ON WOMEN AND BIRDS: ECOFEMINISM AND ANIMAL STUDIES IN SARAH ORNE JEWETT'S "A WHITE HERON" AND KATHERINE MANSFIELD'S "THE CANARY"

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Abstract

This paper explores the short stories "A White Heron" (1886) by Sarah Orne Jewett, and "The Canary" (1922) by Katherine Mansfield through the postulates of ecofeminism and animal studies, respectively. In "A White Heron," it is explored how the female protagonist must solve a predicament for which she has to choose either the financial safety that a man offers, or her own ecological belief system, which is deeply rooted in her identity. In "The Canary," a lonely woman mourns the death of her canary. It is explored how interspecies relationships work in the case of domestic animals, and it is debated whether these are relationships of dominance/submission or of interdependence. While Mansfield's text cannot ultimately escape anthropocentrism, as the bird is only conceptualized in relation to the woman, it is nevertheless a thoughtful, sensitive account of the love and admiration that human animals can feel for non-human animals.

Keywords: Ecocriticism, Ecofeminism, Animal Studies, Birds; Katherine Mansfield, Sarah Orne Jewett.

SOBRE MUJERES Y PÁJAROS: ECOFEMINISMO Y ESTUDIOS ANIMALES EN "UNA GARZA BLANCA" DE SARAH ORNE JEWETT Y "EL CANARIO" DE KATHERINE MANSFIELD

Resumen

Este artículo explora los relatos "Una garza blanca" (1886) de Sarah Orne Jewett y "El canario" (1922) de Katherine Mansfield a través de los postulados del ecofeminismo y los estudios animales, respectivamente. En "Una garza blanca," se explora como la protagonista debe resolver un dilema para el que tiene que elegir entre la estabilidad económica que un hombre le ofrece y sus propios valores ecologistas, profundamente arraigados en su identidad. En "El canario," una mujer que está sola llora la pérdida de su canario. Se explora el funcionamiento de las relaciones interespecie en el caso de los animales domésticos o mascotas, y cuestiona si este tipo de relaciones están basadas en el binomio 'dominación/sometimiento' o si son de dependencia mutua. Aunque el texto de Mansfield no deja de ser antropocéntrico debido a que el pájaro solo es conceptualizado en relación a la mujer, "El Canario" es, aun así, una emotiva y sensible narración sobre el amor y la admiración que los humanos pueden sentir por los no-humanos.

Palabras clave: ecocrítica, ecofeminismo, estudios animales, pájaros, Katherine Mansfield; Sarah Orne Jewett.

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1. INTRODUCTION

In the words of acclaimed ecofeminist scholar Diane Warren, "the oppressive conceptual framework which sanctions the twin dominations of women and nature is a patriarchal one" (1990, 127). Nowadays, it is widely known that patriarchy has consistently reinforced a series of limiting –and ultimately false– assumptions consisting of binary oppositions in which "humankind" is always in a position of superiority to "non-human beings" and the "natural environment;" and in which "man" is always superior –intellectually, emotionally, physically, and morally– to "woman." In the Western tradition, the concepts of "culture" and "nature" are also put in opposition to each other, where "male" and "human" are associated with the former and "female" and "non-human" are equated with the latter. This kind of bipartite divisions are the tools through which the patriarchal order has justified its own supposed superiority and power over any other conception of reality or of the world in which capitalism, imperialism, industrialism, ethnocentrism or sexism was not at the center. This set of ideas is what Val Plumwood called the "logic of colonization," through which the universe is conceptualized in relation to a –prototypically male– master. In her words, "it is the identity of the master (...) which lies at the heart of western culture. This identity is expressed most strongly in the dominant conception of reason, and gives rise to a dualized structure of otherness" (1993, 42). And, although the set of twofold separations is exhaustively long and potentially open-ended, there seems to be a consensus to her assertion that "a gendered reason/nature contrast appears as the overarching, most general, basic and connecting form of these dualisms" (Plumwood 1993, 44). Thus, prejudiced assumptions such as the patriarchal, domineering logic of colonization are the ones that ecocriticism and its branches aim to debunk. These relatively new disciplines seek to promote an ecological, egalitarian thoughtfulness in human individuals by identifying and reflecting about these social and environmental matters in literary texts. Ecocriticism advocates for the awakening of a new consciousness to effectively denounce –and ideally, terminate or significantly reduce– the kinds of oppression that anthropocentrism –power of human over non-human– and androcentrism –domination of men over women– exert.

Although Sarah Orne Jewett and Katherine Mansfield respectively wrote their short stories "A White Heron" (1886) and "The Canary" (1922) before ecocriticism became established as an academic discipline in the 1990s, this article shows that these stories are clearly revealing of a poignant appreciation for nature and non-human living beings –particularly birds– and that these two exquisite women writers shared an admiration for these flying, non-human animals across time and space, an admiration that served them as inspiration for their literary, creative enterprises. As it will be shown, the birds in these narratives are presented on two levels: in literal terms as the non-human animals that they are, and as symbolic parallels to the human female protagonists of the stories. Both stories –each in its own specific way– present two opposing forces: submission to anthropocentric/androcentric oppression versus the need for freedom and solace in response to that oppression, a kind of freedom and solace that the female protagonists can only find in their connection with nature

and/or non-human animals. Thus, superficially, it could be asserted that both stories contain an ecocritical sensibility –and they do. But a detailed close reading might prove that there are degrees of ecocritical consciousness even within eco-friendly texts. Not both stories are equally ecocritical. There is one main difference between them: In Jewett's story, there is a clear identification between the challenging situation of "woman" to "man" to that of "non-human" to "human." Both situations run parallel in "A White Heron" and, indeed, throughout a narratively powerful dilemma, intertwine to the point of communion between the young female human protagonist and the natural environment that she inhabits –exemplified in the figure of a rare, precious bird–, a circumstance that culminates with her understanding that she can only be free herself if she sets nature free. By contrast, in Mansfield's "The Canary," the unnamed female human protagonist –also narrator– appears to be both a victim and a perpetrator. She is oppressed as a woman by men, but she is the oppressor as a human being over a non-human being, as she keeps her bird locked up inside a cage for her own pleasure and comfort. Nevertheless, this does not necessarily mean that Mansfield's text is not concerned with non-human animals. But the perspective that she shows in the matter, at least through the textual evidence present in "The Canary," is clearly anthropocentric, which would put into question whether this is an ecocritical text or not. This does not make "The Canary" any less valid, of course, as a piece of literary art, as it proves to be a thoughtful, detailed observation of grief over the loss of a non-human animal by a human animal, and thus, it is understandable that the perspective in this story belongs exclusively to the mourning woman.

The theoretical framework for this paper does, therefore, consist of a combination of two branches of ecocriticism: ecofeminism and animal studies. Both approaches are applied to both texts, as the different branches of ecocriticism share many of its principles. However, it should be noted that the ecofeminist approach plays a predominant role in the analysis of Sarah Orne Jewett's "A White Heron," while the animal studies approach has a more significant relevance on Katherine Mansfield's "The Canary." This division is merely motivated by a matter of pragmatism, given that the contents and ideas that can be extracted from a close textual analysis of each story make said story ideally suited to be tested against the postulates of a particular ecocritical branch. More specifically, "A White Heron" proves itself to advocate for the same principles and beliefs that the postulates of ecofeminism defend, consequentially revealing that the ecofeminist consciousness was already alive a century before being academically theorized. On the other hand, given that the ecocritical conclusions that can be drawn from Mansfield's "The Canary" put into question this story's concern with the well-being of non-human animals, the postulates of animal studies are especially relevant for its analysis, considering that one of the main claims of this ecocritical branch is that the anthropocentric tendency of humans drives them to anthropomorphize non-human animals –to assign human traits to non-human beings–, something that is potentially detrimental to the latter, and which is clearly made evident in Mansfield's text.

2. SARAH ORNE JEWETT'S "A WHITE HERON"

The historical context in which Sarah Orne Jewett wrote "A White Heron" should not be overlooked, as it brings insights that are relevant for this story's analysis. During the last decades of the 19th C., rare birds' feathers constituted a luxury product for the fashion industry and thus, "by the early 1900s, massive depredations by European and American hunters around the globe had wreaked havoc on avian populations. Bird hunters were now the arm of industrial capitalism" (Taylor 2016). This was the case until the second decade of the 20th C., when the feather trade came to an end. But before the prohibition came to be, herons' feathers were amongst the most coveted in the late Victorian hat-making business. To exemplify this claim, it can be confirmed that "about 192,000 herons [were] killed to provide the packages of heron feathers sold at a single London auction in 1902" (Taylor 2016). Considering this, and although "A White Heron" makes no reference to this particular outcome being the intended fate of its precious bird –this story's hunter is supposedly a taxidermist rather than a businessman–, there is reason to believe that Jewett might have chosen a heron for her story and not any other bird because of how popular and attractive they were in the eyes of the capitalist market of her own contemporary context: the 1880s.

The story's heroic protagonist is Sylvia, a nine-year-old girl who lives in the middle of the countryside at her grandmother's farmhouse, and who holds a powerful feeling of communion with her non-human, natural environment. As George Held asserts, "the key to her vivacity is that she is utterly in harmony with nature" (1982, 58). This is exemplified from the very first lines of the text by showing her comfortability while her cow stops to drink: "Sylvia stood still and waited, letting her bare feet cool themselves in the shoal water, while the great twilight moths struck softly against her. She waded on through the brook as the cow moved away and listened to the thrushes with a heart that beat fast with pleasure" (Jewett 1883, 52). The sensorial, physical description that the text elicits already suggests that Sylvia easily connects with her natural surroundings in a way that does not seem to revolve around a hierarchical structure of human over non-human. Accordingly, she behaves as if knowing herself to be one with nature and does not seem to see her tasks at the farm as an obligation, but rather, as an adventure. Despite having grown "for eight years in a small manufacturing town (...) it seemed as if she never had been alive at all before she came to live at the farm" (52). Nature seems to suit Sylvia's interests and capacities, and to give her a more authentic sense of self in contrast to her previous urban life. Her instinctual connection and adaptability to nature could relate to what Ursula K. Heise calls "situated knowledge," which is acquired: "out of sensory perception and physical immersion, (...) rather than out of more abstract or mediated kinds of knowledge acquisition. Walking through natural landscapes, observing their flora and fauna, (...) and tending animals are some of the ways the human body is perceived to reintegrate itself into the 'biotic community'" (2007, 30). All these are the activities that Sylvia has been engaging with since she arrived to live at her grandmother's farmhouse. However, her integration into the natural biosphere

is going to be tested when a stranger comes into the picture, thus establishing the conflict in the story, an inner conflict that Sylvia will have to solve.

As the story goes, a nice, polite young man tries to befriend Sylvia and her grandmother, telling them that he seeks lodging at the farm for a couple of days, so that he can continue chasing and hunting birds. Sylvia's grandmother readily accepts him with hospitality and tells him that "'the wild creatur's counts [Sylvia] one o' themselves. 'Squer'ls she'll tame to come an' feed right out o 'her hands, and all sorts o' birds" (Jewett 1883, 54). This is enough for the young hunter to make a financial offer to Sylvia in exchange for her help in his quest for the heron. A mere ten dollars, which might be close to nothing to him, but it would certainly help the humble farm. Indeed, "by offering to pay for a favor that would otherwise be done as but a gesture of country hospitality, the ornithologist introduces into a subsistence economy the instrumentality of money" (Held 1982, 60). It should not be overlooked the way in which the binary oppositions "man/woman," "culture/nature," and "rich/poor" become intermingled in the story. These are some of the unfair dualities that ecocriticism denounces, and which "A White Heron" illustrates. There are "strong" entities –a man from the city with money to offer– and complementary "weak" entities –women from the countryside who need extra money just to get by. Whether cunningly or not, the hunter is taking advantage of the villagers' needs. Following the principles of capitalism, where transactions are always favored over collaboration and cooperation, it is easier and more convenient for him to offer money than to ask for a favor, as it would be safe to assume that this way he makes sure that they –out of mere necessity– cannot say "no" to him, and he becomes the client who hires a service that must be provided to him. He becomes the one in control of the situation and the one with power and agency, even though he is an outsider in the context that the story presents. However, his condition as an outsider who aims for control can actually serve to identify him with the figure of "the colonizer," a figure that is certainly criticized by ecocriticism. Nevertheless, all these binary oppositions – male/female, culture/nature, rich/poor, and colonizer/colonized– end up intersecting in a way that introduces and sets the story's main conflict or dilemma. A dilemma that occurs within its protagonist Sylvia, but which is quite inherent to the human condition and therefore universal: The choice between needs and principles; between wishes and values.

That is, with the young man's offer, temptation begins for Sylvia, as "no amount of thought, that night, could decide how many wished-for treasures the ten dollars, so lightly spoken of, would buy" (Jewett 1883, 55). But this dilemma "between the egoist and the altruist" (Held 1982, 59) is not only about money. This situation also brings her with a gender-related predicament, considering that the person who seeks assistance is an attractive and nice older boy to whom she feels intimidated by his charming, manly ways. As such, "Sylvia is tempted less by the young sportsman's money than by his masculine appeal. (...) If this romantic response seems a strange turn for a story about a nine-year-old to take, it nevertheless has a certain psychological validity" (ibid., 61-2). Platonic as their exchange is, it is only natural that a young girl could feel some sort of attraction for a handsome young man. As the text elicits, "the woman's heart, asleep in the child, was vaguely thrilled

by a dream of love" (Jewett 1883, 56). This circumstance only strengthens the internal conflict that she must solve. It is not that she feels obliged to assist the man in his hunting quest out of mere material necessity. What really sets the stakes high is that a part of her truly wants to help him accomplish his wish, due to the fascination that he awakens in her. In other words, it would also please her to please him, thus perpetuating –albeit symbolically– the gendered stereotype of the female finding happiness and purpose by devoting herself to her man's wishes –an idea that was certainly pervasive and dominant in Victorian times, when this story was written. In fact, after their first day hunting together, "she grieved because the longed-for white heron was elusive" (56). This leads to infer that, had they encountered the bird soon enough, Sylvia might have willingly assisted the hunter to catch it. But fortunately for the heron, their first day on the hunt proves unsuccessful.

The text also suggests that the man's seductive actions towards Sylvia are not altogether genuine. He has a personal goal that he wants to achieve. This does not necessarily make him a devious man, but he is certainly being strategic because of his desire to gratify his own personal interest. He is ultimately using Sylvia due to "his eager interest in something else" (Jewett 1883, 54). She is a means to reach his end: the white heron. His portrayal falls in line with Marilyn Frye's argument that "Western Civilization's primary answer to the philosophical question of man's place in nature" is that "everything is resource for man's exploitation" (1983, 67). Sylvia is to him a resource to hunt the heron. And the heron, a resource to satisfy his reputation and self-image as a hunter. He "is less evil than banal, for his cheery egoism reflects the optimism of the nineteenth-century despoilers of nature who deforested the woods" (Held 1982, 59). He simply does not think beyond the scope of his own anthropocentrism. It is not that he has any ill-wish towards the natural world. It is, simply, that he has not developed any capacity for empathy towards his environment beyond what is convenient for him. As Val Plumwood asserts, "This self uses both other humans and the world generally as a means to its egoistic satisfaction" with no interest in "the welfare of others, except to the extent that these are useful to serve predetermined ends" (1991, 19). Thus, it is not a matter of malignant evil per se, as there does not seem to be any specific ill-will on the hunter's part. It falls more closely in the line of what Hannah Arendt coined as "the banality of evil," motivated only by "an extraordinary diligence in looking out for his personal advancement" (1964, 134). That is, it is about selfishness and lack of empathetic environmental consciousness.

The next morning, just before the break of dawn, and thus, before the hunter awakens to undertake his next attempt at finding the heron, Sylvia escapes the farm by herself and manages to climb the tallest trees, discovering the heron's exact location. Consequently, "she knows his secret now" (Jewett 1883, 58). And as a result, she feels exhilarated and compelled to impress the young man, "wondering over and over again what the stranger would say to her, and what he would think when she told him how to find his way straight to the heron's nest" (58). But, although the text does not specify it and makes an ellipsis instead, it can be inferred that Sylvia has an epiphany on her way to deliver the news at the farm. An ecological epiphany. Because, when she meets her grandma and the hunter, and the moment of truth comes, she does not say a word. Sylvia knows that "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" (Jewett 1883, 59). But instead, she resorts to the power of silence, "exercis[ing] her option to withhold her boon" (Griffith Jr. 1985, 24), and thus, finally resisting the temptation that the hunter's offer sparked in her.

But what does her silence mean? It can be concluded that it means reverence to the nature around her and to her own inner nature as well. It means that she has finally chosen her ethical commitment to the environment and non-human beings over the material, financial improvement for which she would have submit to a man's wish. She does what feels right deep in her heart while being aware that it also entails a sacrifice. This is precisely where a large part of the story's environmentally ethical significance lies. It is not easy for Sylvia to make such a renouncement. Not making it would even seem comprehensible considering her and her family's precarious circumstances. The text clearly expresses her internal questioning: "When the great world for the first time puts out a hand to her, must she thrust it aside for a bird's sake?" (Jewett 1883, 59). Thus, her final resolve is not without awareness that she must renounce something valuable so as to comply with her principles. Because of this, her maturity becomes altogether more evident, despite her tender age. However, there is an additional factor to consider that might be even more essential in her decision: it is not only about her moral standards or sense of honor, but also a matter of sheer, instinctual empathy with her non-human environment. Sylvia's dilemma is ultimately what brings her with an enhanced awareness that her own sense of self is inseparable from her sense of the natural world. The vital key about this issue is empathy, not just principles or code of ethics. For Sylvia to have revealed the heron's location, she would have had to resort to what Alexa Weik von Mossner defines as empathy inhibition: "the cognitive suppression of an affective empathetic response due to egoistical motives, cultural beliefs, or outright denial" (2017, 108). It can be interpreted that, during the ellipted ecological epiphany, she has realized that she is one with nature, that she feels deeply *with* nature as a part of *it*, and thus, had she decided on the opposite outcome, she would also have betrayed herself. In this heroic journey that Sylvia has made, her affective respect for nature and her self-identification with it have prevailed. Her sense of ecological responsibility and her sense of female agency have been tested, and she has not yielded. And these two senses prove to be symbolically intertwined: "For in the end the heron's life has become the equivalent of the girl's life" (Held 1982, 65). Sylvia learns that it was not about either saving herself or the bird. But rather, saving the bird was the same action as saving her own identity and integrity.

3. KATHERINE MANSFIELD'S "THE CANARY"

Katherine Mansfield's employment of animals in her stories was frequent, and it is believed that she had a deep appreciation for them, filled with curiosity and admiration. In Derek Ryan's words, "Mansfield foregrounds animals in her work in order to reject anthropocentrism and the oppositional categorization of

human and nonhuman life" (2018, 30). However, it should be noted that, even if this was Mansfield's intention, this supposed rejection of anthropocentrism is not particularly evident in "The Canary," as all agency is ascribed to the lonely woman who recalls her relationship with her caged canary. All that the reader gets to know about the bird comes from the woman's voice and perspective, and whenever there are attempts to "give voice" to the canary, it all comes through the interpretations that the woman makes about the bird's singing. In any case, it can be asserted that, although Katherine Mansfield's "The Canary" can be easily accused of anthropocentrism, the text also proves to be an honest effort at giving visibility to animals as company and to interspecies relationships; as well as a truthful representation of the comforting feelings that domestic animals can prompt on their caretakers. Therefore, tested against the postulates of animal studies, and unlike the case of this paper's other short story, "The Canary" cannot be unequivocally catalogued as an environmentally conscious text. But this does not mean that there are no reasons to consider that it is, as it would be reductive to consider this a matter of absolutes.

"The Canary" is heartfelt account of grief over the loss of a bird-pet. Through the female protagonist's memories, it is shown that her bird-pet meant solace and an escape from a life of seclusion and isolation. "That was what he was. Perfect company. If you have lived alone you will realize how precious that is" (Mansfield 1922, 2). Not much is known about this woman or how her life has come to be one of extreme loneliness. But it is made known that she works as a housemaid at the service of three young men who might not be very fond of her. She says "I was nothing to them. In fact, I overheard them one evening talking about me on the stairs as 'The Scarecrow'. No matter. It doesn't matter" (2). Getting to know this detail heightens the reader's sympathy for this woman, who, in contrast, never says anything negative about the men. What is more, there are textual hints that point to the woman suffering from a lifelong struggle with untreated depression, which was there before the loss of her pet. "There does seem to me something sad in life. It is hard to say what it is (...) It is there, deep down, deep down, part of one, like one's breathing. However hard I work and tire myself I have only to stop to know it is there, waiting" (3). And, in all this sadness, it seems that her only true source of comfort, the only side of life that alleviated her malady, was her little canary.

Nevertheless, there is an incongruity in the interspecies relationship between the woman and the canary of this story. The caged bird prompts in her caretaker a feeling of solace and comfort that ameliorates her sense of seclusion and isolation. But paradoxically, this comes at the expense of the bird, because it is the bird the one who lives in seclusion inside a cage. As Ryan asserts, "there can be little doubt that the canary has penetrated this woman's innermost feelings, even as it is suggested that such feelings are what trapped this bird within a distinctly human realm" (2018, 45). This is certainly an intrinsic feature of birds as domestic animals. Unlike dogs or cats, who can much more easily adapt to a domestic space because they can move freely within it and they –ideally or desirably– have access to outdoors, birds are never let loose, not even inside the human's house. This would turn out to be inconvenient for its human caretaker, who would literally "lose control" of it. Thus, by their very nature as flying creatures and for them to become domestic animals,

birds need to be held inside a cage and, therefore, they stay literally imprisoned. By this reasoning, it could be asserted that birds are naturally unsuitable for being any person's pet, as this condition undoubtedly precludes them from their natural means of transportation and movement (flying) and their natural habitat, which is certainly not a human-made cage. In other words, birds as domestic animals –unlike other animal species such as the canine and the feline– seem to serve only one purpose: they are instrumentalized for the pleasure of human beings. The woman in the story does not seem to consider the importance of the bird's own freedom. When she describes the moment that she first met him, she says: "From that moment he was mine" (Mansfield 1922, 1). This does not mean that the woman in the story does not feel genuine affection for the bird, but her lack of concern for it as a creature in its own right –not only in relation to herself– is revealing of how their relationship can be conceptualized as closer to one of dominance/submission than to one of interspecies interdependence.

As the woman describes the dynamics of her relationship with the canary, it becomes evident that she thinks of herself as its protector, because of how meticulously she takes care of him. She bathes him, cleans his cage, provides him with food... and all this brings happiness to the lady. On a surface level, many would not find it difficult to find this a poignant interspecies connection. But such reading would be nothing short of anthropocentric and, thus, it would be missing one of the key aspects that ecocriticism defends: non-human animals should not be considered and valued only in relation to what they can provide or entail for human animals. As Plumwood states, "there is good reason to reject as self-indulgent the 'kindness' approach that reduces respect and morality in the protection of animals to the satisfaction of the carer's own feelings" (1991, 5). This suggests that, for human beings, there is a fine line between selfishness and selflessness. And the former can easily be confounded with the latter by the human self. In all the interactions that the lady has with the bird, it becomes readily apparent that she is seeking her own satisfaction through her little acts of kindness and nurturing. Besides, although she feels authentic affection for him, and her efforts to bring him comfort are entirely well-meant, it could also be thought that she presumes that the bird is happy with the established situation. As the woman confides, "and I am perfectly certain he understood and appreciated every item of this little performance" (Mansfield 1922, 2). There is no possible way for her to truly know any of this. It seems that she finds the idea comforting enough to choose to believe it. She is projecting her own feelings onto the bird, and thus, she is anthropomorphizing him by ascribing to him human reactions. This does not necessarily mean that she is mistaken in her assumption –she might be mistaken just as she might not be– but there is no real textual evidence that discloses the bird's feelings, given that everything that the reader gets to know is the interpretation that the woman makes of them or how she imagines them to be. For that reason, it may be asserted that both the female human character and Mansfield's text itself perpetuate the hierarchical structure where the category "human" is unmistakably above the category "non-human."

From a strictly earth-centered perspective –the one that ecocriticism aims to take–, it would not seem unfair to assert that Katherine Mansfield's "The Canary"

is insensitive to the natural world. However, it would probably be reductive if this were the only ecocritical conclusion to be arrived at about this text. The story is ultimately a portrayal of a woman's grief and sadness over the loss of her canary, so it is understandable that the narrative point of view belongs exclusively to her. What is more, in those human-animal relationships that are domestic, there always can be found reasons to believe that they are based on dominance/submission: After all, the domestic relation occurs because the human decides so. But nonetheless, there are also reasons to consider that such relationships can be based on interspecies interdependence, given that humans cover the animals' basic needs and provide them with food and shelter –which would not be assured in the wilderness– and genuine affection. As Ryan says of Mansfield: "rather than altogether disposing of hierarchical oppositions between human and animal, a close reading of her texts shows how she often probes and plays on species boundaries" (2018, 31). It does not seem to be a matter of black or white, but rather, of ambiguous shades of gray. Thus, it can be asserted that, in Mansfield's "The Canary," what Plumwood called "logic of colonization" is maintained, but at the same time the appreciation of non-human animals by human animals is evident, thoughtful, and based on admiration. The problem comes when human appreciation derives into potentially unethical and harmful actions towards the non-human subject; actions that the human perpetrates while apparently remaining oblivious to their significance.

4. CONCLUSIONS

This essay has analyzed from an ecocritical perspective two short stories: American author Sarah Orne Jewett's "A White Heron" (1883), and New-Zealander writer Katherine Mansfield's "The Canary" (1922). In Jewett's "A White Heron," nine-year-old Sylvia is faced with an ethical dilemma when she is given the opportunity of a much-needed financial asset on the condition that she helps to hunt and kill a rare, beautiful bird: a white heron. Besides, her attraction to the hunter complicates her dilemma, as she instinctively feels the wish to satisfy his will. But ultimately, she reverences her innate sense of communion with nature and non-human animals by deciding to withhold the information about the bird's whereabouts, thus making a sacrifice, but knowing that she gets to keep her freedom as a young female with an ecological conscience. In Mansfield's "The Canary," a lonely woman eulogizes her dead canary, who was the only relationship of her life that provided her with pleasant company and comfort. The story illustrates the kind of pleasurable, beautiful feelings that domestic animals awaken in their caretakers, but Mansfield's portrayal of the woman's consciousness also reveals a lack of consideration for the bird's autonomy, given that the woman's solace comes at the expense of the bird's freedom. What is more, the woman presumes that the bird is satisfied, while the text never attempts to portray its own non-human point of view. Despite this obvious tendency towards anthropocentrism, "The Canary" makes visible the mutual comfort that interspecies relationships can provide. Both Sarah Orne Jewett's and Katherine Mansfield's stories are interesting, complex, and valuable examples of how literature can be written,

read, and studied through the lens of environmental sensitivity and ecocritical consciousness.

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