

## **Abstract**

This thesis explores the way Elizabeth Bishop grasps the themes and issues usually understood as feminist, both in her poetry and in her life. Bishop identified herself as a strong feminist, yet her feminism defies the conventional understanding of the doctrine prevalent at her time. Her conception of feminism is characteristic for its strong sense of egalitarianism, which reflects both in her poetry and in the way in which she wished to be perceived. Bishop avoids a distinctly feminist strategy and decisively refuses the potential bias in favor of feminine identity, should it be at the expense of gender-neutral worth of her work. Similarly, she firmly rejects the separatist tone of the type of feminism which prevailed during her lifetime and even discards it as thoroughly unfeminist. The thesis examines Bishop's conception of feminism from two points of view: Bishop's general interactions with feminist thoughts and ideas and how they reflect specifically in her poetry.

The first chapter of the thesis focuses on the wider feminist framework. It serves as a necessary theoretical introduction to relevant feminist and gender theories, as well as a broader background for the understanding of Bishop's work with regard to feminism and feminist issues. This includes the general cultural context, but also its reflection in literature and the critical reception of female authors at that time. Accordingly, it also examines Bishop's own relation to feminist doctrine and her specific conception of feminism and compares her to other female poets of her time, both the ones she tends to be likened to and the ones who are usually presented as her counterparts.

The second chapter explores how the concepts discussed in the first chapter are reflected in Bishop's poetry. The close readings of selected Bishop's poems serve to manifest Bishop's neutral, objective attitude toward issues generally explored by feminist writers. It examines Bishop's employment of gender in her poetry, that is her portrayals of men and women as well as her challenging of the conventional binary gender categories. The thesis concludes with Bishop's response to the developments in lyric poetry, which reflect the feminist rethinking of the masculine tradition in lyric poetry, and with an analysis of the way Bishop constructs her poetic personae.

**Keywords:** Elizabeth Bishop, feminism, women's writing, gender, 20<sup>th</sup>-century American poetry, gender identity, lyric poetry