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## Eco-poetry in Elizabeth Bishop's Selected Poems

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<b>Keywords:</b> - weather -human -poets -nature	<b>Abstract</b> It is quiet astonishing to know the deep powerful influences of nature, environment and their creatures on human beings that help shaping and developing the poets mental and actual realization of life. This field of study is called Eco criticism which developed to be an important branch of literary criticism. This literary approach studies literary texts with reference to the interaction between the vast spectra of human activities and interests in flora, fauna, landscape, environment and weather. It is concerned with a special realm of communication with nature that cannot be realized easily without dedication and awareness.
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### الشعر البيئي في قصائد إليزابيث بيشوب المختارة

**الخلاصة:** من المذهل معرفة قوة التأثيرات العميقة للطبيعة والمخلوقات على الكيان الانساني حيث انها ساعدت في تشكيل وتطوير ادراك الشاعر الذهني والواقعي للحياة. يدعى حقل الدراسة بالنقد البيئي والذي تطور ليصبح فرعاً مهماً من فروع النقد الادبي. يتناول هذا الفرع النصوص الادبية بالاشارة الى التفاعل بين طيف واسع من نشاطات الانسان واهتماماته مع النباتات والحيوانات والمناظر الطبيعية والبيئة والمناخ . انه مرتبط بصورة رئيسة مع عالم خاص من التواصل مع الطبيعة والذي يصعب ادراكه بانعدام التفاني والوعي.

تعكس الشاعرة والكاتبة الامريكية اليزابيث بيشوب (1911- 1979) سمات بيئية جلية من خلال اعمالها الادبية وخاصة الشعرية منهاز يتناول البحث مجموعة من قصائد بيشوب

القصيرة المختارة وكما يلي " الى شجرة" و " الخريطة" و " كروزو في انكلترا" و " السمكة".

. سيتناول البحث الشاعرة بيشوب مركزا على ثلاث سمات اساسية وكما يلي مركزية البيئة ( صوت الطبيعة) والطبيعة كصوت مبدع للخيال ووالنزعة المحلية من خلال توظيفها لعدة اماكن ومناظر محلية وثيقة الصلة كمواضيع لشعرها. ومن خلال تحليل القصائد في ضوء الخصائص البيئية انفة الذكر سيحدد البحث فيما اذا كانت الشاعرة اليزابيث بيشوب شاعرة بيئية ام غير بيئية.

## Introduction

Human attachment to locality and environment has been reflected through early ages. So, place has played a global role in shaping the human personality, moreover a sense of communication has been established through various levels of apprehension as they are casted and allocated to human life and culture. Many critics focused on human interaction with nature as they defined ecocriticism as the “study of literary texts with reference to the interaction between human activity and the vast range of ‘natural’ or non-human phenomena which bears upon human experience – encompassing (amongst many things) issues concerning fauna, flora, landscape, environment and weather” (Childs & Fowler 2006, 65). Thus, the literary impulse involves re-reading the existing “literary canon in ecocritical terms, that is, the attempt to address ‘standard’ literary texts in the light of what they reveal about human relations with the non-human world” (Childs & Fowler 2006,65).

Poetry is one of the main genres of literature that has it significance in ecocriticism. The first critic who applies the term ecopoetry is Leonard Scigaj, who in his *Sustainable Poetry* declares “we might define ecopoetry as poetry that persistently stresses human cooperation with nature as a dynamic, interrelated series of cyclic feedback systems”(Scigaj 2015, 37).

Lawrence Buell paves the way for the rising of ecopoetry as he sets a certain tradition of classification in his seminal ecocritical work *The Environmental Imagination*. Through which, he demarcates the major necessary aspects to all “environmentally oriented works” of any genre. The basic role of nonhuman presence should be recognized by any ecocritical writer. The writer’s field of interest should not be limited to the human realm. The writer should hold himself accountable for any environmental violation in a sense that he should respect and treat nature and environment as individuals who have their rights just like the human beings. The writer should deal with the environment as a dynamic evolutionary process rather than a fixed and constant object ( Buell 1995,130).

**Elizabeth, Bishop** (1911–1979) is well known for her power of description, and she uses descriptive skill as a sketch for inner life. Critics have pointed out her way of “turning description to the task of mapping an inner life,” as Bonnie Costello states that “to read Bishop’s poetry is to be caught up in its descriptive vitality and its psychological and philosophical wisdom” (1991, 2).

The paper will reveal Bishop's ecopoetic voice through discussing the three major qualities of ecopoetry in her selected poems : the ecocentricism poetic voice; nature as a creative voice of imagination , and locality in her use of various places and native landscape as poetic subject. These aspects are integrated in Bishop’s poems, thus pondering her works closely will reveal her as proto-ecopoet.

### **Bishop’s Ecocentricism ( Voice of Nature)**

Bishop's miserable childhood plays an important role in shaping her literary realization of the world through her poetry; she frequently reveals and confesses certain views, joys, and miseries of her childhood making them salient in her writing. “loss of parents, her mother’s madness, the poet’s own illness, romantic crises and confusions, uprootedness and travel easily make connections between the life and the writing” (Costello1991, 175). When she was 16 years old, she wrote “To a Tree” in (1927) (Kimmelman 2008,45). In this poem part of Bishop’s high sensibility and passion for nature is revealed uncompromisingly for she writes:

Oh, tree outside my window, we are kin,  
For you ask nothing of a friend but this:  
To lean against the window and peer in  
And watch me move about! Sufficient bliss

For me, who stand behind its framework stout,  
Full of my tiny tragedies and grotesque grieves,  
To lean against the window and peer out,  
Admiring infinites' mal leaves. (ll. 1-8)

So, she gives us an early glimpse into her way of viewing the world. Her deeper sympathies are strongly woven into her realization of the natural world outdoor. She describes the tree outside her window, in her poem, with an intensive sense of kinship and familiarity that bind her with the flora. From the very beginning of her life as a poet, Bishop is interested in the way of refining perception through embracing the natural world. As she conveys her inner pathos to that beautiful tree, finding serenity and comfort, she scrutinizes the tree with its branches, fallen leaves and broken stems. This tree incarnates human life with all its tragedies and grieves through this carnivalisc image. Bishop has her own war to change her world through working on different levels as Pinsky

stated “the war of the poet to work on the world of things and people as much as that world works on her” (Pinsky1980: 7).

Bishop's poetry reveals, and argues implicitly a comprehensive understanding of humans' equality with the rest of the natural world, and that she crystalizes her understanding of the human role in relation to the nonhuman through her intimate knowledgeable vision and artistic focus upon her locality. The poet turns her gaze from herself to the world. As she incorporated the natural world into her poetry, Bishop develops a voice that mostly remains unique in American poetry (Kimmelman 2008 45).

Bishop’s early metaphor is in her “Map”, as she compares the map to a child story , and being a child she travels through the map to discover different places. Moreover she reflects her deep attachment to nature that forms the major boundaries that characterize the map. Having fertile imagination sets herself free through the “Map” announcing a peculiar journey of remarkable aspects. Bishop identifies her feelings in terms of exploration passing beyond normal realization of human beings. She has strange passion for the map as a creature of a unique type that would provoke her curiosity and love for new discoveries.

Presenting earth as a mosaic floating in water shrouded with greenery of sea-weed, Bishop compares the map here to an organic giant that props the sea from under.

Land lies in water; it is shadowed green.  
Shadows, or are they shallows, at its edges  
showing the line of long sea-weeded ledges  
where weeds hang to the simple blue from green.  
Or does the land lean down to lift the sea from under,  
drawing it unperturbed around itself?  
Along the fine tan sandy shelf  
is the land tugging at the sea from under? (ll. 1-8)

Bishop displays her inner voice in a spectacular way, and she manifests her inner perceived landscapes uniquely. Bishop's art is quite visible through her descriptions of outer landscapes. She has remarkably left her magical touches, as she "has been highly praised for the way in which she turns description to the task of mapping an inner life" (Costello 1991: 2). So, she quests the map as a real journey through various topographies and colours that mark the land.

The shadow of Newfoundland lies flat and still.  
Labrador's yellow, where the moony Eskimo  
has oiled it. We can stroke these lovely bays,  
under a glass as if they were expected to blossom,  
or as if to provide a clean cage for invisible fish.  
The names of seashore towns run out to sea,  
the names of cities cross the neighboring mountains. (ll. 9-15)

The Map is concerned with geography and travel. In this poem the eyes of the poetic persona travel on a map. The starting point for this visual journey is likely to be "Nova Scotia, as the viewer first observes Newfoundland and Labrador, and then moves eastward toward Norway" (Mazzaro,172). A sense of curiosity led the poet to unleash her imaginative faculty to unravel islands that were not discovered being given a lighter colour.

Are they assigned, or can the countries pick their colors?  
What suits the character or the native waters best.  
Topography displays no favorites; North's as near as West.  
More delicate than the historians' are the map-makers' colors. (ll. 24-27)

The final lines of the Map enhances the idea why Bishop is "a self-proclaimed poet of geography" (Millier 1992, 75). It seems that this field of discipline makes the geographers peculiar in their sensibility to exceed the historian through applying their beautiful colours. As Bishop

announces her profound admiration for the map makers for they are “More delicate than the historians’ are the map-makers’ colors,” she declares. Through a different kind of perception—subtler, more intuitive than those who work with words—the mapmaker becomes “the ultimate interpreter of the external world. And so it is that artistic vision, expressed by the mapmaker, is understood to be a valid guide to our travels both to the external world of nature and to the internal world of individual consciousness” (Kimmelman 2008:45 ). The poet prefers geography because she thinks it gives a more accurate picture of the world than the study of history does. In other words, geography provides us with more reliable knowledge of the world.

Bishop’s poems are “absorbed with precisely capturing the world through language, and in this emphasis she is more closely aligned with the metaphysical poet George Herbert, the romantic poet William Wordsworth, and the Victorian poet Gerard Manley Hopkins” (Kimmelman 2008:45 ).

These three poets reflect the ecopoetic qualities in their works. George Herbert’s poems the Church Monuments, 'the Pearl', 'The Wreath', 'The Flower' and many other poems have similar process of treatment with environment and place. William Wordsworth is indisputably a poet of nature. Hopkins’s poems 'The Wreck of Deutschland', 'The Windhover', 'Pied Beauty' and other poems have remarkable ecopoetic aspects. Bishop has common harmonious traits with these three poets.

Centralizing the theme of journey in Bishop’s poetry reflects an ample aspiration for knowing the world. This can be seen clearly in her poem “The Map”. She reflects her deep meditation of the world in its tiny

form crystalized in the map. Bishop states “these peninsulas take water between thumb and finger,” Bishop writes “like women feeling for the smoothness of yard-goods.” The simile is incorporated with the landscape rendering it into a domestic world: topographical features are personified and given human like aspects encompassing the natural world.

Bishop is interested in raising unanswered questions such as, “Along the fine tan sandy shelf / is the land tugging at the sea from under?” or “Are they assigned, or can the countries pick their colors?” Bishop continued asking questions of travel in her Brazilian poems, and thus it has been argued that “travel is not a quest for her, but a questioning” (Costello 1991: 153). The travel is the hallmark of her life. In Mexico during 1942–43, she meets the Chilean poet Pablo Neruda. She travels down the Amazon in 1961 with the novelist Aldous Huxley. Even in the final years of her life, while teaching at Harvard University, she continues her travels to Ecuador and Peru (Kimmelman 2008: 45).

In the poem 'Crusoe in England', she is haunted by a wide wild undiscovered world. Bishop's Robinson Crusoe, shipwrecked on his island, has nightmares of having to explore more and more new islands and of being required to be their geographer:

I'd have  
nightmares of other islands  
stretching away from mine, infinities  
of islands, islands spawning islands,  
knowing that I had to live  
on each and every one, eventually,  
for ages, registering their flora,  
their fauna, their geography. (VIII, ll. 5-13)

Bishop employs nature as salient theme in her poetry through imparting a vigor presence of her poetry to be ecocentric and challenging for old traditional premises through integrating herself with nature.



Revealing her sense of discovery in a remarkable way, Bishop discloses in her poem “The Fish” a new realization of freedom, which she reveals in free scene within the main idea of the poem. An impulse of continuity pervades the poem showing the progressive movement in life. Longenbach states that

she provides at the beginning of "The Fish" no sense of its conclusion; instead, the poem seems to discover its direction only as we read it, and (as in Bishop's parable) both the target and the hunter are in motion. The fish and the fisherman become apprehensible to us through the sequence of similes characterizing the fish ( 1997,39).

As she writes leaving the poem at loose end attracting the human mind to its reality:

Here and there  
his brown skin hung in strips  
like ancient wallpaper,  
and its pattern of darker brown  
was like wallpaper:  
shapes like full-blown roses  
stained and lost though age. (ll. 7-13)

Revealing her ecological nature Bishop makes clear in “The Fish” that elusiveness controls her perception. She is fascinated by this creature. She ends that poem, “And I let the fish go.” This line examines the tension that arises in the development of artistic vision itself. “Should vision be developed in isolation, the poet asks, or should vision be broadened by experience?” ( Kimmelman ,46 ). Moreover the fish is inspiring the poet or teaching the speaker how “to imagine and therefore appreciate her world.

The epiphany in the poem's final lines, when everything is "rainbow," becomes possible when the speaker turns from the fish and sees a rainbow in the oil spread out in the ugly rented boat” (Longenbach:

40). So, the first aspect of the confident fisherman is being compromised by the emotional contact with the fish that leads the speaker to set it free, to be engaged with the leaking oil which reflects the rainbow on water.

Bishop wrote 76 lines of duteous, resourceful description, presenting a comparison of the fish with wall paper, thus she says the fish's "skin hung in strips / like ancient wallpaper" and its eyes resemble "old scratched isinglass." Shedding light on this injured creature with a painter's sight and helping the reader observe many extraordinary and brilliant details. The poem does not reflect the misery of a single creature but it is mostly concerned with the fisherwoman that catches the fish. While the first half of the poem shows Bishop's mastery and control of her situation through the use of simple verbs, such as "I caught." Denoting relative opposition with the fish," which "hung a grunting weight" and is infected with parasites.

The second half of the poem witnesses a shift in attitude. The verbs used by the poet reflect her consciousness. She "admired" the fish and "stared and stared" at it. She is totally charmed and captured by the fish. Observing the epic reality of the fish which passes through numerous combat, it has a "weapon like" lower lip from which hang "five old pieces of fishing line," which reveal that the fish has been hooked five times before but has managed to survive. Bishop sees the fish as a valiant warrior who fights so many battles. At the end of the poem, the boat is filled with a sense of "victory" as the "rainbow" of oil on the water spreads everywhere. The poet releases the fish. The poet's feeling of "victory" is not due to catching the fish, at the beginning of the poem, but it is due to the change that occurs during her profound reflections and admiration of the fish. As Willard Spiegelman argues, victory does not come from "the elimination, or conquest, of the enemy, but the embracing, subsuming, and internalizing of him" (Spiegelman 1985:

110). The poem represents an epiphany about beauty, heroism, and the ethics of aesthetic sensitivity.

## **Conclusion**

Elizabeth Bishop reflects her eco-poetic inclination in most of her poems especially 'The Tree', 'The Map', 'the Fish', and 'Crusoe in England'. She focuses on the presence of the nonhuman in a remarkable manner. She extends her vision beyond humanity to inaugurate a new realm of communication with nature. Moreover, Bishop manifests a sense of human accountability to the environment through peculiar treatment with the place and the creatures, believing it to be a dynamic evolutionary process rather than a constant one. Egoism and selfishness are totally rejected by Bishop's poetry and this can be clearly observed through her emotional views towards nature and its creatures. Observing all the mentioned points leads us to consider Bishop as a dedicated ecopoet.

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