



# Indicting Frost for Androcentric Speciesism: An Ecofeminist Reading of Robert Frost's "The Most of It"

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*By climbing up into his head and shutting out every voice but his own, "Civilized Man" has gone deaf. He can't hear the wolf calling him brother—not Master, but brother. He can't hear the earth calling him child—not Father, but son. He hears only his own words making up the world. He can't hear the animals, they have nothing to say.*

—Ursula K. Le Guin

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**Abstract**— Using the critical framework of ecofeminism, this paper examines Robert Frost's attitudes towards both women and nature in his poem "The Most of It". Whether ecocritical or feminist, the mainstream readings of Robert Frost fall into two main axes: 1) Frost for Nature and/or Women Views argue that Frost's poetry is for nature and women (Srivastava, 2017; Shah, 2022); and 2) Frost for Ambiguity Views claim that Frost's poetic work is ambiguous—it could be for or against nature and women (Benin, n.d). This paper belongs to neither of the two. This study makes it unequivocally clear that Frost's view of nature, in "The Most of It", is androcentric as well as anthropomorphic. Ecofeminism is about making connections, on the one hand, between the earth and the entire forms of life on it, and on the other hand, between the patriarchal exploitation of nature and women's domination. This paper, too, attempts establishing many connections: between the poet's use of the male generic language and the oppression of nature and women; between the female's invisibility in the poem and women's domination in the Western patriarchal culture; and between Frost's fame as a poet and his advocacy (through his poetry) for the androcentric worldviews of the patriarchal American society of his time. The findings of this research reveal that "The Most of It" contains strata of male-centric, speciesist worldviews and, consequently, stress the need for more research into Frost's oeuvre using ecofeminist theory.

**Keywords**— *The Most of It*, ecofeminism, androcentrism, anthropomorphism, speciesism.



## I. INTRODUCTION

Robert Lee Frost (1874-1963) was a towering figure among the twentieth century English poets. Although Frost was born and brought up in America, he "wrote some of his best work while "in England [where] he made some important acquaintances, including Edward Thomas, T.E. Hulme, and Ezra Pound (poetandpoem, n.d: 6). The fact that Robert Frost published his first two poetry collections

*A Boy's Will* (1913) and *North of Boston* (1914) in the Great Britain could reveal the intercontinental influence of both Britain and American intellectual heritages upon him. Frost achieved great reputation during his life including many literary and national awards: "he is the only poet to win four Pulitzer Prizes for Poetry" and was adequately rewarded by the American polity. He was given the "Congressional Gold Medal in 1960; and named poet

laureate of Vermont" the next year (poetryverse, n.d: 1). Arguably, Robert Frost "was the most widely admired and highly honoured American poet of the 20th century" (Gerber, n.d).

The feminist ecocritical theory, which is alternatively called ecofeminism, combines the environmental advocacy and feminist activism in one movement (Gaard, 2017) just as the word ecofeminism itself is a portmanteau of ecology and feminism. The existential challenges faced by the environment, including the totality of the fauna and flora and the entire living organisms found on this planet, are the key concerns of environmentalism whilst the societal (mal)treatment and poor life conditions of all women across cultures in all societies form the crux of feminism. Nature and women are regarded as the two pillars upon which ecofeminist theory stands. However, the ecofeminist philosophy has a wider scope because ecofeminism is not only about nature and women; it "is about the convergence of different perspectives on relationality" (Vakoch & Mickey, 2018: xvii). In other words, the relational coexistence between the environment, i.e. the earth, and all other forms of life (human beings inclusive) is the central principle of ecofeminism. This peculiar feature of ecofeminism, relationality, i.e., the interdependent relationship existing among/between all forms of life and the earth, makes the feminist ecocritical theory a tempting intellectual endeavour, while its lofty goal of eliminating all kinds of oppression underlies its moral appeal. The latter also makes this theory an effective tool for political activism.

Ecofeminism embraces diversity, and it amalgamates a barrage of worldviews from various disciplines such as gender and religious studies, critical race and animal studies, literary theory and philosophy. It borrows analytical tools from numerous fields, adapts them and deploys them in order to examine the interconnectedness not only existing between humans and nature/animals, but also between the human beings themselves—between men and women or the Whites and the Blacks. The basic premise of ecofeminism is "that the ideology which authorizes oppressions such as those based on race, class, gender, sexuality, physical abilities, and species is the same ideology which sanctions the oppression of nature" (Gaard, 1993: p.1). Ecofeminists insist on destroying the human/nature dichotomy as they consider it to be the foundation upon which the patriarchal cultures base their justification for women's domination and other forms of social injustice (Warren, 1997). A distinctive feature of this philosophy is that, "ecofeminism particularly includes the nonhuman nature in its discourse" (Vijayaraj, 2017: p.70). Feminist ecocritical theory should not be, as a matter of necessity, an exclusive practice of

the academia restricted within the walls of universities; it is a philosophy (a way of thinking) as well as a political activism (Bedford, 2018: p.197). By applying the ecofeminist theory on Robert Frost's poem "The Most of It", this paper hopes to establish an argument that Frost subscribes to the androcentric speciesism of his patriarchal Western society and that the poem can be used to illustrate how the works of literature have always been utilised in the perpetuation of the androcentric world views as well as justifying the patriarchal exploitation/oppression of both women and nature.

### *The Most Of It*

*He thought he kept the universe alone;  
For all the voice in answer he could wake  
Was but the mocking echo of his own  
From some tree-hidden cliff across the lake.  
Some morning from the boulder-broken beach  
He would cry out on life, that what it wants  
Is not its own love back in copy speech,  
But counter-love, original response.  
And nothing ever came of what he cried  
Unless it was the embodiment that crashed  
In the cliff's talus on the other side,  
And then in the far distant water splashed,  
But after a time allowed for it to swim,  
Instead of proving human when it neared  
And someone else additional to him,  
As a great buck it powerfully appeared,  
Pushing the crumpled water up ahead,  
And landed pouring like a waterfall,  
And stumbled through the rocks with horny tread,  
And forced the underbrush—and that was all.*

## II. MAIN DISCUSSION

### **Sexist/Male Generic Language**

A sexist language discriminates against an individual or a group based on their sex. The male generic language is a form of sexist language which uses the word *man* and/or the masculine pronoun *he* to refer to both men and women—human beings generally. According to Ann Weatherall (2002), "many forms of sexist language have been identified, but feminist social psychologist Nancy Henley (1987) suggested that they might be classified into three types: language that ignores women; language that defines women narrowly; and language that depreciates

women" (p.13). Our concern here is the first category, the language that excludes women. The first line of the poem reads "He thought he kept the universe alone." Opening a poem with a masculine pronoun may not sound offensive/sexist for a layman reader or a non-feminist literary critic. However, for an ecofeminist critic, it is almost impossible for this opening not to have raised the alarm over what will follow in a poem that purports to be addressing a universal human experience of coming face to face with the biggest life puzzle, i.e., the question of existence. Since pondering over the wondrous phenomenon of the human existence or the human place in, and/or human's relation to the universe is not an intellectual venture exclusive to men, using the gender-specific pronoun (He) speaks volumes of the hidden patriarchal agenda the poem sets out to achieve. This is the "natural" way in which language is organised, and the masculine pronoun is normally used to refer to the human beings as a species. A counter argument like this is not uncommon to offer whenever feminist theorists voice out their discontent over how language itself has been twisted to serve the selfish interest of patriarchy in almost all cultures of the world from time immemorial. The use of the male generic language has been made to look natural due to the entrenched biases against women sanctioned by the male-centred cultures, religions and intellectual traditions such as philosophy and literature. This could explain why some feminist philosophers have invested considerable effort in unmasking the androcentric conspiracy entombed in the use of language. Karen J. Warren informs us that:

Many philosophers (e.g., Wittgenstein) have argued that the language we use mirrors and reflects our conception of ourselves and our world. When language is sexist, or naturist, it mirrors and reflects conceptions of women and nonhuman nature as inferior to, having less prestige or status than, that which is identified as male, masculine, or "human," i.e., male. (Warren, 1999: p.12)

It is the realization of this discriminatory, oppressive nature of the male sexist language, created and maintained by the patriarchal order that prompted some feminist theorists such as Luce Irigaray to go as far as proposing the creation of an especially feminist language *parole femme* or Helene Cixous's *écriture féminine*, which will cater for the peculiar needs of women, an exclusive feminine language that "evades males' monopoly, threatens patriarchy and allows novel creativity in women" (Handa, 2021: p.1).

Our language conveys not only our thoughts and ideas, but also our fears and prejudices. In "The Most of It," the persona's attitude seems as innocent as it is "normal" because the pronoun *he* was institutionalized as the most appropriate linguistic term that can "accurately" represent the humankind as a species. However, what cannot escape the fierce scrutiny of the ecofeminist critics are questions such as: why was *he* chosen in the first instance? Why it was not *she*? What are the consequences of the choice and the use of male generic *he* to represent the entire humanity in the poem?

Even though criticism of the male generic language began in the 1970's (Weatherall, 2002), a recently conducted research by Theresa Redl (2020) still finds out that the male bias is on the rise and that even in today's virtual/online interactions, the use of the male generic "personal pronoun 'he' [makes] both men and women show signs of a male bias to an equal extent" (Redl, 2020: 117, p.122). This simply shows how the patriarchal cultures succeed in linguistic personality cult surrounding the male-generic *he* to the extent that even women have been conditioned to view the *he* as an innocent term which represents the human species generally. The inevitable consequence of this anomaly creates a psychological condition in which both genders subconsciously approve that even in real life the female is inferior to the male and, women's voices need not to be heard. Women are "naturally" passive and therefore, they should be "protected" and represented. "Many ecofeminists insist that how we act toward the material world—rocks, forests, rivers, wolves—is influenced by and influences our language" (Legler, 1997: p.229) and therefore, as we shall see in the following paragraphs, there is a strong connection between the poet's employment of the male generic *he* and his treatment of women and nature, his overall attitude toward the universe in "The Most Of It".

If Frost was the most accomplished American poet in the 1920's (Academy of American Poets, 2004: 4) and the criticism of the male generic language began in the 1970's (Redl, 2020), then, it will not be wrong to argue that Frost achieved his fame at a time when the patriarchy's Machiavellian use of language as a tool for women's oppression was the norm. He is described as "[t]he author of searching, and often dark, meditations on universal themes, he is a quintessentially modern poet in his adherence to language as it is actually spoken" (American Literature: the Modernist Period: Frost, 2023). This simply means Frost's androcentrism is not a reflection of a poet's idiosyncrasy. It is a view, an opinion and a general philosophy prevailing in the Western society of his time. When (in 1960) the US Congress awarded

Frost the Congressional Gold Medal, they did so “in recognition of his poetry, which has enriched the culture of the United States and the philosophy of the world” (poetryverse, n.d: para.9). To say Frost’s poetry substantiated the cultural system of American patriarchy is a truism. Which worldview was being sold as “the philosophy of the world” in the above quote? For anybody conversant with the cultural heritage of the West, the answer comes in a single word: Patriarchy. Even after Frost’s death, the US of the late 1960’s and 1970’s was a society where women’s acquiescence and “the feminine habits of silence and docility” were the generally accepted social norms (Voss, 2017: p.1). The all-male US Supreme Court could only manage to admit its first female member in 1981, approximately 200 years after its establishment. “Out of 115 justices that have served on the court, only six have been women” (RepresentWomen, 2022). In the Western culture, women’s domination has always been presented as the modus operandi of nature, the most normal depiction of reality. Therefore, it can be accurately concluded that during the poet’s life time, male chauvinism was not an exception, it was the rule and, as evidenced by his employment of the male generic language not only in “The Most of It” but also in many of his other poems, Frost advocates for androcentric philosophy.

The biblical story of Adam and Eve is one of the “universal” themes referred above. Herbert Marks, a distinguished American critic writes: “The Most of It,” reads like a meditation on Adam’s life before Eve’s creation” (2003: 54). It does not require a deep thinking to realise why critics see parallels between “The Most of It” and the biblical story (Genesis) of man’s creation because the underlying message of the two is the same: man is the master and both women and nature must submit to him. The sole purpose of Eve’s creation was to solve Adam’s problem of feeling lonely! If woman was created to serve man, any attempt by women to question men’s authority will lead to dooms. It is counted as a rebellion against the Divine. In other words, the main lesson of the story could be summed up thus: whenever a man fails to use his authority to enforce obedience to God, the woman will act in disobedience and the result shall be a catastrophe. “The biblical narrative is by and large a narrative of patriarchy” (Matskevich, 2013) and, when critics establish homologues between “The Most of It” and the biblical story of Adam and Eve, it is because of the underlying thematic symmetries binding them together. The biblical story is still a pivot “in contemporary debates on animal rights, on the environment, on the relation between the sexes, on the status of women” (Almond, 1999: p.8). For a very good number of Christians, Adam and Eve’s story is

still used “to justify a subordinate position for women” (June, 2020: p.126).

Of course the poem resembles biblical story of Adam and Eve before the creation of the latter. From beginning to end, there is no feminine noun or pronoun. As a result of the perpetuity of the male generic language, the ‘default’ human gaze is codified as male, providing insidious justification for the erasure of women’s experiences and standpoints. Whether in the academic discourse or in their literatures and other intellectual discourses, patriarchal societies’ perennial employment of the male generic language has the same main agenda: silencing the women.

In order to conclude the discussion on how Frost had lent credence (via the use of the male generic language, which excludes women in “The Most of It”) to male chauvinism and androcentric speciesism, we ought to ponder over the implications of using such a language. The *Plaut v. Spendthrift Farm*, a US Supreme Court’s landmark case which culminated in securing the US judiciary from the interfering encroachment of the legislators will make a very good illustration here. Justice Antonin Scalia who announced the Supreme Court’s decision invoked Robert Frost’s poem “Mending Wall” to support the court’s judgment. “Judges and lawyers routinely seek to clarify their pronouncements and [support their] arguments about the law by resorting to metaphors and stories. They do so because law is inevitably a matter of language. The law can only be articulated in words” (Dolin, 2007: p.2). Although law and literature seem to be two disciplines completely detached from each other in terms of their ends, they both utilise the same means—language (narratives & rhetoric)—without which their highest goals can never be achieved. Both “law and literature structure reality through language” (Dolin, 2007: p.11). In his *A Critical Introduction to Law and Literature*, Kieran Dolin (2007: pp.1-16) gives a comprehensive summary of how Frost’s “Mending Wall” influenced the Supreme Court’s decision, and how two of the justices had even openly and clearly cited some lines of the poem in the course of expounding the judgment. This is a historical legal phenomenon that is invariably referred to daily in the American courts in order to support the doctrine of separation of powers between the three tiers of government. If language/poetry has such a governing power to influence sensitive, life-or-death professions such as law, then its (ab)use cannot be taken for granted.

### Thinking/Feeling Gender Bias

In addition to the sinister machination of imposing the male generic language by the male-centered cultures, the verse “He *thought* he kept the universe alone” (my

emphasis) also conveys a sexist worldview, which is both demeaning and unfair to women, and which might even be worse than the use of the male generic language. The universal human attribute of logical reasoning (the human cognitive ability) has been made a male exclusive trait by the verse while the use of nominalization, i.e., the use of a noun clause as the object of transitive verb "thought", creates an extra emphasis endowing man with not only the cognitive ability but also an additional motor ability, the ability to act—the ability to keep. The verb "to keep" connotes physical strength, dexterity, stamina among others. Therefore, it is not wrong to imply from the verse that both cognitive and motor abilities belong to men, they are men's qualities. The use of two masculine pronouns, both in the accusative position in the sentence (the doer, the actor and the source of the action) and the use of two transitive verbs *thought* and *kept* evidence this claim. The *he* is shown to be thoughtful and active. The mono-syllable nature of the verbs and their final sound /t/ emphasize the accumulation of those qualities in the man. The doubling of the action-oriented verbs and the repetition of the masculine pronoun *he* in one sentence "He thought he kept the universe alone" simply implies the combination of those essential human attributes in the man; whereas, the aptness and swiftness of breath when pronouncing a mono-syllable verb stress that those two qualities are found in one place. The letter "t" that concludes both the spellings and the pronunciations of the verbs (*thought* and *kept*) foregrounds that effect.

The sexist biases that women have a less cognitive ability; and "naturally," women are passive have been promoted so cleverly thus: in the poem, we have the male, present and thinking and acting; anticlockwise, the female is absent entirely. Inasmuch as her invisibility is successfully secured, *she* is automatically deprived of both the ability to think and the ability to act—the question of ontology precedes that of agency. A pioneer eco-feminist theorist, Greta Gaard writes: "Speaking is associated with power, knowledge, and dominance, while listening is associated with subordination" (2017: xxvii). That being the case, the fact that it is a man who speaks in the poem reveals the poet's misogynistic/androcentric bias toward both women and nature. The poem puts women out of sight by making a man the sole representative of humanity; it makes nature passive by putting the man in the position of authority. The man is the speaker as well as the master: the *he* is the active observer whilst the *she/nature* is the passive "object" being observed.

### Objectification of Nature

The man/*he* is the grammatical subject as well as the theoretical subject of the poem. The poem portrays the man in the wilderness as the owner of not just the particular place where he stands, not just the owner of the planet earth but the owner of the entire universe. The man possesses it and controls it and therefore, objectifies it. Through the man's objectification of nature, his insatiable greed for material things and his lust for power are both betrayed. In other words, the man's objectification of nature is fuelled by patriarchy's naked selfishness and sheer greed. This capitalist tendency of the man, which makes him objectifies nature and treats nature as his property, is traceable in many of Frost's poems such as "Stopping by the Woods on a Snowy Evening" in which we read the lines below:

*Whose woods these are I think I know.*

*His house is in the village, though;*

*He will not see me stopping here*

*To watch his woods fill up with snow.*

The existing woods are given to a non-existing man as if the woods cannot have an existence of their own except for the sake of (the) man. The woods/trees are objectified, otherised and owned; they are incapable of being what they naturally are—an important natural partner of human beings on which human beings rely for supply of the oxygen, the source of safety (e.g., when used to built shelter) as well as food. The fact that all of the four lines of the quatrain (I: Whose; II: His; III: He; IV: His) carry some message about the man, betrays the inordinate greediness and androcentric mindset of the poet. It cannot be an accident that everything in the poem is owned either by the speaker or the man in the village who "owns" the woods (His woods, His house, My little horse). The horse too is male not a mare: "He gives his harness bells a shake" (l 9).

The last point above takes us back to "The Most of It" because there too, Frost's male chauvinism would not allow him to stage a female deer. A doe does not deserve such a lofty position to be an emissary (embodiment) of the universe. Thus, when the male human cries out and nature "responds", a male deer (a buck) appears: As a great buck it powerfully appeared / Pushing the crumpled water up ahead / And landed pouring like a waterfall / And stumbled through the rocks with horny tread / And forced the underbrush—and that was all (l 16-20). Frost's choice of a buck in the binary pair of *buck/doe* complements his choice of *man/he* in the *man/woman* and this is because

*the way in which women and nature  
have been conceptualized historically in*

*the Western intellectual tradition has resulted in devaluing whatever is associated with women, emotion, animals, nature, and the body, while simultaneously elevating in value those things associated with men, reason, humans, culture, and the mind.*" (Gaard, 1993: p.5)

In the same passion with how the poet ascribes to the man the cognitive ability to think and the motor ability to keep, he assigns some impressive qualities to this male animal such as the ability to move/swim and the ability to influence his environment. The buck is described as strong and active too, just as his male human counterpart, the *he*. The buck's actions go in line with that description: it "powerfully appeared" and "pushed" the waves to make its way towards the man and, reaching the bank, it "landed pouring like a waterfall / And stumbled through the rocks with horny tread / And forced the underbrush" before it disappears into the jungle (l 18-20). In addition to the use of these action-oriented verbs, which signifies power; the use of the conjunction "And" three times, in the beginning of the last three lines all of which tell us something done by the great buck, reveals the strength of this male animal and its ability to achieve so many things within a very short time frame... and, if a male animal possesses such an enormous prowess, what about his human counterpart, the "owner" of the universe? The mood of admiration pervades the concluding verses of the poem as the narrator's heart is filled up with happiness due to the impressive performance of the male character, the great buck.

However, despite all this impressive performance as well as the admiring tone used by the narrator in describing the buck, Frost did not allow the man *in* the poem to feel accomplished as being part of the environment because doing that would be tantamount to destroying his deeply ingrained speciesist self-concept, which always makes him look down on animals in particular and non-human nature in general. The man's protest continues and,

*And nothing ever came of what he cried  
Unless it was the embodiment that crashed  
In the cliff's talus on the other side,  
And then in the far distant water splashed,  
But after a time allowed for it to swim,  
Instead of proving human when it neared  
And someone else additional to him,  
As a great buck it powerfully appeared,*

The man's intellectual ineptitude results from his androcentric speciesism. He thinks himself superior to the fauna and flora found in the environment, he is a man of reason and authority. He does not merely transcend the planet earth, he owns the universe. He is a "rational" man, who detests nature's "irrationality" and consequently complains continuously; however, "nothing ever came of what he cried" except a manifestation, "Unless it was the embodiment that crashed / In the cliff's talus on the other side" (l 10-11). It seems now that a conversation opens up between the man and the universe. The embodiment is there to convey a message, to offer some sort of response to the man's queries.

Incidentally, the way the embodiment appears or arrives at the scene matters a lot. Most often a messenger's manner adds/subtracts value to/from the actual message s/he is sent to deliver. So, how did the representative of the universe arrive? It "crashed!" The Britannica Dictionary defines *crash* as an intransitive verb which means "to hit something hard enough to cause serious damage or destruction" (The Britannica [online] Dictionary). The word *crash* carries a barrage of negative connotations: nouns like collision and accident; adjectives such as damaged, demolished, destroyed, shattered and scattered among others. The embodiment crashed "In the cliff's talus on the other side" (l 11). Why *cliff* of all parts of the mountain? A cliff is a dangerous, slippery and usually sharp edge of a mountain/rock. This imagery evokes the sense of insecurity and vulnerability, and a never-ending fierce competition existing in nature even among the elements of the landscape that are neither animals nor humankind. A cliff signifies the eternal conflict between land and water, and is not always a safe place to be as seen in the poem when the buck falls off. The choice is deliberate for a different part of the mountain (i.e. a different word) such as the *peak* or the *base*, would have done a different job entirely. The next verse reads "And then in the far distant water splashed" (l 12). It does not require any elaboration that all life on this planet depends on water. Scientifically speaking, water is the source of life. But being a non-human component of nature, water is not considered as something close. It is distant, and it is far. Both adjectives create a wide breadth between water and man. The verb *splash* itself connotes some messy, noisy, unplanned and irregular activities just as when water splashes it rises and falls in an uneven way. By ignoring the verbs that signify calm, ordered and smooth movement of water such as *flow*, the poet chooses to emphasize that water too is chaotic. He prefers to draw readers' attention to the dangerous nature of water as it tries to get the buck drowned. After Frost succeeds in portraying the land (cliff), water, and the animals (the

embodiment that crashed) as cruel, dangerous—detached and distant, far away from humankind; subsequently, he uses the word *human* and follows it with the word *near* in the same line. The poet's androcentric speciesism is betrayed: in the verses where he mentions the non-human parts of nature, distance (and other negatives) prevails whilst in the verse where the word *human* occurs, proximity is the undertone. It is not that the man never sees, finds or hears anything during his encounter with the universe. What makes the narrator to say "nothing ever came of what he cried" is the fact that the man convinces himself internally that all he encounters is non-human and all non-human does not possess any inherent value.

When viewed as a whole, "The Most of It" is a masterpiece, but its message is not all-embracing, to say the least. Even though nature attempts to entertain the man and provide him with "answers" to his queries in her own sagacious and spontaneous way, he does not seem convinced or satisfied due to his androcentric arrogance. For example, rather than reflecting on the natural phenomenon of echo (e.g., how and why do echoes occur?), the man becomes angry and discards the echo as an insult. He thinks it was "but the mocking echo of his own" speech (l 3) not an "original response" (l 8). Likewise, when the deer approaches, displaying its unrivalled athletic skills and mastery of how to cope with life challenges and the ontological anxieties of being in time and space, the man does not get any relief because he was expecting a human being, "someone else additional to him" (l 15). A similar obsession with anthropomorphism could be found in "Choose Something Like a Star," another Frost's poem in which the speaker orders a star and/or the universe to employ the humans' language and communicate to him:

*Use language we can comprehend.*

*Tell us what elements you blend.*

*It gives us strangely little aid,*

*But does tell something in the end.*

Here too, the persona insists that nature behave in a human way else no communication can take place between the universe and human beings. For the universe to have any value, it has to be human or human-like. However, even if it were to employ the use of the human language, the poet has had his mind full of androcentric arrogance so whatever the star might have said, will be of tertiary importance to him, of "strangely little aid".

The man *in* the poem must not be confused with the narrator. Although the two may refer to a single entity (same "person" when the narrator uses the first person pronoun), in "The Most of It" they are not the same. This

distinction is necessary for us to grasp the contradictory stance that the narrator (whom I assume to be Frost) is pleased with the great buck, admires its impressive performance and describes both the buck and what it does in a colourful language using a gleeful tone and what is being elucidated here that the man *in* the poem is disappointed by the appearance of the buck as he is expecting a human, a fellow man. The fact that these are two different "persons" has been made plain by the use of the third person singular pronoun "he" and its possessive form "his" throughout the poem. Had it been the same person telling about an encounter he had had once, the pronouns would have been "I" and "my" not "he" and "his." Rather than softening the patriarchal bias, the difference between Frost/narrator and the man *in* poem hardens it as the narrator/Frost assumes the status of omniscient observer who, being not directly involved in the drama can pass a clear, objective judgment about what is going on. Should we accept what the narrator tells us (about the nonexistence of the female and/or their passivity; and the use of the male generic language) as an innocuous account of a natural law being passed to us by an objective observer? Have women suffered any oppression worse than making their subordination look as a natural phenomenon?

In androcentric cultures, "animals are seen as inferior to humans (men)," and this kind of thinking "reinforces and authorizes women's inferior status" (Warren, 1997: p.12). When the representative of nature (the embodiment) approaches, the man was ready to engage in a dialogue but under a pair of preconditions: 1) the message must be brought by a human being and 2) in human tongue. Consequently, when the buck/messenger appears, the man ignores it as well as the "message" it brought. The human exceptionalism of the man blinds him from seeing the stunning beauty of nature. In the poem, the man's inability to appreciate the intricate complexity of how the universe operates as a gigantic indivisible web (in which man is a tiny thread) is a byproduct of his androcentric speciesism. The man does not see himself as a member of the same primordial family of the earth and consequently, he feels dejected and depressed. While being within the embrace of the earth, which supplies him with everything for his survival; and despite being surrounded by his "kith and kin" in form of animals and plants; he feels lonely and deserted. He is unable to act accordingly due to frustration and disappointment. Worse still, the man fails to learn from the buck and fails to decode the message nature "sends" to him simply because the message was not brought by another human being. His breathtaking arrogance makes it impossible for him to learn from the buck. The man, who thinks he has the entire

universe and keeps it alone in the beginning of the poem, suddenly realizes he is poorer than a buck in the end. The buck has food to eat and water to drink; and it has a "home" (i.e., "the underbrush") to hide itself away from the stranger's gaze. The buck perfectly masters its environment and relates to it in a cordial, lively way. The same blessings (and probably more) nature offers to the man. However, due to his androcentric speciesism, the man cannot adapt to his environment; he neither acknowledges, nor appreciates the abundant gifts of nature that are scattered in the universe. He stoops there poleaxed, helpless and lost in evil thoughts: asking whether that is all the universe has to offer.

The man *in* the poem is none but Frost or, at least, his literary alter ego. In "Our Hold on the Planet", Frost laments that "There is much in nature against us. But we forget." He goes on and declares his faith in the human exceptionalism openly as follows:

Take nature altogether since time began,  
Including human nature, in peace and  
war,  
And it must be a little more in favor of  
man,  
Say a fraction of one per cent at the very  
least,  
Or our number living wouldn't be  
steadily more,  
Our hold on the planet wouldn't have so  
increased. (Bailey, 2014: p.245)

Frost first establishes nature as an enemy to man. He makes it beyond the realm of doubt that he is a devout speciesist and what is more interesting here, unlike in "The Most of It", he lays the foundation of his androcentric speciesism bare. In other words, here Frost tells us the "logical" basis of his belief in the human exceptionalism which is the steady increase of the human population, our vast number on the earth. To save both time and space, there is no need to analyse the argument above. A critical but innocent question will serve reason here: if the human exceptionalism is based on the reproductive ability of the human beings and the large size of the human population on the earth, then any creature(s), any organism(s) that has/have a larger number is/are superior to us. This is the logical consequence of Frost's claim in "Our Hold on the Planet," but accepting it will demolish the human exceptionalist worldview altogether since there are numerous organisms (don't say bacteria, just take the ants) that have higher in populations than mankind.

If we dig deeper in the poem once again, some salient points would be revealed. In the beginning of the poem, the man thinks selfishly: "He thought he kept the

universe alone." The man's selfishness begets an inordinate greediness which results into thinking that he is an absolute master, the owner of the whole universe. In the middle he acts foolishly: "Some morning from the boulder-broken beach / He would cry out on life, that what it wants / Is not its own love back in copy speech / But counter-love, original response" (l 8). He does not engage into any constructive endeavour, he only grumbles. He "cries out on life" trying to force the laws of nature to obey him and act according to his androcentric expectations. The claim establishes by the first line that the man possesses a high cognitive power falls flat entirely. The man does not ponder about the echo; he does not care to learn as to why or how it occurs or how it could be beneficial to him. Nor does he regard it as a form of natural response to his request. In the middle of the poem, as nature realizes the man is deaf, it uses another means to reply his request. An ambassador, a deer arrives. The deer does perfectly well in conveying the message practically. Yet, the man insists on seeing his fellow human or hearing a human voice talking to him. He dismisses every hint highlighted to him, and he cancels every cue conveyed to him. It is now very clear that androcentric human exceptionalism is the source of the man's alienation from his environment.

That in the end of the poem the man is no longer heard about arouses an enormous uncertainty because readers are not allowed to know the fate of the man. What is certain is that he is bitterly disappointed. Is he going to take his own life out of frustration? Instead of feeling disappointed, if it were a woman *in* the poem, she would have felt sorry for the buck (as it falls off the cliff and gets soaked up) because dozens of experiments conducted by psychologists have shown that women are more empathetic than men. A renowned American psychologist, David G. Myers captures this brilliantly: "When you want empathy and understanding, someone to whom you can disclose your joys and hurts, to whom do you turn? Most men and women usually turn to women. One explanation for this male-female empathy difference is that women tend to outperform men at reading others' emotions"(2013: pp.165). Because they engage with their environment more constructively, it is no surprise "that women are more supportive of animal movement causes across a range of cultural contexts" (Deckha, 2013: p.6). Greta Gaard tells us about some classic studies conducted by Nancy Chodorow's and Carol Gilligan's. She writes:

[the] studies have repeatedly shown, a sense of self as separate is more common in men, while an interconnected sense of self is more common in women. These conceptions



of self are also the foundation for two different ethical systems: the separate self often operates on the basis of an ethic of rights or justice, while the interconnected self makes moral decisions on the basis of an ethic of responsibilities or care. (Gaard, 1993: p.2)

Unlike a woman who would like to care and connect, the man is there to conquer and command. In the poem, the man's overall goal is to explore and exploit so he orders nature to obey him, answer his queries in the human way and when that does not happen, his heart breaks down. Even if the man did not die in the past, currently he is dying because *synecdoche* makes the man *in* the poem to stand for the all of us, the humanity, and as a result of men's androcentric speciesist worldview, the humanity is dying slowly but steadily and more painfully. The UN Womenwatch reports:

Detrimental effects of climate change can be felt in the short-term through natural hazards, such as landslides, floods and hurricanes; and in the long-term, through more gradual degradation of the environment. The adverse effects of these events are already felt in many areas, including in relation to, inter alia, agriculture and food security; biodiversity and ecosystems; water resources; human health; human settlements and migration patterns; and energy, transport and industry.

In many of these contexts, women are more vulnerable to the effects of climate change than men—primarily as they constitute the majority of the world's poor and are more dependent for their livelihood on natural resources that are threatened by climate change. (The UN Womenwatch Factsheet 2)

In a similar way with how the female is banished in the poem, in reality too women's voices are not given audience as they occupy the lower rung on the societal political ladder. "Women in 2011 were but 19 percent of the world's legislators (IPU, 2011)," (Myers, 2013: p.166). One of the pioneer ecofeminist theorists, Karen J. Warren encourages ecofeminist critics to be taking empirical data seriously and consequently it will not be wrong to ask: how can this yawning disparity ever be justified? While the males form 81% of the world's lawmakers, the females end up with 19%? This is despite that fact that the world's population of men and women is almost the same. "The

number of men [is] (50.4%) and [that of the] women [is] (49.6%)"(INED, 2020). Women have lesser influence even in making those decisions which exclusively pertain to them. The fact that women suffer the consequences of the debilitating side effects of male-initiated climate change more than men does not give them any say in designing governmental policies on how to tackle the challenges. Women had to fight, and still have to fight in order to get the policy makers' attention to behave responsibly and take care of the earth, the only home of the human species. The vast majority of the catastrophic natural disasters the world experiences are an inevitable result of the shortsighted human/nature dualism, a world view initiated by the androcentric speciesism and perpetuated through the patriarchal cultural practices such as literature.

### III. CONCLUSION

This paper began by analysing the diction of the poem and the language use, starting from the first line and the very first word of the poem. Through a critical examination of the male generic language of the poem, this paper raises and answers some vital questions such as why would a poem which purports to be addressing one of the most pressing philosophical questions (the question of existence) present only males (a man and buck) on the stage and employ only the male-centered narrative? Why use only a *he* to represent humanity as a species? The analysis of poem did reveal why the pervasive presence of the *he* is treacherous by scrutinizing the semantic as well as the syntactic aspects of the guilty pronoun (He), the pronoun that has been used to put countless generations of women into bondage without even allowing them to know they are being oppressed or exploited. The analysis brings Frost's male chauvinism to the limelight by explaining how the poet's banishment of the female from the grand theatre of the poem schemed to achieve a deceitful patriarchal agenda of concealing the women entirely, of forcing them to be out of sight so that they will be "represented" by the all-knowing men. It was made very clear that the poet's use of the male generic language is everything but innocuous.

The poem was shown to be propagating the thinking/feeling and the activeness/passivity gender biases. The paper logically argued that by assigning the thinking ability to the male exclusively, the poet had successfully assigned emotionality to the female; whereas, by making the man *in* the poem an active character, the poet perpetuates the sexist bias of viewing women as passive humans. After all, the fact that the poem does not feature a female character, whether animal or human, conveys the poet's unconscious belief that the female is not active.

Frost could not imagine a doe to have possessed those active and athletic qualities displayed by the buck in the poem. On the other hand, objectification of nature, which is the bedrock of nature's exploitation, was made clear too. Nature is treated as an object, the man's passive property which he owns and controls. Activeness is associated with speaking while passivity is associated with listening: in "The Most of It" it is the man who speaks and nature "listens", and even though nature "attends" to him, the man was neither convinced nor satisfied due to his androcentric/anthropomorphic arrogance. Rather than reflecting on the natural phenomenon of echo (e.g., how and why do echoes occur?), the man becomes angry and discards the echo as an insult. He thinks it was "but the mocking echo of his own" speech (l 3) not an "original response" (l 8). Likewise, when the deer approaches, displaying its unrivalled athletic skills and mastery of how to cope with the challenges and the anxieties of being, the man neither learns anything nor gets any relief because he was expecting a human being, "someone else additional to him" (l 15).

This paper demonstrated how Frost used poetry to reinforce the patriarchal agenda of women's subjugation which was exerting predominance across all spheres and aspects of the Western society during his time. Also, the covert connection existing between women's oppression and the exploitation of nature, as obtained in the poem "The Most of It", was made crystal clear by this study. The poet had no space for any female, be it an animal or a human being. That is an unmistakable evidence of his androcentric anthropomorphism. The world of the poem is exclusively male-dominated, so are both the diction and the language as it was evidently explained in the main part of this study. In the end, the last objective set and achieved by this study was exposing the manner in which the works of literature were (and still are) used as a tool for reinforcing the iniquitous culture of patriarchy and how the promoters of patriarchal propaganda (such as Frost, in the realm of literature) were/are handsomely rewarded by the Western society.

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