

## **Swaying Nature – Native and Poetic Conceptions of the Forest among the Wichí and in Robert Frost’s Poems**

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### **Abstract**

Usually, analogies about nature exist in the native and poetic conceptions that stem from a type of reasoning where sensitive perceptions and intuitions, linked with certain natural elements, give rise to world views which foster human empathy. This article will focus on the concept of “nature”, from the perspective of the Wichí *bazaneros* of Northwestern Argentina. They are traditional foragers, like their neighbours, the Qom, Chorote, Mocoví or Nivaclé of the Gran Chaco lowlands that live on the northern border of Argentina and the southern borders of Bolivia and Paraguay. Their thoughts will be put into correlation with poems by Robert Frost, concentrating mainly on the swaying tree metaphor. Trees, among the Wichí, are associated with longevity, vitality and fertility. Human and arboreal families are connected through trees and, as in Frost’s poem *Birches*, this allows them to swing between the forest and the stars through reveries. However, in both nature is conceived as two-faced: her lovely face tends to change into a cruel one, which disappoints the poet as well as the Wichí people who cherish it so much. For this reason, in both the cases, its swaying character may suddenly lead to a change from a friendly nature to an ominous and suffocating presence predicating human decline and death. Fortunately, reverie and imagination sustain them during these temporary spaces of negativity and afford them periods of joy.

*Keywords:* Wichí, Robert Frost, swaying, faces of nature

## Introduction

This article will focus on the humanization of nature in the indigenous Wichí society, and will analyse its counterpart in the poetics of Robert Frost. Many societies order reality by privileging affections, intuitions or vivid dreams according to their reasoning that there is no logical reason but only different kinds of prioritization to cope with the world. Stillness is the essence of inanimate beings, until an extraordinary event (a spell, the action of a shaman or a theophany) changes their shape or meaning. Hence, in native societies, in folklore and in poetry, metaphorically or not, this communication between species is enabled and may occur, albeit its grasp may be frequently uneasy.

Among the Wichí, certain groves replicate their own kinship ties, such as that of grandparents and grandchildren, as they conceive them as families of trees with masculine and feminine genders. Moreover, the relationships between husbands and wives are represented by couples of birds that mutually express their love by means of birdsongs. Indeed, some humans display certain skills which they attribute to their mythical ancestors. It is undeniable that these societies humanize the elements of nature that are close to them, and to whom they attribute their own intentions, feelings and human behaviours.

These concepts recall what trees mean to the poet Robert Frost who, in his poem “Birches” reminds us of the nostalgic memories of childhood, insofar as they gift the child swinging on the tree with a deep joy: “Soon the sun's warmth makes them shed crystal shells / Shattering and avalanching on the snow-crust— / Such heaps of broken glass to sweep away / You'd think the inner dome of heaven had fallen.” (*Winter Interval*, 1916. Frost, 1979, p. 121–122).

This image compares well with the intense joy experienced by the Wichí people when they await the harvest, at the end of every year in November or December, when the carob pods hail down on the ground and nature deciding whether their shamans have propitiated the Pleiades successfully. Sometimes, their efforts are crowned by rich pickings that then results in collective happiness.

In both cases, the swaying metaphor strikes one as an always precarious balance because nature is Janus-faced: its amicable, peaceful and luminous side may suddenly become untamed, uncontrolled and unpredictable. It also consecrates the recurrent cycle of birth, growth, fullness, and decay, except for the trees in the Wichí case: they are the only natural living beings who are not doomed to death because they harbour the greenness associated with the vital strength (greenery: *watsan*) that hampers the completion of the process of decay. This agrees with the quality of “greenery” (the plant sap is homologous to blood) associated with the vital force that, except for mass destruction, such as a big fire or unlimited deforestation, slows down the natural death process. They believe that trees tend to live for a long time because “the greenery (life force) lives there” (*lewatsanchejaj*, (Barúa, 2001, p. 30). It seems that people who are spiritually close to trees tend to consider themselves as belonging to the earth but, somehow, separate from the earth as well. Also, as will be pointed out in the next section, this vital strength may also be transferred to humans. And although some people find a haven and a pathway to daydreaming in nature, in the case of Frost, she is indifferent to our hopes and fears.

## The Wichí Groves

For the Wichí, trees are links to their mythological home. They are associated with vitality and longevity, as pointed out in a pioneering work by Miguel de los Ríos (1976) about the meaning of the arboreal world, especially in relation to Wichí shamanism. The groves (*kwat*) are conceived as families, which are analogous to the human ones, which can also communicate among themselves.

Their murmurs are usually translated into words by the Wichí grandparents who put a double pod carob (one male, the other female) under their heads so that their dream would reveal the name of their new-born grandchild (Barúa, 2001, p. 40). Thus, the arboreal grandparents and grandchildren relate to the important events in the lives of their human equivalents. Consequently, the Wichí language hosts numerous botanical toponyms (Palmer, 1995, p. 35–60).

Thus, the arboreal grandparents and grandchildren relate to the important events that happen to their human equivalents. The space where they live is marked by what happened to their family and relatives. The laughter, mocking, unexpected or unfortunate moments in the life of these forest walkers are reflected in their territory and its narratives. The footprints store the memory and emotions that each close kinsman has lived. They also point out, above all, the dangers and the changing nature of the landscape that they must negotiate on a daily basis and which conveys information to them and their relatives. The roads are made safe by treading them, observing flora, fauna and celestial phenomena to foresee threats until the roads become insecure again, because the territory and its paths are perceived as an indomitable, aggressive and often petty entity.

However, in their walks they step into the footprints of their ancestors, but they also imprint new paths on the landscape depending on what happened to the flora, fauna or themselves, for example, if the latter were scorched, violently killed, or hit by lightning, (Braunstein et al., 2017, p. 149-205). Palmer points out that, “their place-name classification system is their map where they read as in a navigation chart where all the hazards and all the relatively safe waters are marked” (Palmer, 1995, p. 10).

Trees make their mere existence possible and are, at the same time, a metaphor for life. In the Wichí belief system, their terrestrial figures communicate with the cup composed of the innumerable stars of the Pleiades, which is responsible for the flowering and fructification of the forest. This constellation is defined as a white bough whose stars spill down on top of the trees and cause a heavy rain of carob pods that spin in the air and settle on the ground (Barúa, 2001, p. 38).

Albeit the Pleiades (*Potsethlai*) are composed of a multitude of stars, only seven are visible to the naked eye. For the Wichí, they imply a celestial-human alliance which is oriented towards the economic and vital survival of individuals. Normally, in the latitude where the Wichi live (24°S 61°W), they are visible at the end of July. At this precise moment, the shamans may be able to reach them with their shamanic paraphernalia. After sniffing hallucinogenic *cebil* (in the Wichí language: *ha'tah*; lat. *Anandenanthera colubrina*), their auspicious journey to the stars enables the young seeds to achieve maturation. When they are older, they are ready to fall onto the ground. If the shamans were successful in their task, by November or December, the seeds of all the species mature, most prominently among them the paradigmatic carob tree, and the season of abundance (*Yatchep*) begins. (Barúa, 2001, p.37). Scarcity or abundance is linked

to the constellation of the Pleiades. It is seen as a family whose “children” detach themselves from the constellation when they mature and drop into the forests ripening the fruits. This also happens among other native Chaco groups that have been studied from an ethno-astronomical perspective, e.g. among the Mocoví (López, 2009). Additionally, the Pleiades are believed to be a gigantic white and bright bower from where the stars spill over the trees and cause a heavy rain of carob pods that rotate in the air and settle on the ground (ibid., p. 38), an inverted hair that overflows with stars and is aligned with the treetops. This allows for an exchange between the shamans, trees and stars.

The constellation is conceived of as a rectangle occupied by the celestial family: the father (Moon, *wela*), the mother (the star woman, *katés thlukwetaj*) and their older and younger children. This family has a life cycle analogous to a human's: when the older brothers mature, they slip down from the constellation into the woods, the younger brothers get bigger and brighter and, once they finish maturing, they too slide to the edge of the constellation and get ready to drop down (Barúa, 2001, p. 39).

The metaphorical description of the Pleiades by astronomers has striking analogies: “Seen from the outside, such clouds seem dark and gloomy. But inside, they are brilliantly illuminated by the hot new-born stars. Later, the stars wander out of their nursery to seek their fortunes in the Milky Way, stellar adolescents still surrounded by tufts of glowing nebulosity, residues still gravitationally attached of their amniotic gas. The Pleiades are a nearby example. As in the families of humans, the maturing stars’ journey far from home, and the siblings see little of each other.” (Sagan, 1980, p. 231).

On the other hand, the Pleiades’ influence on the maturation and harvest of fruits is not only a cultural belief of the Wichí but also a part of the empirical knowledge of foragers throughout the world who have observed the relations between the appearance and disappearance of stars in the celestial vault under which they live and the concurrent changes in the sylvan world. The first ethno-astronomical antecedent in the Chaco was the work of Lehmann-Nitsche, who from 1923 to 1929 studied various native groups, including the Wichí (known as the Mataco for many centuries). Presently, there is a much work done referring back these early texts and its celestial topics (Cordeu, 1977; Braunstein, 1989; Giménez Benítez, López & Granada, 2002 and 2006; López, 2009; Lopez & Giménez Benítez, 2007; Gómez, 2017).

Finally, decades ago, *Filiahen*, the shaman who revealed his secrets to Dr. de los Ríos, (1976, p. 69) pointed to a cultural mechanism taught by the trickster *Tokwjaj* (one of the most powerful Wichí ancestors), to find a personal and unique name for the human new-borns obtained when hearing the call of the grandfather tree to his/her grandchild (the masculine or feminine pod) while dreaming (1976; 69). Even today, this process is known as *iwo thleya* (literally, “make his name”). This can refer to all kinds of living beings. Hence, the human, arboreal and star families have the genre assignation, mating and, above all, conception and progeny in common, as well as a secret name – known only to the closest kinsmen – which is the very essence of the Wichí as living people (after their death, their names are intended to be erased from the memories of their loved ones as soon as possible) (Barúa, 2001, p. 25).

### **Swaying between the Sky and Earth**

In Amerindian mythologies, usually the separation between humans and animals is not clear. The mythical ancestors could have animal bodies and human souls. With the passage of myths to historical times, individuals acquired the human body, although they tend to subtly show, to

varying degrees and in specific situations, the traits of animals whose bodies and skills their mythical ancestors possessed. However, the conviction that a sort of backstage mythical world pushes them into a sort of terrestrial exile perseveres— they almost do not belong to the heavenly realm, that of their constellations where the *pahlalis* (mythical ancestors) continue to live, among the feminine Stars, Sun and Moon or the vengeful Rainbow Serpent. Unlike modern humans, these are characterized by glare, enchantment, excess, abundance and plenitude, the traits that the moderns sorely miss.

In particular, male ancestors possessed an animal morphology and human behaviour. However, “they engendered a morphological and cultural Wichí humanity” (Dasso, 1999, p. 50) through various avatars that have taken them away from their mythical space and have placed them in Wichí history. Based on the same idea, women were stars who came down to the earth to steal the food from male ancestors. The women that were captured by them were humanized by mating, the others escaped and still are stars.

For the Wichí, the everyday world may become “a pathless wood”. Even a slight oversight in their behaviour may alter the balance, resulting in an unfortunate event. This can be equated with the child's deeds while swinging on the tree: A part of one of the poem “Birches” unique stanza looks like a metaphorical guide for the Wichí’s cautious behaviour: “He learned all there was / To learn about not launching out too soon / And so not carrying the tree away / Clear to the ground. / He always kept his poise / To the top branches, climbing carefully / With the same pains you use to fill a cup / Up to the brim, and even above the brim.” (Shand & Guirri, 1976, p. 16–17). In fact, children's games, especially the traditional ones, focus on maintaining balance. For example, Wichí girls would form a spiral with their legs until they create a compact group. They represent a growing tree. A boy axes the “tree” hitting the girls' legs. The group oscillates and, when “the tree” falls, the game ends. Or, a child stands in the centre of a circle formed by children lying on the ground and push the child to the centre with their feet from one side to the other without letting him fall (See Métraux, 1946).

Seamus Heaney has highlighted this feature in Frost's poem, which also proved to be vital in interpreting the delicate art of supporting each other that the Wichí have developed: a world of silent movements and careful words to avoid being overheard by malicious beings. Avoiding a noisy world, where the voices are confused, allows them to hear the murmur of the trees. Their forests speak in a primeval language that they have already lost and which can be rescued through day-dreaming (*húislek*) or by taking possession of bird songs. It is curious that in Wichí mythology, the fate of primeval forests was associated with their mythical ancestor, Ovenbird. It is evidenced in their narration of “The Great Fire” (Palmer 2005, p. 268-275):

A group of ancestors went to ask the Fire Owners for embers for their campsites. They warned giggly Ovenbird not to laugh at them. These beings had a human shape, but their bodies were made of fire. When Ovenbird noticed how they released fire while whistling or spitting, he could not help bursting into laughter. The Men of Fire took offense and burned the world.

Because of Ovenbird’s action, the world had to be renewed and so it was; two little siblings survived in a cave. When they came out, not a single tree remained. Then, the boy sang a powerful chant (like the shamans in historical times), the world recovered its forests, and life was restored, albeit devitalized since each new arrangement implies a loss according to the Wichí (Cf. Barúa, 2016). Coincidentally, the Ovenbird also appears in Frost as the primeval bird that knows and expresses reality without words: “*The question that he frames in all but words*” *The Oven Bird* [Mountain Interval, 1916].

Among the Wichí, the sound of trees appears as a mark of pristine reality. In this sense, they resort in their ability to listen to the conversations of the arboreal families while they are dreaming; the tone of their words tries to echo natural and human activities. Furthermore, they grab the songs through the spirits of the birds in order to “see” from above with the bird’s eyes (Barúa, 2013, p. 225).

Frost, willing to push his imagination while setting limits to it, also tries to preserve musicality, but not through free verse or modernist experimentation. His verses deliberately follow the rhythm to guarantee an access, for “a while”, to the celestial world without the danger of getting lost in a world with no paths.

We are seeking to point out certain similarities between worldviews from the Wichí subtropical woods and those of the boreal forests of Robert Frost. This great poet has put his effort into creating very vivid, meticulous images, although his style seems “deceptively simple” for very sensitive and complex realities. This also happens in what is left of many indigenous cultures with foraging backgrounds, especially, among the Wichí communities whose way of life still depends on the woods, as is also the case with other *bazaneros*.

Frost wrote many of these particular poems while staying in Great Britain although he finished polishing them when he was back in New England. In the first edition of his Complete Poems (1964) he wrote a paragraph dedicated to his wife Elinore. He pointed out the places that were dear to them like Plymouth “where we walked in spring beyond the covered bridge”, their farm in New Hampshire as well as Derry or Hyle Brook. Not only is the book of poems titled *Mountain Interval* but also the word “interval” is present several times in the four lines of the dedication. According to his biographer, Jay Parini, an interval is a New England dialect term that would imply that Frost intended it as “a double meaning, suggesting a ‘pause’ on a trip, as well as a landscape immersion” (1999, p. 278).

Perhaps, the “pause in a trip” and the “immersion in the landscape” are the common notes of the poems that are closest to the feelings of “longing” and “enchantment”, described in colloquial language to show the deep emotions that Frost attributed to simple people (Lynen, 1960, p. 12). Of the thirty poems from “Mountain Interval”, we will concentrate on “Birches”, and “The Oven Bird”, “The Last Word of a Blue Bird”, “Out, Out!” and “The Sound of Trees”. We will also reference two other poems, “October” (*A Boy’s Will*, 1915) and “Dust of Snow” (*New Hampshire*, 1923). One can interpret his concern for death (personified in the winter trope) and where to find contentment in spite of it.

Some critics place him under the literary school of Imagism, which was founded in 1914 by Ezra Pound in his book *Des Imagistes: An Anthology*. The primary idea focuses on the image as a direct impression of the senses, through color, rhythm, and over formal elements. However, Frost seems to circumvent any classification by trying to revive not only visual images but also restoring sound, rhythmic and musical images arising from his deep meditation on an object of nature or related to it in each poem. The poems of “Mountain Interval” have been described as brief meditations on an object, person or event. These short pieces have a dramatic quality like monologues and dialogues. Borges et al., (1997) point out that “Birches” and “The Road Not Taken”, are examples where he resorts to an “understatement” that would be a fairly classic form of communication in New England (p. 32–33)

In the following, we are explicitly comparing some aspects of Wichí reverie by focusing on “Birches” (Frost, 1979, p. 121–122). First titled *Swaying Birches*, it emphasized the idea of

swinging between the earth and the sky by children riding birches. This was a common game during Frost's childhood in New England. It is a long poem composed of a single stanza in blank verse, with numerous metrical variations, where the iambic foot prevails as it better translates the natural cadence of speech. Frost produces a sound effect using alliteration where consecutive repetition of the same phoneme, or similar phonemes, suggest sensitive images such as the sound of water or a horse's gallop. "Birches" creates a powerful auditory image when he describes, for example, the ice cracking as it breaks against the branches, "Soon the sun's warmth makes them shed crystal shells / Shattering and avalanching on the snow crust / Such heaps of broken glass to sweep away..." (Lines 10–12).

In order to evoke his particular musicality, he needs to push imagination and translate it strongly into the poetic word through rhythms. This cannot be achieved through free verse or modernist experimentation. This is akin to the Wichí, where behaviors are deliberately rhythmic which ensures fleeting access to the celestial world without the danger of being lost, "And life is too much as a pathless wood." (Line 44).

In "The Figure a Poem Makes", a prose text that appears in the first edition of his *Complete Poems*, Frost defines this experience as, "...begins in delight and ends in wisdom. The figure is the same as for love" (1964, p. vi). He points out that the poem "must be more felt than seen ahead like prophecy. It must be a revelation, or a series of revelations, as much for the poet as for the reader" (p. vii).

As discussed earlier, nature can be beneficial or harmful depending on the circumstances or carelessness with which people use the tools to do their daily chores, she can suddenly turn against them. The latter appears both in the Wichí and a number of Frost poems, such as the grim "Out! Out!..." (Frost, 1979, p. 136–137). An inanimate object, a saw, is presented as a conscious and evil being, who grunts and chatters aggressively while a boy does his job of cutting firewood with it when his sister calls him and his family to the table for supper. And, as if the saw knew what "supper" means, it jumps and eats the boy's hand. The sister wants to call the doctor, but he refuses to avoid amputation. The boy ends up bleeding to death. The poetic expression of this death is heart breaking, "To tell them 'Supper' / At the Word, the saw / As if to prove saws knew what supper meant / leaped out at the boy's hand, or he must have given the hand / [...] They listened at his heart. / Little — less — nothing! / and that ended it" (Lines 14-32).

The analogy is based on comparing the two routines of the everyday world and another world glimpsed through the treetops. Life is worth living only in the ecstasy felt when the two spheres concur, both in Frost's poetic inspiration and in the Wichí dreams or visions. Balancing, the child ascends the birch trunk until it approaches the sky. At the same time, the happy years for the Wichí *bazaneros* are those when their ancestors and shamans establish a connection between the white bower of the Pleiades and the treetops causing a profuse rain of carob pods that delights the inhabitants of the favoured communities.

Frost, evokes nostalgia as he feels as an "expatriate" of the modern world, away from his "home" in multiple ways. According to Lynen, nostalgia arises from sophistication and not from primitive roots. He states that it is usually a part of highly developed societies due to the impulse to look back, towards a purer life that is fading away (1960, p. 12). It does not appear spontaneously but arises from a deeply meditative attitude. The modernization of the early twentieth century is the context for British and American writers, like Frost, seeking refuge in London or Paris to experience new forms and new sensations. Frost wrote most of his poems

in London where he “painted” images, that were in his heart, of the forests and the daily tasks of the New England peasants from which his dreams and revelations emanate, knowing that nothing never will be the same. This is notably similar to the other case compared: the meditative Wichí tend to look back to their cherished mythic world (Cf. Barúa, 2013).

Sometimes, both beg for a delay before the fatal decline, as Frost describes in “October” when the days are already heading towards winter, “Begin the hours of this day slow. / Make the day seem to us less brief. / Hearts not averse to being beguiled, / Beguile us in the way you know / [...] Retard the sun with gentle mist; / Enchant the land with amethyst. / Slow, slow!” (Frost, 1979, p. 27–28)

### The faces of Nature

Frost does not attribute these actions to supernatural beings, as Yeats had done earlier. Seán Hewitt states, “The fluid, Celtic view of nature, what Yeats would term “flux,” is recreated in the sacred space of both the poem and the woods [...] is thus embedded early in the poet’s oeuvre, and is specifically linked to a re-enchantment of the natural world, a revised understanding of the poet’s place within nature” (2018, p. 16–17).

The Wichí would exist somewhere in between: the spiritual world acts in nature as in Yeats, but they are analogous to humans. For instance, the arboreal “grandparents” (the largest trees, *thlukwuetaj*) are equivalent to human grandparents. While they talk to their grandchildren (the seeds, *halo’ thlos*), the human grandfather tries to capture what the old tree is muttering while he is dreaming (Barúa, 2001, p. 29). Likewise, the musicality associated with bird songs that combine rejoicing and lament is fundamental for the Wichí, who aim to reach comfort and joy by means of reverie (Barúa, 2013, p. 226).

In this regard, Seamus Heaney points out that the most conventional analogy of poetry has, like in Wichí nostalgia, “vestiges of times of Edenic happiness and freedom”. Thus, Frost tells us: “Never again would birds’ songs be the same. / And to do that to birds is why she came” (*A Witness Tree*, 1942. In: R. Frost, 1979, p. 338–339).

Nature can also be dreadful and inhuman. However, “Nature is not hostile to man, for hostility would imply in nature a consciousness of specific human concerns. But nature does not oppose man’s purposes; it simply enacts its own tendencies: it is not friendly to man” (Abel, 1981, p. 202). In fact, Frost does not consider himself a “nature poet”, as the Romantics did. Hewitt therefore distinguishes between physical devotion to “Nature” and when she merely inspires mystical vision, “a key tension in Romanticism between appreciation of the physical world (as in Wordsworth) and a disdain for it (as in Blake), suggesting that, in his early life at least, Yeats was more attracted to the idyll, the Romantic landscape, than to a Blakean world of symbolic “unnature”. (Hewitt, 2018, p.3). Nonetheless, some critics do not judge Frost as a Romantic poet but a modern one. “Obviously as a Romantic, Wordsworth uses “Nature” as the prominent theme focusing on the beauty of nature that can heal his pain and give him pleasure. On the other hand, as a Modern Poet, Frost’s vision is to present human being as the central theme, and nature comes as a background. Poetry, to Frost, was a record of personal experience” (Hewitt, 2018, p.7).

Frost defines the swaying experience as “the happiness of what was lost long time ago”, because charm is ephemeral – just a pause in a soulless world. The Wichí are great walkers and, at the same time, meticulous observers of the daily changes in nature. While they talk,



they are attentive to everything around them and when someone stumbles, is clumsy or commits some mischief, everyone laughs. Even those who hail from the forest usually share the funny or surprising events they have witnessed with others. They have said, in many instances, that the ground is being scarred by actual living beings whose feelings and experiences mark the Earth, as it happened with all the beings who preceded them. Something akin to this belief is also experienced in another one of the poems by Frost, *Dust of Snow* (“New Hampshire”, 1923):

“The way a crow/ Shook down on me/ The dust of snow/From a hemlock tree //Has given my heart/A change of mood/And saved some part/ Of a day I had rued” (Frost, 1979, p. 221).

Dahl related *Snow* to winter and death, but in this particular poem he highlights how comforted our poet felt: “‘Dust of Snow’ conducts a familiar human conflict. In this poem, the speaker has lost all hopes and is very sad. When he sits under a hemlock tree the poet has the dust of snow fallen on himself. Making his mood better he feels relaxed and thankful to the nature for saving his day from being wasted” (Dahl, 2016, p.105). Surely the Wichí would smile, like Frost, if a crow suddenly rained on them the dust of snow.

However, in *The Most of It* (“Mountain Interval”), Frost expressed the other face of nature – its unfriendliness. Standing alone at the shore of a lake, “he thought he kept the universe alone”. He could only hear a “mocking echo” and he asked whether nature really wanted to support humanity, implying that nature acts according to her own principles without regard for human purposes. She does not provide an answer to any kind of our tribulations. Frost concludes the poem with a gloomy: “And that was all” (Abel, 1981, p. 204).

For the Wichí, life is a battleground and the slightest negligence may bring about Evil. Their trickster, Tokwaj, is the prototype of a careless and cheating person. Like Sisyphus in Western mythology, he challenged the most important rules of conviviality. Crafty Sisyphus and naughty Tokwaj were punished for their deeds, but, along with them, humanity also was condemned to an existence of hopeless labor (Cf. Barúa, 2016).

## Conclusion

As seen above, there exist important convergences between the Wichí mythology and their groves and “Birches” (and other poems) by Robert Frost. The trees communicate with the true home of the Wichí, that of their mythical ancestors whom they reach through remembrance and reverie. A pause of serenity and joy, that contrasts with the vicissitudes of their current life viewed as degraded and incomplete. Only complex rules of sociability allow them to overcome conflict and pain while enabling them for fleeting encounters with the contiguous world of their mythical ancestors. Full existence is rarely available in the everyday world primarily viewed as threatening and painful. However, what we read in Dahl about Frost can be true also for the Wichí: “Frost is by no means the dark naturalist that many suspect. Behind the mask of ‘grimness’ which many of his critics have fastened upon him, there is a continual elfin pucker; a whimsical smile, a half-disclosed raillery glints beneath his most sombre monologues. His most concrete facts are symbols of spiritual values.” (2016, p. 100)

Finally, in both cases compared here, the “real” world and that of the “imagination” appear as a craving for Nature that, through poetic and mythical remembrance, and is experienced by the

entanglement of poetry and reverie with an, at times, uncaring and unforgiving nature and an, at other times, benevolent and beautiful friend.

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