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Framing Water in The American Poetic Tradition

Abstract

This paper takes a broader view of the use of water imagery in the American poetic tradition. Since the nineteenth century, celebrated poets such as Hart Crane, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, Walt Whitman, Robert Frost, Emily Dickinson, Hilda Doolittle, Marianne Moore, Louise Bogan and Elizabeth Bishop have all imagined water in ways which overlap and extend their poetic thoughts. Contrary to W H Auden's thought-provoking remarks about the 'savage' treatment of nature, which highlights masculinity in America, this paper focusses on showing water as one of the elemental forces, emphasizing the fluid nature of the American poetic discourse. American poets establish an intimate relationship with water, as something at the back of their minds, which is externalized through their poetic response. This paper argues that in establishing their connection with the varied manifestations of water, both, male and female poets have asserted their manhood and womanhood through it.

Keywords: American poetry, nature, fluidity, manhood, womanhood

Introduction

Water has been used as a recurrent image in the American poetic tradition to envision the meaning and space of the act of writing. Be it Walt Whitman's fascination with Long Island, Robinson Jefferson's attraction for the Pacific Ocean, Elizabeth Bishop's longing for the waters of Nova Scotia or Emily Dickinson's imagined sea, water has been an integral part of the natural imagery in the American poetry. Its depiction has been oxymoronic, signifying both life and death, creation and destruction simultaneously. Perhaps its extensive use owes to its ability to reflect a gamut of human attributes. The human condition finds itself sharing elements with what it has come to signify, and so when poetry is written, the image of water makes frequent appearances.

It is interesting how W. H Auden has contrasted the use of nature in English and American poetry in the following manner:

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One of the great differences between Europe in general and America is the attitude towards nature. To us over here, perhaps, nature is always, in a sense, the mother or the wife: something with which you enter into semi-personal relation. In the United States, nature is something much more savage: it is much more like – shall we say? – St. George and the dragon. Nature is the dragon, against which St. George proves his manhood.¹

The first and most significant problem that arises with Auden's contention is that there cannot be a harmonious conclusion derived specific to the entire American poetic tradition and its treatment of natural elements such as water. The division simply is not quite as neat. This paper highlights that since the nineteenth century, natural imagery, especially water imagery, has not been depicted as a destructive force altogether; one which lies outside human beings, and which the American poets have tried to overpower. Another interesting thing to note is that both male and female American poets confronting the powerful nature, be it outside or within, have expressed their manhood and womanhood through it. Both have envisaged water as something at the back of their minds, which makes itself heard as a muse within the poet, an adventurous spirit, a mode of a meditative dissection of thoughts, a quest within, a means to assert power over the self and the society.

In his discussion of the representation of water in the works of twentieth century American poet Robinson Jeffers, Christopher Breach (2003) remarks that Jeffers "does not anthropomorphize nature in an attempt to understand or control it, but instead makes human actions and emotions appear to be simply part of a larger natural order".² The tension between man and nature that Auden's claim dissolves in the light of what Breach has to say.

Similarly, William Carlos Williams' "Paterson" (1967), is an instance of the tradition treating water as anything but a savage dragon to be stood up to. In his autobiography, Williams notes that in writing "Paterson", he created "an image large enough to embody the whole knowable world about me".³ The importance of this comment comes to light taking into account Christopher Breach's observation about the poet. Breach writes that "Williams' inspiration for Paterson came both from the geographical features of the city (with its river and waterfall as a central image) ...".⁴ With water employed as a major symbol of "the whole knowable world" of the poet, the poet's association with nature appears to be deeply personal.

Reed Whittemore's "Waves in Peoria" speaks of the American poet's mind, which is preoccupied with the sonorous voice of water. The American sea squats inside the poet with its "lumbering presence"⁵ reminding him to look back at the American poetic tradition and rethink through it. It is this "lumbering presence"⁶ which is a meditation on Whittemore's predecessors and a response from their descendent poets. The voice recalls Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's floating song ("Song of Haiwatha", 1856), Walt Whitman's fluid "house of maternity"⁷, Emily Dickinson's sea of "eternity"⁸, or Elizabeth Bishop's "dancing floor"⁹ of the sea. The American poets' proximity to the varied manifestations of fluid recurs as their poetic act that constantly makes itself heard and felt:

... that lumbering presence

Has been in my ear so long that I have to say something
Or other about it. In this respect
It is like an unwritten poem pounding and pounding
 A vast cranial shore until nothing else
 Can be heard and the poet grows nervous.¹⁰

Whittemore's poem is reminiscent of the historical fluidity of the American poetic thought. Water as the poetic voice from the past, urges Whittemore to pay heed to it, and to rethink through it in the present. The "cranial shore"¹¹ echoes Freud's notion of the structuring of the mind like language, as it articulates itself through the sound and motion of the 'unwritten' poetic thought within the artist's soul and his poetic language. The artist, as a result of this fluid force, writes fluid verses which cause the palpable poems to always be incomplete reflections, instead of perfect and fixed molds. In becoming so, they have an undisputed influence on the new poets, in deepening their conception of the self's relationship to water and improving their understanding, to make way for the new poets to deliberate on their fragility and carry forward their poetic motion. Water gives the American poets the urge to say, when their poetic thought takes a back seat.

Bishop is another case in the study, with her recurrent use of the image of the sea in her poetry. Hugh Egan (2000), in his article "'Element Bearable to No Mortal': The Sea in Selected Elizabeth Bishop Poems", affirms that the sea

expresses a yearning for totalized, transcendent meaning. This yearning is invariably thwarted, but in its categorical reach Bishop's sea aspires to the status of romantic absolute, a "beauteous form" (to borrow from Wordsworth's "Tintern Abbey") that enables a speaker to "see into the life of things... (the sea is) paradoxically clarifying and confounding: Its wash and rhythm can sharpen, order, and enhance the object of observation; at the same time, this accurate "seeing" unsettles her speakers, leaving them afloat in a larger (and more interior) field of metaphysical indeterminacy.¹²

While it enables both the speaker and the reader to explore, question and even become uncertain about the "life of things", nature is not represented as an antagonistic force.

Walt Whitman too, finds the sea just as fascinating. In his prose, he recalls his aspiration from his boyhood:

I had the fancy, the wish, to write a piece, perhaps a poem, about the sea-shore—that suggesting, dividing line, contact, junction, the solid marrying the liquid—that curious, lurking something, ... I felt that I must one day write a book expressing this liquid, mystic theme. Afterward, I recollect, how it came to me that instead of any special lyrical or epical or literary attempt, the sea-shore should be an invisible influence, a pervading auge and tally for me, in my composition.¹³

The sea and its shore came to be his muse, his means to reflect upon and express himself. Like Bishop, water became an aid for his introspection.

For Frost, nature is not always romanticized in a utopic manner. While it can be threatening, it is not solely that. It is both the “savage monster” and the redeemer. Dierdre Fagan (2007) writes, nature is “not without purpose in Frost; it is a constant palpable

threat, and its gestures are frequently presented as both thoughtful and intentional”¹⁴ Discussing Frost’s *Hyla Brook*, Fagan examines his juxtaposition of fire and water, “water being the only trusted barrier to the fire”¹⁵. The contrasting treatment of the two natural elements shows how nature is not wholly constructive or destructive.

For Hart Cane, nature is the beginning and the end; it is the source and expression of manhood to him. In his article “The Centrality of Hart Cane’s ‘The Broken Tower’”, Melvin E. Lyon (1972) discusses the image of the sea in one particular poem, establishing that “the sea symbolizes the flux of Nature, out of which the towers of individual human lives emerge and to which they inevitably return ... the tower suggests the mutable time-bound crystallizing out of a more permanent fluid reality”.¹⁶

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow’s depiction of water goes somewhat closer to what Auden maintains. However, nature is still not something man has to prove himself or assert his manhood to. In his exploration of the metaphorical representation of waves and tides, Joseph Flibbert (2001) claims that

the motion of the tides is reminiscent of the cycle of life and death. The rhythmical motion and sound of sea waves suggests the mournful tone of elegy in ‘Elegiac Verse’ (1882) and the transcendent majesty of John Milton’s poetry in “Milton” (1875). The motions of water are associated with inward renewal in “Brook and Wave” (1873) and “The Tides” (1875).¹⁷

Like most other poets, Longfellow seems to have a contemplative and self-reflective relationship with water within his poetry.

In the works of Emily Dickinson, the sea is an expression of the emotions she experiences. It is the poetic expression of her inner state, demonstrated through multiple varying forms of water. Ruth Flanders McNaughton (1949) studies imagery within her poems and notes that

Emily’s worshipful attitude toward her lover she expresses through the use of many different images. She is the river and he the sea, or she is only a drop of water and he is the sea. At other times, she is the sea and he the moon, to whose least command she is obedient.¹⁸

For her, the different characteristics that water in its different states exhibits provide her with metaphors to express that which perhaps simple adjectives cannot. Her treatment of these images is her means to dissect and process her affections.

Hilda Doolittle is yet another poet who explores, and then reinforces her womanhood through her manifestation of water within her poetry. For instance, her *Sea-Garden*, which showcases seashore imagery, “de- and re-construct(s) notions of beauty and poetic value. Sea Garden, published in 1916, traverses a coastal landscape and documents both its physical features and its unseen

meanings”¹⁹. Elizabeth O’ Connor (2018) notes that “It is tempting to read the new beauty of “Sheltered Garden”, for instance, as a specific rejection of Victorian femininity”²⁰. For Doolittle then, nature presents a way to reassert herself within and outside the poetic domain.

Water does not merely represent fluidity, softness and feminine beauty. Poets like Marianne Moore employ images of water in very unconventional ways, not shying from concretizing their thoughts through poetic expression in a nonorthodox manner. Yoko Ueno (2012) notes that

Moore avoids the pleasing and dreamy beauty which is “so sweet” that “the sense faints picturing them” in Shelley’s poem. Her split sentence breaks the smooth stream of the language and helps to reject being indulged in sweet beauty of the sea plants. In this way Moore partly rejects typically Romantic and melancholic beauty and transforms it into harder and less pleasing things while she is attracted by it... she has an intention to describe flowerlike beauty and that she denies conventionally feminine beauty at the same time.²¹

Moore not only redefines the symbol to express herself, but also revises the received notion of what it is to be feminine. In her exploration of nature and its employment within her poetry, she breaks the boundaries that may limit the assertion of her womanhood.

In as early as the nineteenth century, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (1807-1882) gave weightage to Whittemore’s poetic confessions. In his “Song”²², he celebrates the forceful fluidity of the poetic discourse, whose “wild emotion” strikes the barrenness of the poet and makes itself loud and clear through the “cave” and “rocky fastness” of the poet’s soul. Longfellow further qualifies Whittemore’s vast “cranial shore” with the length and breadth of the impetus, which “in its vastness” “floats some fragment of a song”. The song can be seen as mellow and fluid a composition spatialized as an incomplete “fragment”. The unfinished song keeps Longfellow’s poetic thought in motion and also prepares the ground for other poets to carry this sonorous music of the inner turmoil further:

So when storms of wild emotion
Strike the ocean
Of the poet’s soul, erelong
From each cave and rocky fastness,
In its vastness,
floats some fragment of a song.²³

In “Tide rises, Tide falls” (1879) Longfellow shows the self-annihilating experience with the sea of his poetic thought. The sea is personified as a destructive muse when its fluidity fails to find the channel to express itself more fully; the poem fails to get written when the “little white hands”²⁴ of the inspirational muse eclipse the linguistic signs created on the surface of the page with its dark calling. The fluidity is both a life giving and life taking experience of the poetic act:

But the sea, the sea in the darkness calls;
The little waves, with their soft, white hands,
Efface the footprints in the sands. . .
And the tide rises, the tide falls.²⁵

Walt Whitman (1819-1892) too, noticed the rise and fall of the sea, as he was particularly fascinated by Long Island. He shows an obsession for the “stretch of beach with nothing but sea-tossings in sight in every direction as far as the eye could reach”.²⁶ Like Longfellow, Whitman is interested in the stretch of the sea around him; he believes in the all-encompassing motion of thought, which culminates in his poems. Whitman gives shape to Longfellow’s fragmented personification of the poetic muse; he envisions the sea as an enigmatic female muse, which participates in Whitman’s act of writing poems. In “Song of Myself” (1885), Whitman believed “you sea! I resign myself to you also”.²⁷ This makes him a conqueror of the sea as he faces its complexities and makes it succumb to his wishes.

In “Facing West” (1860), Whitman expresses his adventurous spirit: “inquiring, tireless, seeking what is yet unfound / I, child, very old, over waves, towards the house of maternity”.²⁸ Here the sea is associated with adventure and the fluidity and mystery of a woman’s body. Whitman’s water imagery has romantic characteristics making the sea a sensuous experience and a source of hidden knowledge of the capabilities of woman. The sea is the founder of new realms, visualizing poet’s imaginative desires and urging him to seek what is beyond the ordinary experience of things.

Whitman obsession with water has made his poems fluid in style and form too. His free verse form has revolutionized modern poetry by making it fluid and therefore capable of taking on new shapes and meanings. His poems have been fluid lines cut into shapes and sizes in order to bring variations in rhythm. In his passionate descriptions of what poetry is, Whitman in his preface to *Leaves of Grass* (1855) asks rhetorically,

What do you think is the grandeur of storms and dismemberments and the deadliest battles and wrecks and the wildest fury of the elements and the power of the sea and the motion of nature and of the throes of human desires and dignity and hate and love?²⁹

In his poetry, the turmoil within finds expression, and water presents the perfect medium.

Another interesting thing to note is that, considering Whitman’s political consciousness and his idealism, in *Leaves of Grass* the fluidity and force of waves show the strength of the American people as a democratic force. Water gives them a sense of togetherness and animates their spirits to strive for their nation. Whitman has shown the flexibility of his subjects in poetry through the sea, moving from personal to socio-political concerns.

Robert Frost (1819-1892) believed that “art strips life to form”.³⁰ He wrote descriptive poetry and used the image of the lake in his poetry quite frequently. Frost uses this water image to show the different approaches male and female artists’ take towards nature. The imagery also talks of gender roles and the domestication of women. In the poem “The Home Stretch” the husband says to his wife, who is looking at the lake outside her home: “Come from that window where you see too much / and take a livelier view of things from here”.³¹ The husband can be taken as voicing the patriarchy that wants women to look at things precisely the way men want them to: from a distance and within their domesticity. The male world does not allow women to entertain an imagination and to free themselves of their assigned domestic responsibilities.

However, in “A Servant of Servants”, the lake outside the window shows nature’s resistance to containment, exteriorizing the desires of women entangled in a homely atmosphere. Although the lake is static and contained, it gives hope to women living a monotonous life for some change in their situation. The transition in their lives can occur once the lake comes into action again by finding channels and gaining strength and connecting to a bigger body, such as the river or sea: “Like a deep piece of some old running river / cut short off at both ends”.³²

The fragmented body of water can be seen as the fragmented life of women; incomplete due to a lack of identity of their own as they are recognized only in relation to men. However, Frost brings hope even in this stagnant and fragmented life, by showing the possibility of the lake’s movement, which will enable it to explore new paths in life. In this way, the water outside shows the hidden desires and capabilities of domesticated women. The Lake’s movement gives women a means to attain power over their lives. Female poets too, realize the force of fluidity male poets find in water imagery.

Interestingly, Robinson Jeffers (1887-1963) too, gives the Pacific Ocean female attributes. He views it as a mother’s womb and a seat of human passion in the “Haunted Country”. He shifts the responsibility of the evocation of wild emotions in human beings to the sea. The lust, incest, guilt etc. all are seeded right from the embryonic stage within the mother’s body, and are transferred to men and women stepping into this world. We come to this world already carrying the burden of guilt and untamed passions.

There are happy places that fate skips;

here is not one of them;

The tides of the brute womb, the excess

And weight of life spilled out like water...³³

Hart Crane (1899-1932) designates the Goddess Venus to express his fascination for the feminine beauty of the sea. He accepts the sea with its beauty and awe. It is the female muse for him, like it is for Whitman and Longfellow. The poet’s relation with his muse is as natural as man’s relation with water. Water is a source of life and a means of aesthetic delight when it comes out as a song or a poem through the poet’s soul. In “The Bathers” (1918) he is attracted to the goddess of Venus and acknowledges her overwhelming presence around him:

They say that Venus shot through foam to light,

But they are wrong....

She came in such still water, and so nursed

In silence, beauty blessed and beauty cursed.³⁴

In “The Bridge” (1930) Crane celebrates the romantic American and his fascination with nature. Hart Crane wrote to Waldo Frank about his observation of the river and the Brooklyn Bridge from his place: “There is all the glorious dance of the river directly beyond the back window”.³⁵ The movement of the river under the bridge gives it a feminine charm that captures the poet’s attention. This river can be taken as the beauty and flux of the modern American life.

Crane’s famous “Voyages” (1921-26) series makes use of the metaphor of sea to show eternity of love. The sea depicts the development of the concept of love from a temporary and mortal phenomenon to an eternal truth. It shows the transformation of the lover from a mortal lover to an immortal one. It is pertinent to note that perhaps Hart Crane’s concept of eternal love that he represented through the water provoked him to commit suicide by drowning in the sea, and his tombstone today rightly reads ‘Lost at Sea’.

Within the female tradition, Emily Dickinson (1830-1886) has remained a model for modern female poets. Dickinson’s poetry has inviting psychological undertones. Her water images become a representation of the concept of death as a reality of life. Though not having a proximity to the sea, she has imagined the sea and her association with it in her poems. She says: “. . . I never saw the sea/ yet know I how the heather looks...”.³⁶ The thought is further reinforced when Emily Dickinson says: “I cannot see how eternity seems/ It sweeps around me like a sea”.³⁷ Dickinson takes eternity to be synonymous to death in her poems. She, therefore, confronts the phenomena of death as an inevitable reality in the lives of human beings. She believes in fighting back this force in life by imagining power over it in her poems.

I started early, took my dog

And visited the sea;

The mermaids in the basement

Came out to look at me.

And bowing with a mighty look

At me, the sea withdrew.³⁸

In “Water, Is Taught by Thirst”, Dickinson talks of the desire of death by saying that “Water is taught by thirst / Land – by the Ocean passed”.³⁹ She regards the existence of the binary opposition of life and death to be natural reality: change is essential, one cannot live perpetually, and death inevitably takes over. In “Water Makes Many Beds” she spells out the reality that death constantly chases life.

Since death is fluid like water, it easily seeps inside the human body, like the soul. Dickinson confronts death before time, by imagining an immersion in the sea:

Water makes many beds
For those averse to sleep –
Its awful chamber open stands –
Its curtains blandly sweep.⁴⁰

Water enables Dickinson to think and to ponder upon the great truths of life. The water imagery makes death a natural calamity, which overpowers human beings and their mortal lives by virtue of its own immortality. Water's fluidity expresses the eternal task of death to find its ways to dissolve life.

The thoughts of great truths in life, which occupied Dickinson also attracted the modernist Hilda Doolittle (better known as H.D.) (1886-1961). In her book *Notes on Thought and Vision and the Wise Sappho* (1982), she describes the exactness of shape and confinement of the soul, and the psyche through the water image. She describes her vision, which is related to her psyche as: "a cap of consciousness over my head. . .like water, transparent fluid yet with definite body, contained in a definite body, contained in a definite space. It is like a close sea-plant, jelly-fish or anemone".⁴¹ Her sea imagery represents the soul as that in the poetry of Emily Dickinson. Unlike Dickinson, however, it does not represent death; rather it shows the containment of the soul/psyche which cannot think or act freely. It has been put into limits by the body and its fixed identity. A woman is capable of thinking but her thoughts are always influenced by the pressures of the body. The fixed identity of the woman renders her unable to be an imaginative and creative being. In "The Helsman" the body succumbs to the promises of the psyche:

But now, our boat climbs – hesitates – drops –
Climbs – hesitates – crawls back.
O be swift ...

We have always known you wanted us.⁴²

Considering the boat as the body of a female being, its to and fro movement under socio-cultural pressures portrays an ambivalence in feelings regarding the callings of the sea of the soul. But despite the hesitation, the body desires to give in to the wishes of the soul. H.D is hinting at the suppressed desires of women and the need to give them expression. Women have fluid soul/psyche, which makes them flexible beings. Therefore, they have a natural relation to water on account of shared fluidity.

In *Notes on Thought and Vision and the Wise Sappho* (1982), the poet describes Sappho as "sea, breaking and tortured and torturing, but never broken".⁴³ The Sea Garden, according to Eileen Gregory (1986), becomes a fluid space within the body, which constantly confronts the norms and morals of the body as a social identity and celebrates her hidden desires.

Marianne Moore (1887-1972), a friend and mentor to Elizabeth Bishop, carries mystery in her water imagery. Considering Dickinson's realization of death

sweeping around human life like water, Moore perceives water both as death and as a deception in life. For her, everything is a mystery and never fully deciphered. Therefore, reality is a partial truth. Man has limited knowledge of what the sea holds for him. Moore, unlike Dickinson, does not desire the imagination of death before time. In “A Grave”, she contemplates on the limits of human life and on the inevitability of death that suffocates life: “the sea has nothing to give but a well-excavated grave”.⁴⁴

Moore’s “An Octopus” gives an altogether different meaning to water. Like H.D., its fluidity houses the mystery of women:

An Octopus of ice
So cool in this age of violence
So static and so enterprising
Heightening the mystery of the medium...
A simplification which complicates. . .⁴⁵

The mass of ice, perhaps an iceberg, is personified as an Octopus, a creature with many legs. The creature, like water, branches out to find new channels with its legs. The seemingly static mass of ice is quiet fluid and full of mystery. This Octopus of ice seems to give hope to women, who are entangled in the monotony of domestic life and fixed identities: their fluid natures too, can become their strength to venture out in life.

Louise Bogan (1897-1970) is yet another poet who delves into the exploration of female psychology in her poetry. Her insight is influenced by Freud. Bogan’s seascapes personify her mental state. She undergoes a psychological journey into the sea of the unconscious to explore her womanhood. This can be due to her agitation with the restricted roles of female artists in the twentieth century. In doing so, she re-explores female mythical figures such as of Medusa, to change the cultural perception of modern women. In “Medusa”, Bogan points out how women have been belittled by men, by making them a destructive beauty without any mind. Bogan confronts the darkness inside her soul in “Putting to Sea”. She gives the sea a moral and psychological depth and explores the mysteries of the unconscious. The poem also talks of sexual frustrations as a result of Bogan’s broken marriage: “With so much hated, still so close behind/ The sterile shores before us must be faced”.⁴⁶

Thus, male and female poets have found water to be the fluidity of form and subject matter in their poetry. In the female tradition, water has not been personified as a female muse within, or a beauty outside, like in the male tradition. For female poets it has been a thought-provoking process of the soul, which enabled them to ponder over life and death as essentials of this world. It has also made them look beyond their fixed gender identities to diversify their experiences of life. Water imagery identifies the fluidity in women, which is their strength to explore the possibilities of new roles for themselves apart from received conventional ones.

The postmodern poet Elizabeth Bishop abandons the female tradition for the most part. She neither talks about female suppression, nor of women liberation, for instance, in terms of equality of rights as the poetry of H.D and Bogan hints at. She does not provide women with an alternative lifestyle or encouragement to make a 'sea garden inside' their souls to nourish their unheeded wishes and desires as H.D proposes, nor does she talk of the limitations of women's experience as Moore does.

Her poetry incorporates elements of both the male and female tradition. She seems to adhere to the concept of water being a female muse, which inspires her to write. From the male tradition, she accepts the concept of the power of fluidity to liberate the experience of women from the female tradition. She does not make the fluidity of women a private affair to be secretly nourished in isolation, as other female poets have suggested. She connects fluidity of woman with their mothers and with other women in the socio-cultural world to acknowledge their capabilities and potentialities in the building of cultures. Furthermore, she explores the fluidity of water within the variety of forms of poetry she writes – formalism, double sonnets, sestina etc. She also explores subjects like traveling, usually widely discussed by men, and shows a range of identities for women.

In "Pleasure Seas" she describes her concept of fluidity:

The sea is a delight. The sea means a room.
It is a dance floor, a well ventilated ballroom.
. . . Pleasure strike off humming, and skip
Over the tinsel surface. . .⁴⁷

Fluidity interests Bishop for being a space of aesthetic delight. This space charges up a woman into action and enables her to be creative, and to connect to other women through the fluidity they share. In this journey, water becomes her strength to rise and explore new meanings for herself within the patriarchal society. Thus, Bishop moves forward in realizing the possibilities of new identities entertained in the unconscious of women in the female poetic tradition, by constructing a powerful maternal discourse in the outer world, and within the paternal domain of the symbolic language.

Perhaps what Auden perceives as savagery stems from violence that can sometimes be observed in American poetry. It is to be noted, however, that within this violence resides beauty, and that it is not an antagonism between man and nature, but man and nature amalgamated, united, and harmonized in a collage depictive of the poets' reality through their poetic creation.

Within their poetry, water embodies that which is deeply personal. It concretizes poetic thought, giving it not only textual, but also pictorial materialization. For poets like Elizabeth Bishop and Hilda Doolittle, the fluidity characteristic of water, lends agency to question and explore identity, womanhood, and the received notions of femininity. For some poets, like Robert Frost, it provides means for introspection. It is the muse, mostly female, but, at the same time, free of any confines of gender.

Whitman's usage of water imagery seeps into his poetic form and style, lending fluidity to both, even when he writes in free verse. His work transforms in relation to the form water takes: it is in turmoil when water takes the form of storms and is calm when it becomes lakes.

For poets like Emily Dickinson, water imagery helps explore the notions of life and death, and for some, like Louise Bogan, it assists the exploration of female psychology through seascapes and the reconstruction of myth etc.

The different dimensions that nature and more specifically water imagery enables poetry to enter, can neither be reduced to a 'savage treatment', nor can it be watered down to an antagonistic relationship. Poets give their thoughts poetic expression, and their connection with nature manifests in ways unique to each of them, and for the most part, this connection is constructive in character.

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