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FORM AND PERCEPTION OF NATURE IN ELIZABETH BISHOP'S "QUESTIONS OF TRAVEL"

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ABSTRACT

Elizabeth Bishop's poetry is acutely form-conscious and human perception informs its descriptions of nature; critics who study Bishop's poetry refer to her use of poetic artifice and note in passing the ethics of restraint and impersonality in her poetry. However, Bishop's poetry is rarely discussed in the sphere of ecocriticism; and the formal significance of human perception infused with the descriptions of nature in her poetry is conveniently overlooked. Likewise, anthropogenic climate change is underrepresented in traditional ecocriticism which insists on removing form—and with it, any trace of the human—from the text. This article proposes that a study of Bishop's travel writing and exploring the significance of concern for nature in conjunction with form-consciousness can contribute to a more profound understanding of both human-nature relationship and Bishop's ecopoetic sensitivities. "Questions of Travel" is one of Bishop's poems that directly grapples with the ethics of human presence in nature. The article explicates the textual and formal features of this poem to elucidate the function of form in its ecopoetic descriptions. The article shows how Bishop accepts the inevitability of human perception of nature and its literary corollary in ecopoetry as form-consciousness, and, thus, by implication, points to the importance of such poetry for a deeper understanding of the relationship between human beings and nature in the context of climate change.

RESUMEN:
La poesía de Elizabeth Bishop es marcadamente consciente de la forma y la percepción humana informa sus descripciones de la naturaleza; los críticos que estudian la poesía de Bishop hacen referencia a su uso del artificio poético y mencionan de paso la ética de la contención y la impersonalidad en su poesía. Sin embargo, la poesía de Bishop raras veces se discute en la esfera de la ecocrítica, y el significado formal de la percepción humana que infunde las descripciones de la naturaleza en su poesía se ignora convenientemente. Del mismo modo, el cambio climático antropogénico raras veces se menciona en la ecocrítica tradicional, que insiste en eliminar la forma—y con ella, cualquier rastro de lo humano—del texto. Este artículo propone que un estudio de la escritura de viajes de Bishop y una exploración de la importancia de la preocupación por la naturaleza en conjunción con la conciencia de la forma puede contribuir a una comprensión más profunda tanto de la relación humanidad-naturaleza como de las sensibilidades ecopoéticas de Bishop. "Cuestiones del viaje" es uno de los poemas de Bishop que aborda directamente la ética de la presencia humana en la naturaleza. El artículo comenta los rasgos textuales y formales de este poema para elucidar la función de la forma en sus descripciones ecopoéticas. El trabajo muestra cómo Bishop acepta la inevitabilidad de la percepción humana de la naturaleza y su corolario literario en la ecopoesía manifestado en la conciencia de la forma, y así, por implicación, señala la importancia de dicha poesía para una comprensión más profunda de la relación entre los seres humanos y la naturaleza en el contexto del cambio climático.

INTRODUCTION

Elizabeth Bishop is known as a keen observer of nature, but she is rarely regarded as an ecopoet. She occupies an odd place in the intersection of literary movements and artistic coteries. Modernists, such as Wallace Stevens and Marianne Moore, heavily influenced her poetry. Yet, as a self-described socialist, she staunchly opposes the radical post-war politics of the High modernists (Erkkila 285). She values and incorporates T. S. Eliot's reticence and impersonality (Bishop and Monteiro 22); nonetheless, she is connected with the confessional poetry of Robert Lowell and his famous biographical style (Chiasson 32). Detailed and extensive descriptions of nature constitute her key defining characteristics, yet she cannot be reduced to one more "master of optics" (Bloom 11). It seems, in all aspects of her poetry, she simultaneously subscribes to

and escapes from the conventions critics try to relate to her. This proclivity to defy categorization, Scott Knickerbocker claims, is exactly the cause of her noticeable absence in discussions of ecocentric poets. The claim, however, cannot be wholly true, since ecopoetry itself is not strictly defined. The protean boundaries of the concept, therefore, must allow for Bishop's poetic sensibilities to have a place in this realm.

Ecopoetry is a loosely defined term, spanning from poetry with purely ecological aesthetics to poetry with a mere green message (Clark 139). The "fluid boundaries" (Fisher-Wirth and Street xxviii) of the definition, however, fail to fully assimilate Bishop's poetry. Ecopoetry emphasizes the independence of nature from anthropocentric perspectives and values; Bishop's poetry, on the contrary, invests in experimentation with poetic form and acknowledges the necessity of artifice instead of spontaneity. According to Knickerbocker, she is form-conscious even in her freest of free verses (56). As a result, critics assume her poetry stands on the side of culture against the natural environment, presuming that nature and culture are two essentially exclusive categories (Bate 13-4). Improving Knickerbocker's argument, this article argues that Bishop's dedication to form and craft alongside a reductive understanding of the natural environment can be the reason why critics do not assign a place to her in ecopoetic practices. Because of this ecocritical bias against her poetry, critics dispense with studying the particular way form in Bishop's poetry facilitates perceptions of nature.

Belief in the immediacy of American nature writing propagated by the transcendentalists has influenced ecocritical approaches. Thus, they find Bishop's ethics of impersonality, together with her unwillingness to break away from formal concerns, problematic. Bishop, however, refuses to treat form as the inevitable accessory of anthropocentrism. Choosing the middle ground between concept and percept (Knickerbocker 57), Bishop's poetry refuses reduction to grand ideas or mere descriptions. Moreover, she rejects puritan sensibilities inherent in traditional ecocriticism—that is, the fundamentalist beliefs in the superiority of form over content. She also refuses to see human beings as distinct from nature. As a result, she welcomes self-referentiality in her poetry. Susan Rosenbaum, likewise, in her essay "Bishop and the Natural World," uses an anecdote provided by Bishop to illustrate the meaning of accessing the real through artifice. In a draft for an undelivered talk,

Bishop recorded that her grandmother used to wear a glass eye, and often when she was looking at someone, her glass eye looked upward and crooked. This metaphor explains that in Bishop's poetry, contemplation of the natural necessarily conjoins the imagination that obscures it (62). Both Knickerbocker and Rosenbaum argue that Bishop's poetry is not about nature per se but our perception of it. In this perspective, the human is part of nature and so what is constituted as natural is wholly reliant on cultural discourses. The insight Knickerbocker and Rosenbaum provide into the structure of nature-human interaction in Bishop's poetry is foundational to our understanding of her aesthetics.

Not only do critics challenge the notion of classifying Bishop's poetry as ecopoetry, but more seriously, they find her poetry's relationship to the contemporary questions of climate change untenable; she does not mention climate change in her poetry nor could she be concerned with it in the 1960s. However, it is possible to detect features of climate change poetry in her travel poems. More importantly, her poetry offers new vistas of poetic engagement with climate change and helps usher in a more nuanced perspective into the relation of human agency and the transformations of nature. Not being concerned with the urgency of climate change, her poetry refuses to engage in pastoral or elegiac representations of nature. Thus, she is safe from the weaknesses of most recent climate change poetry. In this way, her travel poetry can be a proper site of engagement with new ways of addressing climate change for contemporary poets who seek to transform the more conservative poetic engagements with the topic.

In what follows, the article offers a thorough explication of Bishop's poem "Questions of Travel" to illustrate how artifice/form-consciousness is germane to reaching legitimate understandings of human's relation to nature. It also provides a venue to consider new perspectives in the way culture has transformed nature. In this process, form is treated as the awareness-raising potential of language that allows us to "experience organic processes and the phenomena of nature" (Gross and McDowell 8). So the article will explore the formal quality of the poem to show how it contributes to an ecocentric consciousness and offers valuable insight into the possibility of devising new forms of poetic engagement with climate change.

DISCUSSION

In her essay "Noticing with Bishop," Cheryl Alison closely analyses Bishop's poem "The Moose." The poem is about the way a moose encounters a man who is traveling on a bus. Alison observes that most interpretations of the poem focus on the female sex of the moose and its implications in terms of gender studies (132). Bishop's anecdote about the incident that inspired the poem, as described in a letter to Marianne Moore, seems to highlight the gender of the moose. Alison, however, addresses the adjective Bishop uses to describe the moose: "curious." She proposes that Bishop is trying to capture the essence of the moose by using the word "curious" and the general stance she takes vis-à-vis the moose in the poem, as she leaves it free from assumptions generated by human language. As the moose and the man scrutinize one another, they reach a unifying moment of realization (141). Likewise, Bishop often compares natural sceneries with manufactured objects to juxtapose nature with human perceptions and depict their conceptual interdependency. According to Jonathan Bate, Bishop "always respects nature as it is and for itself, while at the same time recognizing that we can only understand nature by way of those distinctively human categories" (65). Bishop is aware that nature can elude human efforts to understand or portray it or that language can transform nature into culture (Alison 63); yet, she believes, human intervention is necessary for an understanding of nonhuman nature. Nevertheless, she rigorously tries to honor the integrity of nature and refuses to project her morality upon it.

The more profound ecological readings of Bishop's poetry often contend that her form-conscious poetry is mindful of nature. Nevertheless, most ecocritical readings of literary texts are theory-averse and refuse to acknowledge Bishops' poetry as ecocritical. This contradiction is due to the divergence in the more recent redefinitions of ecocriticism. Lawrence Buell divides the history of environmental studies in literature into two waves: First-wave ecocriticism and second-wave environmental criticism (17). First-wave ecocriticism belongs to the late twentieth century and is a reaction against "the distantiations of reader from the text and text from the world that had been ushered in by the structuralist revolution in critical theory" (Buell 6). This revolution entered ecocriticism via studies of British romantic poetry and American nature-writing. It resisted the celebration of anthropocentric texts

and aligned itself with the Deep Ecologists' ethics of moving "from a human-centered to a nature-centered system of values" (Garrard, *Ecocriticism* 21). The first-wave celebration of harmony with nature and the championing of ecocentric text were soon disrupted by a second-wave environmental criticism focused on "querying 'nature' as a concept" (Garrard, *The Oxford Handbook of Ecocriticism* 1). From this perspective, nature is always present in the arts through conceptual mediations of human beings. The second-wave incorporation of social and political theories into an environmental discourse provokes the simple but profoundly important objection that "one can speak as an environmentalist, [...] but self-evidently no human can speak *as* the environment" (Buell 7). It is this second category that allows Bishop's poetry to be regarded as positively ecocritical.

"Questions of Travel" as a relatively long free verse composition seems to be less constrained in form compared to some of Bishop's earlier poems which adhere to traditional rhyme and meter. However, it is not without form. Bishop's arduous process of drafting, rewriting, and the blank spaces she left for yet undetermined exact words in her papers (Wallace 87) indicate her concern for form on a much deeper level. "Questions of Travel," published in an eponymous collection in 1956, is a meditation on the ethics of observation that makes possible the rest of the verse travelogues in this collection. This meta-observation encapsulates the intermediacy Knickerbocker explains by "concept and percept" (57). In this poem exists on the one hand, the dilemma between the ethical concept of travel and human presence in nature solely for aesthetic pleasure and, on the other hand, the actual perception of that nature as a singular case. Hence, the questions Bishop's travel poems pose can be extrapolated to the central question of ecocriticism; that is, is it possible to have a definition of nature independent of human perceptions?

Compared to the list of titles in the collection's table of contents, the poem's title appears as an anomaly. Among poems with specific titles referring to exact objects, persons or places under observation such as "Squatter's Children," "Manuelzinho," and "The Armadillo" or the titles that resemble a detailed itinerary such as "Arrival at Santos" and "Brazil, January 1, 1502," the title of this poem strikes the readers as too abstract. "Questions of Travel" is the manifesto of the collection since it bears the collection's title and transcends pure description of landscape to dwell on the philosophy

and ethics of observing nature. Nevertheless, this abstract title does not ensure entry into a philosophical poem with grandiose declarations; instead, Bishop is quick to remind the reader of her "typical reticence" (Knickerbocker 58) toward conceptual statements via a descriptive inaugural stanza that elucidates her characteristic capacity for perception.

The poem's opening line portrays an observer disillusioned or overwhelmed by "too many waterfalls" and "the crowded streams" that "hurry too rapidly down to the sea" (Bishop 91). The negativity in the word "too" indicates the subversive aesthetics of the poem wherein nature writing's trope of treating nature as a transcendent source of infinite pristine beauty is subverted. This subversive attitude appears in Bishop's other poems within this collection as well; for example, in "Arrival at Santos," she describes the scenery as "Impractically shaped and—who knows?—self-pitying mountains, / sad and harsh beneath their frivolous greenery" (87). The landscape portrayed as self-pitying, impractical, sad and harsh, is the canvas on which the poet persona inscribes her intolerance to the exotic Brazilian landscape. Although this negative engagement with the nature description is bewildering to the readers, it is necessary to understand that Bishop here offers a perspective to be avoided, as she does in many other poems of this collection (Hicok 122). Although the repetition of the word "too" in "Questions of Travel" enacts the poet persona's desire to distance herself from exposure to an alien nature, it attests to the presence of a subjective viewpoint in the observation of the scenery. Even though the use of multiple modifiers intimates the readers with the poet persona's peculiar emotional response to the scene, the personification of the streams with the modifier "crowded" and attributing agency to elements of nature in "pressure of so many clouds on the mountaintops" making the waters "spill over the sides in soft slow-motion" suggests a move away from the individual human's center of attention. The conflict between static human perception and active natural dynamisms dissolves the poem's anthropocentric quality of personifications and metaphors.

In the first two lines, the streams were pictured as "crowded," and nature was appropriated by the imposition of emotive and attitudinal modifiers. The following three lines liken the clouds spilling over mountaintops to the image of a waterfall:

> . . . the pressure of so many clouds on the mountaintops

> makes them spill over the sides in soft slow-motion,
> turning to waterfalls under our very eyes. (91)

While the human's presence is still indicated in the phrase "under our very eyes," the poem's attitude to nature becomes more ecocentric within the short span of a few lines. The first stanza's enjambments mirror the movement of the waterfalls and the fluidity of the clouds and the alliteration of the "s" sound in "spill" / "sides" / "soft" and "slow" strengthens the simile of the waterfall by foreshadowing its sound in the earlier line.

The succeeding lines appear entirely after a dash in a parenthetical remark portraying nature in the process of flux:

> —For if those streaks, those mile-long, shiny, tearstains,
> aren't waterfalls yet,
> in a quick age or so, as ages go here,
> they probably will be. (91)

This use of interjections in her descriptions, which can also be seen in her use of commas that provide alternative modifiers or clarifiers, is both an attempt for achieving a more accurate observation and a testament to the artwork's status within environment and time; hence, Bishop's poems employ this "figurative revision and resist any dogmatic relationship between language and nature" (Knickerbocker 68). Two such examples in these lines occur when she clarifies "those streaks" with both scientific observations and also metaphorical descriptors in "those mile-long, shiny, tearstains," and when she interrupts her general remark of "in a quick age or so" with a reminder that this same general remark is also her immediate observation, as she states in the phrase "as ages go here" (91). Self-awareness in this poem comes with the knowledge that the descriptions are not merely time and place-specific but are shaped by time flux. This knowledge separates the environment from the poet persona, and the formal interjections are in the service of that separation.

Having distanced herself from the natural phenomenon she describes, she casts herself in the role of the observer and the witness. Most recent climate change poetry treats the poetic persona as a witness to natural catastrophes and changes (Griffiths 4). Representation of the experience of witnessing, however, requires the medium of language. Knickerbocker attributes Bishop's preference

for a simile to her "ethics of restraint . . . and her subsequent treatment of language as only tentatively touching the reality to which it refers" (69). The final sentence of this stanza is an extended simile:

> But if the streams and clouds keep travelling, travelling,
> the mountains look like the hulls of capsized ships,
> slime-hung and barnacled. (91)

It displays this plurality of meaning in a single landscape and doubles down on this shift in meaning by repeating the word "travelling." Within the context of the other poems of the collection, a reader would assume that travel in the poem's title refers to Bishop's act of traveling to Brazil, which is a journey away from home. However, in this line, she significantly subverts this expectation. She uses the second sense of "travel" as moving in: "the streams and clouds keep travelling, travelling" (91) and removes the human figure altogether from the environment, while at the same time acknowledging its presence in language through the artifice of simile and repetition. This first stanza never wholly detaches its perspective from the human perception, but through Bishop's formal subversions, it moves towards a nature ontologically independent from human understanding and, as such, lays the groundwork for the ethical questions of the next section. As a result, the act of witnessing does not lead to an emotional epiphany. Instead of "recognizing that we are party to environmentally deleterious practices" (Griffiths 8), the poem develops an interrogative mood about the seemingly ideal stance of the human being concerning nature.

The second stanza, except for the first imperative sentence, is composed entirely of successive questions. After a keen perception of nature in the previous stanza, Bishop moves to pose ethical and epistemological questions of travel to be answered in the rest of the poem. Thomas J. Travisano interprets these questions regarding the humans' need for travel as an extension of the competing themes of imagination and reality, and Bishop refuting the romantic idea of imagination's superiority in favor of experience (142). Indeed, there is evidence for this binary opposition of reality and thought when she asks, "[s]hould we have stayed home and thought of here?" Furthermore, she uses the baroque trope of the world as theatre to imply the inherent imaginative nature of the world in her question,

> [i]s it right to be watching strangers in a play
> in this strangest of theatres? (91)

The use of the word "right" explicitly indicates an ethical concern, and when Bishop describes the urge to travel and witness as "childishness" in the next question, it becomes clear that her position is not a straightforward defense of experience against imagination. The trope of theatre and the strangeness Bishop ascribes to it purports a sense of imaginative lure and enchantment as well as uneasiness. Her observation that "while there's a breath of life / in our bodies, we are determined to rush / to see the sun the other way around" (91) implies insatiable greed, which Bishop cannot ethically condone, but she cannot resist either. This act of yielding to the temptation of observation appears in two more instances of repetition. First, in the line "[t]o stare at some inexplicable old stonework, / inexplicable and impenetrable, / at any view" in which the second use of the word "inexplicable" can be interpreted as referring to the ambivalence of human greed in perception, and second, in the following line, "instantly seen and always, always delightful" (91) wherein the finality of "always" is her ultimate surrender to this temptation. Therefore, Bishop does not exclude imaginative engagement for a bland real-life experience, but she regards observation of reality as a way to engage with the real imaginatively.

It seems unlikely that Bishop's uneasiness over her travels in this stanza stems from an environmental concern. The poem conveys the poet persona's discomfort, leading to ethical consciousness and questioning. The ethically interrogative mood of the stanza could be the result of a social dilemma as she is a foreign observer of poverty and the political standstill of Brazil, which "might have sharpened into direct protest, were she to have remained in the country" (Slater 35); likewise, it could be caused by the voyeuristic gaze that such detailed descriptions necessitate. However, when situating this entirely anthropocentric stanza after a section dedicated exclusively to waterfalls and mountains, it would not be too farfetched to assume that Bishop's discomfort can be ecocritical as well; she learns that nature's value and essence are independent of her observations. By inquiring from herself whether it was better to have stayed at home and imagined the place rather than traveling, she is contemplating the difference between a wholly imagined nature and

real nature perceived through experience. In both cases, imagination is central to our understanding of the natural world. The world she observes is "inexplicable and impenetrable, / at any view," (91) and she contemplates her experience as one of dislocation when she asks, "Should we have stayed at home and thought of here? / Where should we be today?" (91) Thus she desires to know whether the impulse to travel results from curiosity about strange theatres of human and wildlife existence or derives from cultural voyeurism. Questions are, however, immediately accompanied by a description of what she has seen: "the sun the other way around? / The tiniest green hummingbird in the world?" and "some inexplicable old stonework," which are all "instantly seen and always, always delightful" (91). The sequence of moral questionings followed by yielding to the temptation of direct experience and observation, and culminated in the assertion of the necessity of the experience in aesthetic-ethical terms—the experience is always, always delightful—indicates that imaginative human perception of nature in its oddest varieties is necessary and ennobling. Traveling and exposure to nature—as it includes both wildlife and the human world—imposes dislocations on the viewer, leading to the cartographic expansion of their psyche. As a result, human intervention may fail to grasp the essence of nature, but it grows in aesthetic and ethical maturity through this exposure. Thus, Bishop admits that her interest in nature and her presence in its vicinity are intimately bound up together. Nature for Bishop is not defined based on its relation to the human but is mediated through human perception, and even though she cannot ethically justify this position, she indeed yields to it.

Bishop's poem reverses the trope of the "Imaginative journey to the locus of climate change," (Griffiths 3) which is an attribute of nature poetry. The journey here is not imaginative but authentic, and its significance lies in the chance for direct observation and geographic and cultural dislocation. This dislocation is both topographic and mental, making the witness find the strange nature attractive and delightful. So instead of cultivating the passive and sterile feeling of lament over that which is changed, Bishop's poetry offers a chance to imagine a renewed relation among human cultures and between human culture in general and nature. "Questions of Travel," therefore, addresses change in the topographic position of the human as it deals with the transformation of our eco-ethical standards of engaging with the world.

The third and longest stanza of the poem is not so much an answer but the defense of one's right to ask questions. Bishop employs conditionals to juxtapose an imagined absence with the presence of the landscape and the consequent sense of loss with the materiality of the experience gained.

> But surely it would have been a pity
> not to have seen the trees along this road,
> really exaggerated in their beauty,
> not to have seen them gesturing
> like noble pantomimists, robed in pink.
> —Not to have had to stop for gas and heard
> the sad, two-noted, wooden tune
> of disparate wooden clogs
> carelessly clacking over
> a grease-stained filling-station floor.
> (In another country the clogs would all be tested.
> Each pair there would have identical pitch.)
> —A pity not to have heard
> the other, less primitive music of the fat brown bird
> who sings above the broken gasoline pump
> in a bamboo church of Jesuit baroque:
> three towers, five silver crosses. (91-2)

Incorporating yet again detailed descriptions of singular images with the anaphora of "it would have been a pity not to have" (91), Bishop contextualizes her temptation to observe with her characteristic specialty in rendering her poems visual. The objects of observation are both natural and artificial, but similes blur their distinctions as trees are "like noble pantomimists" (91) and bamboos are like the "church of Jesuit baroque" (92). A simile indicates the interdependence of the natural and the cultural. In this way, Bishop resists the "separation of human and non-human worlds" (Trexler 17) as a cultural practice and emphasizes their interdependence as fruitful for human culture. In her stance towards man-nature relation, Bishop resembles David Abram who argues that the detachment of the human from its environment began with the invention of phonetic writing—when words were removed from bodily and natural life and entered the realm of abstract. Like Abram, she believes the act of perception is never without participation, so through mere observation of the environment and in the process of perception, humans change nature (Abram 45-7). The element of

wood appears first in trees and then in clogs, the sound of which compels the observer to see the process of nature becoming material goods over time and ponder "what connection can exist for centuries / between the crudest wooden footwear, and [...] the whittled fantasies of wooden cages" (92) in the next stanza. Wood appears to be Bishop's material of choice in describing manufactured artifacts as Knickerbocker observes in relation to her poem "The Monument," an object made of wood is "organic, subject to decay, the weather, and other environmental 'conditions'" (66). Bishop portrays the way culture transforms nature, but she also shows how nature lies at the foundation of culture. Wood as a tree grows, while wood as a clog decays when exposed to rain. Although the transformation of nature to culture is deleterious to the environment, it also offers humans a chance to cogitate their ethical relation to nature.

After this long series of justifications, Bishop shies away from a final declaration and returns to the interrogative mode as she imagines a traveler writing in her notebook:

> *"Is it lack of imagination that makes us come*
> *to imagined places, not just stay at home?*
> *Or could Pascal have been not entirely right*
> *about just sitting quietly in one's room?* (92)

Although in the form of a question, the near-rhymes of "come," "home," and "room" make this resemble a closing couplet that, had it not been for Bishop's restraint, would provide the definitive resolution to her dilemma. One can safely assume Bishop's questioning of Blaise Pascal's often-quoted claim that "all the unhappiness of men arises from one single fact, that they cannot stay quietly in their own chamber" (40) is her tongue-in-cheek refusal of such attitudes. Refusing to bask in the romantic or transcendentalist aesthetic perspective of spontaneity and immediacy, Bishop rejects their poetics of formal reductionism as a way "to achieve a faithful account of nature" (Clark 46-7). In ecocritical terms, staying in one's chamber is the non-interventionist philosophy of removing any human presence in nature in order to save its integrity but, as Bishop posits, even if safeguarding nature is ethically a value, it is a process dependent on the human's recognition of the importance of nature to their existence.

With its perfect rhymes, the following couplet sets up the reader for closure but again never fully commits itself to the responsibility of such an act.

> *Continent. citu. countru. societu:*
> *the choice is never wide and never free.*
> *And here, or there . . . No. Should we have stayed at home,*
> *wherever that may be?"* (92)

It implies a hint of determinism when it claims the choice of where a human is present "*is never wide and never free*" (92), and the unconventional placement of the assertive "*No*" means it is possibly the answer to all previous questions. However, the poem ends with another question opening an entirely new frontier of thought on where human perception belongs. By asking, "*[s]hould we have stayed at home, / wherever that may be?*" Bishop is challenging the perspective that humanity should exclude itself from nature. To Bishop, the human is an irremovable part of nature and will remain integral to it. The nonchalant final line raises the profound objection to the ecocritical assumption that a binary opposition exists between nature and society or human and environment. Thus, although Bishop recognizes human beings' active agency in the transformation of nature, she assumes their ties must be strengthened on moral grounds rather than severed. "The intellectual challenges with which climate change confronts us" (Griffiths 24) requires the form-conscious poetry of a poet such as Bishop, who believes in the dependence of the moral human perception of nature on the existence of form and aesthetic experience of nature.

CONCLUSION

Perhaps, the imperative of all environmental studies in the past decade has been to mitigate first-wave ecocriticism's failure to offer a plausible interpretation of the relationship between human cultural advances and their detrimental impact on nature, specifically in the form of climate change wherein the interdependence of human and nature is central. Thus, the old assumptions of man versus environment and civilization versus nature are inadequate in studying an issue that affects both humans and nature. So any study that aims to be relevant within contemporary environmental discourses must examine the mindset

that defines the relationship of human beings with nature and human predispositions that cause his utilitarian view of nature and show how to change this reductive and detrimental view.

Elizabeth Bishop falls in a sweet spot on the culture-nature continuum; she is still a follower of the post-industrial modernist mentality, which culminated in this environmental catastrophe; however, at the same time—although not explicitly aware of a concept like global warming—she is deeply concerned with her relationship with the outside world, which also includes a fair amount of nature. Henceforth, she is neither a starry-eyed worshipper of nature nor oblivious that the nature around her requires close observation and study. In this intermediary position, her poetic sensibilities of form-consciousness and restraint are beneficial in studying how the environment appears in the mirror of a focused perception.

"Questions of Travel" is one of Bishop's poems that provide a glimpse into her philosophy of poetry and the self-awareness of her craft. Nevertheless, perhaps more than any other poem, it is about her conflict with the ethics of human perception. She feels a profound uneasiness about reacting to the social injustice and environmental degradation around her with just a commentary and a fear that her presence can be more detrimental than beneficial. Moreover, although she avoids a clear answer due to her proclivity for restraint and disdain for abstract declarations, she manages to justify her act of observation with an appeal to the temptation of the environment itself. Her coy suggestion that her travel is not to foreign lands but towards a natural home suggests that she would have disapproved of some environmentalists' efforts to remove humans and their perspective from nature and the ecologically concerned text, respectively. Bishop's poetry evokes some of the themes central to traditional ecopoems, such as the journey to a natural site, the contrast between the familiar and the strange, the transformation of nature as a result of culture, the human's agency in transmutations of nature, and the poet as a witness to environmental disasters brought by the human. Nevertheless, it makes possible a critical reevaluation of its other features, such as the tone of lament, the proposition that nature is better off without the human, and the binarism of natural and cultural, or immediate expression and formal play. With its selective treatment of poetic themes and emphasis on expression through form and content simultaneously, Bishop's "Questions of Travel" reinscribes the importance of human

perception as an element of nature, establishing a compassionate as well as an exulting relation with nature at large.

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