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Cătălina Bălinișteanu-Furdu, Plant and animal metaphors as signs of proto-ecofeminism, Hartung-Gorre Verlag, Konstanz/Germany, 2024, 180 p.

Cătălina Bălinișteanu-Furdu's study aims to analyze ecofeminism in literature - an interesting topic approached in an original manner and from various perspectives meant to show how the perception of the human-natural environment interaction has changed over time. Although at first the book appears to be a survey on women's animalities in the world literature, it is more an attempt at identifying ecocriticism in literary works through the lens of feminist studies. Besides studying the relation between environment and literature, the author is also interested in highlighting the close connection to nature of those who are marginalized, abused, or ostracized – shortly said, of the Other.

The book is divided into two main parts: the first one analyses novels for adults which deal with issues such as independence, free will, colonization, capitalism, seduction; the second part is dedicated to children's literature in which Bălinișteanu-Furdu approaches the work of two female authors who were victims of either a restrictive society (like the Victorian society in Beatrix Potter's case) or of an oppressive regime (like the Communist Party in Ana Blandiana's case). The literary works subjected to an ecofeminist reading are Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, Karen Blixen's *Out of Africa*, Beatrix Potter's *The Tale of Jemima the Puddle-duck* and *The Tale of Johnny the Town-Mouse* and Ana Blandiana's Arpagic poems. Out of these four female writers only two seem to be really concerned with environmental issues becoming advocates for the protection of nature against deforestation (like Karen Blixen) or against changing land which endangers many plant and animal species (like Beatrix Potter). Nevertheless, all four writers whose works are analysed in this book demonstrate how femininity has been always linked to nature, therefore their animal and plant imagery can be considered signs of proto-ecofeminism; and we can talk of *proto-ecofeminism*, since ecological feminism appeared much later than most of these narratives.

The present books should not be understood as a critique against the hierarchies that oppress and enclose women in private spaces without the possibility of going out in nature. It is a book that falls "under the umbrella of animality studies" because the chosen "plant and animal metaphors contribute to the opening of new interpretations of literature through the prism of biodiversity" (Bălinișteanu-Furdu, 2024: 8). The author intended to show readers how the animals or plants linked to different characters (mainly protagonists) were mostly used to describe "the colonized, the enslaved, the noncitizen, the animal" (Haraway, 2007: 18) and this emphasizes the racist or sexist practices in world literature which later became gender stereotypes. All four female writers who were deeply rooted in their industrialized or capitalist or communist societies were conscious of the image of the perfect middle class woman who had been generally represented through domestic animals and cultivated plants, showing that they had been already tamed by civilization.

The protagonists of Charlotte Brontë, Karen Blixen, Beatrix Potter and Ana Blandiana are defined by Cătălina Bălinișteanu-Furdu as being human beings or creatures positioned into a liminal space between culture and nature, showing the

female characters' enclosure in domestic activities, whereas the male characters are assigned public activities which underline their intelligence, power, authority.

The first chapter offers an overview of the numerous bird images Charlotte Brontë employs when depicting the plain, obscure Jane Eyre, and the author adheres to Elizabeth Barrett Browning's and Virginia Woolf's metaphor: 'a bird in the cage' which indicates the Victorian woman's position and her entrapment into the societal conventions. Although these bird images have already been discussed by a large number of critics, Bălinișteanu-Furdu's contribution to these surveys is her analysis of bird imagery which targets the male characters and explains that the familiarity between Jane Eyre and Mr. Rochester lies in their close connection to nature. This ecofeminist reading continues with the discussion on the animality of diseased women who highlights their strength and violence. The analysis of gendered language (with numerous examples of animal and plant metaphors) is resumed in the third chapter, and this is further potentiated by the multimodal analysis of Beatrix Potter's illustrations in which the author used the meaning systems proposed by Kress and van Leeuwen (2006: 87) and the theories of Matthiessen (2007: 20) and Moya Guijarro (2010: 127) on how the viewers/readers interact with these images. This analysis not only shows the gendered language used in Jemima's case when a female characters is visibly placed into an inferior position to the rest of the male characters, but it also favours Timmy Willie's existence in the countryside as compared to the life led by Johnny the Town-Mouse – mirroring Beatrix Potter's love for nature and her intentions to teach children the important role of nature in constructing one's identity.

What comes as a novelty is Karen Blixen's categorization as a conservationist when the author detects in the protagonist's sadness of leaving Kenya for the highly industrialized Europe the signs of what she calls 'proto-ecofeminism'. In *Out of Africa*, the animal and plant imagery is more subtle than in *Jane Eyre*, but Cătălina Bălinișteanu-Furdu observes Blixen transition from Eurocentric thinking to Afrocentricity in which the animal metaphors do not instrumentalize women or the Africans, they do not intend to offend or belittle the Other; they intend to show the female writer's admiration for the Africans' dignity and for the narrator's strength in moments of crisis. Using Donna Haraway's essay on environmental issues (2015: 159), the author tries to explain why Karen Blixen's detachment from colonial practices marks her evolution from Anthropocene to Plantationocene to Planthropocene – these new terms employed by various ecological critics come with the necessary explanations so that the readers should understand Blixen's conservationism and interest in biodegradability.

The study is, at the same time, a successful and original attempt to promote native poetic creation and to emphasize the contribution of the Romanian author Ana Blandiana who, despite the unfavorable socio-political context of the time, managed to determine the reevaluation of human nature through reconsidering the undeniable importance of the universe of plants and animals. The last chapter of the book deals with Ana Blandiana's ecopoetry in which the poet used the fauna and flora imagery to escape the communist censorship, but also to draw the people's attention on the ecological disasters caused by Nicolae Ceaușescu's urbanization plans. As in Beatrix Potter's case, the Romanian poet uses irony and allegory to criticize the dictator's cult of personality and the agents of the political police whose victim she had been for three decades. Arpagic, "the most famous tomcat in town" as Blandiana defines her character is deemed to represent the Romanians' salvation no matter how many

natural resources might be exploited. Through irony and storytelling elements, the poet uses animal and plant metaphors to make the children aware of nature's futile exploitation, of the absurdities of a totalitarian regime (food shortages, badly heated flats), as well as of women's lack of voice and authority during the Communist times.

In conclusion, this book is a useful guide for researchers and postgraduate students who are interested in animality studies, as well as in a feminist reading of various literary works around the world. What is seen at first as a woman's rebellion against the oppressive structures of a patriarchal society, should be further analysed in connection to the natural environment – at least this is the suggestion we receive from Cătălina Bălinișteanu-Furdu's book. A very well-documented book, which offers professionals an engaging reading, proposes a foray into the cultural space and time of ecofeminism.

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Mariana Tîrnăuceanu⁴

⁴ "Vasile Alecsandri" University of Bacău