often labeled "conservative" and nature poet talks naturally about different aspects of human sexuality.

As the analysis of the last group of lyrics shows, sexual love in Frost's texts has both the power to provide human beings with self-realization or with total emptiness. Whereas sex generates learning ("In a Vale"), epiphanic moments of fusion with nature and with the Other ("Rose Pogonias" and "Going for Water") and an almost magical revelation about the beginning of life ("All Revelation"); it also brings uncertainty ("The Strong are Saying Nothing"), fear ("Wind and Window Flower"), animal instincts ("The Subverted Flower") and sacrifice ("Devotion") to human life. It is at the same time a creative and destructive force, which encompasses conception and death. In this sense, these lyrics present the same duality we can find in Frost's dramatic poems, which also present positive and negative portrayals of sexual love. Although his dramatic poems are much more explicit in their erotic undertones, for Frost is especially effective with dialogue, the lyrics also present in a subtle way the different sides of quite challenging erotic experiences.

Much more than being the wise white-haired man who talked about his country through New England, Frost was a remarkable poet who used seasons, rural scenes and human drama to meditate on many psychological issues. And in the same way he used nature to talk about death, human transience, friendship and

love, he also used it to talk about marriage and sex. This is an unquestionable proof that he was a modern poet who threatened the genteel tradition not only because of his enlargement of Imagism from sight to hearing, and of his modern view of nature, but also because he replaced the melodious lyrics about romantic love of the nineteenth century by portrayals of love full of passion, sensuality, temples of the heat, sacred places, and mysterious silences. Nature, thus, was a framework through which he talked about human sexuality, believing in the honest duplicity of symbol and metaphor.

Finally, I would like to mention that since the semiotic circularity of significance is a dialect between text and reader, there will always be something more to say about the same texts and the same poets. Each new reader brings a new sensibility to interact with the text, and all of them, no matter how many structural devices they can decode, go back to the same place: to the ungrammaticalities of the beginning. And since we always end where we begin, poetry continues to be a striking mystery, with new possibilities shining in each rereading. There is always something left behind, uncovered by our particular language. In this sense, there is still a lot more to be said about Robert Frost's poetic production, particularly about his complex female figures, both women and witches, who seem to bring madness and redemption to the men's world.

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