

Mastery of The Visual Tapestry

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Background

To master an understanding of poetic representations as the evocation of a visual experience for the reader, one must first synthesize the interaction between the two mediums interconnected in ekphrastic poetry—the written signifiers and the image. This interaction is visible in the poems, “Brazil, January 1, 1502” by Elizabeth Bishop and “Sea Unicorns and Land Unicorns” by Marianne Moore. Both Marianne Moore and Elizabeth Bishop challenge the more conventional modes of poetic representation. Both poems are an ekphrasis of a tapestry: the visible language depicted by diction that alludes to an artist honing an artistic piece is projected through the active medium of writing and voice.

Methodology

While focusing on Marianne Moore’s “Sea Unicorns and Land Unicorns” and Elizabeth Bishop’s “Brazil: January 1, 1502,” my methodology consists of close reading both poems and applying W.J.T Mitchell’s “Ekphrasis and the Other” from to the tapestries depicted in both poems. W.J.T Mitchell’s is applied in tandem with other scholarly articles, images, and interpretations to understand the poet’s desire in creating a poem that evokes an art object.



Results

- The dispersal of power between word and image and art and poet becomes a theme in Moore’s work. This serves as an inspiration for Bishop, because in her poem, she acts as both an ekphrastic viewer (like Moore, who describes bits of pre-existent tapestries and maps), and as the artist behind her imagined tapestry of Brazil.
- In the alluded tapestry “Les Pecheurs” (“The Fishermen”) – a tapestry from the Manufacture Royale de Gobelins (de Oliveira 45). The Dutch Brazilian artists Eckhout and Post were among the first artists to paint landscape scenes of newfound Brazil
- Moore reaches another dimension by bringing the material to the surface with “cobwebs, and knotts, and mulberries” (Moore, *Sea Unicorns Land Unicorns*). The web-like definition is similarly depicted in *Brazil*; it is in the language where both poets endow the image “with a voice... made dynamic and active, or actually come to view or (conversely) that poetic language might be “stilled” made iconic” (Mitchell 156).

Conclusions

To think of the visual representation of a tapestry in “Brazil January 1, 1502” and “Sea Unicorns and Land Unicorns” is to think of the way in which it has been an object of delight. An “object that [has] been recreated in our imaginations to reflect our moods. And we have come to think of [the fictional tapestry in the poem] as contributing to an idea which we have called nature” (Clark) However, if nature is destroyed by colonization, industrialization, and any human agenda, the idea of certain parts of nature that lived before its obstruction is one that is nostalgically depicted through art.



Acknowledgements

A special thanks to Dr. Elizabeth Gregory for her guidance this fall, Dr. Maria Gonzalez, Dr. Lauren Brozovich, UH Department of English, for their feedback. Andrew W. Mellon Foundation and the Office of Undergraduate Research and Major Awards.

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