

# Images and Their Implications in Elizabeth Bishop's Poetry

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**Abstract**—Elizabeth Bishop was one of the most influential and important poets in the 20th century in the United States. She is an American poet laureate and won the Pulitzer Prize. Her works have been paid more and more attention by scholars at home and abroad. Bishop's poetry based on traditional American poetry, following Dickinson, Stevens, and Mary Moore, uses a similarly reliable technique to express more clearly personalized rhetorical position than peer poets including Lowell and Berryman... Her poems are full of imagination and music rhythms. With the precise expression of language and the perfection of forms, moral allegiance and new ideas are combined to express confidence in upholding justice and a sense of responsibility of poets. Bishop's style of poetry is rigorous, deep in imagery, more precisely, inseparable from objective perceptions and moral illusions. In her poetry, language, skills, and imagery all come together in harmony to produce a very high artistic effect. Her poems are refined and precise, but the internal meaning of the expression is very vague. Therefore, her poetry has a large number of rich and vivid images. The true meaning of poetry is often left to the reader to understand.

**Keywords**—Elizabeth Bishop; poetry; images; Emily Dickinson

## I. INTRODUCTION

Elizabeth Bishop, as a very important poet in the 20th century in America, writes a lot of poems worthy of studying to world literature. Her poems based on the tradition of America poetry, as her predecessors, Emily Dickinson, Bishop's poems often obscure silence and reservations. She often preserves the true meaning of her poem for the readers to think. Her poems are full of imagination and musical rhythm. With the help of the precise expression of language and the perfection of form, her poems combine moral with new ideas and express her faith in upholding justice and the poet's sense of responsibility. Her poetic details and rich allegiance have been exemplary in the eyes of poets and critics. Regarding poetic art, she once said: "Writing poetry is an unnatural act, and the poet's goal is to make them more natural." She strictly followed the principle of dissatisfaction and never publishing in her life. Therefore, the poems published in his lifetime were only seventy to eighty. After she died, people found some poems from her manuscript, but they still didn't add up to 100 songs. Her poetry can be clearly divided into three categories from the subject matter:

the first uses realistic themes, the second uses imagined themes, and the third uses memories and dreams as themes. These three types of poetry form an architectural correspondence in her poetry collection: the poetry of the realistic theme is its base, the poetry of the imaginative theme is its dome, the poems of memories and dreams are themes like its bay window or balcony. In fact, this phenomenon of continuous trials between realistic and imaginary subjects not only appears to poets but also more prefers to artists.

In general, except for the poetry that writes animals, imagery is undoubtedly unambiguous, and other symbolic poems cannot simply correspond to specific things. Because Bishop's life was concerned with the universal laws of human nature, life, and nature, she spent all her life to absorb this knowledge. Her purpose is to make poetry equal to nature: complex, mysterious, and infinitely symbolic for every kind of thing. Imagery is an important element in Elizabeth Bishop's poetry. Imagery plays a very important role in appreciating poetry and analyzing its value. Bishop's poetry and imagery convey crucial information, but it is not easy for readers to understand because of Elizabeth Bishop's poetry is complex and profound.

## II. BRIEF INFORMATION ABOUT ELIZABETH BISHOP

### A. Life of Elizabeth Bishop

The poet Elizabeth Bishop was born on February 8, 1911 in Worcester, Massachusetts. When she was less than one year old, her father died. When she was five years old, her mentally ill mother entered a mental hospital and she disappeared from the Bishop's life. From 3 to 6 years old, Bishop went to live with his grandparents in the big village of Nova Scotia in southeast Canada. And then she was then taken to the grandparents' homes in Worcester and Boston. The environment of the grandfather's family is not suitable for her growth. In her recollection *Rural Rat*, Bishop wrote: "Nobody asked me for advice. They disobeyed my wishes and brought me back to where my father was born. I also feel that I am old and moving towards death. I am alone and boring with my grandmother, silent grandfather, lonely dinner... In the evening, I lie down, turn the torch off and on, and then weep." By the time his mother's sister came to rescue her, Bishop, who was born sickly, became weaker.

Eczema, asthma, choreography, and nervousness caused her to be almost unable to walk.

### B. Elizabeth Bishop's Writing Features

Elizabeth Bishop's poems emphasize nature. She followed the principle of dissatisfaction and non-publishing throughout her life. Therefore, the sum of the poems published during her lifetime was only 70 or 80. In addition to writing poetry, she loves travel, writes journals for magazines, and occasionally writes novels and criticisms, but the output is not high. She has a special attitude towards poetry. Her poetry is full of imagination and music rhythm. With the accurate expression of language and perfect form, she combines moral allegiance with new idea, and expresses confidence in upholding justice and a sense of responsibility of the poet.

Her poetry can be divided into three categories in terms of subject matter. The first category uses realistic themes, the second uses imaginative themes, and the third uses memory and dream themes. In fact, this phenomenon of continuous experimentation in realistic themes and imaginative themes appears not only in the poets here, but more often in the painters. For example, the French impressionist Cezanne, he always wanted to try imaginative religious paintings. He wanted to paint a kind of majestic feeling, but he failed repeatedly. He later discovered that his talent still lies in realistic themes. So he concentrates on painting the apple on the table. Bishop's realistic style of poetry is loyal to the actual experience, but it is not a simple description. Instead, it uses a proper metaphor to make it full of vivid drama, more specifically the "circus atmosphere". Such as the *Rock Sandpiper*, *Cockroach*, *Fish*, etc. Generally speaking, except for the symbolic nature of poems written for animals, other symbolic poems cannot simply correspond to specific things. Bishop's focus is on human nature, the universal laws of life and nature. Bishop's poetry with imagination as the theme is not much, but there are such topics in the early, middle and late periods. However, it is difficult to find a clear development trajectory. Some scholars believe that these poems are only occasional attempts. Her poems with memories and dreams are very few, and they rarely involve adulthood. They only relate to childhood. The most commonly used confessional poet in her contemporaneity is the theme of memories.

Her best poetry is about two places that are important to her, Nova Scotia and Brazil. One of these two places is her childhood land where she is displaced, and the other is where her adulthood is most deeply loved. The deepest feelings in her poetry come from these two places. In a foreign home, Bishop pointed out that she is a foreigner rather than a native. It is provided that all three of his poems have names that are geographically meaningful: *North and South*, *Problems in Travel*, and *Geography III*. And her early metaphor of poetry was a map. Bishop is good at using monosyllabic words in her poetry. The advantage of using monosyllable vocabulary is that they sound real. Her rhythm is skewed, her rhythm is irregular, her stanza is asymmetric, her comedy often violates genre requirements, and her allusions are concealed,

but at the same time these specializations have created her extraordinariness.

Bishop's abstract refinement of reality, the feeling of malformation, alienation in human society, aversion to society, religion or political groups, and her preference for drawing "maps" have resulted in many of her poetry collections. Her views and attitudes are reflected in his poems. They led Bishop's poetry to a specific theme — landscape poetry, travel poetry, but not epic and religious poetry. They ensured that Bishop could escape the blockade of certainty and social solidarity. Bishop creates a new lyric poem by adhering to an extraordinary expression of clarity, simplicity and naive tone, which is her unique writing style.

## III. IMPORTANCE OF IMAGES IN BISHOP'S POETRY

### A. Importance of Images in English Poetry

Poetry images are the basic elements of poetry and are the soul and life of poetry. Poetry images are based on language. In fact, the process of poetry creation is the process by which poets seek objective things as images and construct imagery language so that their subjective emotions can be expressed vividly. From the perspective of linguistics, most of the images corresponding to poetry are nouns that express concrete objects and events, including nouns and noun phrases. These figurative and perceivable nominal terms are used in poetry to become imagery words. In poetry, a group of imagery language can be a single imagery word; it can be a fixed idiom; it can also be a non-nominal phrase or sentence with imagery as its main body.

The poetic imagery language is a means of shaping the artistic image from the perspective of literature and art. From the perspective of linguistics, it is also an artistic language that conveys aesthetic information and aesthetic feelings. The language image of poetry is based on everyday language. The realization of aesthetic value must rely on the conceptual meaning of everyday language. It is also different from everyday language. It is an aesthetic variation of speech, semantics, and grammar in everyday language. It is reflected in the extraordinariness of the collocation between imagery words and adjectives, verbs, etc. that bear the subject of poetry imagery. The language of poetry imagery is characterized by figurativeness, metaphorically, and nationality. The poet uses the metaphor way to make the figurative poetic image language become the carrier of his subjective emotion. Based on the relationship between the subject imagery words and the national culture accumulation, the poetic imagery language can be divided into the inherited imagery language and the innovative imagery language. Whether it is an inherited imagery language or an innovative imagery language, it has nationality and must be constrained by national culture. The poetic image language has the functions of image description, emotion description and aesthetics. Language of poetry imagery is a highly unified language of image depiction and emotional depiction. It expresses lyricism from the perspective of the combination of image depiction and emotional depiction, embeds subjective emotions, and deeply philosophizes the image of objective things. The poetic imagery language has rich

aesthetic attributes. Its essential feature is aesthetics, which brings people's feelings and inspirations to the beauty and has outstanding aesthetic functions.

The imagery portrayal function and emotional portrayal function of the poetic image language also make the poetic image language bring people the aesthetic feeling of the external form and the inherent sense of beauty. When poets construct imagery language, they use the metaphorical thinking mechanism. Metaphorical thinking is based on the similarities between people and things and between things and things. Therefore, metaphorical thinking follows the law of thinking that all things infiltrate each other. The poet constructs the similarity between subjective emotions and objective things through the use of intuitive association or extraordinary imaginative thinking operations, and associates one's own subjective feelings with certain perceptual features of objective things, thus constructing metaphorical poetry image language. The poets are stimulated by the external world, creating creative motives, and are driven by creative motives to organize internal speech.

The poetic image language has the features of multi-layered semantics, ambiguity and uncertainty. The understanding of the deep meaning of poetic imagery must be constrained by cultural context. In poetry, the main imagery words in imagery language play an important role.

#### *B. Importance of Images in Bishop's Poetry*

Reading Bishop's poetry, many readers may notice the irreplaceable role of imagery. In Bishop's poetry, imagery is not only a simple element in her poetry, but also the soul of her poetry. The image dominates Bishop's poetry and expresses the poet's emotions and intentions in a secret way.

We all know the imagery means to use figurative language to represent objects, actions and ideas in such a way that it appeals to our physical senses. Imagery, in a literary text, is an author's use of vivid and descriptive language to add depth to their work, or create visual using words. Making the reader feel as if he is present in the very moment, right between the lines, is what imagery is all about. It appeals to human senses to deepen the reader's understanding of the work. Using vivid descriptions and comparisons with the help of sound words, helps recreate images and emotions.

Bishop is trying to seek the balance of passion and restraint; in her poems readers can always find a mysterious silence. She seems want to tell us some personal things, but readers cannot clearly understand the truth of the matter. In sestina, although Bishop chooses silence forbear way to express her feeling. Readers can still feel the sadness which penetrates in the whole poem. Bishop restrained, repressed the sadness very well and do not allow it to be self-expansion, but all the family imagery, such as "children" "grandmother" "tears" "almanac" "marvel strove" "house" as well as other ordinary things imbued with the feelings of the poet. Unlike other contemporary poets, she chose a poetic and silent way to show her loneliness.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

So it is proved that the childhood experiences means significant to a person, especially a sensitive woman poet. Readers can feel her wordless sorrow feeling though her poetry she hides them very well.

Childhood experience is a kind of psychological effect basically; it is changed with the age and the environment changing. As a tendency, childhood experience is more like a kind of subjective psychological variation. This nature of childhood experience of the writer is very important. It means that a writer can continue to absorb his childhood experience at all the creation of his life. The experience of childhood is very important to a writer which bound to this or that affect his life creation.

Bishop always lives in the childhood memories which make her feel very unhappy. The life, experience and feelings in childhood become the inexhaustible source of creation in her life. Those unpleasant experiences developed her filled with lonely, sensitive, introverted, inferiority complex psychological.

The images in Elizabeth Bishop's poetry tell us that childhood experience is the main source of images in her poetry, and her images has created her poetry.

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