

On literature and ecofeminism: a reading on Sarah Orne Jewett's "A white heron"

Sobre literatura e ecofeminismo: uma leitura de "A white heron", de Sarah Orne Jewett

Ernani Hermes*

* Doutorando e Mestre em Letras – Estudos Literários pela UFSM, bolsista CAPES, professor da área de linguagens da rede estadual do Rio Grande do Sul.
Email: ernani.hermes@gmail.com

This study was financed in part by the Coordenação de Aperfeiçoamento de Pessoal de Nível Superior (CAPES) - Finance Code 001

O presente trabalho foi realizado com apoio da Coordenação de Aperfeiçoamento de Pessoal de Nível Superior (CAPES) - Código de Financiamento 001.



Recebido em: 01-mai-2024
Aceito em: 19-jun.-2024

Abstract: Sarah Orne Jewett is an American writer of the Nineteenth Century and is associated with American Realism. One of her most known works is the short story "A white heron", published in 1886, which is about the relation of a girl and a hunter who are in search of a white heron. Given this context, I intend, in this essay, to analyze the literary narrative through the lens of ecofeminism. This theoretical perspective tries to interwoven the oppression of women, and other oppressed groups such as children, poor people, black people, and traditional people, and the exploitation of nature. To do so, this work undertakes an analytical path considering the resizing of the fictional figure towards its relation to nature represented in the diegesis. The theoretical framework is found, mainly, in Jytte Nhaneg (2011), Chen Ling (2014) and Laila Fariha Zein and Adib Rifqi Setiawan (2017). Therefore, I realize that the relation raised between character and nature is set on power relations and construction of hierarchies symbolizing oppression of women and destruction of nature by men.

Keywords: Sarah Orne Jewett. Ecofeminism. American Literature.

Resumo: Sarah Orne Jewett é uma escritora norte-americana do século XIX associada ao realismo norte-americano. Um de seus trabalhos mais conhecidos é

o conto “A white heron”, publicado em 1886, sobre a relação de uma menina com um caçador que está em busca uma garça branca. Dado esse contexto, procuro, neste ensaio, analisar a narrativa literária sob o viés do ecofeminismo. Essa perspectiva teórica procura interligar a opressão da mulher, e outros grupos oprimidos, tais como crianças, pobres, negros e povos tradicionais, e a exploração da natureza. Para tanto, este trabalho empreende um percurso analítico que considera o redimensionamento da figura ficcional no sentido da sua relação com a natureza representada na diegesis. A fundamentação teórica é buscada, principalmente, em Jytte Nhanege (2011), Chen Ling (2014) e Laila Fariha Zein e Adib Rifqi Setiawan (2017). Desse modo, percebo que a relação erigida entre personagem e natureza direciona a relações de poder e construções de hierarquias que simbolizam a opressão da mulher e a destruição da natureza pelo homem.

Palavras-chave: Sarah Orne Jewett. Ecofeminismo. Literatura Norte-Americana

Introduction

Sarah Orne Jewett was born in 1849 in the village of South Berwick, Maine, and died in 1909. Due to health problems, she was not able to attend school regularly. However, supported by her father, she used to read a lot, including English and European writers and American authors as well. She had her first story published when she was 19 in literary magazines. Her work body is composed of the novels *Deephaven* (1877), *A country doctor* (1884), and *The Country of Pointed Firs* (1896), and the short story collections *Old Friends and New* (1879), *Country By-ways* (1881), *A*

White Heron and other stories (1886), and A Native of Winby and other tales (1893), and children books.

Peter B. High (1986), in An outline of American Literature, points out that Jewett was a realistic writer and her fiction was set in New England. She was connected to a regionalist aesthetic, in High's words:

it tried to show what was special about a particular region of the nation. Jewett's characters are usually ordinary people, living in ordinary little New England towns. The way they speak and the details of their lives give us a strong feeling for New England as a place (HIGH, 1986, p. 78-77).

The author states that the way Jewett constructs her characters is very realistic. The psychological intensity comes from moral dilemmas that open up perspectives to a conflicting interior. Besides that, her fiction is constituted by rich imagery, which deepens a symbolical capital over character figuration.

During the Twenty Century, some theoretical perspectives came up imbued with the interest to resize culture and its relation to power. One of these perspectives is ecofeminism. To make it short, this critical theory considers that oppression of women, and other marginalized groups such as black and traditional people, poor, and children, is connected to oppression of nature. To put it more simply, ecofeminism is the critical thinking that does not divide oppressions but interwoven them regarding a power structure that makes possible oppressive dynamics.

Before this overview, I intend, in this essay, to analyze the short story "A white heron", by Sarah Orne Jewett through the lens of ecofeminism. To do so, I consider, in the analytical part, the power relations aroused by the interaction between the fictional

figure and nature. In other words, I notice that from the narrative emerges some hierarchies that unveil oppressive behavior towards nature and women.

Therefore, in the first section, I point out some theoretical concerns on ecofeminism trying to present a definition to this term; in the aftermath, I analyze the literary text; in the conclusion, I outline some possibilities of the relation between Literature and ecofeminism.

Ecofeminism: a theoretical concept

At the first sight, when we look at the word "ecofeminism" we can notice the combination of the words "ecology" and "feminism". Chen Ling (2014) says that the French feminist Françoise d'Eaubonne coined the term "ecofeminism", or "ecological feminism", in 1974. Ling explains that "She called on women to lead ecological revolution and establish new relationships between humanity and nature as well as man and woman" (LING, 2014, p. 104). Therefore, ecofeminism rises from a confluence of two social movements: the ecological movement and the women's liberation movement, the first concerning about ecological crisis, and the second struggling for gender equality.

Ling gives the context in which ecofeminism was raised:

With the acceleration of industrialization and modernization process, ecological problems have become global problems and key issues which constrain the development of nations. In the internal social ecological systems, gender division and gender inequality have also become important factors that constrain the development (LING, 2014, p. 104).

According to this, ecological and gender issues are turned into theoretical concerns. From these issues, different perspectives emerge, as explained by Ling:

Based on the integration of these theories and multi-dimensional perspective of theories, Ecofeminism is committed to the critique of modern industrial civilization and tries to rebuild the cultural values of the society so as to obtain the liberation of women and nature (LING, 2014, p. 105).

In this view, the oppression of women and nature is taken from modern industrialization. In this social setting, both women and nature are oppressed, the first one by exclusion, repression, lack of freedom, and all kinds of domination ran by patriarchal power, the second one, in its turn, is exploited by power structure due to get profit. Therefore, think from an ecofeminist perspective is to put together different oppressive structures, such as patriarchalism and capitalism.

Jytte Nhanenge (2011) conceptualizes ecofeminism as an “umbrella term” (p. 98) to discuss oppressions over different groups: women, poor, traditional, and black people, children, and nature. The author describes these oppressions as “unjustified” (p. 98) and they are all connected by a power structure. Therefore, Nhanenge provides a concept of ecofeminism beyond that from Ling (2014), once this one do not consider groups as poor, black, traditional people and children. Before this contrast, I can notice that Nhanenge’s concept of ecofeminism is the link between any kind of oppression and nature exploitation.

Appealing to Karen J. Warren (2000), Nhanenge (2011) calls this connection between oppressed groups and nature “women-Others-nature” (p. 98). The author explanation is that:

"Others" is spelled with a capital O, distinguishing it from the general word "others." "Others" conceptualizes the diverse groups of subordinate people. These include children, people of color, poor people, traditional people, old, frail and sick people, homosexual people, disabled people, and other marginalized groups of people (NHANENGE, 2011, p. 98).

As explained before, Nhanenge (2011) does not consider ecofeminism just as oppression of nature and women, but nature and all marginalized groups. So, given this list of the groups put at the margin, the groups that occupy the center, that is, the privileged and oppressors, are men, white, adult, rich, heterosexual, and socially considered 'abled'. In this perspective, is built and hierarchy, in which the second group is above the others, and, as an effect, exerts a power relation on people marginalized and nature.

In this view, the oppressor group is taken as a normative identity, to be a man, to be a white person, to be rich, to be heterosexual, is the norm, but to be anything different is to be at the margin, is to be non-normative. These identity categories are constructed as "others", and being so, they can be exploited, deprived of their rights, and their bodies can be taken merely as objects, as parts of the engine of capital because the dominant group does not see these "others" as equal, as humans as they are.

It is necessary to highlight, so, what nature is. Nhanenge (2011, p. 98) says that "nature includes all that which is not human, nor human made like non-human animals, plants, bio-organisms, ecosystems, minerals, water, air, soil, mountains, etc". This way, oppression over nature embraces land exploitation, air, water, and soil pollution, all kinds of violence against animals, among other examples. Through this lens, is noticeable the idea that the lives of

marginalized people and nature are less important than privileged people and profit-making. Then, oppression is based on the objectification of people, as I said before, as mere pieces of the capital machinery, feed by racism, sexism, patriarchalism, ableism, among other oppressions.

About the goal of ecofeminist perspectives, the author says that:

They aim to end structural exploitation of nature and the linked marginalization of millions of poor, colored, and traditional women and men. Understanding the philosophical and theoretical foundation of ecofeminism is therefore meant to increase awareness of this unjustified domination, which may lead to enhanced action for change (NHANENGE, 2011, p. 98).

By these terms, ecofeminism is not just a theoretical perspective, it is a political project intending to substantial social changes. This concern comes up from the statement that the destruction of nature to the accumulation of capital is deep-rooted in male power. According to this view, the social changes proposed by ecofeminism aim to the liberation of women, and all oppressed people, as well as nature, due to get off ecological crisis and promote gender equality.

As a conjoin of theoretical concerns and political action,

Ecofeminism comprises a diverse collection of political and theoretical issues. Incorporated are theoretical concepts from ecology and environmental studies, especially regarding the interdependence of life. Other inspiration comes from philosophy, development studies, critiques of modern science and technology, and a variety of feminist theorizing and activism (NHANENGE, 2011, p. 98).

Seen in these terms, ecofeminists perspectives are found on interdisciplinarity, once its exercise evokes different areas of knowledge, such as Philosophy, Sociology, Anthropology, Natural

Sciences, Politics, Cultural Studies, among others. The interdisciplinary framework is necessary since the concerns focused on ecofeminism can appear in different materiality; it can appear in cultural and fictional productions, as films, literary works, in collective actions, as social movements, for instance. To say it in another way, oppression of marginalized people and nature, the central point of ecofeminist reflection, can be seen in different objects, so it demands an analysis undertaken through different areas.

Considering this multiplicity, Laila Fariha Zein and Adib Rifqi Setiawan (2017) point out the connection between these different objects and oppressive structures is the basis of the ecofeminist approach. Thus, as a theoretical exercise,

Ecofeminist analysis explores the connections between women and nature in culture, religion, literature and iconography, and addresses the parallels between the oppression of nature and the oppression of women. These parallels include but are not limited to seeing women and nature as property, seeing men as the curators of culture and women as the curators of nature, and how men dominate women and humans dominate nature. Ecofeminism emphasizes that both women and nature must be respected (ZEIN and SETIAWAN, 2017, p. 01).

An ecofeminist reading on Sarah Orne Jewett's "A white heron"

Sarah Orne Jewett was what can be called nowadays a "protofeminist". That means to question female oppression before the social movement of the Twenty Century that become known as feminism. Jewett uttered a speech that unveils gender roles in a society marked by sexism. In addition, she made up her literary creation in a regionalist aesthetic, exploring the region of New England; so, her works are traversed by provincial landscapes.

Both elements, when put together, open up an overview that intersects gender issues and nature concerns.

The short story “A white heron” first appeared in 1886, in a collection of the same name. The plot is centered on Sylvia, a nine-year-old girl, who lives with her grandmother, Mrs. Tilley, on a farm. The girl has a cow, Miss Moolly, as her only friend. One day a man, The Hunter, appears to her and she gets frightened of him. The strange man is hunting, chasing a white heron – there comes the title – and asks for shelter in Mrs. Tilley's house. This is the basic story engendered by the omniscient narrator.

The narrative structure is very traditional. In the first moment, the reader is introduced to the characters – Sylvia, Mrs. Tilley, and Miss Moolly –, and to the space setting, the farm, and nearby. The action rises when Sylvia first met the Hunter and he scares her. By this time, the Hunter tells his hosts his plan to hunt the heron and invites Sylvia to the hunting. The climax is set when the girl goes out to the woods in search of the heron in the middle of the night and finally finds the white heron sought by The Hunter. From this moment, she comes up with a moral dilemma: should she tell The Hunter where the heron was and let him kills her, or should she lie to him and allow the heron to live? The action falls when The Hunter and her grandmother find her in the woods. The resolution comes when she decides not to tell where the heron's nest is.

This explanation about how the plot is structured is useful to explain what happens in the story. At the first sight, it is noticeable two central figures: Sylvia and The Hunter. They have very different relations to nature. This is the way through which

ecofeminism takes shape in the story: power relations are exposed as long as the way each character interacts with nature is shown. Thus, the central point is the hierarchy erected putting the male figure on the top and the female figure and nature at the bottom.

The open scene of the short story is set when it is late at night, eight o'clock, and Sylvia is taking her cow home. The narrator says: "A little girl was driving home her cow, a plodding, dilatory, provoking creature in her behavior, but a valued companion for all that" (JEWETT, 2001, p. 01). The cow is characterized by adjectives (plodding, dilatory, provoking) that describes her behavior; such adjectivation, however, is the first element that exposes the relationship between the animal and the girl, since it does not sound derogatory, but affirms Sylvia knew Miss Moolly beyond this behavior, they were a companion that each other only had.

This idea of how close they were is confirmed when they are playing hide-and-seek after Miss Moolly had hidden "Sylvia had to hunt for her until she found her, and call Co' ! Co'" (JEWETT, 2001, p. 01) and "an intelligent attempt to play hide and seek, and as the child had no playmates she lent herself to this amusement with a good deal of zest" (JEWETT, 2001, p. 01). The cow was her only friend and they enjoy all the time together, both were deeply connected, and the words "amusement" and "zest" express this sentiment. Thus, being an animal, Miss Moolly, in this relation, is a symbol of all nature and shows the integration between Sylvia and the natural world.

Still about Sylvia, she had moved from town to the country part of New England. This movement brings up a contrast between nature and industrialization. About it,

Everybody said that it was a good change for a little maid who had tried to grow for eight years in a crowded manufacturing town, but, as for Sylvia herself, it seemed as if she never had been alive at all before she came to live at the farm. She thought often with wistful compassion of a wretched geranium that belonged to a town neighbor (JEWETT, 2001, p. 01)

The character lived for eight years of her nine in a town described as "crowded manufacturing", which means in an industrial context; however, during this time she never felt alive, moving to country seems like a renewed way to exist. That is because on the farm she had been connected to nature, which provides her elements to make up a sense of belonging and identity. She belongs to that environment surrounded by nature – woods, and animals –; in the industrial urban scenario, she does not feel any sense of belonging.

These two elements open up a perspective of interpretation that Sylvia is integrated into nature. Nature is an element that shapes her identity and subjectivity. Consequently, there is no hierarchy between her and nature: she is neither above nor under, nature, both are in the same position, one is integrated into another. Hence, she never wonders about leave the farm: "Sylvia whispered that this was a beautiful place to live in, and she never should wish to go home" (JEWETT, 2001, p. 02).

The industrial scenario of the town is an environment so noisy, so turbulent, which makes it impossible to establish a deep connection to nature. This contrast between town and country is meaningful since it represents the opposition between nature and

industrialization. This duality can be seen as imagery of capitalism because industries are a symbol of accumulation of capital and alienated work, the basis of this economic system. The important element in this construction is that capitalism is the opposite of nature: in town, where the capitalist engine prevails, it is impossible to be connected to nature.

When Sylvia remembers town, a remarkable event that comes up to her mind is when a boy was chasing her:

She was just thinking how long it seemed since she first came to the farm a year ago, and wondering if everything went on in the noisy town just the same as when she was there, the thought of the great red-faced boy who used to chase and frighten her made her hurry along the path to escape from the shadow of the trees (JEWETT, 2001, p. 02).

This image is rescued by her memory when she is with Miss Moolly in the woods and it is late in the night and dark the fear felt by her reminds her of this boy chasing her. The way she thinks about town is very clear: in town, there was so much noise and a boy who frightened her. Then, being noise a reference to industrialization and this one a symbol of capitalism, the boy hounding her can be taken as an image of sexism, of a male figure oppressing a female figure. Therefore, capitalism and sexism are connected in the narrative, once Sylvia's memories bring them up together when she is scared.

The sensation of fear increases when she hears a whistle: "Suddenly this little woods-girl is horror-stricken to hear a clear whistle not very far away. Not a bird's-whistle, which would have a sort of friendliness, but a boy's whistle, determined, and somewhat aggressive" (JEWETT, 2001, p. 02). Here, again, another contrast is built: animal and human. Animals, a part of nature, do

not frighten her, but a man, yes. In this piece, is very clear that she is in deep relation to nature in such a way that noise from a bird, an animal, would be a sight of “friendliness”, but from a man is a sight of fear, once it is aggressive. To say it in another way, an animal would be her friend, she feels safe in their company, but a man means danger.

Once she is afraid, she hides in a bush, however

The enemy had discovered her, and called out in a very cheerful and persuasive tone, "Halloa, little girl, how far is it to the road?" and trembling Sylvia answered almost inaudibly, "A good ways." She did not dare to look boldly at the tall young man, who carried a gun over his shoulder, but she came out of her bush and again followed the cow, while he walked alongside. "I have been hunting for some birds," the stranger said kindly, "and I have lost my way, and need a friend very much. Don't be afraid," he added gallantly. "Speak up and tell me what your name is, and whether you think I can spend the night at your house, and go out gunning early in the morning." (JEWETT, 2001, p. 02).

The man whistling was The Hunter, who gets lost in the woods. There is the first hint of violence against animals: the gun over his shoulder and his speech when he says he is hunting birds. The Hunter is a symbol of the oppression of nature since he kills animals just for pleasure. He is the opposite of Sylvia, who had a genuine connection to nature.

Sylvia takes The Hunter to her grandmother's home and she offers him shelter. Mrs. Tilley talks about her granddaughter's relation to nature saying:

"There ain't a foot o' ground she doesn't know her way over, and the wild creatures count her one o' themselves. Squer'ls she'll tame to come an' feed right out o' her hands, and all sorts o' birds. Last winter she got the jay-birds to banging here, and I believe she'd 'a' scanted herself of her own meals to have plenty to throw out amongst 'em, if I hadn't kep' watch (JEWETT, 2011, p. 03).

Here the relation between Sylvia and nature is focused through her grandmother's speech. She says Sylvia used to feed and take care of animals and she had a great acquaintance knowledge about birds. This last information calls The Hunter attention: he can use her acquaintance to help him in his hunting, as exposed in the following quotation:

"So Sylvy knows all about birds, does she?" he exclaimed, as he looked around at the little girl who sat, very demure but increasingly sleepy, in the moonlight. "I am making a collection of birds myself. I have been at it ever since I was a boy." (Mrs. Tilley smiled.) "There are two or three very rare ones I have been hunting for these five years. I mean to get them on my own ground if they can be found."

"Do you cage 'em up?" asked Mrs. Tilley doubtfully, in response to this enthusiastic announcement.

"Oh no, they're stuffed and preserved, dozens and dozens of them," said the ornithologist, "and I have shot or nared every one myself. I caught a glimpse of a white heron a few miles from here on Saturday, and I have followed it in this direction. They have never been found in this district at all. The little white heron, it is," and he turned again to look at Sylvia with the hope of discovering that the rare bird was one of her acquaintances (JEWETT, 2001, p. 03).

The question asked by The Hunter expresses his interest in her knowledge to achieve his aim of catching the white heron. Besides, he says that he catches animals to collect, which involves killing them. When Sylvia asks him if he keeps the birds caged, he says that what he did was killing and stuffing them. This is an image full of violence: The Hunter kills the birds, and if that were not enough, he fills their bodies with some material and turns them into objects. At this point, there is an association between violence against animals, represented by birds, with capitalism, since what he is doing is to turn nature into private property. Furthermore, he says, proudly, that he killed each one of those composing his collection, representing the violent behavior

towards nature. Given this context, the relation established between The Hunter and nature is based on domination, violence, and oppression.

The proposal made by The Hunter consists of offering ten dollars in exchange for the location of the heron's nest. In the first moment, she accepts and goes to the woods with him in search of the heron. They spent the whole day and Sylvia starts to get along with him. "At last evening began to fall, and they drove the cow home together, and Sylvia smiled with pleasure when they came to the place where she heard the whistle and was afraid only the night before" (JEWETT, 2001, p. 04). According to this quotation, Sylvia is not afraid of him anymore; she contrasts the day before when she felt frightened by his whistle in the same place.

When she passes by a pine tree, she thinks about it as the possibility of seeing the world, and consequently, to figure out the location of the heron. Through the narrator's voice, the reader can access Sylvia's thought: "Now she thought of the tree with a new excitement, for why, if one climbed it at break of day, could not one see all the world, and easily discover from whence the white heron flew, and mark the place, and find the hidden nest?" (JEWETT, 2001, p. 04).

That night she wonders about the pine tree, the tallest wood, where she thinks the heron's nest is. Imbued by this thought, she gets up in the middle of the night and goes to the woods alone to find the heron. Nonetheless, her will to figure it out was not just about the heron, it was a will to see the world.

In the woods, Sylvia goes to the place where the pine tree is and starts to climb it. When she gets to the top, she sees the world:

Sylvia's face was like a pale star if one had seen it from the ground when the last thorny bough was past, and she stood trembling and tired but wholly triumphant, high in the tree-top. Yes, there was the sea with the dawning sun making a golden dazzle over it, and toward that glorious east flew two hawks with slow-moving pinions. How low they looked in the air from that height when one had only seen them before far up, and dark against the blue sky. Their gray feathers were as soft as moths; they seemed only a little way from the tree, and Sylvia felt as if she too could go flying away among the clouds. Westward, the woodlands and farms reached miles and miles into the distance; here and there were church steeples, and white villages, truly it was a vast and awesome world (JEWETT, 2001, p. 05).

From the top of the pine tree, Sylvia sees the world in a perspective she has never seen before. She is deeply connected to nature: she sees the sea, the forests, the daybreak, and hawks; she also sees humankind creations, as churches, and villages. At this moment, she understands her place in the world, the conjoin made up by nature and the provincial landscape, untouched by industrial modernity, is there she belongs. There is no hierarchy between her and nature: both were in harmony. When she is deeply connected to that natural landscape, she sees the heron:

there where you saw the white heron once you will see him again; look, look! a white spot of him like a single floating feather comes up from the dead hemlock and grows larger, and rises, and comes close at last, and goes by the landmark pine with steady sweep of wing and outstretched slender neck and crested head. And wait! wait! do not move a foot or a finger, little girl, do not send an arrow of light and consciousness from your two eager eyes, for the heron has perched on a pine bough not far beyond yours, and cries back to his mate on the nest and plumes his feathers for the new day! (JEWETT, 2001, p. 05).

She finds the heron in the exact moment she is most connected to nature. When it happens, she sees the world from the perspective of the heron: beauty, freedom, purity. Considering this, the heron itself is a symbol; it represents independence and wonder of nature, which must be kept safe from the greed of industrial power. Seeing the world this way, she recognizes the value of the heron's life, which means, Sylvia identifies herself with the heron.

When Mrs. Tilley realizes Sylvia is not home, she and The Hunter go to the woods looking for her. When Sylvia is found, a moral dilemma comes up: should she tell The Hunter where the heron's nest is and let the bird be killed or lie to him and let the bird live? This ethical concern is about to be on the side of nature or the side of greed – referring to capitalism and unbridled industrialization. The solution Sylvia finds is not to tell him:

But Sylvia does not speak after all, though the old grandmother fretfully rebukes her, and the young man's kind, appealing eyes are looking straight in her own. He can make them rich with money; he has promised it, and they are poor now. He is so well worth making happy, and he waits to hear the story she can tell. No, she must keep silence! What is it that suddenly forbids her and makes her dumb? Has she been nine years growing and now, when the great world for the first time puts out a hand to her, must she thrust it aside for a bird's sake? The murmur of the pine's green branches is in her ears, she remembers how the white heron came flying through the golden air and how they watched the sea and the morning together, and Sylvia cannot speak; she cannot tell the heron's secret and give its life away. Dear loyalty, that suffered a sharp pang as the guest went away disappointed later in the day, that could have served and followed him and loved him as a dog loves! (JEWETT, 2001, p. 06).

Sylvia's decision of being on the side of nature instead of The Hunter is an act of resistance. She chooses to be silent and her silence resists to the oppression of nature. Women have faced

male oppression over the years marked by denying them the right to speak. Here silence is subverted strategically and is turned into resistance.

In the last lines of the short story, the narrator puts up a question: “Were the birds better friends than their hunter might have been, — who can tell?” (JEWETT, 2011, p. 06). However, the narrator also says: “Whatever treasures were lost to her, woodlands and summer-time, remember!” (JEWETT, 2011, p. 06). That means, it does not matter if Sylvia could get some money, nature is more important than that. This is the central point of the story: nature is much more valuable than any money; so, it is above capitalist greed.

Considering these points, throughout the text comes up an intersection among different oppressions. The Hunter oppresses nature once he kills animals to turn them into objects of his property. He also oppresses women because Sylvia is just a way to him, through which he can achieve his aim of getting the heron; different of her, who starts feeling truly friendship for him. At least, there is, we cannot forget, an oppressive relation to children, thus Sylvia is a nine-year-old girl and he plays with her innocence.

These different kinds of oppression are represented in the literary discourse by different devices: firstly, there is a contrast between country and town, meaning the opposite of industrialization and nature, since the first is a mechanism of capitalism, which sees nature just as a resource of profit; secondly, the different relations of each character with nature, Sylvia maintaining a relation of integration and The Hunter a relation based on oppression and domination. Both contrasts mean power

relations, once The Hunter wants to exercise an oppressive power towards nature and Sylvia. In addition, a hierarchy is built in The Hunter speech: he, the male figure, is on the top and can domain both women and nature, which are at the bottom of this hierarchy. However, in Sylvia's perspective, there is no hierarchy, there is a relation of integration, security, and respect between character and nature.

Conclusions

Taking into account the analysis proposed in this paper, and the theoretical concerns presented about ecofeminism, I achieve some outcomes through this reading. First of all, I can observe, as the central point of ecofeminism, that every kind of oppression is related to each other. Thus, they are linked by a power structure that puts up the white male rich heterosexual identity as the norm and establishes a hierarchy putting it on the top and other identities at the bottom, and consequently are explored and demined. Such issues are represented in the narrative of Sarah Orne Jewett, the literary devices used to construct these meanings are a series of contrasts: country versus town, nature versus industrialization, women's relation to nature versus men's one.

Therefore, considering Literature as a discourse that, even fictional, represents reality, some texts might present elements that unveil these power structures oppressing nature, women, and other non-normative identities. In these cases, ecofeminism is a potent reading key to understand the literary text in its relation to the world. Then, ecofeminism is absorbed by literary criticism to understand some power relations underlying the text.

I should not miss observing that ecofeminism is a theoretical perspective that came out in the 1970s and the short story analyzed was published almost a hundred years before, in 1886. Thereupon, reading the classical text through the lens of contemporary critical thinking is a prolific practice, once it might promote new perspectives of understanding, updates the text before contemporary context, and opens up possibilities of new meaning-makings.

References

HIGH, Peter B. **An outline of American Literature**. New York: Longman, 1986.

JEWETT, Sarah Orne. **A White Heron and other stories**. New York: Blackmask, 2011.

LING, Chen. The Background and Theoretical Origin of Ecofeminism. **Cross-Cultural Communication**, 2014, n. 4. Available on: <http://public-library.uk/ebooks/105/91.pdf>. Accessed on April 22nd, 2021.

NHANENGE, Jytte. **Ecofeminism: Towards integrating the concerns of women, poor people, and nature into development**. Lanham: University Press of America, 2011.

ZEIN, Laila Fariha; SETIAWAN, Adib Rifqi. General Overview of Ecofeminism. **LxARS**, 2017, vol. 01. Available on: <https://redox-college.s3.ap-south-1.amazonaws.com/kmc/2020/May/06/Qi3Wc9cIGZWdfOvWRUdk.pdf>. Accessed on April 22nd, 2021.