

Elizabeth bishop essay sample



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The recurring theme of discovering beauty and wonder in mundane objects in Elizabeth Bishop's "The Fish", "The Bight", and "Sandpiper" is illustrated by the descriptions of the creature/ place she chose. Instead of assimilating to social conventions and adapting the view most people have, Bishop captures the unique beauty she sees from the minute details of life.

In "The Fish", Bishop used the metaphor of a warrior imagery to form visual images of the fish. It has evaded capture many times before from lines 60-61 describing the hooks and the lines "still crimped from the strain and snap// when it broke and when he got away". The use of personification here brings to mind the terrible struggles the fish has gone through to as well as the strength and determination the fish seemingly has in order to live.

The admiration the speaker has for the fish is also shown with a simile in lines 62-64: "like medals with their ribbons// frayed and wavering// a five-haired beard of wisdom". It furthers of the imagery of the fish being an soldier or a general who has received accolades for his actions of great bravery, again reinforcing how the speaker now sees the originally "battered and venerable and homely" fish in lines 8-9 as a beautiful creature worthy of praise and respect. The speaker had a moment of epiphany at the very end of the poem and decided to "let the fish go" to live another day because she ultimately sees beauty in a seemingly ordinary creature.

In "Sandpiper", the focus of the entire poem is on the actions of the "obsessed", "focused" and "preoccupied" bird. Elizabeth Bishop's once again sees beauty through the vision and perspective of the bird which only has its mind on the particular grain of sand it is searching for. The repetition in line

17, “ looking for something, something, something” shows the intensity of the bird and its dedication to find the perfect grain of sand.

The colour imagery used to describe the sand in lines 19-20: “ the millions of grains are black, white, tan and grey// mixed with quartz grains, rose and amethyst” emphasizes how the sandpiper’s quest to find those few grains of quartz, rose and amethyst sand is all but impossible – and yet it still has the willpower and persistence to do so, fixated towards its own self-imposed mission. The speaker has much admiration for the ordinary bird on the beach because it has the tenacity and focus to search for a single, minute object, just as how the speaker hopes to find beauty in minute details as inspiration for her poetic creations.

“ The Bight” describes a bustling, chaotic harbor with loads of “ untidy activity” (line 35) going on. Bishop however once again sees beauty in this place through the use of the extended metaphor of the bight towards life. She imagines all the activities in this place as “ littered with old correspondences”, which shows how the bight is overflowing, literally filled, with many people going about in their own business with metaphors and similes forming visual, tactile and auditory images. There are so many different activities happening at the same time with the boats coming to dock to shore and then going out to the sea again, birds soaring around the harbor and people working in their daily lives. It refers to how our everyday lives are also the same – filled with many “ untidy activities” which is messy and chaotic. In lines 29-30, this idea is further reinforced by “ boats are still piled up against each other [...] not yet salvaged, if they ever will”. This visual image of the boats shows how again in life we have duties and tasks

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we would much rather avoid and the bight is filled with “ old correspondences” which could imply duties as well as the past.

Elizabeth Bishop’s recurring theme in the poem shines through in the final two lines by saying “ all the untidy activities continues// awful but cheerful”. It refers to how there are so many things in life as in the bight we find unpleasant, and yet Bishop still find things and details to be cheerful about and appreciative. It is chaotic in the busy harbor, but yet the speaker is accepting of the fact that it would continue to bustle on and she finds peace and even find it “ cheerful” to be witnessing the scene.