

A Sociopolitical Ecofeminist Reading of Selected Animal Poems by Elizabeth Bishop

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the sociopolitical vision of some of Elizabeth Bishop's poems from an ecofeminist critical perspective. Bishop, a twentieth-century American poet, uses animals and natural elements to manifest her attachment to nature (and women by implication), thus reflecting an oppressed feminist voice through the theme of abused, weak nature. By relating Bishop's poems to W. B. Yeats's poem *Leda and the Swan*, we foreground an ecofeminist relation between the Greek myth Yeats employed and Bishop's poems. Our contribution lies in the multilayered pattern of ecofeminist defense this article traces in poems like *Giant Snail*, *Giant Toad*, *Strayed Crab*, *The Armadillo*, *Sandpiper*, *The Moose* and *Trouvée*. The conclusion emphasizes the attempts Bishop shoulders through her animal poetry to renew the old man-nature relation of balance and justice and simultaneously to elevate woman/nature. Bishop's poetry, it is argued, exceeds the personal or subjective and thus contains socio-political, anti-patriarchal thrusts explored in this article through an ecofeminist lens.

INTRODUCTION

Surveying the literature on the famous American poet, Elizabeth Bishop (1911-1979) and her poetry, many argue that her connection to natural elements makes her different from her contemporaries writing in the confessional tradition. For example, Iris Shu-O Huang states that "Bishop is distinguished from her contemporary confessional poets" "due to her objective and reticent tendencies" as well as her [deliberate] detachment from her peers "although she has a personal life tragic enough to confess" (2010, p.7). By the same token, Guy Rotella observes that Bishop's poetic style is "to accept the nature of things and to avoid the fraudulent impositions of religious or romantic self-indulgence, claiming more meaning than the facts can bear" (1991, p.198). Consequently, one may argue that her poetry exceeds the personal side and contains sociopolitical (anti-patriarchal) thrusts we seek to explore in this article. In addition, nature in Bishop's poetry is not simply an "ornamental background but rather is featured as an overwhelming foreground in relation to which human beings are dwarfed and trivialized" (p.4). Interestingly, Bishop's relation to nature is neither purely personal nor anthropocentric. She does not present reality in terms of human experiences or values; rather, it is a kind of reality

that opposes human dominance and negative intervention. In fact, the ecocritic Sueellen Campbell argues that humans are "neither better nor worse than other creatures...but simply equal to everything else in the natural world" (1996, p.128). However, we argue that Bishop's poetry does not apply Campbell's equation between humans and animals. Her animal poetry seems to give the louder voice to the animal over the marginalized human, thus attempting to give justice to women and nature in an ecofeminist pursuit. Hence, Bishop seems to interrogate the traditional (patriarchal) association between woman and nature that also equates man with mind or reason. Kim Fortuny (2015) supports our argument declaring that "human-centred assumptions concerning man's dominance over animals" are "not honoured in Bishop's poems in general, and this animal ethics partially accounts for the enigmatic, other-worldly quality so often noted of her poems featuring animals" (p.1099). By giving animals a voice to communicate their experience to the reader (and by relating such animals to the oppressed position of the "Other"), Bishop is affiliating her animal poems with the concerns of feminism and ecocriticism and equally foregrounding the "sociopolitical" nature of her poetry. She relates the position of animals in her poetry to the position of

the oppressed, silenced "Other". The importance of this article lies in its concentration on the ecofeminist perspective in the chosen poems as well as the sociopolitical implications of such poems.

Within (post)modern American literary circles in the fifties, Bishop was one of the poets who led a "rebellion against the impersonality of the New Critical mode ... with a rejection of the highly specific gender roles of popular post-war culture" (Macgowan 2004, pp.23-24). Other features of the poetry of fifties are "sexual frankness and the questioning of gender" in the works of "the Confessional poets, some of the most important of whom were women" including "Anne Sexton and Sylvia Plath" and "Elizabeth Bishop and the later work of Adrienne Rich have affinities with it" (pp.23-24). They rejected many attitudes related to "the claims of male authority, as well as, in various ways, the conventions of literary decorum and romance" (pp.23-24). Furthermore, Bishop was influenced by the poets "Moore and Lowell... throughout her career" (Ebberson 2006, par.2). Bishop's style, which is well-known for underscoring nature, opens the door for new and timely ecocritical and ecofeminist readings of her work. It is our contention that ecocritical feminism has not been adequately explored in Bishop's poems. Critics have read Bishop with relation to American transcendentalism, meditative and religious poetry, postmodern poetics, and comparative perspectives, among others. It is the intersection between feminism and ecocriticism that we project in this article.

An adequate understanding of ecocriticism justifiably leads to a better comprehension of ecofeminism. According to Shenaam, ecocriticism:

is an approach to analyze the representation of nature in literary texts. It is concerned with creating an awareness in the society about the environmental degradation. The anthropocentric activities are considered as the major factor resulting in the devastation of ecology as well as animals. (p.155)

Bishop's poetry is informed by significant ecocritical awareness. In this regard, ecocritic Sumathy (2009) believes that literature "plays a very important role in creating awareness about the environment" (p.1). For example, Shadi Neimneh and Fatima Muhaidat in their article "The Ecological Thought of J. M. Coetzee: The Case of *Life and Times of Michael K*" (2012) apply ecocriticism to Coetzee's 1983 novel *Life and Times of Michael K*. They argue that Coetzee "demonstrates an interest in all living organisms and pays attention to their environment and interaction...and that minor forms of life like plants and animals are as significant as human life on earth" (p.12). Coetzee's vision seems similar to Bishop's treatment of nature in her poems. Coetzee's vision interrogates animals in literature from a postcolonial perspective stemming from racial tension in the apartheid era in South Africa, unlike Bishop's vision which employs nature and animals for a feminist end to be explicated in this article. Nevertheless, the broad moral and sociopolitical implications of the use of nature and animals in Coetzee's novel and Bishop's poems are still related.

Generally speaking, ecofeminism links nature to women. For Lawrence Buell, *et al.*, ecofeminist discourses typically

argue that "the exploitation of nature and that of women are intimately linked" (2011, p.424). Additionally, ecofeminists believe that "the battle for ecological survival is intrinsically intertwined with the struggle for women's liberation and other forms of social justice" (p.424). By the same token, Greta Gaard and Patrick D. Murphy declare that ecofeminism is not established "only on the recognition of connections between the exploitation of nature and the oppression of women across patriarchal societies" (1998, pp.2-3). Ecofeminism is rather based "on the recognition that these two forms of domination are bound up with class exploitation, racism, colonialism and neocolonialism" (pp.2-3). By comparison, ecofeminist literary criticism, Lawrence Buell, *et al.* argue, is "a politically engaged discourse that analyzes conceptual connections between the manipulation of women and the non-human" (2011, p.425). Accordingly, ecofeminist literary criticism links nature to women, seeking justice and reclamation of the disrespected, abused, and underestimated women. Subordinate women are aligned with nature in terms of the oppression they suffer under the authority of man. Ecofeminism asserts that there is a relationship between the subordination and oppression of women on the one hand and the exploitation and degradation of the natural world on the other hand (Mellor 1996, p.147). It is this association that gives Bishop's animal poetry ethical and sociopolitical relevance as well as undeclared feminist weight. Judith Plant believes that "women have long been associated with nature - metaphorically, as in 'mother Earth', for instance" (1980s, par.1). She adds that women have historically:

had no real power in the outside world, no place in decision-making. Intellectual life, the work of the mind, has traditionally not been accessible to women - due in part to society's either/or mentality, coupled with a valuing of the spiritual over the natural. (par.2)

Nowadays, ecology "speaks for the earth, for the 'other' in human/environmental relationships; and Ecofeminism, by speaking for the original others, seeks to understand the interconnected roots of all domination, and ways to resist and change" (par.2). This apparent and conventional politicized relation between woman and nature is to be connected with Bishop's animal poetry in this article.

Many critics appreciate Bishop's style of writing. For instance, Helen Vendler thinks that the three poems of huge animals which are *Giant Toad*, *Giant Snail* and *Strayed Crab* "contain reflections on Bishop's self and her art" (1987, p.825). Additionally, Vendler argues that Bishop's poetry is "purely human, refusing even Keats' mythological resources" (p.834). On the other hand, Chen thinks that Bishop's style "is characterized by precision, objectivity and delicacy" (2009, p.127). He connects Bishop's poetry to "the basic ideas and doctrines of the New England Transcendentalism;" thus, Bishop is "a descendent from the great tradition" (pp.127-128). What makes her a descendent from that tradition are "her deep concern with herself as an individual at all costs, her constant preoccupation with and sympathy for nature, and the somewhat mysterious and metaphysical temperament of her poetry" (p.128). In a related line of thought, Lise Lalonde believes that "Bishop's poetry is an art

of precise observation that seeks out the strange dimension of the ordinary" (2011, p.3). For us, Bishop's nature poems about animals are part of her larger socio-political and feminist vision.

In this article, Bishop's poems titled by animal names are chosen for discussion including one poem which is not entitled after an animal, *Trouvée*, but still revolving around the animal theme. Consequently, we are to follow the ecofeminist way of thought by listening to the voice of the marginalized abused animals, symbolizing subordinate women, to absorb and comprehend their views on man and nature. The use of symbolism in Bishop's poetry supports our ecofeminist reading of her aforementioned poems, for suggestion and implication open the floor for different readings and authenticate our views. According to Lynn Keller and Cristanne Miller (1984), writing indirectly is an established feminist technique because "Traditionally, women have voiced radical conceptions of themselves and their world in code form, under a guise of obedience, respectability, or triviality; the claim that women have had to speak and write indirectly has become a commonplace in feminist criticism" (p.533). Therefore, the feminist potential of Bishop's animal poems works through analogy and suggestion rather than direct statement. It is concealed behind the presence of animals. Weak, abused, and lonely animals in Bishop's poems stand for the secondary condition of women in literature and culture, a subordination which feminists often resist and react to.

Our approach to Bishop's selected poems is far from the moral or didactic purpose of literature. While animal fables are didactic, Bishop's animal poetry is not as simple and direct as fables. One of the apparent characterizations of her poetry is mystery and symbolism. Didactic poetry, by contrast, instructs, "either in terms of morals or by providing knowledge of philosophy, religion, arts, science, or skills" ("Glossary Terms: Didactic Poetry", n. d, par.1). In fact, in a letter to Ann Stevenson in 1964, Bishop declares her hatred for didacticism: "I dislike the didacticism, not to say the condescension, of the practicing Christians I know... they usually seem more or less on the way to being fascists" (Unpublished Manuscript). Consequently, we argue that her poetry is not simply didactic but rather voicing some embodied, indirect messages to the human world to return to its humanity and take care of natural resources. Apparently, this makes her poetry not only committed literature but also politicized one as it favors nature and women against patriarchy and oppression. Nevertheless, Bishop achieves this without giving up the aesthetic beauty of her poetry or its nature as art.

Bishop conceals her feminist poetic identity behind nature and animals. She takes refuge in the acceptable and loved voices of animals and nature. In her poetry, she feminizes nature and its elements, apparently neglecting "man," because nature is the great mother and man is banished away in a reaction to his patriarchal ways of dealing with women. It seems that nature and women are the source of creation while man is a small part of their wholeness. Bishop gives her voice to Mother Nature in her poetry, for she knew it

would speak for her fluently. In part two of this article titled "Bishop and Yeats", there is an analogy between Yeats' poem and Bishop's treatment of women in her poems. In part three titled "Bishop's Animal Poems," we discuss the selected poems of Bishop following a pattern that interestingly recurs in the poems. As for the conclusion, we are to assert the pattern of superior animals, animals as teachers and harmed animals. Additionally, we concentrate on the socio-politically oriented themes in Bishop's poems and her role as an ecofeminist who shoulders a responsibility towards society and nature.

BISHOP AND YEATS

In his poem *Leda and the Swan* (1923), W. B. Yeats draws a violent scene of raping helpless Leda by the masculinized Swan. A kind of analogy can be drawn between Leda and woman/nature. Leda represents nature which is a symbol of women for ecofeminists. Thus, woman is violated, abused and raped along with nature. On the other hand, the Swan as a large, strong bird stands for patriarchal male authority which includes male abuse of nature as well as their injustice to women. By the same token, Ruzbeh Babae and Wan Roselezam Wan Yahya declare that Yeats's poem "is based on the story of Leda, who was raped by Zeus in the form of a swan and later gave birth to Helen of Troy" (2014, p.170). Babae and Yahya read Yeats's poem in a postcolonial lens taking Leda as a symbol of Ireland which was occupied by England (2014). Similarly, Maria Viana thinks that the poem expresses "the Irish situation in an allegory" (2010, p.57). However, our ecofeminist argument is to draw attention to Leda as a symbol of both exploited women and nature by the Swan which symbolizes man. As Elizabeth Butler Cullingford declares, the poem contains "subordination, dehumanization, pain, rape, being reduced to body parts and penetrated by an animal: 'Leda' has it all" (1994, par.14). Consequently, we argue that Bishop's selected poems reflect Yeats's *Leda and the Swan* symbolically in a poetic, indirect critique of human-nature relationship. This choice of Yeats's poem is particularly made due to the established nexus we already mentioned between woman and nature. Yeats' poem and Bishop's poem share the popular romantic theme of a violated nature which is to be discussed in next section. However, their approach and literary concerns are obviously different.

BISHOP'S ANIMAL POEMS: THE ECOFEMINIST VISION

Bishop is known for her refusal of being classified in feminist anthologies. According to Victoria Harrison (1993), Bishop prefers to be called "the 16th poet [American Poet] with no reference to" her "sex" rather than "one of four women-even if the other three are pretty good" (cited in Harrison, p.33). Harrison comments that Bishop believes "that gender marking (as well as racial marking) contributed to inequality" (p.19). However, in an interview with her by Elizabeth Spires (1981) entitled "The Art of Poetry," Bishop declares that she is "a strong feminist" (personal communi-

cation). Mutlu Konuk Blasing comments on Bishop's declaration of being feminist, stating that "whatever she [Bishop] may mean by it, she is not evading the political issue—does not entail her perceiving her work as a woman poet's, and she demands to be read from this double perspective" (1994, p.265). Bishop supports feminism as a movement that seeks justice for women. Similarly, she thinks that it is not fair to view feminist anthologies as a separate genre since women are not inferior to the male literary canon. More importantly, Bishop does not have to use the word "woman" in her animal or nature poems to underscore the feminist potential of her poetry. Her poems function through analogies, suggestion, and symbolism.

If we are to connect Bishop's poetry to issues of equality and justice for the marginalized, we find such issues in her use of language as well as in the pattern of elevating nature we are to discuss next. According to Jonathan Ausubel,

a look at her [Bishop's] use of grammatical subjects and objects and passive voice and then at her use of passive-voice subjection and objectification shows a persistent social subtext emerging from her arrangement of people and things in her poems that extends well beyond gender. (p.83)

Thus, Bishop's calls for justice and refusal of gender classification are apparent in her use of language and her centralization of nature at the expense of man.

As mentioned before, *Leda and the Swan* affirms Bishop's connection with the ecofeminist literary theory whereby woman and nature are intertwined, oppressed elements to be elevated and renewed through literature (Buell, *et al.*, 2011). Interestingly, we have found some patterns in the poems discussed in this article (*Giant Snail*, *Giant Toad*, *Strayed Crab*, *The Armadillo 1965*, *Sandpiper*, *The Moose and Trouvée*) that Bishop follows in treating nature-woman and man. The first one is neglecting the human and elevating the non-human; the second is showing animals as teachers superior to humans and educators of man; and the third is showing animals as harmed by human chaos and the abuse of nature. Taken together, such patterns elevate nature, and by implication the subaltern woman, and imbue Bishop's poetry with a sociopolitical dimension.

Elevating the Non-human

As we understand from Bishop's poems, animals do not care for the human world around them. They are capable of self-sufficient lives away from humans. Interestingly, Bishop does not even use personification as a technique with animals as if by way of uplifting them above the human status. They treat themselves as the owners of nature where they rest and live. This theme is repeated in the selected poems studied in this article. In *Giant Snail*, to begin with, the title indicates a huge size of a snail which humans see as tiny. The snail tries to reach a place after "the rain has stopped" (Bishop 2004, p.21). It suffers through the journey because of its size. It encounters a toad which is "too big, too" (p.21). The snail thinks that its "proportions" and the toad's "horror" the "neighbors" (p.21). Humans might be part of the neighbors who are terrified of their size. We can see how small and tiny

neighbors and humans look alike for the snail. Additionally, the snail praises its beauty: "I know my shell is beautiful, and high, and glazed, and shining", and the beauty of the ribbon it left behind when walking: "I leave a lovely opalescent ribbon: I know this" (p.21). However, the snail pities itself for being too big; "But O! I am too big. I feel it. Pity me" (p.21). The giant size seems ironic as if this giant snail is a mockery of the human who is huge in size compared with the snail. While humans live in a chaotic world and try to find their real selves, the snail knows exactly where it is going and how to reach its desired place. Furthermore, the poem *Giant Toad* begins with the declaration: "I am too big. Too big by far. Pity me" (p.22). The toad pities itself for its giant size but still praises its beauty. It describes the "one great beauty" it has, i.e. its eyes, the "mist" that moves on its skin, and its changing colors and sound; "Give voice, just once./O how it echoed from the rock! What a profound, angelic/bell I rang!" (p.22). *Giant Toad* and *Giant Snail* convey the same sense of the huge size and beauty of animals without considering the existence of man. Accordingly, the poems hint at the marginalization and abolition of man away from nature and animals. In a reverse form of marginalization, the poems privilege the non-human over the human. They interrogate, by implication, the exclusion and marginalization which have been forced on women as well in histories of patriarchal domination.

Similarly, in *Sandpiper* one faces a kind of a philosophical bird that is looking for "something" which it is "obsessed" with (p.54). The sandpiper sees only itself even in the vast ocean, which it neglects, and focuses on its "toes" (p.54). The bird is too busy looking at the grains between its toes and is unaware of "the Atlantic" (p.54). An ocean not a sea is nothing for the bird, thus a man is nothing for it too. For the bird, "the world is a mist" (p.54). In addition, the *Strayed Crab* describes the journey of a crab that seems to go on another way from its home. The crab praises its beauty and personality; "I am dapper and elegant, I move with great precision,/cleverly managing all my smaller yellow claws/...my shell is tough and tight" (p.67). It seems that the crab controls its life except for this time when it has lost its way home. In its way, it encounters a snail and a toad which seem to be *Giant Snail* and *Giant Toad*. It warns them of its claws: "Watch out for my right claw, all passerby!" (p.67). One cannot see any encounter with the world of man here. Bishop gives the whole stage for the crab to express itself, thus elevating the natural over the human and even negating the oppressive human existence. In a sense, she reverses the traditional power relations dictated by the discourses of patriarchy and even humanism which make "man" the center of this universe.

The lives of the animals have changed to the worse due to the intervention of man. In *The Armadillo*, the two owls, the baby rabbit and the armadillo live in serenity and peace in their habitats with no encounter with the human world. The fire balloons were their first (and last for the rabbit) experience of the other world of cruel humans (p.68). They were living alone without even a desire to discover any humans. Nevertheless, man imposed himself and his anthropocentric

ways of living on their world. Likewise, in *The Moose* (when capitalized it refers to the poem) Bishop gives the reader a good clue of the passengers on the bus who leave the countryside behind. The only apparent reason for describing the human scene in the bus is to contrast it with the appearance of the moose (it is not capitalized because it refers to the animal) at the end of the poem. The passengers indulged in talking and sleeping. The sudden appearance of the moose, however, stops their actions taking the whole of their attention. Bishop describes the moose as being “Towering/...high as a church/...grand, otherworldly,” which indicates its elevated state compared with trivial people and their bus (p.89). Although three pages of the poem are dedicated to describing the journey of the bus, the last page of *The Moose* is more relevant than the first three ones. The amazement that the she-moose evokes in the passengers points at the superiority of its kind over theirs. The she-moose can be read as a way of elevating Mother Nature over the whole human scene. Additionally, Bishop’s language contains many indications of the elevated position of nature, aptly a symbol for women. When she describes the moose, she writes that it is “Towering” and “antlerless,” which can be read as a way of overestimating nature compared to the bus scene before (p.89). On the other hand, Bishop elevates the position of woman-nature to the level of making it sacred. Her description of the height of the moose—“high as a church”—indicates that the position it occupies is no less sacred than the position of the church in the people’s minds. Furthermore, Bishop declares that the she-moose is “safe as houses,” thus expressing the feeling of safety that nature and woman spread around (p.89).

The hen in Bishop’s poem *Trouvée*, a French expression meaning to find or feel, has lost its center due to man’s abuse and cruelty. The place which is a city is supposed to be full of trees and landscape; however, man puts so many buildings on the land until it disappeared. The hen looks for a place in the crowded city, but does not find one (p.95). Instead, it is crushed under the wheels of a speeding car. This decentralization of animals from the city is caused by man. Accordingly, *Trouvée* can be read as an embodied reaction by the animals whose places were destroyed and lost by the new city. There is an urgent need to find a substitute place free from human intervention. The hen can be read as a symbol of neglected natural resources and oppressed women in the new industrial, urban life. The fact that the hen is run over by a car, i.e. a machine, testifies to the ecological concern expressed in this poem. The deadly fate that the hen witnesses in Bishop’s poem is a warning to all women that they could be victims of the careless man. Thus, it is a call for women to first take care of the natural resources around them and second to examine the reality of their inferior position in the male-dominated society. Calling for a green world is like calling for justice for women and reclaiming their rights in the industrial world around them.

One notices that the snail, the toad, the crab and the sandpiper consider themselves as the center of the world rather than the marginalized other of patriarchal societies. The hen in *Trouvée* has lost its center just as the animals in *The Armadillo* have lost their habitats. However, such animals have

a life of their own that should be valued, kept, and protected against intervention. The rich details of their lives make man no longer the sole center of the universe.

Animals as Teachers

In the poems we discuss, Bishop tends to show animals as teachers for the humans who have lost their manners in a (post)modern world of instability. Thus, in *Giant Snail* Bishop shows us a determined, committed and ambitious animal which declares: “I have set myself a goal, a/certain rock, but it may well be dawn before I get there” (p.21). Additionally, we are shown the tiring journey of the snail which decides to continue nevertheless; “I give the impression of mysterious ease, but it is/only with the greatest effort of my will that I can rise above the/smallest stones and sticks” (p.21). So, the snail’s will is a very strong one, for it suffers even with the smallest things in its road. However, it continues even when something tapes on its shell and says: “Let’s go on” (p.21). Consequently, the reader of the *Giant Snail* learns to be staunch and committed to a set of goals in this life, for regardless of its tiny size, the snail sets itself a goal and works for it. We are face to face with a teacher of patience and strength.

On the other hand, *Giant Toad* sends many embodied messages to the human world. Although in its way it fears the snail, “Don’t breathe until the snail/gets by”, it remembers the shared things with the snail: “But we go travelling the same weathers” (p.22). The toad indicates a coherent animal community in which every animal knows its limitations, unlike the postmodern human world where wars, exploitation, and violence dominate the relationships among humans. Additionally, the *Sandpiper* which was looking for something in the grains between its toes “is preoccupied” (p.54). Bishop uses an oxymoron of “controlled panic” (p.54) to describe the bird’s fear of the world. The sandpiper teaches the readers a way to deal with the ever changing world around them and the noise it produces. It flees to a state away from the whole world looking for its “something”: “The roaring alongside he takes for granted,/and that every so often the world is bound to shake./He runs, he runs to the south, finical, awkward,/in a state of controlled panic” (p.54). We may argue that this poor, lonely sandpiper teaches man to look within himself, in this accelerating rapid world of changes, to find serenity and stability. Toward the end of the poem, the sandpiper finds its world in the grains. Thus, the challenge now is for men to find their own world in the potentially sick civilization they establish, one that alienates the individual from his/her life.

The *Strayed Crab* is wise in dealing with the world around it. When it encounters the “grievous snail,” it taps its shell “encouragingly” and asks it to “cheer up” (p.67). Additionally, when passing by the “sulking toad” it accuses it of making “loud and hollow noise” and that it is “so vulnerable” although it is “four times” its size (p.67). It declares that it owns “a pool” which it sees as the whole world and that is why it leaves the snail and the toad without harming them, for it is satisfied with its life: “And I want nothing to do with you, either sulking toad./... I/do not care for such

stupidity” (p.67). The last two lines express the preferences of the crab which seem far in this world: “I admire compression, lightness,/and agility, all rare in this loose world” (p.67). The wisdom of the crab appears when it points at the very problem of the human “loose world,” the lack of stability and resolute conditions due to many factors, one of which might be industrial civilization. Additionally, the crab declares its beliefs saying: “I believe in the/oblique, the indirect approach, and I keep my feelings to myself” (p.67). This advice seems too similar to Bishop’s poetic techniques including mystery. It may also be read as a call for humans in this world to rationally and smartly deal with whatever they encounter, just like the crab.

Moving to *The Armadillo*, the animals (the armadillo, the migrant owls, and the dead burned baby rabbit) are originally living away from human beings. The last stanza of Bishop’s poem brings to the reader’s mind the previous images of the poem, images now underestimating and devaluing the fire balloons as “dreamlike mimicry” evoking “piercing cry and panic” in the animals. Also, the “weak mailed fist clenched ignorant against the sky” might be the burned rabbit’s fist exclaiming its own imposed death by the fire balloons coming from the sky (p.68). The message here is for the human world to reconsider the recurrent actions which they think are joyful for them but are actually deadly for the animals around them.

Moreover, the moose’s unexpected appearance in the sight of the passengers, in the poem of that title, can be read as a call for busy humans to reconsider their relationship with a vast, distant nature. On the other hand, the she-moose might be read from an ecofeminist perspective as a symbol for women who are marginalized in the patriarchal world. Consequently, *The Moose* is a call for rethinking the position of women in the Western society. Similarly, the dead hen in *Trouvée* with its “tissue paper” “wing feathers” calls for and interrogates the sympathy of humans who are coldly busy with their vehicles without slowing down for the hen to pass by (p.95). Its wings were “spread/flat, flat in the tar,/all dirtied,” which indicates that it was crushed by some car and the tar got spread on it. Polluted by vehicles and carelessness of man is the city where the hen meets its deadly “fate” (p.95). The poem communicates the sense that humans should focus more on their morality and humanity with animals and treat them more respectfully and kindly. Hence, the animals of Bishop’s poems teach humans the values of patience, determination, independence, wisdom and the peaceful treatment of others.

Harmed Animals and Misused Nature

The animals of Bishop’s poems are victims of human beings and human civilization. In the last part of *Giant Snail*, the reader wonders whether the snail is going to reach its goal or not. Indirectly, Bishop hints at the possibility that the snail might not reach the rock it wants. One may suspect that the snail might be crashed, eaten or even thrown in the air by some children. Most of these dangers that surround the snail’s journey are human ones. The use of “If” in the last stanza evokes such a suspicion in the reader’s mind, for

Bishop declares “If and when I reach the rock, I shall go into a certain crack/there for the night” (p.21). This possibility of danger points at the carelessness of man towards other creatures in the universe including women who are marginalized and underestimated by him in a Western context according to reading Bishop. Indeed, the *Giant Toad* describes how human children were once cruel and violent to it and its brothers:

...Once, some naughty children
picked me up, me and two brothers. They set us down
again
somewhere and in our mouths they put lit cigarettes. We
could
not help but smoke them, to the end. I thought it was the
death
of me, but when I was entirely filled with smoke, when
my slack
mouth was burning, and all my tripes were hot and dry,
they
let us go, But I was sick for days. (p.22)

Bishop creatively and accurately describes this violent scene. The toad has lived that incident with the cruel children who are the products of a civilization of ignorance and carelessness towards animals. Here, Bishop also hints at the cultural reason behind natural disasters and abuse which begin at the level of parenting and upbringing. On the other hand, the toad appears to have more humanity than humans, for it uses its poison responsibly when it could use it to defend itself against the violent children. Bishop declares: “I have big shoulders, like a boxer. They are not muscle,/however, and their color is dark. They are my sacs of poison,/the almost unused poison that I bear, my burden and my great/responsibility” (p.22). This merciful toad which has “almost unused poison” warns man that it might be dangerous if it uses this poison. It threatens humans: “Beware./...If/I will it, the poison could break through, blue-black, and/dangerous to all”(p.22). The toad could poison the children, but chose not to, for they are young children whose perspectives of the world have not been shaped yet. However, it threatens the adult world, warning from its poison as a last call for reconsidering the harm they do to animals around them. Likewise, the world of the *Sandpiper* gets affected by the irresponsible actions of man regarding nature. One concludes this from the different kinds of grains that the ocean brings to the bird’s feet, which indicates that the ocean is polluted by human misuse. Bishop states that: “The millions of grains are black, white, tan, and gray/mixed with quartz grains, rose and amethyst” (p.54). Different grains with different colors and textures indicate the different materials that the grains are made of, which might be dangerous for the bird if swallowed.

Although in *Strayed Crab* Bishop does not mention humans (just as she does in the poems discussed in this article), the strayed crab indicates the existence of man around it. The crab which is too clever “and elegant” knows its way very well (p.67). However, this time it says “This is not my home. How did I get so far from water? It must/be over that way somewhere”(p.67). One may argue that the existence of some man-related equipment such as boats, nets or even

a hut is what causes the crab to lose its way home. Still, the crab is self-confident and assured that it will find its way home: “If I maneuver a bit and keep a/sharp lookout, I shall find my pool again” (p.67). The flexibility with which the crab faces its current situation and its calmness are two characteristics humans need to learn from the crab.

Similarly, it is clear in *The Armadillo* that the animals in the scene get annoyed and frightened by the fire balloons thrown in the air during a human festival. These “dangerous” balloons frighten animals (p.68). When “the flame ran down...the pair/of owls who nest there flying up/and up...until/they shrieked up out of sight” (p.68). Unfortunately, their “ancient...nest must have burned” in a clear pinpoint at what human irresponsible and “illegal” acts can do to the original animal habitats. Further, “a baby rabbit” seems to be burned and turns to “a handful of intangible ash/with fixed, ignited eyes” as if accusing man of this undeserved death. Interestingly, Bishop names the poem after the armadillo because despite its natural protection still it fears the fire and leaves “the scene” (p.68). The armadillo leaves injured, “rose-flecked”, disappointed by all this illogical violence and cruelty and scared; “head-down, tail-down” (p.68).

Although *The Moose* does not contain clear accusations for man of harming the animal, we can argue that the road established in the middle of the moose’s habitat indicates man’s exploitation of the woods at the expense of animals. It seems that the bus has annoyed the animal, so it gets out to discover the noise. Or maybe the moose is just walking its way when it encounters the bus. On the other hand, in *Trouvée* the hen of course was harmed by the human civilization and mostly by vehicles running on the street; Bishop declares “Oh, why should a hen/have been run over/on West 4th Street/in the middle of summer?”(p.95). Thus, the hen which was “white” has turned to be “red-and-white now, of course” in an embodied hint at its death (p.95). George Mateiro thinks that this poem reflects “Bishop’s fears that summer about Lota’s serious illness and its consequences for herself” (2012, p.82). So, it seems that the death of the hen reflects the death of Lota, who was Bishop’s friend and lover for fifteen years, in her real life. Again, we witness the symbolic connection between the harmed, abused nature including animals and victimized women in real life scenarios.

CONCLUSION

To sum up, one can say that the pattern of superior animals, animals as teachers, and harmed animals is legitimately found in Bishop’s *Giant Snail*, *Giant Toad*, *Strayed Crab*, *The Armadillo*, *Sandpiper*, *The Moose* and *Trouvée*. This pattern supports ecofeminist and ecocritical views on the harmful dominance of man over nature that we may link to Yeats’s reworking of the classical myth in his poem *Leda and the Swan*. Leda got raped by Zeus in the form of a male swan and was harmed. The offspring she bears, we may argue, is a symbol of the consequences of the exploitation and abuse of nature-woman by man. Thus, that same pattern is Bishop’s responsible, political, and conscious contribution to the ecofeminist literary theory that seeks spreading awareness of natural values through literature. Although the swan

is a bird, it represents the harmful patriarchal authority over women and nature. Similarly, the hen in *Trouvée* and the sandpiper in *Sandpiper* are “poor” victims of human-made actions.

Bishop’s nature poetry is a cultural attempt to bridge the gap between humans and nature. Additionally, from an ecofeminist point of view, it is a way to gain justice for woman-nature. Indeed, the teaching animals indicate the loss of values that human society witnesses in a postmodern, posthuman era of indeterminacy, high-technology, and over-industrialization. However, we deny that Bishop’s poems studied above are didactic in the negative sense of the word. We argue that her poems are intriguing enough to open the door for multiple readings, including ours. On the other hand, the superiority by which animals are portrayed in Bishop’s poems seems justifiable in light of the bad, harmful deeds of man against animals and nature.

Ultimately, the reader may wonder whether we can read Bishop’s poetry in terms of devaluing “man” compared with the elevated superior woman-nature. Her poems simply represent an alternative vision to established power structures and the sociopolitical status quo. Future literary theory might call for the rights of man by re-reading and justifying his deeds to nature. And there are probably uncountable women who misuse nature and abuse animals as well. The ecofeminist goal of this study has been to find a common ground for both women and men to have an understanding of ways to deal with each other respectfully and thus responsibly save the natural world of animals and plants around them. The ecofeminist nexus between women and nature is a way to attract attention to the wrongs done to both of them. Studying the poems of Bishop in this article from this perspective establishes a ground to study more modern American poetry in light of ecofeminism.

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