

Essay the fish by elizabeth bishop essay

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In this poem, the first-person narrator tells of a fish that he has caught in his “rented boat,” and goes on to contemplate its many features, its history, and what it means that he has caught it again. The use of imagery and sensory language is astounding, allowing us to vividly see the relationship that develops between man and fish, the fisherman’s respect and admiration for the creature growing with each notice of its many features. With this in mind, Bishop appeals to our many senses and manages to place us in the role of the fisherman, creating a visceral portrait of a single moment in time through sheer imagery.

Throughout the course of the poem, we never finally pin down what kind of fish the fisherman has caught, though it is thought by some that it would be a jewfish or amberjack. That is not important, however, as the fish “is everyfish” (Frost, 31) – a ubiquitous, all-encompassing concept. Its vagueness allows us to feel more in tune with the fish and apply our own imagination to it. The vivid details of the fish provided by Bishop fill in the blanks for us; what is important is what the fish has been through, rather than what it is.

Many different senses are appealed to in Bishop’s imagery and language. The first, obviously, is sight, with the fisherman describing the fish having “brown skin hung in strips...shapes like full-blown roses,” “white flesh,” “dramatic reds and blacks of entrails,” and so on. However, she also gives us a more visceral sense of touch, with the coarseness of the flesh and the frayed wires of the fishhooks the fish has gained from previous attempts on his life. There is even an element of sound to the description of the fish, with the “grunting weight” of it, and the snapping of the fishing lines the fish had

already. All of these things give us a more complete picture of the experience of catching this fish.

The greatest connection the narrator feels in the poem is when the fish's eyes, which are the most intricately described feature in the poem, finally turn - though not to stare back at the fisherman. He describes it as "the tipping of an object toward the light," which is an incredibly detailed event that is both familiar and implicitly filled with sensory imagery. The shine of the reflected light, the sound of the moving object, the feel of it in your hand as you turn it - all of these things come to mind when that simple phrase is encountered in the poem.

Eventually, the protagonist lets the fish go, even after everything that he has experienced to get there. It is unknown why the fisherman does this, though there are many implications that can be made. It is possible that, given the intimate experience and knowledge of the fish that was found in his examination of it, that he gave the fish pity and sent it back. Perhaps the fisherman never wanted to kill the fish in the first place, and was hunting for sport. This can be substantiated by the supreme feeling of victory that the fisherman feels, which "fill[s] up the little rented boat" and allows that sense of satisfaction, especially after seeing the fish hooks that hung from the fish's lower jaw like trophies. He has finally been bested, and therefore the fisherman has all the victory he needs, letting him back into the water.

In "The Fish," Elizabeth Bishop combines simile, metaphor and sensory imagery to great effect, creating a snapshot of a perfect moment between man and nature. This intimate knowledge of another creature through detail

and implication provides the reader with an incredibly powerful emotional reaction, leading us to be transformed and placed in the role of the fisherman ourselves. In this way, we can experience the fish for ourselves, and be just as dazzled as he was when he caught the creature from the oil-filled ocean.

References

Frost, C. (2009). A Poet's Inner Eye. *Humanities*, 30(2), 28-31. Retrieved from EBSCOhost.