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‘Convicted of Patricide?’: Robert Frost’s Nationalism in the Eyes of Contemporary Arab-American Women Writers

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Eman K. Mukattash,

"'Convicted of Patricide?': Robert Frost's Nationalism in the Eyes of Contemporary Arab-American Women Writers"

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Abstract: Given the culturally expansive nature of the American literary tradition of today, the question of the relevance of Robert Frost's poetry to the poetry of contemporary Arab-American women writers is an issue worth exploring. Writing almost one hundred years ago does not make Frost's poetry out of date. Frost's poetry is as relevant to today's America as it has been to the America of his days. And this can be ascribed to the multiplicity of perspectives he presents in his poetry as he examines crucial questions lying at the core of America's "grand narrative of national development" (Westover 216). Hence, the ambivalence which characterizes his national poetry. Reading Frost's representation of subjects crucial to the American history in light of the contemporary Arab-American women writers' can yield a better understanding of the ambivalent standpoint he adopts in most of his national poems. To achieve that, the discussion will analyze, compare and contrast the statements Frost and five contemporary Arab-American women writers (Naomi Shihab Nye, Lisa Suhair Majaj, Suheir Hammad, Mohja Kahf and Nathalie Handal) make on the crucial questions of national identity, citizenship and cross-cultural existence in a number of their selected poems. What place does Frost's ambivalence find in their poetry? And to what extent is it shared or rejected? These questions, amongst others, will be addressed in the current study with the aim of assessing the impact of Frost's oeuvre on the poetry of contemporary American poets of Arab descents.

Eman K. MUKATTASH

“Convicted of Patricide?”: Robert Frost’s Nationalism in the Eyes of Contemporary Arab-American Women Writers

I. Introduction

In a poem titled “The Passing There” (2003), Syrian-American poet Mohja Kahf (1967-) acknowledges the feelings of anxiety the speaker in Robert Frost’s (1874-1963) “The Road Not Taken”[1] (1916) experiences as he tries to choose between two roads. Being torn between two worlds without being able to “choose one over the other” (Kahf, “Passing” 19) causes one to feel anxious indeed, but this anxiety should not, as Kahf explains in her poem, be expressed with regret. As she and her brother Yaman encounter the same experience, they do not worry themselves, as much as Frost’s speaker does, to decide which road to take. The seemingly more traveled-by road which Frost’s speaker regrets not choosing can be as ghostly as the other in spite of its familiarity:

> Impossible for us
> To choose one over the other,
> And the passing there
> Makes all the difference.[2] (19)

The same dilemma of choice which causes the Frostian speaker to regret choosing one road over another repeats itself in these lines, but without triggering the same feelings. Apparently, this is no longer a twenty-first century dilemma, for, as Nathalie Handal (2005) explains in her review of Kahf’s 2003 poetry collection *E-mails from Scheherazad*, children of immigrants have learnt *not* to insist on choosing one world over the other. Instead, they have developed the ability to “embrace crossings to be open to the unfamiliar and even become intimate with strangeness. Children often find a way to exist in both worlds and find a way for both worlds to exist together That is what Mohja and her brother did with where they came from (Syria) and where they now come from the (Unites States)” (2).

The different stands Frost's and Kahf's speakers take show that the two poets, the American forefather and his half-granddaughter, are treading different roads with regard to crucial questions such as national identity, citizenship, coexistence and cultural pluralism. While Frost sees choice as a dilemma triggering negative feelings of regret, Kahf tends to take things more easily as she dismisses the possibility of a wrong or a right choice altogether. Regardless of what crossing one takes, Kahf disagrees with Frost’s view that choice should be always expressed “with a sigh”[3] (Frost, “Road” 131).

With the literary works of the twenty-first century Arab-American women writers being increasingly incorporated into mainstream American culture, the question of the relevance of Frost’s works to theirs is brought to the fore. After all, to those female writers Frost is the ‘American idol’ they look up to and to them the questions of choice, national identity and cross-cultural interaction he raises in his poetry are of utmost significance.

Writing almost a century ago does not make Frost’s poetry out-of-date. In fact, Frost is the poet of twenty-first century America in much the same way he is the poet of early twentieth century America. And this can be ascribed to the fact that his poetry is far from being static. The image he depicts for America in his poems is a changing one and can, in this sense, be proven relevant to the America of contemporary Arab-American women writers in several ways. This clearly shows in “The Road Not Taken,” which might well be read as a postmodern example on embracing different choices simultaneously as much as it can be read (as is traditionally the case) as an example on dismissing

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[1] Frost spent the years between 1912 and 1915 in England, where he used to go on walks with the English writer Edward Thomas. In one of those walks, Thomas found it hard to decide which road to take and ended up regretting his choice. Frost wrote this poem as a joke to his friend’s indecisiveness, but, ironically enough, Thomas took his joke too seriously that he ended up enlisting in the war where he died two years later. His death brought feelings of misery and anguish to Frost.

[2] In “The Passing There,” Mohja Kahf and her brother Yaman are accused by an Indiana rifle-armed farmer of trespassing, based on concerns about their religion and ethnic origins. That incidence makes Kahf recall another when she has been chased out a vineyard back in her native Syria by one of the watchmen.

[3] In “Negotiating Boundaries: Arab-American Poetry and the Dilemmas of Dual Identity,“ (2010) Abraham Panavelil Abraham dwells on this point arguing that though wrenching, Kahf insists on articulating such “necessary, if difficult, coexistence” (132) between the two worlds she belongs to. “What Kahf takes from this duality is not just the wrenching apart, but also a necessary, if difficult, co-existence.”

other choices in favor of one: the two roads, which Frost describes as worn "really about the same," and "equally [lying] /In leaves no step had trodden black," (131) are in fact the same road.[4]

This ambiguity, which is a feature characteristic of Frost's writing, bespeaks of the ambivalent approach he takes towards vital questions lying at the heart of America' s history. Frost rarely espouses one stand in his poetry. His view of many of America' s native-born philosophies is irresolute, just as the view of Arab-American women writers who are writing almost a century later. This common ground bringing together different poetic voices from different ages is worth digging into, given the culturally expansive nature of the American literary tradition of today.

To this end, the study aims to shed light on the potential relation holding together early twentieth century father and twenty-first century daughters (Frost and Arab-American poets) by examining their approach to the crucial questions of national identity, citizenship and cross-cultural existence. How American are Frost's Arab-American granddaughters when compared to him? What similar or different choices have they made compared to him? Whose representations of the multicultural American community are less biased? These questions, among others, will be addressed in the current study by examining, comparing and contrasting the statements Frost and contemporary Arab-American poets make on the crucial questions mentioned above in a number of their poems.

A review of relevant literature on the subject shows that the relation bringing together Frost and contemporary Arab-American writers is not directly touched upon. The article by Haydar Jaber Koban (2016), "Testimonies of Resistance and Assimilation: A Postcolonial Study in Mohja Kahf' s *Emails from Scheherazad*," speaks of a potential relationship between Kahf' s poem "The Passing There" and Frost' s poem "The Road Not Taken." Quoting a line from Kahf's poem in which Frost' s name is mentioned, Koban unearths points of intersection at which Kahf's contemporary views on questions of choice, identity and cultural difference simultaneously relate to and diverge from Frost's views.

Despite the limited number of sources on the subject, there are several works which consider the expanding space given to Arab-American literature in the American literary tradition. In an extensive introduction tracing the beginnings and development of Arab-Anglophone literature, Layla Al-Maleh (2007) explains that Arab-Anglophone Literature has not attained the needed recognition in the mainstream culture it has come to live and flourished in. And though its origins date back to the arrival of the first wave of Arab immigrants to the USA towards the end of the nineteenth century, it is still in the process of being incorporated into contemporary American literature (1-5). A similar view is adopted by the Palestinian-American poet and critic Lisa Suhair Majaj in her article "The Origins and Developments of Arab-American Literature" (2008). Like Al-Maleh, Majaj criticizes the fact that contemporary Arab-American literature is denied a legitimate position when compared to other literatures produced by minorities in contemporary America. Though the 1960s have witnessed the birth and development of that vaguely defined category of Arab-American literature, there is little consensus on whether Arab-American literature is to be regarded as Arabic literature written in English or as American literature produced by a minority group. Both views, Majaj argues, truncate the perception of such literature as a hybrid body of works which is neither fully Arabic nor fully American (11-12).

In a book titled *Modern Arab-American Fiction: A Reader' s Guide* (2011), Steven Salaita sheds light on the absence/rarity of "book-lengthy criticism focused specially on the Arab-American tradition" (1) despite the fact that it is a constantly growing body of literature. As an "Institutional category," (3) Arab-American literature is still young; it is in the process of "legitimizing itself" (4) in the larger body of works that forms American literature. In similar fashion, Carol Fadda-Corney (2014) dwells on the growing role Arab-American writers are currently playing in shaping the transnational turn in Anglo-American literature. The incorporation of Arab-American literature into the syllabi of courses of literature at universities and high schools has placed it at "an important juncture in its development as a field" (8). This, she argues, will not only help subvert "negative conceptualizations of Arab-Americans in the US, … that are deeply entrenched in the binary logics of Orientalist discourse," (9) but will also help approach mainstream culture in a transnational context where "complexity and heterogeneity" (9) are not only recognized, but are acknowledged as well.

The significance of the current study is twofold. Given the culturally expansive nature of the American literary tradition, the question of the relevance of Frost' s poetry to the poetry of contemporary Arab-American women writers is an issue worth exploring. Not to forget that the limited number of studies examining the connection between the predominantly national poetry of Frost and the more

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[4] For further information, see David Orr, *The Road Not Taken: Finding America in the Poem Everyone Loves and Almost Everyone Gets Wrong* (2015).

transnational poetry of contemporary Arab-American women writers lends significance to the study. Contemporary Arab-American women writers have, no doubt, read Frost's poetry, and their reading of it entails that they have been exposed to Frost's views and have responded to them, whether with acceptance or rejection, in their poetry. These statements, amongst others, will be examined in the current study with the aim of assessing the impact of Frost's oeuvre on the poetry of contemporary American poets of Arab descents.

II. Frost's America: An Ambivalent Vision

In "Robert Frost's America," (1951) Mark Van Doren speaks of an intimate relationship bringing together Frost and his native America. All his life, Doren explains, Frost "has been discovering America, " (1) shaping and reshaping the outline of that relationship in his poetry. Questions of patriotism, national identity and cross-cultural interaction are frequently raised in his poems but are never approached from a singular perspective. They are always addressed from multiple perspectives and this explains why Frost's poetry pertains not only to the America of his days, but to today's America as well. Rather than assess the "American story" from the perspective of the American citizen only, he has chosen to dig into the other perspectives which stem from the silenced versions of the same old story.

Frost's Americanness is made evident through several themes he brings up in his poetry. One theme relates to what ties him to his native America. No doubt, this connection is deeply rooted in him, for he is America's poet. Yet, he is never blinded by that connection from seeing things as they are in reality. In "The Gift Outright" (1942), "Immigrants" (1928), and "America is Hard to See" (1962), three of his patriotic poems, Frost expresses ambivalent feelings towards his homeland. Staggering between acceptance and refusal, he manages to explain what makes him proud of his Americanness as well as what makes him want to think twice before doing so. In an article titled "National Forgetting and Remembering in the poetry of Robert Frost," (2004) Jeff Westover dwells on this point by arguing that the colonial element is acknowledged as an integral part of the history of America by Frost in his poem "The Gift Outright."[5] Frost realizes that the American project has evolved from a colonial one, and this makes him question the legitimacy of the American project as one founded on democracy and freedom. As Westover explains, "The Gift Outright" "addresses the matter of the nation's origins, demonstrating the way in which key elements of colonial history are obliged to be forgotten in the process of constructing a grand narrative of national development. In Frost's poetry, remembering becomes a way of both articulating national responsibilities and critiquing forms of patriotism he found too easy" (216).

Westover's words fit well with the parenthesized statement that Frost's speaker adds with tongue in cheek towards the end of the poem. America has no doubt become his ancestors' land, but not without a dear price that had to be paid to make this belongingness legitimate: "The deed of gift was many deeds of war" (497) offers an unexpected turn in the poem and highlights the ambivalent standpoint that Frost takes up regarding crucial questions such as patriotism.

The same ambivalent feelings which permeate "The Gift Outright" are sensed in another of Frost's patriotic poems, "America is Hard to See." Here, Frost goes back further into the history of America aiming to contemplate Columbus' discovery of America away from the familiar American perspective. Hoping to teach more conscious patriotic feelings, he questions whether the discovery and foundation of the New World have really initiated a new phase in history. Columbus "might have fooled them in Madrid" and "…have had [him] sung/ As a god who had given us/ A more than Moses' exodus," (2) but to Frost the hidden story of Columbus' accidental discovery of America forces him to stop for a while and think again about mistaking the 'Indian' renown that Columbus has sought for an 'American' one. Just as the Mexican historian Edmundo O' Gorman puts it in his book *The Invention of America* (1961) what Columbus has discovered is the land but not its people (64-68, 230-238).

In "Immigrants," Frost's ambivalence is made clear in his less conventional approach to the question of immigration. Recalling the immigrants who have come to the new land aboard the Mayflower almost three hundred years ago makes him question whether the ship which has "gathered people to [them] more and more" has really been the welcoming "convoy in to the shore" it has traditionally been regarded as. After all, those immigrants, as few as they have been then, have not been as welcome

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[5] Though he wrote a special poem for the occasion titled "Dedication: For John F. Kennedy, His Inauguration," Frost ended reciting the words of "The Gift Outright" from memory. Because of the sun light, the eighty-seven-year-old Frost found it hard to see the faint ink of the letters on the paper.

as the first two lines of the poem give the impression. Here, Frost could be hinting at the illegal status that today' s immigrants are given in America. Though the arrival of immigrants to America has not come to an end with the early arrival of the Massachusetts pilgrims, the same frustration of expectations is there awaiting them. Sailing with the virgin hopes for a new place they intend to call a "home," what they find is an anxious welcome setting them further rather than closer.

Another recurrent theme in the poetry of Frost relates to the validity of the American project which is born with the discovery and foundation of America. Here again, Frost adopts the ambivalent standpoint we find in his patriotic poetry. Whether the American project is born from the same ideals of democracy and freedom which are claimed to have accompanied the rise of the new nation is a question Frost raises in a number of his poems. In "The Vanishing Red," (1916) a poem describing the murder of a Native American, John, by a white settler, Frost makes it clear that the democracy philosophy fueling the American project is a big lie. After all, founding America, the land of freedom and equality, has necessitated a big price; the massive destruction of the natives of that land: "He is said to have been the last Red Man/ In Acton. And the Miller is said to have laughed—/ If you like to call such a sound a laugh" (179).

The same implicit message is evident in another of his poems, "The Sachem of the Clouds" (1891), in which the voice of the sachem of an Indian tribe is heard bemoaning his people' s death: "all my race is gone before me, all my race is low in death!" Unlike the red John whose voice is never heard in "The Vanishing Red," the sachem realizes how burdensome his silence has become. And this, along with the responsibility he holds as head of the tribe, makes him insist on making his version of the old American story heard. So does Frost, who answers to the urgency of the sachem' s call. His refusal to defend the legitimacy of this project shows in the poem by acknowledging the anger of the sachem who intends to avenge his dead people through the clouds which he summons to "Come, O come, with storm, come darkness! Speed [his] clouds on/ Winter's breath."

Frost's representation of the American Dream, another integral component of the American project, exposes the ambivalent standpoint he adopts towards major American-born philosophies in his poetry. Skeptic of its validity as a dream liable to come true, he examines the realistic aspect of this national dream, choosing to call it a "nightmare" rather than a "dream." In "After Apple-Picking" (1914), a poem describing someone who is picking apples and feeling really tired through the process to the extent that he is about to sleep, Frost questions how viable it is to believe that hard work and equal opportunities, the two cornerstones of the American Dream, are sufficient to bring one "from rags to riches." Echoing E. A. Robinson in "Richard Cory," (1897) Frost refuses to build hopes on false expectations when "…there' s a barrel that [he] didn' t fill," and "the ladder sways as the boughs bend." The same questioning tone is sensed in another of his poems. In "Directive" (1946), a rather long poem reminiscing about an old prosperous America which is no longer so, the speaker explains how barren the farmhouse and the marble sculpture in the graveyard have become when in the old days, all have been lively and productive. The negative change seen here relates strongly to that seen in "After Apple-Picking," for both hint at how frustrated people in the early twentieth century America have become compared to their earlier ancestors.[6]

The same mixed feelings are expressed by Frost in the poems tackling the theme of cross-cultural interaction and co-existence. Crucial questions of whether people of different cultural origins and upbringing should build connections or avoid them are the subject of several of his poems such as " Mending Wall" (1914) and "Ax-Helve" (1923). "Mending Wall" questions the truth of whether or not "Good fences make good neighbors." While one neighbor disagrees, the other blindly sticks to the maxim despite the fact that the former is "all pine and [the latter is] apple orchard." Could that form of coexistence be harmful, as the neighbor explains, when "[His] apple trees will never get across/ And eat the cones under the pines…" ? Here again, Frost refrains from giving a clear-cut answer; whether getting rid of "good fences" could make friendly neighbors is no proposition he would like to dictate his readers on. What he makes us aware of instead is his being on middle grounds in this regards, for though his speaker tells us that every spring both neighbors meet to mend the broken wall, which hints at a future possibility of communication, he still sees his neighbor as an "old-stone savage armed," moving "in darkness as it seems to [him]." In a 2017 article titled "A Strangeness in Common:

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[6] Regardless of how sullen Frost's tone seems in these two poems, he does not reject the American Dream altogether. For him, as well for all Americans, this dream is part of what constitutes the American culture. Yet, his wavering approach to America's 'from rags to riches' philosophy stems from his sage insight that what used to work well in an earlier America does not work well now.

Trespass, Drift, and Extravagance in Robert Frost," Christopher Patrick Milter dwells on this point linking the hesitancy we find in Frost's poetry in this regard to a tension in the latter's view of things, which, Milter explains, stems from his belief in his "right to move and speak freely, as if walls or boundaries were an affront to the co-extensiveness between a man's imagination and the organic world" [7] (65).

The same feelings of eagerness to and fear of cross-cultural connection are sensed in "Ax-Helve," a poem telling how an ax becomes a means of breaking connections, just as the wall between the two neighbors is in "Mending Wall." An unexpected visit the Canadian neighbor pays the speaker, in order to comment negatively of the ax he is using to cut trees, is enough to arouse suspicions of whether that visit is really intended to foster connections between the two neighbors or to break them. Later, as the speaker accompanies the Canadian neighbor to his house to see the latter's collection of axes, the threat rises in him. The sight of the Canadian neighbor's wife who speaks broken English makes things even worse. Eventually, we are kept in the dark, just as in "Mending Wall," as to whether a hope for cross-cultural connection is possible in the future. Once more, Frost prefers to step backwards and leave it for the reader to decide:

> I didn't know him well enough to know
> What it was all about. There might be something
> He had in mind to say to a bad neighbor
> He might prefer to say to him disarmed.
> But all he had to tell me in French-English
> Was what he thought of- not me, but my ax,
> Me only as I took my ax to heart. (228-29)

The discussion above delineates the fact that Frost's approach to questions lying at the core of American history is of relevance to the contemporary view of them. This relevance makes the proposition of a potential connection between Frost's and contemporary Arab-American women writers' understanding of notions such as identity, citizenship and cross-cultural co-existence a valid one. Frost's ambivalent feelings towards an America he was raised to call a home, his doubts regarding the democratized vision which has accompanied founding that home, and his reserved attitude towards accepting cross-cultural differences and the possibility of co-existence are shared by contemporary Arab-American women writers but are questioned as well.

III. Frost's America Re-Envisioned by Contemporary Arab-American Women Poets

The above overview of the selected poems shows that Frost adopts an ambivalent standpoint to questions of national identity, citizenship and cultural pluralism. Whether it is as early as the 1620s when his Puritan ancestors got onto the Mayflower to build their long-sought-for "City Upon a Hill" or his early twentieth century America, he makes it a point never to show where he stands both as an American citizen and as a writer. Instead, he chooses to raise questions and to keep them unanswered. And this helps him maintain the distance needed to prevent his poems from becoming time- or place-bound and give the reader the space needed to arrive at an answer as well.

Reading Frost's representation of subjects crucial to the American history in light of the contemporary Arab-American women writers' can help understand the ambivalent standpoint he adopts in most of the poems discussed above. In fact, it is this ambivalence that qualifies him to be described as a "poet ahead of his time." Though writing almost one hundred years earlier, Frost has indeed managed to address twenty-first century issues in a way that predicted the coming Arab-American poets'. To prove that, the discussion will analyze, compare and contrast Frost's and five Arab-American women writers' (Naomi Shihab Nye, Lisa Suhair Majaj, Suheir Hammad, Mohja Kahf and Nathalie Handal) presentation of four themes common in Frost's poetry: The discovery and foundation of America, the American philosophy of democracy, the American Dream and cultural pluralism in America.

1.The Birth of the American Project

The birth of the American project is subject of several of Frost's national poems. Belonging to a nation with a "self-made" history makes Frost not only feel proud to be among its citizens, but encourages him to see his poetry as a vehicle to serve this end as well. Nonetheless, Frost, as always, is far from

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[7] In his article, Milter explains that through their wanderings Frost and Thomas strayed into "private properties" (65) and that got him into a fist fight with one of the game keepers who accused him of trespassing. Hence, the repeated references to road-taking and trespassing that we find in several of his poems.

taking things for granted; he prefers to seek truth rather than to receive it. This he does by raising open-ended questions and adopting a skeptic tone, as seen in "The Gift Outright," "America Is Hard to See" and "Immigrants, "which serve as examples of the Frostian questioning spirit that lends skepticism to certainty. What place does this skeptical tone have in the poetry of contemporary Arab-American female poets?

A convincing answer can be found when reading Frost' s "The Gift Outright" in relation to the poetry of Palestinian-American Naomi Shihab Nye (1952-). "We Did Not Have Drinking Water in the Middle of the Ocean" (2011) and "The Only Democracy in the Middle East," (2011) two of Nye's recent poems,[8] share the same skeptic tone of Frost's "The Gift Outright." How could a land be someone's if that person has not become the land's yet? Frost's and Nye's speakers agree explaining that there is a huge difference between owning a land and belonging to it. Frost's European ancestors, however, could not understand that difference when they first arrived to America. Thus, whether in Massachusetts or in Virginia, they were "England's, still colonials,/ Possessing what [they] still were unpossessed by" (497). And though they have eventually been able to foster a strong sense of connection with the land, their realization that "it was [themselves]/ [They] were withholding from [their] land of living" could not serve as a good enough justification for the "many deeds of war" they have had to offer as a "deed of gift" to validate that connection.

The same contradictory feelings are found in Nye' s poem, "We Did Not Have Drinking Water in the Middle of the Ocean." As the speaker struggles to instill feelings of belonging to the new land he has chosen to call a home,[9] he realizes that his physical presence in the new land is insufficient to invoke in him the same old patriotic feelings he used to feel towards his native land. No matter how hard he tries to convince himself that he has "immigrated to the land of the free," he still sees his people as slaves in it:

> They had their own interests.
> They couldn' t see us.
> We were tiny as pebbles to them
> That you push with the toe of your shoe. (31)

In these lines, we sense Frost's cynical tone which has worked to wreck the strong sense of belongingness to the America of his forefathers in "The Gift Outright." Like Frost, Nye refuses to accept things as they seem to be; first impressions, she agrees, are in most cases deceiving. Had not she " immigrated to the land of the free" (31)? Why could not she feel free there? By exposing the contradiction lying at the heart of this "freedom" fallacy, Nye lends a critical tone to Frost' s cynicism.

In "The Only Democracy in the Middle East," Nye discusses the same subject but in reversed terms. This time, it is not the speaker migrating to a new land which, as he hopes, will offer him freedom and citizenship; here the speaker is forced out of his native land by those who, resembling Frost's European settlers, have come to colonize a land. Still, this poem shares the same cynical tone of the previous, for the pretext which has validated the deep sense of patriotism which the European settlers have learnt to feel in "The Gift Outright" is repeated here but in more inhumane terms. The Israelis know how important it is to feel what Frost's European ancestors have felt and this has led them to seek that feeling in the same "many deeds of war" (497) that Frost's forefathers have committed before. Nye dwells on this point in an interview with Kate Long (2009), wondering how one group of people can see it righteous to take over another' s homeland.

> It is sad to think how 'military actions' can upset the homes of others without enough consideration… Devastating destruction of homes, schools, non-military targets, hundreds of civilians—how cruel must human beings become to allow themselves to commit such acts and feel righteous about it?

Suheir Hamad (1973-), another contemporary Palestinian-American poet, speaks critically of what ties a person to a land in several of her poems, one of which is "argela remembrance" (2010). Like Frost's people, Hammad's people yearn for a land to feel tied to, but, unlike them, they have never

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[8] *Transfer* (2011) is a poetry collection Nye has written in memory of her father, who is the subject of most of the poems in it.

[9] Abraham (2010) explains that though Nye seems to be torn between the two selves she nurtures, she has always refused to see identity as "something to be preserved or denied or escaped or romanticized: it is just another way of being human" (131).

stopped to look for what can make them feel a part of it. Connection to the land (Palestine) is rooted deeply inside them. Every tiny detail of the land connects them to it: the coffee grinds, the tea leaves, the seashells and the strawberry argela flavor testify to how dear the land is to them. Even the names they call their sons and daughters bespeak of that unbreakable connection which makes them "call [themselves] the east" (38). But, as their land is taken by others, they find themselves forced to leave for a new land, just as Frost's and Nye's people have done.[10] The scene changes as they are seen heading by sea to a new land which has none of the coffee grinds, the tea leaves, the argela flavor or the Arabian names they used to call their children after. The same sense of heading nowhere which Nye's speaker feels as he is leaving for a new place is sensed here. And here again, the speaker explains that his people could never become the new land's, a fact made absent from Frost's "The Gift Outright," which makes it clear that the then America's newcomers have made sure to own the land regardless of the means. This, however, has not made them think the way Frost's people have; offering "many deeds of war" as a "deed of gift" (497) could never put an end to their being "unpossessed by the land" (497):

> We are a people
> Stood on the edge of the sea
> Asked her to kiss our toes goodnight
> She kissed them goodbye
> We departed. (Hamad, "argela" 38)

"Guidelines" (2009), a famous poem by the Palestinian-American poet Lisa Suhair Majaj (1960-), shares the same quizzical tone we find in the poems of Nye and Hammad. It differs in being more challenging and outgoing. Highly argumentative, the poem gives a number of directives on how to react if an Arab is asked about what ties him to the foreign land (America) he lives in. Using a number of repeated conditional clauses, Majaj manages to set things in their right places, explaining that no concessions are needed to prove their right to citizenship. In an interview conducted with her in 2007, Majaj sheds light on this point. She asserts her right to respond to public violence exercised against her as a foreigner depriving her of the right to equal citizenship: "Writing about public violence allows me to make space for the sorrow within, and to reclaim some part of my own history as a legacy against destruction" (407). Unlike Frost's people who have had to disclaim the "thing" which they have been withholding from the land and which has prevented them from becoming legitimate citizens, the speaker's people are encouraged to feel at ease with what makes them who they are. Here again, Frost's questioning tone is taken to a further level, which allows for redefining the notion of citizenship on less restricting grounds. After all, staying in a state of denial is not likely to make things any better: "If they ask you what you are,/ Say Arab. If they flinch, don't react,/ Just remember your great aunt's eyes" (Majaj, "Guidelines" 53).

The strong ties which have kept Hammad's people connected to the land even at the time they are departing it are touched in these lines. Neither Hammad nor Majaj want to deny being Arab, non-American and not blond enough to be called "white." Quite the opposite, they see those differences equivalent to "the deed of gift" that Frost's people have had to offer to foster a strong connection with the land. Hence, regardless of how long Hammad's and Majaj's people intend to stay in that new land and regardless of how upset that long stay will make the natives of that land feel, they have their own terms of becoming the land's as much as its natives have had: "…we live here. How about you?" (53).

Another poem that shares the same challenging tone of Majaj's "Guidelines" is "Declaration of Independence" (2017) by the Palestinian-American poet Nathalie Handal (1969-). Brief and straight to the point, Handal proposes the idea of developing strong ties to more than one country at the same time. Her purpose is to prove that there is no need to feel anxious like Frost's people have had when they "were possessing what [they] still were unpossessed by," (497) for being a native to one and only country is, as she explains, a lie! As the poem comes to an end, it becomes all the more subversive. Handal's closing words are no doubt unexpected, but they place her at crossroads not only with Frost, but with her own contemporaries as well. Unlike Frost, though like her contemporaries, she refuses to be forced to repress how she feels towards any place she belongs to, whether a native one or a non-native one. Yet, unlike her contemporaries, she seeks a more comprehensive approach as to what

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[10] Abraham (2010) explains that Hammad's search for the home is beyond culturally defined boundaries. "Like many Arab-American writers, Hammad also articulates a search for home – a home located beyond the dual legacy of violence in the Middle East and exclusion in the U. S. and a search for an identity in a foreign land" (133).

defines citizenship. After all, countries, borders and constitutions are human artifacts; they limit more than they set free. As she asks again about the validity of her opening question, she helps the readers arrive at the conclusion Frost hints at but never openly states in "The Gift Outright": his people are not the land's, just as the land is not theirs.

Frost's hints at the hidden interests which have clouded the discovery of the New World in "America is Hard to See" are echoed by contemporary Arab-American women writers in their poetry. Hamad, for example, exposes the double standards by which history works to erase the memories people have of the place they used to call a "home" in "argela remembrance." The coffee grinds, the tea leaves, the strawberry tobacco remind the speaker and her father of their lost land, but the colonizer, similar to Columbus in Frost's poem, works hard to eradicate those elements from the memories of the ones they have taken their land from. Their aim is to camouflage the truth so that when those leaving their native land "[stand] on the edge of the sea" (38) asking "her to kiss [their] toes goodnight" (39), and the sea kisses them "goodbye" instead, they do not see it weird! The more truth is manipulated, the more legitimacy is lent to their plans. Once again, Hammad's insistence on exposing the American "democracy" fallacy is accompanied with an intention to replace it with a more genuine one.

The same manipulation of truth is seen in Kahf's "The Fallen Protester's Song" (2011), a rather long poem rethinking the meaning of freedom, which has become a long-lost right in her conflict-torn country of birth, Syria.[11] The Syrian government tries to take on the "Columbus" role in changing reality to serve their ends. It drains people's mind of their ability to see the truth as is. Freedom, in their version of the truth, becomes a narcotic "dosed in hidden little baggies only for the few" (2), who will have their insides cut out "trying to find the freedom and extract it surgically" (2). Like Frost, Kahf exposes the manipulative strategies the government employs to fool people into another version of the truth fabricated to serve their ends. Yet, unlike him, she shows more immediacy in her response. Freedom, as she sees it, should no longer be denied as a narcotic messing with the minds of people. It has to be offered to all because it is as mandatory as "photosynthesis in plants."

In denouncing the false expectations which await immigrants on their way to a new homeland, Nye agrees with Frost in "Immigrants." In her poem, "We Did Not Have Drinking Water in the Middle of the Ocean," the speaker describes the frustration he and his people have felt upon arriving to their so-called homeland. The ship which could not house them through the journey, the sea which became so rough as to reject their coming and the large number of people "sick on the floors at night" (31), have made the larger than life hope that they have nurtured inside themselves for long dwindle into the " little droplets" (31) shoved away by a "tidal wave powering over [him]" (31). Just as with the Mayflower immigrants, the speaker and his people could not find in their "migratory" decision a solution to their homelessness.[12] Handal's "Declaration of Independence" sends a more direct message about the state of immigrants in today's world. Describing the notion of the country as false, she denies any country the right to regard immigrants the way Nye's speaker and his people were treated (as tiny pebbles). Immigrants should not be seen as inferior to the natives of any country, a conviction she shares with Frost and Nye. Yet, unlike the depressed tone we feel in Frost's and Nye's poems, Handal's tone is more challenging. Her own version of the American Declaration of Independence grants the inalienable rights of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness not only to the natives of the country, but to its immigrants as well.

2.The Ideals of the American Project

Frost does not only question the validity of what connects him to his native America, he digs into the ideals which fuel that connection as well. America has emerged as the land of democracy and egalitarianism meant to replace an old decaying world, at least for the dregs of Europe who hoped for a new beginning in a new place. But, in reality, this "dream come true" has proved to be based on fake ideals. The hidden project of colonization has gone hand in hand with the slogans of equal opportunities, democracy and individualism which the American project has called for. Frost makes that truth heard in

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[11] In an article reviewing a number of Kahf's poems, Ingrid Kerkhoff (2016) explains that this poem is composed by Kahf in memory of Gaith Matar, a Syrian protestor who gained a wide reputation as a defender of nonviolent resistance. He was arrested by the Syrian government and his body was returned four days later to his family after he has been tortured and killed.

[12] In an article titled "Home in Contemporary Arab-American Literature: Randa Jarar's *A Map of Home*," (2015) Esra Oztarhan argues that immigrants build an accumulative sense of the self where "disparate experiences and cultural contexts" (Majaj, "Arab-American" 6) are interwoven. "This transformative identity concept perceives the becoming of migratory subjects as an ongoing and never ending process" (Oztarhan 65).

two of his poems, "The Vanishing Red" and "The Cloud Sachem," in which he unearths the colonial agenda lurking behind the discovery of the New World and the establishment of settlements. He even goes further to hint at racial discrimination and white supremacy in "The Vanishing Red" which tells the story of the white Miller who wants to get rid of the "last Red Man-/ In Acton" (179) and sets a well-wrought plan to do so. "The Cloud Sachem" echoes those hints more openly through the sachem of the tribe who invokes elements of nature to avenge his deceased people. Unlike the deceived native in "The Vanishing Red," the sachem insists on retrieving all rights taken away from him and his people.

These two poems, among others, reflect Frost's quizzical tone. Never will he accept blindness to the truth, regardless of how in pain it will leave him. He digs deep into the ideals employed to serve as a cover for a manipulative agenda and works hard to resist them. And this brings him together with his twenty-first century female fellow writers. Nye, for example, exposes the fake ideals which many seemingly democratic projects call for. In "Everything in Our World Did Not Seem to Fit," she describes how the Israelis see it justifiable to force others out of their country/houses for the simple reason that they do not have one. She wonders on what scale two different nations' need for a home is measured when both of them need the home. As in Frost's "The Cloud Sachem," the need for a home validates whatever action the homeless takes. The European settlers have gone to America looking for a home and have taken one that is not theirs; in like manner, the Israelis have come to Palestine looking for a home that is not theirs. Neither of them (the European settlers or the Israeli settlers) will ever see their act as illegal, which, according to Nye, justifies seeing Frost's ambivalent attitude in some cases as misleading:

> Once they started invading us.
> Taking our houses and trees, drawing lines,
> ...
> It wasn't a bargain or deal or even a real war.
> To this day they pretend it was. (Nye, "Everything" 29)

Nye's rejection is shared by Hammad, who exposes the double standards employed by colonial systems in several of her poems. Speaking in a more daring voice than Nye, she uncovers the truth about the "freedom, democracy and equality" ideals employed to brainwash the "colonized" and convince them that leaving things in the upper hand is for their benefit. In "argela remembrance," she echoes Frost's hints at the unreliability of such systems. Just as the "last Red Man" should not have trusted the white Miller who has pretended to want to show him the wheel pit to get rid of him, the speaker's father in the poem should have realized that when his people "stood on the edge of sea" asking it to "kiss [their] toes goodnight," (38) it was only to "kiss [them] goodbye" (38) forcing them to leave their land. The hypocrisy that we hear Frost almost one hundred years ago censuring is repeated here, the only difference being the recognition on the part of the speaker's father of that delusive plan which is alien to the Native American John in Frost's "The Vanishing Red." This is made clear in the father's recognition that the reason behind his people's standing "on the edge of [their] sea" (39) is not because they wanted to depart, but because those coming to own their land have "made [them] leave" (39).

In "Break (vitalogy)" (2008), another poem by Hammad, this idea is likewise highlighted through the emphasis she puts on irregular sentence structure and the bringing together of words from different languages.[13] The silenced reaction of John which we are never meant to know about as he is pushed into the wheel pit is heard more openly here as the speaker insists on seeing himself as "ana blood wa memory" (18). Unlike the silenced John, the speaker refuses to remain sacrifial as he is supposed to be. He even speaks with a more daring tone declaring, "ana harb/ heart/ ana har" (18), in an attempt to resist the dominion of those who are trying to turn him into a light-colored version of the silenced John. Hammad is not satisfied with only sharing Frost's insistence on exposing the truth lurking behind such systems; she decides to "write back":

> Ana w ana
> We related
> Woven

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[13] In "Suheir Hammad Analysis: Breaking Words," (2010) Olivia Kahn explains that the linguistic structure of the sentences in Hammad's poetry is what gives it force. Not only does she mix Arabic and English words, but employs a "choppy" sentence structure in broken order to create the intended effect.

Ultimate design
Physical dream. (18)

The decision to "write back" is likewise shared by Kahf, who refuses to restrict her poetry to questioning the double standards of colonial systems. Like her contemporaries Nye and Hammad, she insists on resisting them. Frost's questioning mind but refuses to stop where he does. Like Nye and Hammad, she insists on resisting the double standards of colonial systems, not only on exposing them. In "The Fallen Protester's Song," she speaks on behalf of one of her fellow countrymen about the unique flavor of the "secret freedom [they]'d been eating/ out of the hidden cupboard" (1) when eaten openly. This right, the speaker explains, becomes the "opium" that such colonizing systems thrive on. By fooling people into believing that, only under their rule, are they entitled to the unalienable rights of freedom and self-expression, they manage to turn all of those who choose to follow them into red Johns! The speaker, however, is alert to those fallacies. He refuses to be fooled by the fake version of freedom that they are deceived by; real freedom, he believes, should "no longer be treated like a narcotic,/ dosed in hidden little baggies only for the few" (2). It should become a life-processor, just as "photosynthesis in plants" (2).

It is unfortunate that, as the speaker makes clear later in the poem, he is made to pay the high price for sharing that4 for-the-few "narcotic" openly with others, yet the resisting tone which characterizes his words and which he shares with Hammad's speaker make him all the more reliable. Unlike Frost's red John who has remained passive till the end of his life, Kahf's speaker sees resistance as the coming step to prevent self-destruction: "My friend, you are heaving a giant iron shelf,/ Off the limbs of people/ whose bones it crushes./ Soon it will yield to the weight of all your shoulders" (2).

3. The Cornerstones of the American Dream: Equal Opportunities and Financial Reward

Frost's national responsibility, as an American citizen and poet, does not end with exposing the colonial element inherent in the "grand narrative of national development" (Westover 216). It extends to other culture-specific elements, which, as his poetry shows, cloud, as much as the colonial element does, America's national narrative. The American Dream, the core of the American project, is a subject of a number of his poems. In two of those, "After Apple-Picking" and "Directive," he sheds light on the truth lurking behind a dream as old as Captain John Smith's 1607 Virginia settlement. Ideals such as industry, individualism, equal opportunities and freedom of choice are questioned thoroughly with the aim of examining whether the Americanized version of the dream is true enough to keep people going on. In an article titled "The Dream of Possession: Frost's Paradoxical Gift" (2009), Jeffrey Gray touches on this point by explaining that Frost chooses a more realistic, and to a large extent, a darker version of Captain Smith's romantic dream. For Frost, the American Dream has deteriorated into a nightmare that ought to be eradicated from the American consciousness altogether (Gray 59-62).

Like Frost, Kahf dwells on the discrepancy between reality and the dream in a poem titled "Doves." (1999) Speaking to the reader, the speaker takes up the role of the magician who is trying hard to convince his audience of his supernatural powers. He asks the reader not to back off because he is currently not finding what he is looking for. The doves are there, but they are hidden because the reader needs to "Believe in the existing but unseen" (1). Though the speaker becomes more abstract in the following stanzas asking the reader to pass up his lilac-like shoulder to reach love's canteen, he differs from Frost's two speakers in "After Apple-Picking" and "Directive" in being more willing to believe that the impossible can come true. While Frost chooses to look at things with realistic eyes refusing to fool people into believing that the doves they are waiting for are "in [his] pockets with the rabbits" (1), Kahf prefers to leave some space for "hope" because that is what dreams are there for:

Jump out of your self. Jump to me.
I'll do it with you- one, two, three-
Let's drop the veils together
Don't turn away because of what you see.[14] (1)

Following along the same line, Hammad chooses to allow for this small space of hope to drive her dream on. In "Break (vitalogy)," she describes a dream she has of a lion kissing her, though in reality,

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[14] "Doves" is one of the unpublished love poems Kahf compiled in a manuscript.

what is happening is all related to a "harb" (war), "blood" and "memory" that have depleted her just as the speaker is in Frost's "After Apple-Picking." Nevertheless, Hammad's speaker refuses to see her sleep as Frost's speaker does; a phase of inactivity separating him from reality and relieving him of its depleting impact. Here, the speaker is fed with strength as she dreams of the lion. And though the "dream" will come to an end, it will certainly have a lasting effect on her after she wakes up.

4. Cultural Pluralism: Building Connections or Destroying Them

Another recurrent theme in the poetry of Frost which finds place in the poetry of contemporary Arab-American women writers is that of cross-cultural connections. What view does Frost espouse when it comes to relations between people of different cultural origins living in the same place? How is he similar or different when compared to contemporary Arab-American women writers writing on the same topic?

In many of his poems, Frost refuses to voice one specific opinion; he prefers to stand on neutral grounds. "Mending Wall" and "Ax-Helve" are two of his poems in which people from culturally different backgrounds and upbringing come into contact. In "Mending Wall," the two neighbors, each with rather different convictions, discuss whether fences are needed to make of them two good neighbors. Whether or not the speaker supports having the fence is not ultimately made known to the reader, but the speaker' s view of his neighbor in the last lines makes the option of building connections a far-fetched one. In her 2018 article "Using Robert Frost' s 'Mending Wall' to Teach Overcoming Barriers to Communication," Deepa Sethi highlights this point by explaining that the last lines "further the notion of psychological barriers to communication" (46), which result from certain beliefs that " keep us tied and prevent us from getting close to people" (46). The same zeal-free attitude is adopted in "Ax-Helve," in which an American farmer remains on the defense towards his Canadian neighbor who pays him a visit one day and suggests replacing the ax he is using with another.

This theme is recurrent in several poems by contemporary Arab-American women writers, but it is handled by them with less hesitance than in Frost' s. "Stone Fence" (2009), a biographical poem by Majaj, employs the "fence" as a means to connect rather than to separate. The fence the speaker builds with "gathered stones from the field" (36) helps her build and maintain relations which last for a long time, even after death makes people absent. Despite the fact that the speaker' s bicultural upbringing could have made it hard to relate to her Palestinian relatives many years after she has left Palestine, the memory of the stone wall which has served as a site for many of the activities she shared doing with her grandmother and parents has enabled her to maintain past relations in the present. Unlike the neighbors in Frost's poems who, though close, have found it hard to connect, she has shown willingness to do so despite the unbridgeable distance. In an interview conducted with her by the International Feminist Journal of Politics, Majaj (2007) stresses this point by explaining that as a poet and an academic, she has developed the "ability to connect with others through empathy, communication and imagination" (405), even when she could not be as close as should be. Thus, those memories do not die as time passes but are compared in the poem to "green things sprouting, wisps of life between rocks. Birds drop seed, soil collects in pockets" (36).

Like Majaj, Handal approaches the theme of cross-cultural interaction in positive terms. In two of her poems, "Declaration of Independence" and "Love and Strange Horses—*Intima'* " (2010), she opens her arms wide to all that is different and new. Whether it is a new country, a new friend or even a new animal, she embraces the difference as enriching rather as restricting. She defines what is different as the "new" that is worth getting introduced to. In "Declaration of Independence," she disavows the "stay-on-the-alert" approach to difference which we see and feel in Frost's two poems. Belonging to a country that is not one's birthplace is not as scary as it seems. By time, the new country becomes as old and as dear as the native one. The last line of the poem echoes her question stressing the contingent nature of the traditionally fixed entity of the "country" : "love isn' t a lie, but a country is?" In another poem, "Love and Strange Horses- *Intima' ,*" Handal takes this idea to a further level. The horse which "came from somewhere in Eurasia" (26) is not native to the place he is living in. He is not familiar to the speaker, yet his unfamiliarity does not make him less likable to her. In the poem, we hear the speaker talking of a secret bringing him and the horse together. Both share "A need to return—to belong" (26) which is not effaced by the differences that draw them apart. To the speaker, their difference raises no alarms as with Frost's two speakers in "Mending Wall" and "Ax-Helve." Rather, it helps both of them (the speaker and the horse) connect:

> He came toward me.
> It was a quiet afternoon.

I stood unmoving.
And we listened to the untitled music
Circling the earth like an anthem
Free of its nation. (26)

This openness to other cultures is likewise shared by Hammad. In “Break (vitalogy),” the speaker calls for building connections as a means to resist annihilation. With its challenging tone, the poem defines “all matter related,” (18) regardless of whether it has things in common or not. The “we connected” (18) that opens the poem interweaves an “ultimate design” (18) in which different parts, even of the human self, are brought together to form a new “blend” that defies definition. Hammad's new self is an amalgam of the different pieces which have been in conflict for long, but which have found peace and tolerance in that “renovating structure” (18). Unlike the hesitating tone that vibrates through Frost's two poems, the self-assuring tone we feel with the opening words of the poem makes us realize that “connecting” is not as fear-driven as Frost’s speakers think it to be.

IV. Conclusion

The question of whether contemporary Arab-American women writers are following in the footsteps of Frost cannot be simply answered with a “yes” or a “no.” The relation connecting them to Frost is ebb-and-flow like. While it cannot be said that any of the five Arab-American female poets discussed here is guilty of disowning the fatherly Frost or the literary tradition he has bequeathed to the American canon, it cannot be said as well that any of them is blindly reproducing his art. Nye, Majaj, Hammad, Kahf and Handal share several of Frost’s views on the crucial questions of citizenship, national identity, immigration and cross-cultural interaction. Yet, their approach to those questions stems from the specificity of their experience as Arabs of American descent. Frost’s approach, as well, stems from the specificity of his experience as an American farmer, poet and diplomat. Being all these has made him realize the national responsibility he bears to what he has all his life been calling a “home,” and that responsibility is committedly expressed in his poetry.

In his poems, he represents the American narrative of national development but without letting that responsibility deteriorate into what Westover (2004) describes as a “blind” version of patriotism (216). His insistence on raising fully aware patriotic feelings is reflected in the questioning tone that we hear in his poems. Whether he is shedding light on the ties connecting him to his homeland, the foundation and development of the newly-established nation or its relation with other nations, Frost is keen on representing the American story from the different perspectives of all of those who have been involved in its making. And it is exactly here where father and daughters meet. Like Frost, Arab-American women writers own the “critical” eye of the keen observer. Yet, unlike him, theirs is more quizzical and immediate. At the time that Frost wavers between acceptance and rejection and expresses his less traditional opinions timidly, their standpoint is more steadfast.

When it comes to what ties his ancestors to the land, Frost is well aware that the connection is, more or less, enforced as it has required a dear price to be paid by the natives of the newly discovered America then. This realization, however, is reluctantly expressed by Frost in his two poems “The Gift Outright” and “America is Hard to See,” both of which unearth a strong feeling of national responsibility which is nonetheless wisely steered. On their part, Arab-American female poets show less reluctance in expressing how they feel to the land in their poetry. Nye’s “We Did Not Have Drinking Water in the Middle of the Ocean” and “The Only Democracy in the Middle East,” Hammad’s “argela remembrance,” Majaj’s “Guidelines,” and Handal’s “Declaration of Independence” share the quizzical tone that is felt but not stated directly in Frost’s national poems. Whether in denying the connection those who have taken their land by force claim to feel towards a land that is not theirs or in legitimating their efforts in trying to connect with the new land they have turned to after becoming homeless, their standpoint is more fixed and defined than Frost’s.

The same steadfastness is found in their poetry with regards to the applicability of democratic political projects. While Frost chooses to implicitly hint at the fake ideals those projects are fueled by, his half descendants see that exposing the double standards behind them is not enough; resistance is needed for survival. Kahf and Hammad exhibit this firmness more than their other contemporaries, a fact seen in the reaction of their two speakers (in “The Fallen Protester’s Song” and “Break (vitalogy)” respectively) who take the sachem’s call for revenge in Frost’s “The Sachem of the Cloud” to a further level. Freedom, the once “for-the-few narcotic” will not stay so for long. It will spread out as fast as their poems do.

Frost' s reluctance is likewise felt in the poems tackling the theme of cross-cultural interaction. While the hint at a tendency to foster and maintain connections cross-culturally is present, such connections are still regarded as threatening. On their part, Arab-American women writers do not share Frost' s wavering position. Instead, they welcome the diverse relations that living in a culturally pluralistic society as today' s America gets one into. Regardless of the differences that may make it hard for individuals from diverse cultures to connect, the richness of the new experience is what counts best.

Despite the different roads Frost and the contemporary Arab-American female poets seem to take, they have a lot in common. Their literary tradition is rooted in Frost' s, and from his presentation of the different aspects of his early twentieth century Americanness, much of their twenty-first Americanness emerges. None of them is guilty of Bloomsian patricide;[15] they all share the conviction that Frost's literary production befits today's multicultural America. And this is proof enough that Frost, as has been pointed out at the beginning of the study, is a poet "ahead of his time" and that his poetry, stemming from the heart of the American countryside, narrates the old American story in a context close to the postmodern context contemporary Arab-American women writers have chosen for their poems.

What places Frost at some steps from contemporary Arab-American women writers is the ambivalent feelings he expresses in several of his poems towards crucial questions lying at the heart of America' s history. This ambivalence, however, should not discredit his approach as "too traditional" or underestimate the relevance of his poetry to contemporary poetry, especially the poetry written by American poets of foreign descents. For the modernist he is, Frost has shown a keenness on challenging singular perspectives in his poetry and this is exactly the point where Arab-American women writers resume what he has already started. With Frost' s reluctance toned down, they are eventually able to embrace new perspectives of their experience and to relate to its different dimensions less reservedly.

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[15] In *The Anxiety of Influence*, (1973) Harold Bloom argues that though a young author takes pride in his male predecessors, it becomes necessary at some point in his journey of authorship to free himself from the source of his anxiety, the father author, in order to establish himself as a legitimate contributor to the literary canon.

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