

"DAZZLING DIALECTICS": ELIZABETH
BISHOP'S RESONATING
FEMINIST REALITY

By

SALLY BISHOP SHIGLEY

Bachelor of Arts
University of Utah
Salt Lake City, Utah
1984

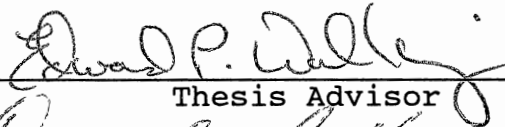
Master of Arts
Oklahoma State University
Stillwater, Oklahoma
1987

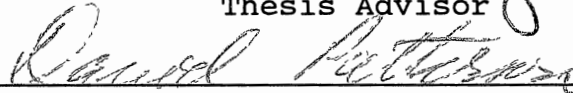
Submitted to the Faculty of the
Graduate College of the
Oklahoma State University
in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for
the Degree of
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY
December, 1992

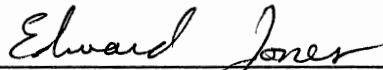
Thesis
1992D
S555d

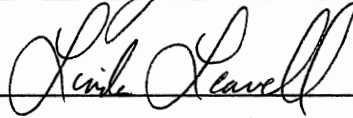
"DAZZLING DIALECTICS": ELIZABETH
BISHOP'S RESONATING
FEMINIST REALITY

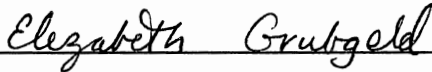
Thesis Approved:

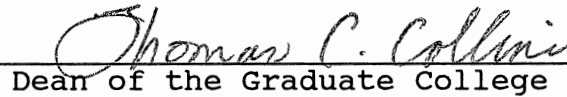

Thesis Advisor










Dean of the Graduate College

PREFACE

As I began this study, colleagues, friends, and family asked me about whom I was planning to write. When I told them that I was interested in Elizabeth Bishop, the response was a puzzled frown. Even some learned fellow graduate students thought intently for a second and then ventured "Didn't she write that poem about the fish?"

Although Bishop has become increasingly more well-known since her death in 1979, she is still not the first poet that comes to mind when one thinks of post-modernist, feminist poetry. The purpose of this study is to prove that Bishop's work is more complex, philosophical, and feminist than it initially seems. Beneath highly descriptive, formal, objective texts lie resonating, moving meanings that question representation, tradition, and issues of gender.

I extend a generous note of thanks to my major advisor, Dr. Edward Walkiewicz, whose insight and guidance have helped shape this work. Thanks also go to my committee, Dr. Elizabeth Grubgeld, Dr. Edward Jones, Dr. Linda Leavell, and Dr. David Patterson, for their time and assistance.

Special thanks go to the staff of the Weber State University English Department. Kay Brown, Nick Van Wagoner, and LaDee Eastland provided priceless assistance with the

formatting and printing of this document. Their collective computer knowledge and patience are immensely appreciated.

John Shigley, my patient husband, has served as proofreader, computer consultant, and confidante throughout all of my graduate work. Very special thanks go to him, without whom this study would have been much more difficult.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

| Chapter | Page |
|---|------|
| I. INTRODUCTION: BISHOP AND FEMINISM | 1 |
| II. SUBVERSIVE OBJECTIVITY IN <u>NORTH & SOUTH</u> | 40 |
| III. DECONSTRUCTING CULTURE IN <u>A COLD SPRING</u> | 76 |
| IV. OPPOSITIONS AND REFLECTIONS: GENDER-BENDING IN THE LOVE POEMS. | 120 |
| V. QUESTIONS OF HOME: LIMINALITY IN "BRAZIL" IN <u>QUESTIONS OF TRAVEL</u> | 151 |
| VI. QUESTIONS AT HOME: AMBIVALENT DOMESTICITY IN "ELSEWHERE" | 199 |
| VII. THE GEOGRAPHY OF SELF: RESONATING SELVES IN <u>GEOGRAPHY III</u> | 248 |
| VIII. CONCLUSION | 314 |
| WORKS CITED | 322 |

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION: BISHOP AND FEMINISM

Elizabeth Bishop occupies an undefined space in American literature. Her Complete Poems contains fewer than one hundred poems that appear direct and straightforward, but leave resonant, intriguing images and ideas in the reader's mind. Bishop constructs deceptively simple, objective descriptions, which soon give way to complex, often troubled meditations on solitude, loss, and the confusing business of being in, but not necessarily of, society. She presents these poems in a tone best characterized by her mentor, Marianne Moore, who said of her, "At last we have someone who knows, who is not didactic" (354). Bishop's voice and her themes are informed but not pedantic, precise but not trivial, passionate but not gothic or sentimental, and controlled but not narrow or absolute. Avoiding the purposefully difficult, obtuse, grand mythmaking of her modernist predecessors and the palpable personal angst of contemporaries such as Robert Lowell, Bishop resides in a powerful between-space.

Bishop's ambivalence was personal as well as poetic. Although she won prizes and honors including a Guggenheim Fellowship, National Book Award, and Pulitzer Prize, Bishop

avoided the American poetry scene: she was paralyzed with fear at the thought of giving readings or teaching writing, and she did neither until, at the end of her career, she found it an economic necessity.¹ Obsessively well-read and curious about subjects ranging from modern painting to the Greeks, Bishop aligned herself with no literary groups or schools. In an age of movements and manifestoes, she stuck to her belief in reading as the best means of becoming a poet. She was similarly conservative about friendships based on shared artistic values. She was friends for decades with Robert Lowell, but their letters contain much more gossip and news and personal intimacy than they do literary theory. They certainly discussed and read each other's poetry, but theirs was not a correspondence preoccupied with Jamesian bon mots about the present and future state of writing.²

Unwilling to name herself as a part of any school, she was nevertheless clear about what she wasn't: she was not "metaphysical," although she like the British metaphysical poets, especially Herbert ("Interview," Brown 9); she was not "political;" in fact she "took up" T. S. Eliot in the thirties out of "perversity" because everyone else was becoming communist ("Art of Poetry" 78); and she certainly was not confessional--she very much wished "that they'd keep some of these things to themselves" ("Poets" 35).

While such recalcitrance may seem "colorful" or eccentric, it is troublesome in the sense that Bishop's

reputation and rank as a poet have been hurt by the difficulty that critics have had in categorizing her. Finding no immediate niche in which Bishop neatly fits, critics have marginalized and misunderstood Bishop. Lorrie Goldensohn notes that currently there is a "rapidly and valuably increasing body of scholarship on Bishop" (xv), but this has not always been the case. The relatively small number of critics who wrote about Bishop between the 1946 publication of North & South and her death in 1979 often dismissed her as a miniaturist disciple of Marianne Moore or complimented her delicacy and visual accuracy. In 1946, Oscar Williams deemed Bishop an "over-educated" writer of "charming stained glass bits here and there" (525) and memorable lines, but finally a "minor" poetic voice. Nathan Scott echoes this sentiment almost forty years later as he calls Bishop a "poet without myth, without metaphysic, without commitment to any systematic vision of the world" (255) who is "too chaste for her ever to have moaned about falling on the thorns of life" (259). Somewhat less dramatically, Seamus Heaney's 1988 article calls Bishop "reticent" and "mannerly"--one who "respects other people's shyness in the face of too much personal intensity" (300).

Feminist critics share this problem in "labelling" Bishop, but this is the most minor of their difficulties. As a self-supporting, independent, successful lesbian woman, Bishop arguably led the life of a feminist, but personal experiences, overt lesbianism, and gender politics are

absent from the surfaces of her poetry. This has led feminist critics such as Adrienne Rich to be simultaneously "drawn to" and "repelled" by Bishop: Rich was encouraged by the fact that Bishop was an accepted, successful woman poet, but she felt bitterly disappointed that there was nothing in Bishop's poetry that a young lesbian poet could use as a "model" for her own life (15). In a sense, the fact that Bishop was accepted by the "establishment" made this disappointment more keen. Alicia Ostriker uses stronger language as she calls Bishop an "eminently acceptable woman poet among the academic critics" or one of the "poets who would be ladies" (Stealing the Language 54). For this critic, Bishop was an outsider among feminist poets because her internalization of patriarchal norms and strictures had made her emotionally distant from other women and their real needs and concerns ("Dancing" 585).

Ignoring the energizing contradictions, the rhetorical invitations, and the intertextual dialogues that are the source of Bishop's poetic force, both feminists and mainstream critics have underestimated Bishop. Despite the seemingly uncomplicated, objective textual surfaces and the apparent lack of any new poetic "theory" in her work, Bishop can be considered a complex and important post-modernist poet. In addition, despite her ambivalence about participating in a feminist political agenda and the absence of overt feminism in her poetry, Bishop can be called a feminist poet. Bishop's work is much more complex,

philosophical, and rhetorical than it initially seems, and it is armed with passion and power and subversive energy. Her poems are baited traps that lure the careless reader into making assumptions about gender, tradition, and representation and then work, through resonating images and meanings, to dissolve those assumptions. M.M. Bakhtin, whose critical writings are generally about the novel, shed interesting light on this resonance in Bishop's poetry. Against her objective, formal poetic surfaces (what Bakhtin would label "centripetal" forces) a destabilizing, anti-rhetorical, and subversive force (what Bakhtin would call "centrifugal") is always operating.³

A close, deconstructive reading of Bishop's poetry will illustrate her skill and insight as a poet, but proving her feminism looms as a much more difficult obstacle. The poetry is apparently silent on the subject of feminism, but Bishop is not. The difficulties in calling Bishop a feminist lie in her own complicated commentary about feminism. Bishop's rejection of feminism, it seems, is equalled only by her fear of being considered anti-feminist. This contradictory mindset can be seen in her important 1977 interview with George Starbuck. During their discussion, Bishop talked more extensively than she ever had before on the subject of feminism. It happened almost accidentally. Asked about her poem "Roosters," Bishop said "I suddenly realized it sounded like a feminist tract, which it wasn't meant to sound like at all to begin with. So you never know

how things are going to get changed around for you by the times" (320).

This ambivalence about public or critical opinion is typical. In a 1981 interview Bishop is asked about the apparent autobiography in Geography III. She remarks "This is what the critics say. I've never written the things I'd like to write that I've admired all my life. Maybe one never does. Critics say the most incredible things" (64). Her mixed feelings about feminism, however, seem more urgent. Unable to dismiss the "incredible things" critics are saying with reference to her feminism, Bishop steers Starbuck back to the topic:

Bishop: "I never gave feminism much thought [she trails off].

Starbuck: Did it seem important to notice what women poets were doing?

Bishop: No, I never made any distinction. I never make any distinction. However, one thing I should make clear. When I was in college and started publishing, even then, and in the following few years, there were women's anthologies, and all women issues of magazines, but I always refused to be in them. I didn't think about it very seriously, but I felt it was a lot of nonsense, separating the

sexes. I suppose this feeling came from feminist principles, perhaps stronger than I was aware of. (323)

Starbuck proceeds to ask her about creative writing classes and the best methods for learning to write poetry; she interrupts him, anxious to talk further about the feminist question:

Bishop: Again, about 'feminism' or Women's Lib. I think my friends, my generation, were at women's colleges mostly (and we weren't all writers). One gets so used, very young, to being 'put down' that if you have any normal intelligence and have any sense of humor you very early develop a tough, ironic attitude. You just try to get so you don't even notice being 'put down.' Most of my life I've been lucky about reviews. But at the very end they often say 'the best poetry by a woman in this decade, or year, or month.' Well, what's that worth? You know? But you get used to it, even expect it, and are amused by it. One thing I do think is that there are undoubtedly going to be more good woman poets. (324)

There is a brief interchange about Bishop's shyness, and

then she continues:

I know I wish I had written a great deal more. Sometimes I think if I had been born a man I probably would have written more. Dared more, or been able to spend more time at it. I've wasted a great deal of time. (329)

For a woman who "never gave feminism much thought," this is a very complex response. Bishop begins by distancing herself from the argument altogether and abdicating any intention of making her poem "feminist." It is a move that simultaneously authorizes her --"it wasn't my intention"-- and concedes the possibility that things (meanings) may have gotten "changed around" by the times. She admits that feminist echoes may be in her poems at the same time that she eschews any responsibility for them. This verbal give and take continues throughout the interview.

She claims to have "never [given] feminism much thought," and not to have noticed what other women poets were doing, but proceeds to make some very direct statements about her decisions not to be anthologized with these other female writers. She never gives these women a thought, but she knows exactly what they are doing.

Despite the self-contradiction and her glib attempts to distance herself from the term "feminist," Bishop is not insensitive to sexism, to the imbalance in the gender hierarchy. She admits that cultural attitudes about gender

have led her to be less prolific, less "daring" than she might have liked. She understands why women are compiling anthologies of their own--she is just impatient with what she views as "ghettoization" of women in "separate but equal" anthologies. She has feminist attitudes and feelings, but she does not know what or how to name them.

Bishop certainly was not an active, political feminist or a utopian, separatist feminist, but she was a feminist. When she calls the separating of the sexes "nonsense" and objects to being the best woman instead of the best poet, she makes an argument in keeping with liberal feminism, which has always emphasized the legal and social equality between the sexes. In fact, in her 1981 interview with Elizabeth Spires, Bishop reacts angrily at what she viewed as the ploy of an earlier interviewer to "play her off as old fashioned" against Erica Jong, Adrienne Rich, and "other violently feminist people" (80). Bishop insists that she is not "old fashioned" or apolitical, but her use of the word "violent" suggests that she sees herself as inhabiting a feminist middle ground, somewhere in between the active feminism of Jong or Rich and the anti-feminism to which some critics might assign her. Seeing distinctions between men's writing and women's as dubious and damning, she argues for a humanist approach that would let women write and publish without being marginalized. The problem with this ambivalent middle ground, from a critical perspective, is the same as the problem that critics have in aligning Bishop

with a school: she tells us that she is not confessional and not metaphysical, but she won't tell us what she is. Similarly, she says that she's neither "violently" feminist nor "old fashioned," but she calls herself a feminist.

The last thing that a feminist reader of Bishop wants to do is make a patronizing move as reader and say that Bishop is more of a feminist than she thinks she is or than she is willing to admit. Her ambivalence and self-contradiction, however, open a space in which to question her motives and rhetoric. Naming her refusal to be isolated with other women poets in an anthology and her view of art as genderless⁴ as "strongly feminist" ideas, Bishop initiates an interesting dialogue within her own language. Asking which "side" she ultimately takes (feminist or genderless, pro-woman or pro-patriarchy) is asking the wrong question. Bishop's work self-reflexively illustrates how both poles are present and active in her poetry at the same time.

In many ways, the trouble critics have in defining Bishop as feminist (or not) resembles the difficulty that critics (feminist and non-feminist) have when attempting to define feminism. Feminism is certainly not a monolithic, unified philosophy. In her comprehensive introduction to feminist thought, Rosemarie Tong says:

feminist theory is not one, but many
theories or perspectives and . . . each
feminist theory or perspective attempts

to describe women's oppression, to explain its causes and consequences, and to prescribe strategies for women's liberation. (1)

Dividing feminism into "schools"--liberal, Marxist, psychoanalytic, socialist, existentialist, post-modern--Tong nevertheless admits that these distinctions are merely descriptive labels. One idea or theory is continuously spilling over into or reacting to another. Each voice expresses different feminist thoughts and together they form feminism[s]. These varied political and critical voices are in constant dialogue. They are continually

lament[ing] the ways in which women have been oppressed, repressed, and suppressed, and celebrat[ing] the ways in which so many women have . . . taken charge of their own destinies and encouraged each other to live, love, laugh, and be happy as women. (1-2)

Through her comments, but most convincingly through her poetry, Bishop adds her unique and valuable voice to this dialogue.

Bishop's poetic voice, however, is not one we would immediately associate with feminism[s]. She uses objective, precise description instead of the lyric speaking voice that is associated with much feminist poetry.⁵ She rarely uses a first person speaker, and when she does, it is a well-disguised persona. When approaching an emotional issue in a

poem, she usually mediates that emotion through simile, metaphor, and symbol. In addition, she constantly sets up oppositions--inside/outside, here/there, travel/home--and places her speakers at the center of these contradictions.

Such two-sided, limited, binary logic, for many feminists, is at the heart of societal oppression. Building on the work of Sartre, Simone De Beauvoir in The Second Sex argues that as people differentiate themselves from all that surrounds them, everything that is not self becomes an "other," foreign and alien to the self. The more well-developed a person's self becomes, then, the more objectified and distant the other becomes. In western society, this other has become associated with the female. Western culture, literature, and society have been built upon this unequal opposition: "whole" man/"empty" woman with penis envy, rational mind/irrational body, reason/intuition, logic/chaos, civilization/savagery. These binary pairs are oppressive because they are never equal and opposite. One term is always more important or more valued than another, and this better half is almost always the male or male-associated half.

Post-modernist critics such as Helene Cixous and Luce Irigaray push this argument into the realm of language, seeing the relationship between signifier and signified, metaphor and tenor as being similarly oppressive. In her important work "The Laugh of the Medusa," Cixous advocates that instead of being limited by traditional rhetoric, women

should try to "write from their bodies" (489), free the "immense resources of the unconscious" (484) and "unthink the unifying, regulating history that homogenizes and channels forces, herding contradictions into a single battlefield" (486). Women, she continues, need to "sweep away syntax" (489) and the limitations of Aristotelian logic and instead write the "in-betweenness" that is women's experience. Luce Irigaray adds that we must "re-interpret the whole relationship between the subject and the discourse, the subject and the world, the subject and the cosmic, the microcosmic and macrocosmic" ("Sexual Difference" 119). Instead of obsessively trying to determine "who or what" this "unknowable other is," we should focus on the "wonder, surprise, and astonishment" (124) of the between space.

When Cixous advocates "sweeping away" syntax or Irigaray urges us to look away from binary poles, it is easy to assume quickly that Bishop has no place in their scheme. After all, she creates binaries and consciously uses metaphors and potentially oppressive symbols. Cixous' feminism, however, does not ask for the abolition of traditional language but instead for the broadening of language. She sees "no grounds for the establishing of a discourse, but rather an arid, millennial ground to break" (481). She adds, "what I say has at least two sides and two aims: to break up, to destroy; and to foresee the unforeseeable, to project" (481). This is not nihilistic

destruction but revision: seeing language and its possibilities anew. Calling for valorization of the "infinite richness" of women's varied imaginations and constructions, she continues:

To admit that writing is precisely working (in) the in between, inspecting the process of the same and the other without which nothing can live, undoing the work of death--to admit this is first to want the two, as well as both, the ensemble of the one and the other, not fixed in sequences of struggle and expulsion or some other form of death, but infinitely dynamized by an incessant process of exchange from one subject to another. A process of different subjects knowing one another and beginning one another anew only from the living boundaries of the other: a multiple and inexhaustible course with millions of encounters and transformations of the same into the other and into the in-between from which woman takes her forms (and man, in his turn; but that's his other history).

(487)

Cixous urges women to consider both the binary nature of

language and the fact that those binary terms will never be stationary--will never stop interacting with and changing the meaning of one another. Writing in the "white ink" (486) of women's writing is an alternative way of thinking: a call to question continually and search out the complicated relationship between the signifier and the signified. She continues:

Her writing can only keep going without ever inscribing or discerning contours, daring to make these vertiginous crossings of the other(s) ephemeral and passionate sojourns him, her, them, whom she inhabits long enough to look at from the point closest to their unconscious from the moment they awaken, to love them at the point closest to their drives; and then further, impregnated through and through with these brief, identificatory embraces, she goes and passes into infinity. (491)

What seems contradictory is in fact synergistic: Bishop can use form and symbols and metaphors at the same time that she illustrates the limits and weakness of these constructions to control or finitely represent anything. Creating structures and then setting them in motion or dismantling them, Bishop becomes one of the infinitely rich women's voices to which Cixous urges us to listen.

Cixous' suggestions about language and women do not necessarily represent the unequivocal feminist word on writing. Many critics view any focus on "writing from the body" or writing outside of the tradition as a dictum to reject all that is canonical and write a new, illogical discourse. Despite Cixous' protestations that she is not establishing a discourse, critics such as Margaret Homans see "women's language" as a utopian and "anachronistic dream" (218). Homans goes further to suggest that this dream is not only unimaginable, but hypocritical as well. She reasons that feminists interested in dismantling or deconstructing the dualisms of the patriarchy are in a sense upholding them when they valorize women's experience in poetry. When they demand that the poet and her experience be present and literal in an "I" speaker, they privilege and validate the power of a signifier to actually express experience or meaning. Using women's experience to subvert or write outside the patriarchy, Homans concludes, supports this dualism (218). Mary Jacobus makes a similar point when she argues that while entering the patriarchy through language is oppressive, "refusal, on the other hand, risks inscribing the feminine as more marginal madness or nonsense" (12). Jan Montefiore echoes this concern as she warns of the risks of exclusively privileging women's "subjective awareness of themselves" (62). By valorizing a particular kind of women's experience, she argues, we risk creating a narrow version of what is "authentic" and of

excluding or marginalizing women who do not fit the model (63).

Bishop's reputation among feminists may have suffered for precisely this reason. If writing about personal, intimate experience is narrowly viewed as the only alternative to writing within patriarchal, structured norms, then Bishop could be viewed as writing outside of a feminist context. Until the publication of Geography III (1976), there were very few autobiographical echoes in Bishop's work. In fact, when Bishop does mention a fact that could be associated with her life, she distances herself from the association by using incorrect facts or skimming over the reference with objective, third-person description.

There is much that is singular and dramatic in Bishop's life but none of it appears nakedly on the surface of her poems--a fact that seems to have frustrated some critics. Peter Sanger, a Canadian critic, went so far as to track down all the "Nova Scotia" details in Bishop's poems and try to find the places to which they refer. His article attempts to connect every person and every place in the poems to something "real." He argues that it is the very "equivocation of her origins" that led him to be interested in them: in the work of another, more "open" poet, he would not have bothered to investigate (15). One could almost imagine that if Bishop had not been such a brilliant poet, critics would still have found a way to discuss the paradoxes and tragedies that make up her biography. Bishop

was born in Worcester, Massachusetts to a Canadian mother and an American father. Her father died suddenly of Bright's disease, a kidney ailment, when Bishop was eight months old. In reaction to the death, her mother began a long struggle with mental illness. Shuttled back and forth between her Bulmer grandparents in Great Village, Nova Scotia and her Bishop grandparents in Worcester, Bishop spent her childhood, in her words, "as a guest in someone's home" ("Art of Poetry" 75). She saw her mother for the last time when she was five years old. This troubled woman died in a Canadian hospital for the insane when Bishop was at Vassar. After college, Bishop roamed nomadically through Europe, returned sporadically to New York, lived for a short time in the Florida Keys and Mexico, and then moved to Brazil, where she spent her happiest years living with her lover Lota Soares.

Bishop chose to exclude direct reference to these facts from her poems. Students are often surprised, in fact, that the great loves in Bishop's life were women. Their surprise springs not from any contradictory heterosexual clues in the poetry, but instead from the virtual absence of explicit sexual information in most of the poems. Even in poems that could be deemed love poems, the focus is usually metaphoric or emotional, and when Bishop uses a physical detail, the gender is unclear: do the "nine black hairs" fluttering on the loved one's chest in "O Breath" belong to a man or a woman? What is the gender of the owner of the shining black

hair in "The Shampoo"?

Of course one explanation for Bishop's reticence is that she was merely maintaining her privacy--her sexual choices were nobody's business. After all, not all heterosexual poets choose to write about their sex lives. Another possibility is that she was loathe to expose herself and her beloved to what was and is a homophobic American culture. Her silence about her troubled childhood may be the product of anti-confessionalism: the impulse that made her wish that Lowell and others had resisted the urge to tell all ("Poets" 35) and that prompted her to warn her creative writing students against becoming mesmerized by their own pain. Painful memories, in Bishop's mind, do not make poetry--in fact, they may interfere with a student's ability to write a good poem⁶. She was so suspicious of the confessional impulse that when former student Wesley Wehr told her he had been trying to read the confessional poets she exclaimed "Don't' you have anything better to read than that?" and offered to send him some old copies of National Geographic (327).

A close explication of Bishop's work in later chapters will show, however, that an additional possibility exists. Bishop's famous reticence, her apparent need for privacy, can be seen as an invitation of sorts--an invitation for the reader to assume certain things about gender and tradition and then be proven wrong by the text. The caesuras that invite dualistic gender division in "O Breath" and then make

clear distinction impossible; the "factual" details of the young Elizabeth's life in "In the Waiting Room" that turn out to be completely false--these poetic red herrings lure the reader into making suppositions that the poems will refute.

Bishop's refusal to use direct experience in her poems is not a rejection of women's language and experience, then, but a way to combine authentic feminist impulses with a binary, familiar language that lures readers into confronting their own prejudices. Bishop's texts are linear and symbolic and objective, but they also resonate with movement and fluid meaning. Bishop may not write openly of her experience and her "self," but she creates feminine and feminist texts that force the reader into the nebulous space between the signifier and the signified. She may not write the "experience" that Montefiore and Homans assume is the only kind of women's writing, but she does write in one of the varied and rich women's voices that Cixous mentions.

Deconstructionist critic Jacques Derrida supports the idea that this betweenness, this doubleness is essentially female. He, in fact, uses the female metaphor of the hymen to express the locus of meaning: somewhere in between literature and truth (183). In his analogy, the hymen is

. . . the consummation of differences,
the continuity and confusion of the
coitus, [it] merges with what it seems
to be derived from: the hymen as

protective screen, the jewel box of
virginity, the vaginal partition, the
fine, invisible veil which, in front of
the hystera, stands between the inside
and the outside of a woman, and
consequently between desire and
fulfillment. It is neither desire nor
pleasure, but in between the two. (213)

Even this paradigm could be seen, however, as arresting meaning, making it a static entity centered between two poles. Derrida undercuts this possibility as he argues that "with all the undecidability of its meaning, the hymen only takes place when nothing really happens" (213). In other words, he implies that meaning may exist in the space between two poles, but the act of reading continuously deconstructs and reconstructs or repositions this space.

Andrea Nye makes a similar point about the work of French post-structuralist psychoanalytic theorist Lacan. Nye determines that for Lacan, female writing always "hovers" or defies absolute interpretation. "Without a phallus, without a name," Nye suggests, "the female subject will always be in question, always have to find its identity in something else" (140). Nye further notes that on the "shifting ground of Lacanian theory, the very uncertainty of a woman's foothold becomes the only true feminist stance" (142). Thus, the resonating meanings, the moving lines of Bishop's poetry can be categorized both as feminist and

female writing.

The problem with such theorizing, as Julia Kristeva sees it, however, is that women risk being seen or seeing themselves as prisoners in the mad, empty abyss that classic Freudian psychoanalysis consigned them to. Kristeva finds the whole subject of "women's language " to be "highly problematical" ("Women's Time" 200) and argues:

The desire to give voice to sexual difference, and particularly to the position of the woman-subject within meaning and signification, leads to a veritable insurrection against the homogenizing signifier. However, it is all too easy to pass from the search for difference to the denegation of the symbolic. The latter is the same as to remove the 'feminine' from the order of language (understood as dominated exclusively by the secondary process) and to inscribe it within the primary process alone, whether in the drive that calls out or simply the drive tout court. In this case, does not the struggle against the 'phallic sign' and against the whole mono-logic, monotheistic culture which supports itself on it, sink into an essentialist

cult of Woman, into a hysterical obsession with the neutralizing cave, a fantasy arising precisely as the negative imprint of the maternal phallus? ("Il n'y a pas de maitre a langage" 134-35)

Alice Jardine suggests that while Kristeva recognizes "hysteria as potentially liberating and as one of the major forms of contestation throughout our history, she also recognizes its very real limits" (11). Nye echoes this idea and notes that

for Kristeva, to abandon the patriarchal symbolic is to fall back into marginalism or psychosis. Kristeva's own forbiddingly theoretical style illustrates her conviction that women must not abandon the masculine world of theory, science, and logic. At the same time, women scholars must work to make the system 'budge,' as Kristeva put it, constantly to undermine patriarchal order by reviving the abyss of the rejected maternal that threatens any claim to logical certainty. (148)

Psychoanalytic feminist Larysa Mykyta makes much the same point when she says:

To be radically effective every phallic

mode of operation must perhaps always and continually be accompanied by a female gaze, by a focus on and a questioning of the conditions of power and of the conditions of discourse--a questioning of the manipulation of language, hence a questioning of the conditions and structures of literature. Perhaps, and this must always remain a question, perhaps then women will begin to be seen differently. (56)

Women scholars (and poets) must enter into patriarchal thought to expose its fallacious absolutes--but they must interrogate the system as they use it. They must question the value and power and potential of language even as they use it to convey their feminist message. Instead of "seceding from the canon," Ostriker suggests, women can "shed light on it" by "revising" the myths associated with it ("The Thieves of Language" 13).⁷ Bishop can thus be formal and feminist. She can use oppositions, logical contradiction, and linear constructions while still arming these constructions to undermine the tradition.

In "Sorties," Cixous uses the image of the "dark continent," an unfathomable, terrifying, and dangerous land, as a metaphor for the way the patriarchy has viewed women (566). Bishop charts this continent of female writing with the intent of proving that, while it is not dark and evil,

it is complex and dangerous: it will undermine and revise narrow or incautious assumptions. Using form to undermine and destabilize the absolute binaries and structures of form, Bishop also accepts the fluidity and betweenness advocated by Cixous. She creates poems that move and change as they are read--and that caution the reader to proceed carefully and thoughtfully.

At the beginning of Bishop's short story "In the Village," a woman screams and the sound is absorbed and stored in the church steeple. The narrator urges: "Flick the lightning rod on top of the church steeple with your fingernail and you will hear it"⁸ (Collected Prose 251). Bishop creates poems that deceive in their initial stillness and then resonate, sometimes screaming, sometimes singing with energized and energizing meaning.

Chapter II will examine Bishop's use of figures, her subtle naming of speakers, and the oddly surreal quality of the poems in her first book North & South. Implicit in the precise, minute description and "recording" of data is an undercurrent of inconsistency that dismantles and questions the accuracy and advisability of representative language. Chapters III and IV will probe the nature of the change in tone between North & South and Bishop's second book A Cold Spring. Apparently more "emotional" and less distanced and distancing than the first effort, Cold Spring seems at times uneven and less satisfying than its predecessor. This uneven quality results from a strange mix of poems: several

obviously pastoral or anti-pastoral poems grouped with highly descriptive, yet strangely ascetic love poetry. The mix is not as random as it initially seems. Focusing her description into often ambivalent pastoral landscape scenes explicated in Chapter III of this study, Bishop questions the nature of pastoral conventions and experiments with the empirical eye/I that will become the childlike but not childish speaker of later books. In Chapter IV, we will explore how the remote vagueness of the love poems rehearses the gender and identity dialectics of later poems and validates the rhetorical "baiting" and linguistic game playing of the earlier books. More directly than she has before, Bishop shows us that she can employ binary symbols and objective description and still open up a resonant space for female writing. Chapters V and VI explore how Bishop's experimentation with linguistic control and representation have allowed her to approach the troubling issues of her childhood (albeit obliquely and tentatively) for the first time. Wryly promising a "drive to the interior," the poems of Questions of Travel posit oppositions between home and foreignness, Nova Scotia and Brazil, here and elsewhere, only to prove these absolute categories fallacious and even psychologically dangerous. In addition, questions of liminality will be addressed: can travel be seen as a "destination?" What are the implications of Bishop's first overtly autobiographical speakers being children? Is Bishop on an errand to discover home or in exile from homelessness?

Finally, having "arrived" at a literal or created home in Questions of Travel, Bishop explores the topography and geography of the self in Geography III, the subject of Chapter VII.

Notes

1. At the time of this writing, no definitive, authorized biography of Bishop has been written. All previous and subsequent biographical information is compiled from interviews and from the works of Anne Stevenson and Lorrie Goldensohn. In Elizabeth Bishop (1966), Stevenson introduces Bishop to the world. This is the first, and until the last decade, the only book-length study of Bishop. Bishop agreed to cooperate and correspond with Stevenson for this book, and the biographical information included is based on telephone conversations and letters between the two of them. Goldensohn's recent book (1992), attempts to construct the biography via unpublished poems, letters, and manuscripts. On a trip to Brazil, Goldensohn discovered a box of Bishop's unpublished work and journals while discussing Bishop's time in Brazil with one of the poet's friends. Giving extensive biographical background, Goldensohn attempts to surmise what was going on in Bishop's mind and life at the time she wrote certain poems.

2. David Kalstone's important book (1989) is the best place to begin looking for information about Bishop's literary friendships. Using letters between the three poets as his foundation, Kalstone attempts to describe and explain Bishop's life by investigating what she said about life and literature to Moore and Lowell.

3. In his translation and anthology of Bakhtin's primary works, Holquist explains the concept of "heteroglossia," the dialogic principle at the heart of Bakhtin's work:

Heteroglossia is Bakhtin's way of referring, in any utterance or any kind, to the peculiar interaction between the two fundamentals of all communication. On the one hand, a mode of transcription must, in order to do its work of separating out texts, be a more or less fixed system. But these repeatable features, on the other hand, are in the power of the particular context in which the utterance is made; this context can refract, add to, or, in some cases, even subtract from the amount and kind of meaning the utterance may be said to have when it is conceived only as a systematic manifestation independent of context. (xx)

Holquist determines that it is this "extraordinary sensitivity to the immense plurality of experience," this acute vision of intertextuality that distinguishes Bakhtin from "other moderns who have been obsessed with language" (xx). This "plurality" fits nicely with the "vibrating meaning" and simultaneity that are at the heart of Bishop's

writing.

Bakhtin himself explains these concepts further:

literary language itself is only one of these heteroglot languages--and in its turn is also stratified into languages (generic, period-bound and others). And this stratification and heteroglossia, once realized, is not only a static invariant of linguistic life, but also what insures its dynamics:

stratification and heteroglossia widen and deepen as long as language is alive and developing. Alongside the centripetal forces, the centrifugal forces of language carry on their uninterrupted work; alongside verbal-ideological centralization and disunification go forward. Every concrete utterance of a speaking subject serves as a point where centrifugal as well as centripetal forces are brought to bear. (272)

This constant motion and interaction of meaning, Holquist argues is best described by Bakhtin's term "dialogism":

Dialogism is the characteristic epistemological mode of a world

dominated by heteroglossia. Everything means, is understood, as a part of a greater whole--there is a constant interaction between meanings, all of which have the potential of conditioning others. Which will affect the other, how it will do so and in what degree is what is actually settled at the moment of utterance. This dialogic imperative, mandated by the pre-existence of the language world relative to any of its current inhabitants, insures that there can be no actual monologue. One may, like a primitive tribe that knows only its own limits, be deluded into certain thinking there is one language, or one may, as grammarians, certain political figures and normative framers of "literary languages" do, seek in a sophisticated way to achieve a unitary language. In both cases the unitariness is relative to the overpowering force of heteroglossia, and thus, dialogism.

(426)

While these theories serve as an interesting model or touchstone to reference what Bishop is doing, they must be

used with conscious knowledge of the fact that Bakhtin never intended that his theories be used to discuss poetry. In fact, as David H. Richter notes, Bakhtin uses the poetic and its monologic, centripetal associations as a direct counterpoint to the dialogic tradition of the novel (10). Richter respects Bakhtin's distinction, but notes that his views changed over time and that he became more of a mind that perhaps all literature by its very nature might be "double-voiced" (12), a term echoed by Linda Hutcheon in her study of modern parody (4). Following this logic, Richter argues that the dialogic exists in the relation of the speaker to the poet, "in the degree of objective, or, on the other side, subjective stance which the poet has employed. Any poem that represents or portrays a speech act would be to that extent dialogical" (15).

Richter later adds that "since dialogism is a function of discourse rather than of overall form, it can certainly appear in the prosified poetry of the twentieth century, in the oeuvre of a poet who finds expressive use for heteroglossia" (18). Even in less "prosified" poets in whose work form and rhyme and rhythm occur, Richter notes, the restrictive, limiting power of the form is at least equalled by the power of this form to concentrate and, through tone and sonic implication, "create the internal dialogue Bakhtin so valued" (20). Richter blames Bakhtin's reticence on this point as being a result of the inherent

differences between the Russian and American literary critical traditions (26).

Bakhtin was certainly not in Bishop's mind when she wrote these poems--and I am not suggesting that these theories are the definitive model for explicating Bishop's poetry. In conjunction with feminist theories of a "muted," yet subversive female discourse, however, they provide an enlightening model for describing the vibrating, resonant movement in Bishop's poems.

4. On the subject of gender and art, Joyce Carol Oates and Harold Bloom share Bishop's philosophy without her ambivalence. Bloom sees gender as a "source of values in the genesis of art" but asserts that these values are not in and of themselves "aesthetic" (1). Oates, who, like Bishop, objected to women's anthologies, argued that "voice" is "sexless" (11):

No one would confuse propaganda with art, nor should one confuse--however generously, however charitably--propagandistic impulses with art. . . . Content is simply raw material. Women's problems, women's very special adventures: these are material: and what matters in serious art is ultimately the skill of execution and the uniqueness of vision. (10)

5. In her article "Women's Time," Julia Kristeva notes that after 1968, feminists move away from emphasizing liberal equality and are primarily interested in "the specificity of female psychology and its symbolic realizations these women seek to give a language to the intrasubjective and corporeal experiences left mute by culture in the past" (190). Women's writing moves away from the linear and formal to record specifically female experience in an authentic, uncensored woman's voice (188-190). Elaine Showalter makes a similar point as she suggests that "the Female Aesthetic of the 1970s was a call for a return to the Mother Tongue, a genderlect of women's speech celebrated as more immediate than patriarchal language" (Sister's Choice 7). Showalter notes that this idea still informs much American feminism, although some European feminists find this emphasis on experience and essentialism "naive" (5).

6. Bishop's most explicit commentary on the subject of personal "confession" or self-revelation in poetry comes from the conversations remembered by former student Wesley Wehr. Wehr met Bishop when economic necessity had driven her to accept a teaching position in Seattle. Impatient with teaching and homesick for Brazil, she nevertheless maintained her characteristic stoicism regarding explicit personal emotion and poetry. Complaining to Wehr about the melodramatic note of "truth" that her students agonized to

express in their work, Bishop muses: "the fact is that we always tell the truth about ourselves. It's just that quite often we don't like how it comes out" (319-20). In her mind, if her students would try to write a good poem, paying attention to rhetoric and syntax instead of "truth," the truth would emerge in their poems. Advocating reading over "dissipation, or inventing theories about poetry, or writing [his or her] memoirs with which most poets occupy their time" (322), Bishop continues to ponder why her students are so mesmerized by their own pain. She sees them as well-fed, with clear complexions, driving nice cars to class and writes "and what do they write about in their poems? Suffering, of all things! I don't think that any of them knows anything about suffering, but their poems are just filled with it. I finally told them to come to Brazil and see for themselves what real suffering is like. Then perhaps they wouldn't write so 'poetically' about it" (322). She goes on to question why her students seem to wish that they were or act as if they were fashionably insane. Her incredulous anger on this subject is mitigated by a palpable empathy for the truly insane and a fear that her students are forgetting where the psychological "edge" is. While part of her anger is based in a grown woman's irritation with the studied melodrama of graduate school, the rhetorical strategies she advocates appear in her own poetry--or, more to the point, the very real tragedies and

confusions and lost loves of her life do not appear there.

She explains:

Because I write the kind of poetry that I do, people seem to assume that I'm a calm person. Sometimes, they even tell me how sane I am. But I'm not a calm person at all . . . I can be as confused and indecisive as anyone . . . But I feel a responsibility, while I'm here at least, to appear calm and collected . . . so these young people won't think all poets are erratic."

(325)

This finely honed sense of responsibility extends beyond her interaction with the students she taught on a daily basis. In his critical study of Bishop's correspondence with Moore and Lowell, David Kalstone notes the same reticent stoicism. In a letter to Lowell, Bishop describes a feeling of panic and melancholy that most closely resembled a feeling she had as a child when she "wanted one of her aunts." She then catches herself and adds: "Now I really have no right to homesickness at all" (Becoming a Poet 21), effectively shutting out the morass of fear and pain and death that made up her orphaned homelessness. Kalstone perceptively notes that this retreat into absolute fact, this characteristic demurral is an

attempt to "fend off" the problems and anxieties that she feared would overwhelm her. He urges us not to forget that the exquisite clarity and precision was the product, at least in part, of tension and fear (22). In an excerpt of a later letter to Lowell, Bishop makes this point even more emphatically. She says that "solitude and ennui" are the "kind of suffering I'm most at home with and helpless about." She adds: "I guess I think it is so inevitable and unavoidable there's no use talking about it; that in itself it has no value anyway" (Kalstone, Becoming 123).

7. But learning to read and love the canon, as Suzanne Juhasz notes, puts American women writers in a "double bind." They learn from the tradition the egotism and Adamic impulses of the Romantic tradition, but cannot reconcile or make these modes "match" with their female experience. They are faced with two choices: they can either translate this experience into accepted canonical codes or write outside the canon (and be rejected). Juhasz argues that poets of Moore's and even of Bishop's later generation often chose "translation" into canonical codes in response to societal pressures (36). While successful as poets, these women saw their "victory qualified [from a feminist perspective] by the very methods used to gain it" (54). So the double bind becomes a triple or quadruple bind. As Diane Wood Middlebrook points out, even a poet as otherwise outrageous as Gertrude Stein chose the impersonality and "gender

blindness" of modernism in order to make significant contributions to "poetic form" ("Prologue" 3).

In a tradition that Nina Baym suggests completely excludes women as a threat to male literary and social control (71), women find a place to write by learning and digesting the patriarchal myths and then participating in what Alicia Suskin Ostriker calls "revisionist mythmaking" (Stealing the Language 11), in which the myth or tradition or convention is rewritten from a female point of view. A myth is "revised," Ostriker notes, when it is "appropriated for altered ends" ("The Thieves of Language" 13) from those traditionally associated with the myth. Women's poetry in Ostriker's view does not exist separately from the tradition. It exists with the tradition. It is "duplicitous" and not "ironic": in other words the tradition and the revision exist simultaneously. Both meanings "coexist with equal force because they have equal force within the poet" (41). Bishop can write, then, in her objectivist, formal mode and still create resonating oppositions and contradictions that revise these very models.

Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar echo Ostriker as they argue that "when women did not turn into male mimics or accept the 'parsley wreath,' they may have attempted to transcend their anxiety of authorship by revising male genres, using them to record their own stories in disguise.

Such writers therefore "participated in and . . . 'swerved from' " the tradition (73). On a more specific level, Joanne Diehl suggests that American women poets not only revised myths and traditions, but "reinvented" language, using words in such a way as to subvert or at least add a new layer of meaning ("At Home With Loss" 123). This "doubleness," Susan Van Dyne notes, is a "constant corrective" to the patriarchal Adamic tradition of Emerson (474). Women writers do not "submit" to the tradition (Merrin 94) but actively take what they need from it. Choosing their tools from the tradition, poets such as Bishop nevertheless open a space in the tradition, in form, or in language in which to experiment and speak in unique, authentic voices. Annette Kolodny notes that the reason that many women's texts are devalued is that a student trained in the canon has learned to recognize and value certain paradigms that are missing in women's texts ("Dancing Through the Minefield" 151). She suggests that readers need to learn new paradigms and recognize the existence of a new integrated tradition ("A Map for Re-reading" 60). Patricia Joplin agrees as she calls for women to listen to and learn to hear and recognize a multiplicity of women's voices (264).

8. All references to Bishop's prose are from The Collected Prose, edited and introduced by Robert Giroux.

CHAPTER II

SUBVERSIVE OBJECTIVITY

IN NORTH & SOUTH

Bishop's preoccupation with geography is evident in everything from her globe-trotting life to the titles of her books. The "epigraph" or preface to Geography III, in fact, is taken directly out of an 1884 edition of "First Lessons in Geography," a primer for elementary school students. It comes as no surprise, then, that in her first book, North & South, she includes a poem called "The Map." It seems appropriate--even predictable for Bishop, the experienced traveller, to offer readers a guide, an outline of the poetic terrain ahead of them. This first poem can be seen as a map directing the reader how to read Bishop, but it also functions as an indictment of the reader who would skim the surface. "The Map" serves as a guide to reading Bishop in this book and especially later books, because it challenges the reader to question the problems and possibilities inherent in both reading and representation.¹

Beginning with a simply-stated observation, the poem² appears to be a close, minutely detailed view of something the reader has never really looked at before:

Land lies in water; it is shadowed
green.

[t/o]

Shadows, or are they shallows, at its
 edges [t/o]
 showing the line of long sea-weeded
 ledges [t/o]
 where weeds hang to the simple blue from
 green. [t/o]
 Or does the land lean down to lift the
 sea from under, [t/o]
 drawing it unperturbed around itself?
 Along the fine tan sandy shelf
 is the land tugging at the sea from
 under? [t/o]

The first clause of the poem states an obvious geographic and cartographic fact: the land at its edges is in the water. The rest of the sentence describes the color of the land--or is it the color of the water? The indefinite pronoun forces the reader back to the previous clause to see which noun is being "shadowed green." The speaker complicates things further in the second line as the indefinite quality of the "edges" is emphasized by the confusion between "shadows" and "shallows." The simple description of this "objective" document is becoming increasingly murky.

As the stanza continues, the complexity deepens. In lines three and four, the definite, bounded connotations of the words "line" and "simple" are undercut by the description that surrounds them: the line is actually

fringed with hanging seaweed, preventing a "simple" distinction between the blue and green colors. The rhyme of these first four lines reinforces the sense of indefiniteness and complication as well. Enveloped between the "green[s]" is the "edges/ledges" rhyme. By isolating this rhyme between the exactness of the green/green rhyme, Bishop emphasizes the rhyme and the liminal connotations of the rhymed words. This sense of liminal "betweenness" will continue in the final four lines of the stanza.

By line five, the poem has moved far from the declarative statement of the opening line. The language is still relatively simple, but Bishop suddenly anthropomorphizes the land, asking if it is leaning down to "lift the sea from under." The blurred lines of the earlier phrases have now detached themselves from the static map and begun to move. Completing the question in line six, Bishop wonders if the leaning land is "drawing it [the sea] unperturbed around itself?" Who is it that is unperturbed in this metaphoric scenario? Is it the sea or the land? Again, the indefinite pronoun leaves both possibilities open. Having complicated an already difficult text with the first question, Bishop then rephrases and asks the same question again: "Along the fine tan sandy shelf/is the land tugging at the sea from under?" (7-8). "Lifting" and "drawing" have now become "tugging," a verb that suggests more tension and conflict than the previous verbs. In addition, the definite edge suggested by the word "shelf" is

undercut by the disintegration implied by the "fine sand" that composes it.

By the end of the first stanza, the reader expecting a "charming stained-glass bit" (Williams 525) finds instead a complicated mosaic. What began as a simple description has become an example of the problems inherent in both graphic and verbal representation. Through the complicated phrasing, Bishop questions the ability and the advisability of art or language to represent their referents. The implications of such questions are potentially frightening in their scope: if something as traditionally static and stable as a map contains all of these inherent contradictions, what about something as fluid as a poem? What about all human observation? Bishop refuses to dwell on the entropic possibility of such questions. She instead proceeds to the next stanza, where she will use further description as a vehicle for questioning reading and representation.

Similar in movement and content to the first stanza, the second stanza (from the first words) reflects the speaker's awareness of the complex nature of descriptive language:

The shadow of Newfoundland lies flat and
 still. [t/o]
 Labrador's yellow, where the moony
 Eskimo [t/o]
 has oiled it. We can stroke these lovely

bays, [t/o]
 under a glass as if they were expected
 to blossom, [t/o]
 or as if to provide a clean cage for
 invisible fish. [t/o]
 The names of seashore towns run out to
 sea, [t/o]
 the names of cities cross the
 neighboring mountains [t/o]
 --the printer here experiencing the
 same excitement [t/o]
 as when emotion too far exceeds its
 cause. [t/o]
 These peninsulas take the water between
 thumb and finger [t/o]
 like women feeling for the smoothness of
 yard-goods. [t/o]

Whereas the first stanza began boldly trying to talk about the "land" represented on the map, stanza two begins with the more indefinite "shadow" that is Newfoundland, lying "flat and still" on the map's surface. This stillness is soon disturbed, however, as the fanciful "moony Eskimo" colors the map an oily yellow (10-11) and the speaker appears explicitly for the first time in the poem: "We can stroke these lovely bays,/under a glass as if they were expected to blossom,/ or as if to provide a clean cage for invisible fish" (11-13). Eschewing the lyric "I," Bishop

creates a plural speaker. Just as she has buried the "I" of the poem's speaker in description (what Lois Cucullu calls substituting the "eye" for the "I" [249]), Bishop obfuscates our focus on the speaker in this poem by making the speaker a "we." In doing so, she implicitly invites the reader to join the speaker in his or her contemplation of the map. With this move, she shifts the focus of the poem from representation and description to reader/speaker interaction--reading. The phrase in which this "we" appears contains additional invitation and instruction as well. Offering the possibility of "stroking" the map, Bishop encourages the reader to interact actively with the text, "as if [the bays] were expected to blossom" or as if this interaction would produce some effect. The bays are not to be seen with the naked eye, however, but "under a glass," presumably a magnifying glass. If the stroking of the text is reading or interacting with the text/map, then reading through a powerful glass can be seen as close, critical reading--reading that focuses, creates boundaries and "clean cages for invisible fish."

The words "cage" and "invisible" complicate Bishop's invitation, however, as the "blossoming" of meaning is set against an attempt to "cage" or capture a meaning not readily apparent. As the names of land towns run out to sea and the cities impinge on the mountains, Bishop warns the reader of the dangers inherent in reading with too narrow a glass or with a careless eye so that boundaries and subtle

implication and complication are lost. If they read quickly or run with an interpretation that deals with only parts of a poem, Bishop suggests, critics will succumb to the same inaccuracies as the map's printer whose "excitement too far exceeds its cause." Almost as a test, Bishop then revises the anthropomorphized metaphor of the first stanza to create a simile of "peninsulas . . . like women feeling for the smoothness of yard-goods." Armed with the warnings of the previous stanzas, the reader can interpret this comparison fully aware of the possible contradictions and complexities that surround it.

This image itself graphically and imagistically mimics the warning given in stanza two. Situating the water within the grasp of the peninsula, Bishop focuses the reader on the between space: the interaction of the two elements and the way the sea encloses the peninsulas, but the peninsulas interrupt and enclose the bay. By indicating that the peninsula is "feeling" for the smoothness of the cloth/sea, Bishop "dynamizes" this betweenness: again, the poem is set in motion. The subtle implication of movement further blurs the lines between the sea and the land, the words and lines, and that which all these signifiers represent.

The tension between stillness and movement continues in the final stanza as Bishop juxtaposes the now suspect objective description with a fanciful interpretation:

Mapped waters are more quiet than the

land is,

[t/o]

lending the land their waves' own
 conformation: [t/o]
 and Norway's hare runs south in
 agitation, [t/o]
 profiles investigate the sea, where
 land is. [t/o]
 Are they assigned, or can the countries
 pick their colors? [t/o]
 --What suits the character or the native
 waters best. [t/o]
 Topography displays no favorites;
 North's as near as West. [t/o]
 More delicate than the historians'
 are the map-maker's colors. [t/o]

The "land" of the first stanza that became the "shadow" of the second stanza is replaced by an even further abstracted image: "mapped water." The bays that had the potential to "blossom" in the second stanza are now not only statically, abstractly represented but "quiet" as well. In addition, they "conform" to the shape of the land. The colon promising to illustrate or explain this phenomenon introduces a chaotic refutation, however, as quiet, static images go berserk. The shape that represents Norway not only "runs" but "runs in agitation." "Profiles" of land dynamically "investigate" the sea, but within the same line the enclosing sea is empowered and defined as the place "where land is." Just as in the first stanza, the

contradiction is reinforced by the envelope rhyme of the first four lines of this final stanza. The exact rhyme of "land is" frames the resonating contradiction between "agitation" and "conformation."

Whereas stanza one focused on the potential contradictions and problems inherent in graphic and (by implication) linguistic representation, and stanza two introduced the additional variable of the reader, stanza three points to the cartographer/poet. After introducing the two contradictory "readings" of the first four lines of the stanza, Bishop asks the creator of the map/text for answers. On one level, Bishop's question appears to be a fanciful bit of musing: "can the countries pick their colors?" If we pursue the analogy of this poem as a map to poems that follow, however, this question speaks to the very nature of representation. Is a country green or yellow because that color somehow symbolizes or "suits the character or the native waters best"? Or are these colors a part of some rhetorical purpose on the part of the mapmaker?

Mark Monmonier, a cartographer, notes that color is used completely at the discretion of the mapmaker, and warns that the use of color is one of the most potentially seductive and dangerous choices a cartographer must make (147). Monmonier suggests that because people respond emotionally to color, especially to hue intensity, color is an excellent and efficient tool for the propagandist: "because of embedded emotions or culturally conditioned

attitudes, some colors carry subtle added meanings" (153) and affect the way a person reads a map. Conceding that "maps must lie" in that they are proportionate, selective, and scaled, he nevertheless offers that in the hands of the uninformed or irresponsible, color can obfuscate as well as inform. To answer Bishop's question, the countries cannot choose their colors and the color does not necessarily follow any characteristics of the place.

The final lines of the poem support this explanation. If "Topography displays no favorites" and "North's as near as West"--in other words, if the geographical features obviously have no "say" in the decision--it is up to the mapmaker to decide. The final line can be read as the closest Bishop will ever come to literary criticism or theory. The phrasing of this last sentence emphasizes how important the issue is for her. Instead of saying "the map-maker's colors are more delicate than those of the historian," the speaker inverts the comparison and buries the colors themselves at the end of the sentence: "More delicate than the historians' are the map-makers' colors." It is not the choice of colors but the delicacy with which the cartographer chooses and uses them that is the important issue for the speaker. The so far implicit link between map-making and language-making becomes explicit as the line continues and the choice of colors is compared to the choice of historians' words.

The map-maker must use more care than the historian

because the map is a potential guide to the future: it represents geographic phenomena for potential travelers instead of recording journeys of the past. Similarly, the poet has a responsibility to be aware of the implications of his or her choices. The reader, in much the same way, must probe carefully and delicately to avoid the sloppy reading suggested by stanza two. By creating a poem that attempts a simple description of an objective, static map and then illustrating how that description changes, moves, and disintegrates, Bishop signals to the reader that careful attention must be paid to even her infamous "objective," formal, simple poems. Beneath the "flat and still" surfaces of these poems lie contradictions and complications that energize and concentrate her meaning. "Beware," Bishop whispers--"the objective is the subversive." By extension, the subversive is subtly the feminist as well. The objective, linear surfaces of "The Map" mesh with the questioning of absolute meaning, the fluidity between word and referent to form a new voice in women's writing--a new and valuable variant of "white ink." Forewarned by the resonant meanings in "The Map," the reader is prepared to approach the rest of the poems of North & South. Ranging in subject from the mast-sitting man of "The Unbeliever" to the nocturnal "Man-Moth," these poems expand and develop the dynamic, feminist tensions introduced by "The Map." Using abrupt, significant shifts in perspective and perception, extended (sometimes overextended) metaphors, and

significantly distorted or inverted syntax, Bishop further illustrates how heavily descriptive, seemingly objective poems can vibrate with inconsistent, potentially destructive and subversive meaning. In poems which depart from this visual focus on real or surreal objects, Bishop shows how the subjectivity introduced by an obvious first person or named speaker can catalyze these destabilizing contradictions in similar ways.

Although critics such as Oscar Williams admired the poems in North & South and deemed Bishop deserving of the Houghton Mifflin Poetry Award she received in recognition of them (525), their praise was mimetic of the narrow, precise elements they lauded in Bishop. Williams sees her "keen eye for small physical detail" but finds her "overeducated" and academic (525). Randall Jarrell, in a similar, if less patronizing vein, applauds Bishop's powers of observation and her ability to avoid what he viewed as an appalling tendency in which "many a poem is gruesome occupational therapy for poet[s] who stay legally innocuous by means of it" (488). Stating that only a "geological event" such as the publication of Paterson could overshadow Bishop's book, Jarrell then unconsciously undercuts it by describing the poems as "calm" (he uses this word three times), "sympathetic" (three times as well), "beautiful" (twice), and "simple and mild" (489). This tone would be mimicked later by Lowell who said of Complete Poems "When we read her, we enter the classical serenity of a new country"

(Schwartz and Estess 206). These adjectives are certainly not pejorative, but they are a patronizing way of describing a poet making the potentially subversive moves illustrated in "The Map." It is a critical commonplace to laud Bishop's careful, "inch-by-inch" description. What many readers ignore, however, is that this description is charged with the potential and kinetic linguistic energy that fuels the powerful ascents and dizzying descents that dominate the poems of North & South.

"The Imaginary Iceberg" illustrates this fusion of description and unstable perspective. Like "The Map," this poem also uses contradictions and the subsequent linguistic anxiety resulting from them to fuel further writing, meaning, and implicit criticism. Essentially an extended meditation on a single metaphor (Bogan 113), this poem contains oxymorons, abrupt shifts in visual perception, and wrenched verbal constructions that undermine both the metaphor and the whole idea of representation through metaphor. "Imaginary Iceberg" is the second poem in North & South, and its juxtaposition with "The Map" affects the reader's interpretation of it. The title positions the reader directly in the realm of fiction with the word "imaginary." When this word is coupled with the plural speaker in the first word of the poem, the reader is encouraged to see this poem as additional commentary about the nature of the creative imagination and of poetry: the "we" is again an invitation to enter the dialogue and the

text.

This dialogue begins with a statement that prioritizes and valorizes the imagined over the "real":

We'd rather have the iceberg than the
 ship, [t/o]
 although it meant the end of travel.
 Although it stood stock-still like
 cloudy rock [t/o]
 and all the sea were moving marble. (1-
 4)

Initially portraying imagination as a static phenomenon that would "end" travel or progress in the real world, the speaker quickly undercuts this idea with the use of the simile and metaphor in the third and fourth lines. The balance or opposition emphasized by the repeated "although[s]" is complicated by the word choice describing the things being balanced. The stillness of the imagination is portrayed in the simile of the "cloudy rock" while the sea, that which is "real," is "moving marble." The absolute static nature of the rock is blurred by the fact that it is "cloudy" and the movement and travel associated with the sea are abruptly halted with the oxymoron "moving marble." This metaphoric contradiction starts the resonating movement of the poem and refutes the initial stillness of the iceberg.

From this point forward in stanza one, the iceberg and not the sea (the imagination and not the real) will be associated with dynamism and movement. The iceberg becomes

a "breathing plain of snow" (line 6) that is in quiet "repose" (line 10), but will awaken to "take pasture" on the sea (line 11). This analogy is abruptly interrupted at the stanza break, however, as the speaker forces the reader out of the metaphor and violently back on to the decks of the ship:

This is a scene a sailor'd give his eyes
for. [t/o]

The ship's ignored. The iceberg rises
and sinks again; its glassy pinnacles
correct elliptics in the sky. (12-15)

Wrenched back to the perspective of the observer of the phenomenological world, the reader is then plunged immediately back into the meditating on the iceberg. Again, as in the first stanza, this meditation begins as an observation: we watch the iceberg rise and sink. We study the static, well-defined, boundaried "glassy pinnacles" and the "correct elliptics." This attempt at control and objectivity is short-lived, however, as the up and down movement foreshadows the resonant oppositions of the rest of the stanza. The fifth line of the stanza shifts the reader's focus from the iceberg back to the ship again:

This is a scene where he who treads
the boards [t/o]
is artlessly rhetorical. The curtain
is light enough to rise on finest ropes
that airy twists of snow provide.

The wits of these white peaks
 spar with the sun. Its weight the
 iceberg dares [t/o]
 upon a shifting stage and stands and
 stares. (16-22) [t/o]

As in the first stanza, the implied oxymoron of "artless rhetoric" undoes the easy objectivity and the reader is taken on a roller-coaster ride of shifting perspectives: the mind's eye ascends with the "curtain" of snow only to fall again at the word "wit." The reader is dislocated from the direct metaphor of the curtain because the word "wit" forces him or her to remember that a "rhetorical" construction is being used. From wit we move to the peaks and the sun, only to fall again as the inverted construction in lines 21 and 22 focuses the reader on the "weight" of the iceberg. This foregrounded weight sits on dangerously unsteady ground: the static nature of the word "stares" is destabilized by the uncertainty of the rhyme "dares" and the "shifting stage."

As the third stanza opens, the shifting, unstable perspective is deepened as the speaker invites the reader's eye inside the iceberg: "This iceberg cuts its facets from within" (23). From this internal perspective, the reader is two lines later forced completely outside: we move from the "facets within" an iceberg that "saves itself perpetually and adorns only itself" (25-26) to the speaker bidding "good-bye" as the "ship steers off" (28) toward the horizon.

Safely outside the imaginary iceberg, we move to the final and perhaps most destabilizing lines: "Icebergs behoove the soul/(both being self-made from elements least visible)/to see them so: fleshed, fair, erected indivisible" (31-33). The dramatic, oratory nature of the word "behoove" alerts the reader that he or she is headed for an ironic or untrustworthy statement. This ironic doubleness becomes tripled or quadrupled as we enter the parenthesis and the word choice arrests reading. We move from the doubleness of "both" to the simultaneous singleness of "self-made" to the squinting interiority of "elements least visible."

Following this parenthetical interruption, the syntax resumes: Icebergs, we are told, ask the soul to "see them so: fleshed, fair, erected indivisible." Icebergs want the soul to see them as real, beautiful and created: both as real and as imagined. If souls are created from the same stuff and in the same way as icebergs--if the soul/self is also created and imagined, then the soul too wants to be seen as real. The final word complicates this already complicated conclusion, however, as the soul and the iceberg want to be seen as real ("fleshed"), created ("erected"), and "indivisible." This final word focuses the reader on the resonating space between real and created: they are separate entities, but "indivisible" as well. There is no absolute static grounding for the self or the imagination. Additionally, if we follow Lacan's view of the imagined symbol as phallic, there are no concrete absolutes between

male and female either--at least in terms of the imagination. The phallic peninsulas of "The Map" intruded into the female sea and were enclosed by it. Similarly, the "erected" and erect imaginary icebergs cannot be divorced from the "real," moving sea. They are individual, separate, but nevertheless connected. The same could be said for the reader and the writer. In both cases, meaning or communication exists in the dynamic relationship between real and imagined, reading and writing. The line between the signifier and the signified is blurred at least, if not indistinguishable.

The same dichotomy is approached in a more narrative way in "The Man-Moth." In this poem, the perception of a "real" man is counterpointed with the tentative perceptions of the imaginary man-moth. Using similar shifts in visual perspective, Bishop interrogates the difference between the safe, earthbound man and the curious, child-like creature:

Here, above,
 cracks in the buildings are filled with
 battered moonlight. [t/o]
 The whole shadow of Man is only as big
 as his hat. [t/o]
 It lies at his feet like a circle
 for a doll to stand on, [t/o]
 and he makes an inverted pin, the
 point magnetized to the moon. [t/o]
 He does not see the moon; he

observes only her vast [t/o]
 properties, [t/o]
 feeling the queer light on this hands,
 neither warm nor cold, [t/o]
 of a temperature impossible to
 record in thermometers. [t/o]

But when the Man-Moth
 Pays his rare, although occasional,
 visits to the surface, [t/o]
 the moon looks rather different to him.
 He emerges [t/o]
 from an opening under the edge of one of
 the sidewalks [t/o]
 and nervously begins to scale the faces
 of the buildings. [t/o]
 He thinks the moon is a small hole at
 the top of the sky, [t/o]
 proving the sky quite useless for
 protection. [t/o]
 He trembles, but must investigate as
 high as he can climb. (1-16) [t/o]

While the man remains pinned to the sidewalk, the man-moth
 tries to climb through the "hole" that is the moon, seats
 himself "facing the wrong way" on trains going "terrible
 speeds (29-30), and "cannot tell the rate at which he
 travels backward" (32). Readers familiar with "Imaginary

"Iceberg" and "The Map" will recognize these potentially destructive, catalyzing shifts in perception, but a new element is introduced with "The Man-Moth." Whereas the previous poems examined the ability of language to accurately, statically represent reality, this poem much more overtly focuses on the creator of this language--the poet.

Unlike the man who "has no such illusions" (22), the curious and rare man-moth must do "what he fears most" (23) as "Each night he must/be carried through artificial tunnels and dream recurrent dreams" (33-34). Compelled and cursed to look beyond what the man can see, the man-moth regards his talent as "a disease/he has inherited the susceptibility to" (39). Yet if this illusive creature is pinned down, he will unwillingly offer the product of his compulsion:

If you catch him,
 hold up a flashlight to his eye.
 it's all dark pupil, [t/o]
 an entire night in itself, whose haired
 horizon tightens [t/o]
 as he stares back, and closes up the
 eye. Then from the lids [t/o]
 one tear, his only possession, like
 the bee's sting slips. [t/o]
 Slyly he palms it, and if you're
 not paying attention [t/o]
 he'll swallow it. However, if you

watch, he'll hand it over, [t/o]
 cool as from an underground spring and
 pure enough to drink. [t/o]

The man-moth can be seen as the poet/creator: one who sees the moon and not just its light and one who "travels back wards," compelled to view the world with different eyes than the ordinary man. His "trembling" terror and inclination to dare and fall signal the dangers inherent in being the one who seeks to represent the objective and subjective elements of the world in language.

Up the facades,
 his shadow dragging like a
 photographer's
 cloth behind him, [t/o]
 he climbs fearfully, thinking this time
 he will manage [t/o]
 to push his small head through that
 round clean opening [t/o]
 and be forced through, as from a tube,
 in black scrolls on the
 light. [t/o]
 (Man, standing below him, has no such
 illusions.) [t/o]
 But what the Man-Moth fears most he must
 do, although [t/o]
 he fails, of course, and falls back
 scared but quite unhurt. [t/o]

(17-24)

On the one hand, the man-moth falls from his fantastical ascents "scared but quite unhurt" (24), but on the other he can and will only part with his creation (compared painfully and significantly to a "tear" and a "sting") when the observer probes the dark recesses of his observing eye. The man-moth sees and creates more than the earthbound man, but at great cost. In which direction is the poem pointing the reader then? Does Bishop's "artless rhetoric" encourage us to move up toward the moon and the man-moth or down to the man? Counterpointing the purity of the vision and the pain of the creation with the safety of the terrestrial man, Bishop's tone suggests that the space between ascent and fall, between the moon and the sidewalk is the answer. Neither extreme is viable just as neither pure objectivity nor pure explicit representation is possible. Being "pinned" safely to earth without "illusions" is as potentially fatal in a spiritual sense as falling from the dangerous heights of imagination. Another point is suggested by the visual positioning and the language of the poem. The Man-Moth exists somewhere in between the "Man" on the ground and the traditionally female moon in the sky. He is neither completely man nor completely something else. With this positioning, Bishop suggests that poetry exists somewhere between earthbound male logic and the continuous movement (backwards, upwards, downwards) of the fluid feminine. The Man-Moth can join neither the Man nor the moon, but is

trapped in the creative, fluid space between the two. David Kalstone makes a similar point. Kalstone views the central conflict in the poem as the creative mind trapped and stifled in the physical body (Becoming a Poet 15). Mind and body (male and female) may be opposites, but one cannot exist without the other.

When asked about her inspiration for this poem, Bishop explains that she was reading a newspaper article and saw a typographical error: "Manmoth" was printed instead of "mammoth." She continues:

This poem was written in 1935 when
I first lived in New York City.

I've forgotten what it was that was
supposed to be 'mammoth.' But the
misprint seemed meant for me. An oracle
spoke from the page of the New York
Times, kindly explaining New York City
to me, at least for a moment.

One is offered such oracular
statements all the time, but often
misses them, gets lazy about writing
them out in detail, or the meaning
refuses to stay put. This poem seems to
me to have stayed put fairly well--but
as Fats Waller used to say, "one never
knows, do one? (Poet's Choice 103).

Bishop accepts the possibility of vacillating meaning, makes

a judgement about the "static" meaning of this poem, and then sets the whole thing in motion by saying "but you never know." Tensely balanced between the oracular and the ordinary, the creative and the objective, both her poem and her commentary emphasize the impossibility of direct, simple representation.

Departing from the surreal quality of "Man-Moth," "Imaginary Iceberg," and "The Map," "Large Bad Picture" uses less alien but nonetheless shifting perspectives to further explore the relationship between objective and subjective description. Like "The Map," this poem positions the speaker/poet looking at another form of representation--this time a painting. Another "fictive" element, the speaker's memory, will fuse with art and poetry to form a momentary "new" fictive reality in which all three mesh. This moment is merely a temporary synthesis, however, and the questions at the poem's close signal the resumed tensions between seeing and recording observation. This introduction of memory as a synthetic, fictive device, a classic modernist, post-romantic move, will be important when Bishop begins writing about her childhood in later books.

In "Large Bad Picture," Bishop manipulates the speaker's perspective, but she never lets the persona completely lose sight of the fact that he or she is looking at a work of art. With this move, she foregrounds the process by which tensions inherent in reading and interpreting interact with the tensions in observing and

recording. Opening the poem by referring to her great-uncle's painting simply as "a big picture" (4), the speaker continues this broad description as she notes the cliffs "receding for miles on either side" (5) and the "flushed, still sky" (6) that form the painting's background. As she continues gazing at the painting, the focus of the poem narrows and she begins noticing that:

On the middle of that quiet floor
sits a fleet of small black ships,
square-rigged, sails furled, motionless,
their spars like burnt match-sticks.

And high above them, over the tall

cliffs'

[t/o]

semi-translucent ranks,

are scribbled hundreds of fine black

birds

[t/o]

hanging in n's in banks. (13-20)

Despite minute details like the "square-rigged" sails (15) or the "hundreds of fine black birds" (19), the simile "like burnt match sticks" (16) and the word "scribbled" (19) force the reader to remember that a painting (a bad one), and not an actual scene is being described. As sound enters the poem, however, in the form of the "crying" of the birds, the focus abruptly shifts, and we are in the scene, instead of looking at it:

One can hear their crying, crying,

the only sound there is
 except for occasional sighing
 as a large aquatic animal breathes.

(21-24)

The sensuous detail of a walrus-like creature or whale sighing and the sudden aural focus of the poem are triggered by the speaker's memory: the nature of the description changes because the speaker's memory is momentarily linked to the objective observation. The visual touchstones that have dominated the discussion up to this point are transformed as they synthesize with the subjective experience of the speaker.

This discovery of a new world within the world of the poem continues in the dizzying descriptions of the sun in the following stanza:

In the pink light
 the small red sun goes rolling, rolling,
 round and round and round at the same
 height [t/o]
 in perpetual sunset, comprehensive,
 consoling. (25-28) [t/o]

With the word "perpetual" (28), the static world of the painting returns. Although the speaker tries to regain this connection, musing about how and why the ships came to the harbor, the immediacy of the earlier stanza is gone. Yet, for a brief moment, the speaker's memory of her great-uncle remembering "the Strait of Belle Isle or/some northerly

harbor of Labrador" (1-2) merged with the painted images and her imagination to create a new, albeit fictive reality. This "new reality" is analogous to the ambivalent feminine between space occupied by the Man-Moth. This moment is not strictly aligned with either the visual/empirical or the memory/subjective, but is instead a momentary synergism of the two.

Although there is no named first person speaker in "Large Bad Picture," the climax or epiphanal moment in the poem is engendered by the subjectivity and memory of the speaker as he or she is looking at the painting. The speaker sees it differently and uses different language to describe it when he or she is "involved" with her subjective memory. When Bishop chooses to use a first person speaker in North & South, the subjectivity of that speaker changes the scene being viewed as well. In fact, the changing perspective is usually the topic of the poem. Many of the poems containing first person speakers in North & South focus on the different perspectives and distortions engendered by the subjectivity of these narrators.

In "Love Lies Sleeping," the initial metaphor of "earliest morning" as a train "switching all the tracks" (1) foreshadows the changing perspectives and succession of gloomy metaphors that make up the body of the poem. The explanation for this gloom occurs in the last stanza as morning comes to one

whose head has fallen over the edge

of his bed, [t/o]
 whose face is turned
 so that the image of

 the city grows down into his open eyes
 inverted and distorted. No, I mean
 distorted and revealed,
 if he sees at all. (54-60)

The speaker refers initially, in line five of the poem, to the morning sun coming into "our bed." From this point she shifts to a first person pronoun suggesting that her perspective differs from that of the person sleeping with her. The speaker's gloomy view is linked to an implicit problem in her relationship with her lover. The evidence that this man is the problem is provided in the final lines. As the vision of the city enters this person's eyes, he cannot distinguish the difference between "distortion" of reality and "revelation": his subjective interpretation of events is what causes the speaker to view the world from a melancholic perspective.

Although lacking the "double" subjectivity of the previous poem, the rather fanciful "A Miracle for Breakfast" also questions the reality/perception nexus as the plural first person speakers hungrily await the miracle "scheduled" to occur on a hotel balcony. Viewing reality in empirical terms, the protagonists of the poem miss the irony of waiting for a miracle in much the same way that people would

wait for a train. This ironic tone suggests in many ways the tragic irony of Auden's "Musee des Beaux Arts." While they wait, criticizing the man trying to turn a crumb and a cup of coffee into "gallons" (36) of coffee and "loaves"(11), the "miracle" occurs "on the wrong balcony" (39). The balcony is only "wrong" because it is not the one that they are methodically and trustingly looking at. "The Unbeliever," "Sleeping on the Ceiling," and "Sleeping Standing Up" make similar points as in all three poems, the speakers hope to change reality by changing perspective: the unbeliever views the sea, sparkling and "hard as diamonds" (26) as dangerous; he therefore refuses to leave his place atop the mast and join with the rest of the ship. The only reason the sea looks "hard," however, is because he is so far away atop the mast. Similarly, the speakers in the two "Sleeping" poems see serenity in the impossible: "Sleeping on the ceiling" would let the speaker forget the troubles symbolized by the "peeling wallpaper" and "locked gates" (6-7), but to get to the ceiling, she envisions impossibly tunnelling under the wallpaper and just hanging from the ceiling. The speaker of "Sleeping Standing Up" posits that the "ninety dark degree" (2) angle created by lying down fallaciously structures the world of dreams and lets the dreamer think that he or she can survive doing dangerous things. If the speaker could sleep standing, she suggests, he or she would be more apt to see things as they really are and find the home symbolized by the "never found"

cottage at the poem's close (24).

The first person speaker of "Paris, 7 A.M." probes the problems of subjectivity and perception as well. The speaker's meditation on the courtyard below is compared to three different ways of perceiving: "It is like introspection/to stare inside, or retrospection,/ a star inside a rectangle, a recollection:" (14-16). In this case, prolonged perception creates changes in the speaker's mind, not in the view of the scene itself. The same is true in the much-anthologized "The Fish." The speaker catches a venerable battle-worn fish and as she contemplates it, she subtly changes. The fish is initially described as "tremendous" (1). This estimation changes as the speaker views the "brown skin" hanging in strips like "ancient wallpaper" (10-11), the "barnacles" speckling his belly (16), and the "tiny white sea-lice" (19) that infest the fish's gills. These ugly, "negative" traits cause the speaker to re-evaluate: the gills become "frightening" and "crisp with blood" and able to "cut so badly--" (24-26). The dashes that isolate this phrase suggest that the word "cut" brings the speaker back to the fish's predicament and her view changes again. The inside of the fish now becomes beautiful: "the coarse white flesh/ packed in like feathers,/the big bones and the little bones,/ the dramatic reds and blacks/of his shiny entrails" (27-30). The subjective mind that saw the fish as gruesome and dangerous has within a few lines transformed fish guts into aesthetic

objects. As the speaker continues to examine the fish, the various leaders broken off in its jaw (50-64) and the battles implied by these cement the speaker's admiration for the fish until "victory filled up/the little rented boat" (67) and "I let the fish go" (76). The speaker's pride at catching a tremendous fish is transformed into pride at letting the fish back into the water. The fish hasn't changed, but the "reality" has changed as the speaker's perception has changed. In all of these poems, the crucial issue is the "feminine," uncertain space between the actual/empirical seeing and the subjective interpretation.

Not all of the poems in North & South illustrate this destabilizing, energizing force. "Casabianca," "The Colder the Air," "Wading at Wellfleet," and "Seascape" read like poetic exercises or practice runs for the more powerful poems. The poems that "work," however, demonstrate the same contradiction and motion and force as "The Monument," which asks in the first line "Now can you see the monument?" and focuses us again on the dangers and temptations inherent in reading and writing. First described as a "box" (2), and then just "wood" (1-2), then later "horizontal boards" (24), the monument changes shape and connotation and significance with every refutation and change the speaker makes. After it metamorphizes through stages ranging from "ancient promontory" and "ancient principality" (35-36) to "a temple of crates" (55) to solid, or maybe hollow, "artifact" (59), the monument's protean edges are finally defined at the end-

-or are they?

the bones of the artist-prince may be

inside [t/o]

or far away on even drier soil.

But roughly but adequately it can

shelter [t/o]

what is within (which after all

cannot have been intended to be

seen). [t/o]

It is the beginning of a painting,

a piece of sculpture, or poem, or

monument, [t/o]

and all of wood. Watch it closely. (73-

80)

The only thing we really know after reading this stanza is that whatever the thing observed is, it is made of wood. Everything else is fluid. The contents may be inside or very far away. The repetition of "but" introduces further doubt, which is only compounded by the unsure "roughly" and "adequately": whether the contents need to be sheltered is as uncertain as whether they are "intended" to be seen. The final declarative statements promise certainty but provide simultaneous alternatives: painting, sculpture, poem, or monument. In fact the only statement we can take without reservation is the final one. The words and meaning and perspective in "The Monument" shift and contradict and undercut to produce a resonating, powerful meaning that

echoes that of the earlier poems. The objective poet lauded in reviews has emerged as a subversive voice questioning reading and interpretation, reality and representation, and the role of the critic and writer. These essential questions do not paralyze Bishop. Instead, she controls the doubt and instability and uses it to fuel additional poems. If "The Map" can be seen as a guide to the reading of North & South, this first book can be seen as advice on how to read what follows. In the words of Bishop herself, "Watch it closely."

Notes

1. The traditional interpretation of geography and cartography is that they are the most "objective" and boundaried branches of the "soft" sciences. Few things seem more exact than the measurement, representation, and relation of specific places to other specific places. In recent years, however, geographers, like other post-modernist thinkers, have become interested in the nature and implications of representations. The result of this interest is a sub-branch of the field known as phenomenological geography. Geographical scholars such as Yi-Fu Tuan in essence ask the same questions that Bishop asks in "The Map": what are the implications of a map's color, size, the placing and arrangement of the names of towns? Using rural, urban, and historic examples, Tuan implies that "culture" dictates our perception, recording, range, and "awareness" of space (Space and Place 148). Tuan further suggests that naming and description of place have as much to do with people's perceptions of space as do the actual represented dimensions, mountain ranges, and topographical delineations ("Language" 692).

Robert Sack, another phenomenological geographer, expands on this idea:

Geography, through cartography, has
already done much to coordinate some of

the differences among perceptions and descriptions of space that result from different technological levels, ages, personal orientations, and degrees of abstractions. (6)

He adds that a map can and does depart from the one-to-one representation traditionally associated with it to provide a "standard yet flexible description of space" (6). E. Relph is more specific, as he notes the difference between the "personal" geography of "memory, fantasy, and present circumstances" and the "formal, academic geography" which describes empirically. Relph stresses that the relationship between these two branches is not a dualistic one but a continuum or "epistemology": formal geography flows from and is connected inextricably to personal geography. Later in his discussion, he continues on this theme, stating that "setting and meaning combine in the direct and empathetic experience of landscapes . . . All of these dialectics are interrelated in a place" (48).

Bishop, of course, could not have read these geographers. All but Relph were published after her death. Their research and conclusions, however, help to validate the connections between linguistic and spatial representation that occur in "The Map." Bishop's explicit questions about the colors and construction of maps and her implicit interrogation of the resonating dynamics of

representative language are shared and pursued by experts outside the fields of literature and literary criticism.

2. All references to Bishop's poetry are from The Complete Poems: 1927-1979.

CHAPTER III

DECONSTRUCTING CULTURE IN

A Cold Spring

In North & South, Bishop taught the reader to mistrust the conventional, direct relationship between meaning and text, word and referent. By creating seemingly objective descriptions and surfaces and then injecting elements that almost simultaneously undercut and destroy that objectivity, she encouraged the reader to doubt first impressions and assumptions: readings and interpretations are never north or south, but, as her title suggests, north and south. Thus, meaning is never exclusively "in" vehicle or tenor, symbol or referent, word or connotation. The meaning is never at one "pole" or another, but resonating in between. One pole simultaneously negates, defines, refutes, explains, and destroys the other.

With this in mind writers (and readers as well) have choices: they can look away from the seemingly entropic implications or they can accept and use their disruptive potential. They can become hypnotized and paralyzed by the vibrating meaning or they can create a frame, via symbol or paradigm, fully aware of the temporary and limited power of the frame.

Bishop chooses to accept the limitations of linguistic

frames and exploit the energy that lies within them . She fuses the instability and doubt produced by this awareness with celebration of the pluralistic meaning that lies between the binary poles of language. Fully aware of the instability of the written word, she nevertheless continues to write. In A Cold Spring, her second book, Bishop moves from interrogating objectivity and representation to questioning internalized assumptions and cultural icons. Using pastoral landscapes and speakers' memories of gentler times, Bishop challenges both the cultural valorization of innocence over experience and the traditional opposition of innocence and experience. Neither state is a viable model for living or thinking, and readers programmed with an unexamined ideological separation of the two will be trapped into inaccurate readings of Bishop's poems. Bishop will also interrogate the opposition between ignorance and understanding and expose the fallacious dichotomy present there. Finally, she will counterpoint love with sex or indifference, and trip readers as they skim metaphor or stray detail and make culturally predictable and correct assumptions.

The pastoral bower that Bishop visits in Cold Spring is not the Theocritean bower of the ancients. C. Hugh Holman describes the pastoral in literature as a various and changing tradition. Beginning with Theocritus' Idylls, which were third-century sketches of the ideal lives of shepherds, the pastoral became, for the Greeks, descriptions

of bucolic harvest festivals or the laments of love-lorn shepherds. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the pastoral became a stylized, conventional vehicle for predictable poems about love amidst the splendor of nature. By the modern era, poets as various as Frost and Roethke were being hailed as "pastoral" just because their poems were set in rural landscapes (320-21).

Bishop's pastoral resembles the pastoral of the seventeenth century more than that of any other century, but she harkens back not to the conventionalized love poem, but to the more complex pastoral of a poet such as Andrew Marvell. Rosalie Colie notes that Marvell departs from one of the key assumptions of the pastoral. Traditionally, the pastoral landscape has reflected the state of mind of the shepherd speaker: the speaker's happiness was reflected by the shining sun and the sadness or lament was accompanied by clouds and storm. Marvell questions and complicates that relationship. The speaker goes to the landscape to escape his problems, but his difficulties follow him (331). The pastoral bower cannot provide refuge. Thus, the landscape in Marvell's "mower" poems, for example, continuously thwarts the speaker. Joseph Summers suggests a similar point as he argues that for poets such as Marvell, the "vernal wood" that "spoke unambiguously to the human heart" is absent (127). For Marvell, Summers adds, "human moral criteria do not apply" to the indifferent and changeable world of nature (134). Thus, the mind and heart of the

speaker are destined to be alone and isolated whether in the heart of the city or standing amidst the splendor of a meadow. Colie suggests that "in a fallen world, even pastoral innocence is not innocent enough" (42). It lacks the power to heal and restore the speaker's mind: communion with pastoral nature will not replace the speaker's troubled spirit with the seeming innocence and happiness of nature. If we argue that it can, that it does, Bishop will remind us in Cold Spring that our opinion is based in our own perceptions of what innocence and experience, happiness and pain actually are. It is our perception of the pastoral bower, not the bower itself that is key.

David Kalstone perceptively notes this use of the pastoral in Bishop as he argues that Bishop chooses selectively from the pastoral tradition. She isolates her speakers in landscapes ("Conjuring" 252), focuses on their subsequent meditative explorations (264), and draws ambivalent conclusions from their musings (264). Jerome Mazzaro agrees as he views Bishop's relationship with nature as that of a "relativist" who sees life as a "dialectical process" between men and women and their environment (196). While Mazzaro notes the break between the minds of Bishop's speakers and their environments, his use of the word "dialectical" suggests a systematic movement from thesis and antithesis to synthesis. As North & South has proven, Bishop's poems resist that third step. Instead they resonate and question via contradictory, sometimes

paradoxical poles.

The impulse for such resonance is evident from the very title of the first poem of Bishop's second book. "A Cold Spring" is at once empirically factual (spring in many locales is still very cold) and poetically contradictory. Cold is not a word we readily associate with the animal-filled pastoral that will follow. This sense of unexpectedness is reinforced after the epigraph. Hopkins's line "Nothing is so beautiful as spring" prepares the reader for daffodils and frolicking lambs. Instead, we get a reminder in the first line that this is indeed a "cold" spring and that the expected rejuvenating details of pastoral spring are going to be counterpointed by something cold, contradictory, resistant:

A cold spring:

the violet was flawed on the lawn.

For two weeks or more the trees

hesitated; [t/o]

the little leaves waited,
carefully indicating their

characteristics. [t/o]

Finally a grave green dust
settled over your big and aimless

hills. [t/o]

One day, in a chill white blast

of sunshine, [t/o]

on the side of one a calf was born.

The mother stopped lowing
 and took a long time eating the
 after-birth, [t/o]
 a wretched flag,
 but the calf got up promptly
 and seemed inclined to feel gay. (1-14)

The colon after the first line signals that the speaker is going to provide details that will illustrate this cold spring. The speaker begins with violets, one of the earliest and most common of the spring flowers. After the title, the epigram and the first line, violets seem an empirically logical beginning. As the line proceeds, however, this empirical "truth" will be complicated. The violets in this particular cold spring are "flawed on the lawn" (2). Are the violets flawed? Have they been touched by a late frost? Are they imperfectly formed? Or does the presence of the violet "flaw" and mar the perfection of the tender spring lawn? The passive voice construction prevents a clear answer to these questions. In the work of a poet who pays meticulous attention to details and correctness,¹ this vagueness has to be deliberate.

Having thus destabilized the poem with the title and the first two lines, the speaker introduces more inconsistencies as the poem continues: "For two weeks or more the trees hesitated;/the little leaves waited,/carefully indicating their characteristics" (3-5). Suddenly, the poem is anthropomorphized: the leaves wait,

hesitate, and indicate just how they are going to look. The precision of these details is undercut, however, by the indefiniteness of "two weeks or more." The sound of these three lines resonates with inconsistencies as well. The heavy end-stops and the rather plodding declarative sentences of the first two lines are counterpointed with the bouncy, if irregular dactyls and the near-rhyme of "hesitated/waited/indicating." It is as if the "cold" of the title is represented in the first two lines and the traditional, pastoral "spring" is found in the next three.

The word "Finally," opening line six, makes the deliberation of the leaves seem even more calculated and tiresome, and it introduces yet another change in tone. The speaker abruptly pulls back out of the personification, and we are once again regarding the scene from without. Any perkiness connoted by the dactyls is now tranquilized by the leaden "grave green dust/settled over your big and aimless hills" (6-7). The possessive pronoun "your" in this line apparently refers to Jane Dewey, a friend of Bishop's to whom the poem is dedicated. If we follow the deconstructive readings of North & South, however, we can also see it as a reference to the reader: in this context, the phrase "your big and aimless hills" is a synecdoche for the pastoral image of spring that the reader carries in his or her imagination.

The speaker understands that the reader has read poems that speak of the earth waiting to be reborn; or poems such

as William Carlos Williams' "Spring and All," in which the cold, desolate "road to the contagious hospital" is the unlikely scene for spring's awakening. With that understanding in mind, the speaker manipulates the reader's cultural and literary assumptions about spring. The initial alliteration and the repeated monosyllables slow the reading, emphasizing the "your" and the leaden tone foreshadows the negative details about the birth of the calf that are to follow.

Undergraduate students are often horrified at the use of such an elemental physical detail in a poem--especially a poem about the "beauty of spring." "Why use such a nauseating, unpoetic detail?" they wail. "Is she trying to sicken us?" they ask. The answer of course lies not in the detail itself, but in the way that this detail relates to the others preceding it. In the first nine lines of the poem the speaker presents the aesthetic view of flawed spring, the anthropomorphized view, and the distanced and deliberately somber view: none of these is satisfactory for reader or speaker.

Despite its seeming indelicacy, the image of the cow eating the afterbirth combines the fecundity of the traditional spring pastoral and the bleakness of its inversion without the cliches of either extreme. The speaker understands the problem that readers might have with the image, calling it a "wretched flag," but nevertheless forces them to see, just for a moment, in a new way. Then,

almost as if to re-emphasize the point, the speaker tells of the calf "getting up promptly" and "feeling gay." By counterpointing the visceral detail with the expected pastoral image of a frolicking animal, the speaker illustrates the weakness of using cliched pastoral details by themselves.

Carolyn Handa notices this strange mixing of images and metaphors in Cold Spring and argues that Bishop's ambiguous and ambivalent metaphors are part of a process of self-discovery, both as a poet and as a woman. Handa suggests to be a female poet in Bishop's age meant finding a way to confront the way that one viewed oneself as a woman and then finding a way to create dialogue with surrounding male voices (371). By critiquing pastoralism and the "tradition" surrounding it, Bishop implicitly undercuts the canon and finds a new pastoral moment to record, a new space in which a woman poet can work. Linda Hutcheon notes this move in feminist jazz musicians who use "ironic distance" to create "reactionary" music that both critiques mainstream jazz and creates a new women's jazz (12).

Because Bishop did not embrace any overt critical or literary philosophy and because her attacks on the tradition seem random, some critics view Bishop as the worst kind of troublemaker: an unpredictable and continuously moving one. Helen Vendler calls Bishop's poetry "sinister" ("Poems" 827), a word that the casual reader of "The Fish" would not readily associate with her. Harold Bloom echoes this

sentiment, however, as he views Bishop as the most powerful and dangerous descendant of Emily Dickinson (6). Marianne Boruch repeats this charge as she speaks of Bishop's "dangerous double wealth: illumination and its fire" (118). Boruch's image is a particularly effective one, because it suggests resonating images, paradoxes, and oxymorons which show a brief flash, a glimpse of the new, and then disintegrate, making room for the next word, and the next lines, and so on. Bishop's feminist and poetic power lies in this movement, this ability both to seduce the reader into making assumptions and then subtly invite him or her to revise those assumptions and read on with a new idea or image in mind.

She makes just such a move at the beginning of stanza two of A Cold Spring. The pastoral frolicking of the calf at the end of the first stanza is continued in the opening lines of stanza two--but not for long:

the next day
 was much warmer.
 Greenish-white dogwood infiltrated
 the wood, [t/o]
 each petal burned, apparently,
 by a cigarette-butt; [t/o]
 and the blurred redbud stood
 beside it, motionless, but
 almost more [t/o]
 like movement than any placeable

color. [t/o]
 Four deer practiced leaping over
 your fences. [t/o]
 The infant oak-leaves swung through the
 sober oak. [t/o]
 song-sparrows were wound up for
 the summer, [t/o]
 and in the maple the complimentary
 cardinal [t/o]
 cracked a whip, and the sleeper
 awoke, [t/o]
 stretching miles of green limbs
 from the south. [t/o]
 In his cap the lilacs whitened,
 Then one day they fell like snow.
 Now, in the evening,
 a new moon comes.
 The hills grow softer, tufts of
 long grass show [t/o]
 where each cow-flop lies. (15-33)

Stanza two continues the manipulation of time of stanza one: stanza one began identifying the season as "spring," then moved to increasingly smaller increments of time--"two weeks," "one day", and now in stanza two we arrive at the "next day." The poem seems to be picking up speed. One reason for this acceleration is the subject at hand: spring, once the days get warm, seems to happen all at once.

Another explanation, however, is that having shown the reader spring metaphors at both ends of the rhetorical spectrum, Bishop has primed him or her for more fracturing of the pastoral.

The speaker in stanza two will throw contradictory images at the reader in clumps. She introduces "dogwood," a traditional spring shrub, but it is sinister in its "infiltration of the wood." We see spring "petals" but they look as if burnt with cigarettes. The redbud is "blurred," "motionless," and "more like movement than any placeable color" all at the same time. Nathan Scott views all this frenetic detail and desire for exactitude as Bishop's "exuberant submissiveness to the hegemony of l'actuelle" (273). What she is exuberant about are the problems inherent in ever actually representing the empirical world in fresh, active, precise language. By showing the extremes of the forms she seems to work within, Bishop makes a place for herself and others like her to work.

Amidst all this metaphoric movement, the speaker goes a little crazy mid-stanza, and the poem turns into a surreal pastoral landscape with cardinal as draconian ring master, deer practicing deer-like pastoral behavior, and mechanical sparrows wound up tight enough to last the entire summer. As the tension of these images reaches its peak, the poem abruptly changes direction and with the crack of the cardinal's whip, the land is personified with the trite image of the waking sleeper with a head of falling blossoms

and limbs like green shoots. Having again undercut the standard images of the "spring poem" and exhausted the reader by using ambivalent, contradictory, or tired images, the speaker pauses briefly again and creates a new, alternative image.

Again, the unexpected, non-poetic detail arrests the reader: this time it is grass, long and fluffy enough to indicate and frame each cow-pie in the field. Riveting the reader with another surprising detail, the speaker then expands the new image:

The bull frogs are sounding,
 slack strings plucked by heavy thumbs.
 Beneath the light, against your white
 front door, [t/o]
 the smallest moths, like Chinese fans,
 flatten themselves, silver and
 silver-gilt [t/o]
 over pale yellow, orange, or gray.
 Now, from the thick grass, the fireflies
 begin to rise:
 up, then down, then up again:
 lit on the ascending flight,
 drifting simultaneously to the same
 height, [t/o]
 --exactly like the bubbles in champagne.
 --Later on they rise much higher.
 And your shadowy pastures will be

able to offer [t/o]
 these particular glowing tributes
 every evening now throughout the summer.
 (34-49).

In this expanded lyric moment, the speaker shows a capacity for precise, new, moving description only hinted at in stanza one. Having opened up a space in the pastoral by fracturing and splitting it with surprising images and contradictory metaphors, the speaker gives us a new set of images or visual nomenclature for spring: frogs like mellow bass strings; delicate, dusty iridescent moths on an open screen door; fireflies. The image of the fireflies seems to signal a shift, however, and the tone changes. Does the image of fireflies remind the speaker of Marvell's pastoral "glowworms" and wrench her from her new lyric images? Is it self-consciousness at being caught in such an unguarded lyric moment? The poem's movement suggests that it is the movement of the fireflies that arrests the speaker's attention.

The respective images of frog and moth are very brief, powerful images. As the stanza progresses, the speaker allows herself to elaborate about the fireflies, and the unnecessary description of up, then down, then up again recalls her to the deer, "practicing" leaping earlier in the stanza. Caught in the act of cliché or unnecessary description, the speaker assumes the self-consciously poetic tone of the earlier "cigarette butt" language: the bubbles

are exactly like champagne; later they will rise even higher. Just in case you missed the clever simile, the speaker implies, I will pin it down with precision. She moves to the other pastoral, sweetly lyric extreme in the poem's final lines and gains emotional distance from her unguarded moment as she offers the reader "glowing tributes" now and "throughout the summer." Bishop adds new images to the worn concept of the pastoral by juxtaposing pastoral cliches with new, shocking images. She offers original, lyric moments by setting self-consciously poetic language against fresh, precise images such as the moths. Neither of these rhetorical extremes, Bishop suggests, can be used exclusively. There must be a balance between the vulnerability of poetic sincerity and the protective screen of poetic language. An awareness of the inherent limitations of language is the key: no matter how original or lyric an image or line is, it is still a mere representation, fraught with all the ambiguities and inconsistencies that "The Map" suggested accompany linguistic representation. Similarly, the most cliched of constructions has some genuine emotion or impulse behind it: the speaker either cannot find unique words in which to express something or the emotion is so strong that the cliché serves as an insulating barrier.

Jane Shore suggests that Bishop's passion for precision and the use of qualifying words such as "exactly" signal Bishop's calling attention to the rhetoric inherent in

metaphors. Bishop, Shore posits, wants the reader to take care while reading her figures and never to forget their rhetorical intent (182-83). Far from being stabilized and oriented by fact and accuracy, as Gregory Orr suggests (32), Bishop mistrusts the power of all language used sloppily, not just metaphors. As North & South has shown, even the most objective language carries resonating and destabilizing contradictions. Like Auden in "Ode to Terminus," Bishop understands that poetic language is a "resonant lie" (64), but she also understands the importance of poetry--the need to keep singing even when the limitations of the poetic song have been revealed.

Despite the manipulation of the pastoral and the brief, lyrical moments, Cold Spring remains in many ways an unsatisfactory poem. The reader can see and appreciate how Bishop destabilizes the pastoral by upsetting and setting in motion the contradictions and cliches of the tradition. Readers familiar with Bishop can see how this impatience with a tired tradition creates anxiety, which in turn causes Bishop to doubt, destroy, and rebuild. Critics and readers of American literature can see Bishop's deconstructive, destabilizing poems as part of a woman's poetic tradition: Emily Watts suggests that unresolved issues and resonating contradictions have been a part of American women's poetry from Anne Bradstreet to the present (6).

What seems missing in these poems is a readily identifiable or recognizable persona or voice. Shore

suggests that Bishop simultaneously draws attention away from and toward herself by an "extreme fussiness" and "obsessive" concern for getting things right (183). Shore is correct in linking Bishop's ambivalence about self-revelation to her rhetorical game playing, but Shore's language also suggests that some psychological anomaly in Bishop makes this unavoidable. Bishop maintains an objective and rhetorical remoteness in the early books by choice not by compulsion. In keeping with her discomfort with confessionalism and her refusal to appear explicitly as a "woman" poet, Bishop uses empiricism and objectivity to distance herself in North & South. In Cold Spring, issues of pastoralism, innocence, and experience are the battleground. Bishop is "trying out" her voice, disguised in various ways, before she will claim it via a name or an association with place in later books. The issues of rhetorical power and control, innocence and experience, and gender that form the first two books are the same issues that will fill the last two. There are certainly "voices" that guide and prompt us through these poems, but they are directors more than they are active, lyric presences. Part of what makes Cold Spring frustrating reading for many readers is that she seems to be experimenting with issues that are very personal, but it is at this point an abstract experiment--she will not mention them.

The abstract issues at stake in "Over 2,000 Illustrations and a Complete Concordance" are the polemic

distinctions we make between domestic and foreign, childhood and adulthood, innocence and sin, and holy and profane. The concrete scenario is that of a traveller who goes to the Holy Land to find meaning and answers among the strange and "primitive" peoples. Hoping to find mystery and "rebirth" and holiness, the speaker instead finds cynical commercialism and a "hole." In the poem's final stanza, the speaker is leafing through the Bible, wondering why the answers that he or she seeks are neither in the holy book, nor in the place where the "holy" acts occurred. Although this poem takes place among the dry, ancient ruins of the Holy Land and not in a grassy meadow, elements of the pastoral shape this poem's theme as well. Lacking something in his or her day to day existence, this traveller has journeyed to find satisfaction: something or someone that will "speak" to the stirrings that are making the speaker dissatisfied. The traveller is on a deliberate errand; she has an agenda of things to accomplish. She has gone to a new landscape to escape one psychological and emotional world and "discover" another. But like Marvell's mowers, the speaker goes to the "bower" in search of peace and harmony, only to find that the ambivalence has accompanied him or her.

This characteristic tension is clear from the poem's title, which reads like an evangelical newspaper advertisement for a "new and improved" edition of the Bible. This document, the title tells us, contains two thousand

ways in which you can visualize or put yourself into the unfamiliar scenes. In addition, it has a complete listing of the important words that the author uses and the locations of where these words have been used. The word "concordance" signals something else as well. The primary meaning of "concordance" is not list, but "harmony" and agreement. The central and unresolved conflicts in this poem will be between the speaker's heart and how he or she "should" feel, between the travel brochure and the actual trip, between the dreams of childhood and the tediousness of adulthood. A more telling title would be "Despite 2,000 Illustrations and a Complete Concordance": seeing all the sights and reading all the books and following all the cross-references will not ease the discord in this speaker's mind.

The problem is clear from the first line as the word "thus" suggests a simple cause/effect logic that falls apart with the conditional word "should."

Thus should have been our travels:

serious, engravable.

The Seven Wonders of the World are tired
and a touch familiar, but the

other scenes, [t/o]

innumerable, though equally sad and

still, [t/o]

are foreign. Often the squatting Arab,
or group of Arabs, plotting, probably,

against our Christian Empire,
 while one apart, with outstretched arm
 and hand [t/o]
 points to the Tomb, the Pit, the
 Sepulcher. (1-10) [t/o]

This speaker/traveller, it seems, has followed a cultural formula in search of answers: he or she has travelled the world, the poem will tell us, in hopes of finding a catalyst, a stimulus that would help solve some of the speaker's problems. Failing, the speaker returns to the Bible, the book that served as model. After all, when Christ and the prodigal son and all the other "questors" in the Bible went in search of answers, they found them. Therein lies the speaker's problem. The "serious and engravable" experiences of the Biblical exemplars, which the speaker emulates, fail to help the speaker. Neither the symbol nor the actual referent provides refuge.

What the speaker finds instead of answers is another set of resonating oppositions. The "wonders" of the world are not wonderful: they are "tired/and a touch familiar," the familiar in the speaker's mind being the deadly enemy of "wonder." "Real" life in this Holy Land, however, is just as troublesome. Although it is "equally sad and still," just as tragic and poignant in its own way as the previous "wonders," it is "foreign." If familiarity neutralizes wonder, the viable alternative is not foreignness. The "other scenes" from which the speaker might learn things are

presented as alien, alienating, and threatening. Turning away from the traditional "wonders," the speaker is faced with two "foreign" possibilities--Arabs plotting against "our Christian Empire" or Arabs who are co-opted into being "tour guides" through the holy relics of Christianity. Both, however, are presented with the trite, cliched images of a five minute news blurb or travel brochure, and it is no surprise that the speaker finds no comfort in them.

As the stanza continues, the standard sights, the "required" stops on a budget tour bus through the area, are listed by the speaker. It is not the sights themselves, but the way that the speaker, and by implication, the tourists perceive them that is the problem:

| | |
|--|-------|
| The branches of the date-palms look | |
| like files. | [t/o] |
| The cobbled courtyard, where the Well | |
| is dry, | [t/o] |
| is like a diagram, the brickwork | |
| conduits | [t/o] |
| are vast and obvious, the human figure | |
| far gone in history or theology, | |
| gone with its camel or its faithful | |
| horse. | [t/o] |
| Always the silence, the gesture, the | |
| specks of birds | [t/o] |
| suspended on invisible threads above the | |
| Site, | [t/o] |

or the smoke rising solemnly, pulled by
threads. (11-19)

[t/o]

The speaker sees what he or she expected to see, what the Bible or associations and assumptions had prepared him or her to see. This "concordance" between expectation and reality is strangely ironic. Instead of having an epiphany or being transformed by the wonder of it all, the speaker sees "obvious," expected, structured ("files," "diagrams," "pulled by threads,") things. Bishop again undercuts the absolute and traditional relationship between the signifier and the signified, the place and the illustration, by making the connection fallacious and unsatisfactory.

The very decipherable, understandable nature of both the speaker's reading and travels, seems to be the problem:

Granted a page alone or a page made up
of several scenes arranged in

cattycornered rectangles

[t/o]

or circles set on stippled gray,
granted a grim lunette,

caught in the toils of an initial

letter,

[t/o]

when, dwelt upon, they all resolve

themselves.

[t/o]

The eye drops, weighted, through the

lines

[t/o]

the burin made, the lines that move

apart

[t/o]

like ripples above sand,
 dispersing storms, God's spreading
 fingerprint, [t/o]
 and painfully, finally, that ignite
 in watery prismatic white-and-blue.

(20-31)

These scenes, the speaker implies are easily "resolvable," but only if they are isolated, stopped somehow, framed. "Granted" or given a page in a book, a series of "catty-cornered" snapshots, or seen through a small window, "when dwelt upon" or studied, these images can be understood. Studied is the operative word here.

As the speaker describes the act of looking or reading, a strange thing begins to happen. The eye "drops, weighted," but weighted by what? The previous lines and title have positioned the speaker as either reader or traveller. The discussion of "pages" and "diagrams" late in the stanza suggests to the reader that the "book" is being discussed. Thus, when the reader encounters the word "lines," lines of text come to mind. "Weighted" in this context implies deliberation or concentration on the part of the reader. As the stanza continues, this simple equation is complicated. The weighted eye becomes a "burin" or a cutting tool used by marble engravers. Lines in this context become the lines on either side of the tool as the engraver makes his cut. As the burin cuts, the action is transferred from the tool to the lines themselves, which

"move apart/like ripples above sand, dispersing storms" (27-29). These storms then become "God's spreading fingerprint" and "painfully, finally" later "ignite/in watery prismatic white-and-blue" (29-31). The epiphany, the awareness that the speaker desires, occurs as he or she is immersed in the illustration, the scene, the photograph, the framed image, and forgets momentarily what it is supposed to mean. The scene ignites and begins to move when the speaker views it without intention. In "Map" Bishop's text began to move and vibrate when the reader's careful interpretation led to paradoxical contradiction. In this poem, the movement and insight occur when the speaker achieves what Bishop will later call "a self-forgetful, perfectly useless concentration" (Stevenson Elizabeth Bishop 66). If North & South was a model, a map of how to carefully read her work, "A Cold Spring" and "Over 2,000" suggest that A Cold Spring was written as a model of how, as readers and citizens, our culturally shaped expectations, our traditions, and our conventions can impede or even prevent us from seeing what we are looking at. The speaker in "Over 2,000" brought his or her ambivalence into the "foreign" pastoral, but he or she also brought a mind and an ability to look past or between the obvious poles, the contradictions.

This idea is confirmed in the second stanza as the speaker moves from what should have been in his or her travels, according to the Bible or atlas, to describe what actually was there. "Entering the Narrows at St. Johns,"

the speaker describes a picturesque, ordered, and altogether boring scene of which he or she is no part: "touching" goats bleated (33), "fog-soaked weeds" bordered the cliffs (35), "Collegians marched in lines" (37), the jukebox played (42), ships hung at anchor (46-47). Amidst this travelogue landscape, something disturbing appears:

The Englishwoman poured tea, informing
 us [t/o]
 that the Duchess was going to have
 a baby. [t/o]
 And in the brothels of Marrakesh
 The little pockmarked prostitutes
 balanced their tea-trays on their
 heads [t/o]
 and did their belly-dances; flung
 themselves [t/o]
 naked and giggling against our knees,
 asking for cigarettes. It was
 somewhere near there [t/o]
 I saw what frightened me most
 of all: [t/o]
 A holy grave, not looking
 particularly holy; [t/o]
 one of a group under a keyhole-arched
 stone baldaquin [t/o]
 open to every wind from the pink desert.
 An open, gritty, marble trough,

carved solid [t/o]
 with exhortation, yellowed
 as scattered cattle-teeth;
 half-filled with dust, not even the dust
 of the poor prophet paynim who once lay
 there. [t/o]

In a smart burnoose Khadour looked on
 amused. (47-64) [t/o]

The juxtaposition of the Englishwoman, her tea-table, and her pregnant friend the Duchess with the child-prostitutes dancing for cigarettes shocks the speaker out of the sanitized, selective travel pictures of the earlier lines and foreshadows the ironic inversion that will close the stanza. The poem certainly indicts the Englishwoman pouring tea for being able to gossip over cucumber sandwiches while, nearby, there are children plagued with smallpox surviving by prostitution, but the speaker is implicitly indicted as well. The speaker would not know about the Englishwoman if she weren't there drinking her tea. Journeying to a foreign land to find something meaningful, "serious," and "engravable," the speaker nevertheless participates in the ethnocentrism of the foreign dignitaries there.

This discrepancy between what should be and what is, between what one chooses to see and what really exists, is what will frighten the speaker most at the end of the stanza. Stumbling upon what should have been a "holy" grave, the speaker instead finds a hole, half-filled with

dust and open and vulnerable to the ravages of the wind and the desert. Despite the carved "exhortations," the holy signs and symbols of the life of the "poor paynim" who once rested there, the indifferent desert has taken over. The symbols and cultural icons and intent and faith of those who buried this person have no power against either the desert or the "amused" Khadour who regards the speaker's tragedy. Like the "arabs" of the first stanza, this onlooker is aware of the space between the symbol and its meaning, the "holy land" and the land in which he actually lives. Blinded by culture or religion or expectation, the speaker cannot see this.

The final attempt of the speaker to resolve these issues is presented in the final stanza:

| | |
|--|-------|
| Everything only connected by "and" and | |
| "and." | [t/o] |
| Open the book. (The gilt rubs off the | |
| edges | [t/o] |
| of the pages and pollinates the | |
| fingertips.) | [t/o] |
| Open the heavy book. Why couldn't we | |
| have seen | [t/o] |
| this old Nativity while we were at it? | |
| --the dark ajar, the rocks breaking with | |
| light, | [t/o] |
| an undisturbed, unbreathing flame, | |
| colorless, sparkless, freely fed on | |

straw, [t/o]
 and, lulled within, a family with pets,
 --and looked and looked our infant sight
 away. (65-74)

The book containing the chief iconography for those of the "Christian Empire" syntactically and physically begins to disintegrate in the speaker's hands. The words and symbols and paradigms that led the speaker to the Holy Land on a quest in the first place seem incidentally or accidentally connected now. The thrice repeated "ands" emphasize that the connection could be linguistic or situational, sequential or causal, not necessarily ordained or holy.

The book of the title has in this stanza become just a "heavy book" that is falling apart, dusting the speaker's hands with the gilt (guilt?) from its gaudy pages. As the book and the speaker's faith disintegrate, the most sacred of all Christian symbols falls apart as well. Asking why he or she could not have seen the Nativity of the illustration (static, "undisturbed," interpretable, safe) instead of the troubling sights that filled the trip, the speaker finally understands that nothing and nobody are going to supply the answer to this or any other question. The holy family in the manger becomes "a family with pets," a change that is not so much sacrilegious or cynical as despairing.

Wishing to "look our infant sight away," the speaker longs for a less abrupt and disillusioning awareness of the emptiness of the symbols that have always been trusted.

Bishop neatly emphasizes this point as she interrupts the question ("Why couldn't we have seen this nativity and looked and looked our infant sight away?") with the changed image of the holy family. While the reader may feel empathy for the speaker's angst at this point, Bishop prevents complete identification in her use of an additional and fallacious opposition. Breaking away from both the Christian symbolism and the faith in it or some foreign landscape to supply metaphysical truth, the speaker replaces these binary symbol systems with another one: namely the opposition between innocent childhood and jaded adult experience. The adult speaker longs to have had the opportunity to give up his or her innocent illusions more slowly, but this longing is undercut by the poem. Bishop will not allow the simple equation of childhood with untroubled innocence, and adulthood with weary responsibility. The poem has already shown us children who may be childish, but certainly are not child-like, in the image of the young prostitutes. In fact, if anyone in the poem has "infant" sight, it is the naive and narrowly focused speaker, not the children of Marrakesh. While giving a nod to the speaker's pain, Bishop nevertheless indicts him or her for replacing one fallacious set of binaries with another equally distorting set. The foreign pastoral bower has been replaced at the end of this poem by what the speaker views as the pastoral world of undisturbed childhood.

Ironically, the speaker ignores or does not recognize the only genuine, truly epiphanic moment in the poem, the "prismatic white-and-blue" moment of the second stanza, because it did not carry a religious or philosophical tag along with it. Bishop suggests through this poem that awareness or truth or knowledge may be possible, but not probable if we frame, name, and systematize it. Meaning is between the pages, in the "holes," and not in the holy books and their words.

The difference between knowledge and its opposite is also the subject of "At the Fishhouses," one of the few poems in A Cold Spring to receive serious critical attention. Initially, the opposition between two kinds of knowing seems direct, explicit, and simple: stanza one, the "land" stanza, presents the reader with the concrete world of empiricism; stanza two is a fulcrum, a transition between land and sea; and stanza three is the "sea" stanza, presenting the complicated business of real understanding. Elizabeth Spires reads the poem in this way, arguing that it is a "meditation on empirical knowledge versus absolute truth, the human problem of 'netting' or having anything with any degree of certainty in a physically ever-changing world" (20). She expands this opposition by further suggesting that while empirical information is easily gained, knowledge is an outgrowth of "pain and adversity" (22), a product of anagnorisis. Seamus Heaney echoes this distinction as he points out that Bishop departs from her

usual emphasis on fact and observation in this poem to explore the "different, estranging, and fearful" world of "mediated meaning" (305), meaning that defies a simple empirical equation.

Although the issues of knowledge and ignorance are certainly the subject of this poem, the conclusions that Bishop draws about this apparent opposition are far from simple. In fact, the poem is finally about the impossibility of drawing conclusions. By creating what appears to be a simple opposition and then complicating that opposition with ambivalent images and rhetoric, Bishop once again offers the reader a caveat about the nature of reading and the necessity for caution when approaching questions of truth. Going to a maritime pastoral landscape in search of knowledge is as fraught with problems as going to a spring meadow or a foreign capital in search of comfort and peace.

Yet the poem is full of details that invite such a reading. It opens with a lone fisherman mending his net at twilight, moves to a discussion of the sea as "bearable to no mortal" (48), alludes to protestant hymns, and closes with a classic Petrarchan oxymoron of knowledge as cold fire. The reader is tempted early on to see the fisherman in religious terms as the mediator, the "fisher of men," he who can arbitrate between the real world and the other world represented by the sea. Even if the religious overtones are ignored, the educated reader will hear echoes of the Wordsworthian solitary, the poet/prophet who can transcend

the phenomenal world:

Although it is a cold evening,
 down by one of the fishhouses
 an old man sits netting,
 his net, in the gloaming, almost
 invisible, [t/o]
 a dark purple-brown,
 and his shuttle worn and polished.
 the air smells so strong of codfish
 it makes one's nose run and one's eyes
 water. [t/o]
 The five fishhouses have steeply peaked
 roofs [t/o]
 and narrow, cleated gangplanks slant up
 to storerooms in the gables
 for the wheelbarrows to be pushed up
 and down on. [t/o]
 All is silver: the heavy surface of
 the sea, [t/o]
 swelling slowly as if considering
 spilling over, [t/o]
 is opaque, but the silver of the
 benches, [t/o]
 the lobster pots, and masts, scattered
 among the wild jagged rocks,
 is of an apparent translucence
 like the small old buildings with

an emerald moss

[t/o]

growing on their shoreward walls.

(1-20)

The description of these concrete details at the shoreline is softened somewhat by the faint, silvering twilight, but the details are complicated in another way as well. In symbolic terms, within a comparison of land and sea, the land would traditionally represent the concrete, the actual, the static. The sea would stand for the changeable, protean, mysterious, female.

A perfunctory glance at this point reveals the rudiments of this symbolic tradition, but Bishop defies the reader with her detail. The net of the solitary fisherman is "almost invisible": that which would aid him in capturing and holding the sea's mystery may or may not be there. The gangplanks point both up into the storerooms and down into the sea. The sea "swells," pregnant with surface tension and threatens at the enjambment to "spill over" (13-14)--but does not. The sea's surface is simultaneously silver and reflective and "opaque." The "benches,/the lobster pots, and masts" (15-16), however, are "apparently translucent," an odd quality for solid, wooden objects. Close reading of these descriptions reveals that all on land is not what it concretely seems.

Perhaps the most telling detail, however, is the description of the fish tubs:

The big fish tubs are completely lined

with layers of beautiful herring scales
and the wheelbarrows are similarly

plastered [t/o]

with creamy, iridescent coats of mail,
with small iridescent flies crawling on

them. (21-25) [t/o]

Later, there will be "sequins" (37) or more scales on the fisherman's vest. "Iridescent," of course, implies the shifting of reflected light--a changeable shininess of an object. This word also has as its root the word "iris," Greek for rainbow, a fact which strengthens the sense of resonance or shifting focus in this stanza. "Rainbow" suggests not only changeability but color variance and evanescence. When taken together, these details in a sense refute the concrete, empirical, and absolute quality of the objects on the land and prepare the reader to suspect what is to follow.

The small stanza that divides the first and third stanzas is fairly straightforward in its details, but the earlier stanza has invited the reader to question simple representation:

Down at the water's edge, at the place
where they haul up the boats, up the

long ramp [t/o]

descending into the water, thin silver
tree trunks are laid horizontally
across gray stones, down and down

at intervals of four or five feet. (41-
46)

The multiple, repeated prepositions in this stanza focus the reader downward by stages into the water, emphasizing the transition between land and water and the capability of man's going between the two realms. The careful reader has been warned of this easy equation earlier, however, by the "almost invisible" net and later by the "broken capstan" of stanza one. A capstan is a device used aboard ships to lift and hoist things out of the water. A broken capstan then prevents or complicates the transference of things from water to land and, by implication, human access to whatever it is that stanza three will tell us that the sea has to offer.

The opening of this final stanza seems in direct refutation of the first stanza's details

Cold dark deep and absolutely clear,
element bearable to no mortal,
to fish and to seals . . . One seal

particularly [t/o]

I have seen here evening after evening.

He was curious about me. He was

interested in music; [t/o]

like me a believer in total immersion,

so I used to sing him baptist hymns.

I also sang "A Mighty Fortress Is Our

God." [t/o]

He stood up in the water and regarded me
steadily, moving his head a little.

Then he would disappear, then suddenly

emerge [t/o]

almost in the same spot, with a sort of

shrug [t/o]

almost as if it were against his better

judgment. (47-59)

The stanza begins with a series of judgments about the sea that are too important and insistent to even be interrupted by a comma. There are no qualifiers--just "cold dark deep" and then, emphatically, absolutely clear. The errant reader not piqued by such unequivocal language from Bishop will surely be intrigued by its juxtaposition with another emphatic line: this element is bearable to "no mortal." The shifting, reflection of the land stanza seems unbelievably quixotic when compared to this initial description of the sea. In her indictment of the pastoral, Bishop plays with another tradition. By using protean details to describe the land and making the sea seem absolute and defined, Bishop challenges the traditional associations of male/logical/land and female/changeable/sea. As her inversion is incomplete and troubled, however, she avoids replacing one limiting symbolism with another.

What follows this description will complicate further. The seal with which the speaker converses is initially labelled as an alternative to mortal man: he and the fishes

are by implication somehow immortal or at least not subject to the limitations of man. Yet he is not completely one with the "cold dark deep" sea. Like the speaker, he cannot seem to turn away from the world alien to him: the speaker cannot keep from meditating on the sea and the seal cannot "against his better judgment" keep from bobbing to the surface to check out the speaker. Like the rest of the ambivalent elements in this poem, neither the speaker nor the seal is entirely a part of or alienated from the land and the sea.

As soon as the speaker tries to make the seal fit in with the land world, making a series of simple declarations about his religion and beliefs, the alien quality of his world enters the poem again:

Cold dark deep and absolutely clear
 the clear gray icy water . . . Back
 behind us, [t/o]
 the dignified tall firs begin.
 Bluish, associating with their shadows,
 a million Christmas trees stand
 waiting for Christmas. The water seems
 suspended [t/o]
 above the rounded gray and blue-gray
 stones. [t/o]
 I have seen it over and over, the same
 sea, the same, [t/o]
 slightly, indifferently swinging above

the stones, [t/o]
 icily free above the stones,
 above the stones and then the world.
 If you should dip your hand in,
 your wrist would ache immediately,
 your bones would begin to ache and
 your hand would burn [t/o]
 as if the water were a transmutation of
 fire [t/o]
 that feeds on stones and burns with a
 dark gray flame. [t/o]
 If you tasted it, it would first taste
 bitter, [t/o]
 then briny, then surely burn your
 tongue. [t/o]
 It is like what we imagine knowledge to
 be: [t/o]
 dark, salt, clear, moving, utterly free,
 drawn from the cold hard mouth
 of the world, derived from the rocky
 breasts [t/o]
 forever, flowing and drawn, and since
 our knowledge is historical, flowing,
 and flown. (60-83)

Trying to remind herself that the world is not one in which
 he or she belongs, in which such easy assumptions can be
 made, the speaker focuses quickly on the land behind: the

trees, which carry no reminder of the sea. Attention is soon rooted back to the water and the stones beneath it, however, as the speaker contemplates the absolute, and given traditional symbolism, ironic sameness of the sea swinging "indifferently" above the stones. This word choice is significant. Not only is the sea oblivious and "indifferent"; it is literally not different--not changeable. Or so the speaker thinks.

When the speaker deliberately tries to interact with the sea, she makes the same move that she does with the seal: comparing the frigid water to fire and burning and pain, she tries to frame and give meaning to the sensation. This is not the action of near freezing water on human flesh, she will later suggest, but anagnorisis--"like what we imagine knowledge to be." This personifying simile falls apart even as she utters it as the climax of the poem is interrupted by clumsy, self-conscious rhetoric. Lee Edelman calls such an interruption an "inevitable mediation of selfhood, the intrusion of the 'I,' that makes direct contact with any literality--any 'truth'--an impossibility" (180). The reader's assumptions about the pastoral symbolic tradition and the conventions associated with it are completely undone as the speaker is clumsily incapable of making a controlling connection between the sea and "knowledge" or whatever it is that she sees as the antithesis of the supposed empiricism of the land. If the sea is sort of "like" what we might "imagine" or think

knowledge to be, it is nothing like it--or we know nothing about knowledge and therefore have a hard time finding a metaphor for it.

This last conclusion is supported by the final lines of the poem as the speaker fumbles for a defining analogy or metaphor. Initially, knowledge is "drawn from the cold hard mouth/of the world" and then, the physiological fine points of this metaphor considered, "derived from the rocky breasts." The formal, academic quality of the word "derived" when used in juxtaposition with the dramatic "rocky breasts" is almost comic. The analogy continues, however, as knowledge is first a cycle, "flowing and drawn," and then, because we only really "know" the historical past, "flowing and flown." By the end of the poem, what is really "flown" is both the clear distinction between land and sea, knowledge and empiricism and the dramatic tone that the speaker had hoped for. The reader is left with an uncomfortable empathy for the fumbling metaphor-maker and a foggy sense of what knowledge is.

This is just where Bishop wants us to be. As Brett Millier notes, despite Bishop's interest in empiricism and observation and knowledge, like the metaphysical poets before her, she is "conscious of mystery above all else" ("Modesty and Morality" 54). Her attention to physical detail, adds Lynn Keller, is prodded by "fascination of all that does not meet the eye" (104). She refuses the simplicity of empiricism, the "forced" connection of

tradition, convention, and metaphor, and finally, the poet's power to represent literally or to represent effectively through rhetorical figures. In a letter to Anne Stevenson Bishop writes:

reading Darwin, one admires the beautiful, solid ease being built up out of his endless, heroic observations, almost unconscious or automatic--and then comes a sudden relaxation, a forgetful phrase, and one feels the strangeness of his undertaking, sees the lonely young man, his eyes fixed on the facts and minute details, sinking or sliding giddily off into the unknown.

(Elizabeth Bishop 66)

Bishop is not paralyzed by the entropic possibilities inherent in the problems of the tradition and representation; she is fascinated by the "strangeness of the undertaking." By dismantling or at least complicating the inherent, simplifying oppositions in a tradition such as the pastoral, Bishop continues the work that she started in North & South. In that book, she interrogated the traditional notion of objective representation. In Cold Spring, she uses the pastoral as a target for dismantling cultural assumptions about the limited, dualistic nature of innocence, experience, knowledge, spirituality, reality, and the canon tradition.

This questioning and deconstruction of absolute binaries, as Chapter I suggested, is an essentially feminist move, as are her questionings of the tradition and its conventions. The formless, entropic energy that results from such a deconstructive explosion is, according to Cixous and Irigaray, in itself "feminine" in nature. Having made implicit feminist gestures in her deconstruction of canonical and cultural assumptions, Bishop will end her second book by making a more direct move. Although gender itself has been conspicuous by its absence so far in Bishop's work, the "love poetry" that closes Cold Spring will speak directly to the issue of sex for the first time in the chronology of the poetry. Gender, ironically, will still remain oblique (a feminist move as well), as Bishop cagily uses direct binary models to question our assumptions about sex and love and gender.

Notes

1. In her conversations with Wesley Wehr, a student in her class at the University of Washington in 1966, Bishop becomes emphatic about her students' basic ignorance of how to use the language. True to the spirit of her mentor, Marianne Moore, Bishop is very serious about the correct use of the particulars of the English language. Responding to Wehr's question about the general quality of the poetry of his classmates, Bishop says:

There's another thing that bothers me very much: a tendency in my class for the students to write a kind of mood poem--about love, loss, dripping leaves, damp moonlight. Their poems are too vague. And if anyone in that class uses the word "communicate" once more, I'm going to scream! I hate that word! Those students are not there to "express" themselves; they're there to learn how to write a good poem.

I found out the other day, to my horror, that they don't even know the difference between a colon and a semicolon! Some of them speak so badly that I can't tell whether they're dumb

or it's some kind of local speech affectation or impediment. They keep saying things like, "Oh, Miss Bishop, you know how it is." And I'll say, "No, I don't know how it is. Why don't you tell me how it is? I'm not a mind reader."

I asked them if any of them possibly knew what was wrong with that ghastly slogan, Winston Tastes Good Like A Cigarette Should? There was complete silence in the classroom. I finally had to get out my Dictionary of English Usage and slowly read to them the definitions of like and as. When I got through, most of them were staring blankly at me. I could have walked right out of the classroom at that point. But I said, "If you students want so badly to express yourselves, why don't you bother to learn even the simplest things about your own language?" You studied with him--what did Theodore Roethke do about this sort of thing? What was I brought here to teach anyway?

CHAPTER IV

OPPOSITIONS AND REFLECTIONS:

Gender-Bending in

the Love Poems

The early poems of Cold Spring associated the pastoral refuge, whether it be a meadow, an exotic foreign locale, or a sea-shore, with innocence and youth: the baby animals of "Cold Spring", the ambivalent childhood of "Over 2,000 Illustrations," the nostalgic speaker talking with her grandfather's friend in "At the Fishhouses." In her critique of the pastoral tradition, Bishop undercut any uni-dimensional view of childhood, offering instead a varied and complicating spectrum of behaviors and possibilities. She makes the same moves in the poems about adults at the end of this book: adulthood, experience, sin, morality are no simpler to define than their complicated opposites.

The ninth poem of this twenty-poem volume, "The Prodigal," provides the perfect fulcrum between the poems interrogating pastoral innocence and those probing the world of adult relationships. Bishop's division of this book almost perfectly in half is cleverly ironic: "Prodigal" and the poems that follow it are about the impossibility and meaninglessness of such neat boundaries.

Bishop locates the young man of the parable on a farm,

anesthetized by alcohol and the "brown enormous odor he lived by" (1) and sure "he almost might endure/his exile yet another year or more" (13-14). Both physically and mentally, this man is caught between the obvious squalor of his surroundings and the ambivalent possibility of going home. "Home," the tone of this poem suggests, is not a childhood refuge, but a place that is not an easy alternative to the dung-encrusted sty in which he works:

Carrying a bucket along a slimy board,
he felt the bats' uncertain staggering
flight, [t/o]
his shuddering insights, beyond his
control, [t/o]
touching him. But it took him a long
time [t/o]
finally to make his mind up to go home.

(24-28)

Mired literally and figuratively in the morass of shit and adult experience, this man is nevertheless vulnerable to the frightening "insights" that threaten his walk along the "slimy" board. This balance, the liminal, "beyond his control" tight-rope walk, seems preferable to what waits for him at home. Since the nauseating, depressing details of his adopted home are obvious and explicit, the "insights" he has must be about the home to which he is loathe to return. In the Biblical version, of course, the Prodigal returns to the celebratory killing of the fatted calf. His father

rejoices and tells the good son "thy brother was dead, and is alive again, and was lost, and is found" (Luke 15: 11-32).

No such resurrection is suggested for this man. Though the Prodigal "took a long time" deciding to go home, the precarious, balanced imagery at the end of the poem urges the reader to equate his going home with finally sliding off the board. Adulthood and independence for Bishop are not characterized by the invulnerability of knowledge and experience--nor are they the opposite of the innocence and childhood associated with home. Instead adulthood, and all that is associated with it, is a staggering, balancing, shuddering set of choices and decisions and actions. Those wanting or accepting a convenient abstraction or social more to define the difference between innocence and experience, sexuality and sin will be thwarted and trapped by their complacency.

This is nowhere more evident than in "Four Poems," a poetic cycle that deals obliquely and craftily with the emotional, physical, and intellectual issues surrounding sex and love. The first poem, "Conversation," follows a now familiar pattern: Bishop presents the reader with ostensible binaries and then dismantles them--or at least implicitly urges the attentive reader to dismantle them.

The title of the poem sets up the first and most obvious opposition as a conversation implies questions and answers between two people:

The tumult in the heart
keeps asking questions.

And then it stops and undertakes to

answer

[t/o]

in the same tone of voice.

No one could tell the difference.

Uninnocent, these conversations start,

and then engage the senses,

only half-meaning to.

And then there is no choice,

and then there is no sense;

until a name

and all its connotation are the same.

(1-12)

Initially, the first set of oppositions is undercut via metaphor as it is the "tumult" of the heart and not the person that is asking the questions and giving the answers to those questions. The "tumult" as questioner completely dissolves any connotations of logical neatness as the very nature of a "tumult" suggests chaos. This is not a tidy, systematic series of questions and answers. Despite the direct, simple language and the careful precision of "stops and undertakes to answer," the poem becomes even more chaotic by the end of the short stanza. A kind of whirling vortex is created as the questioner answers his own question

and no one can tell the difference between the questions and the answers: the questions become the answers. The last line of the stanza provides an even more disturbing unhinging of the neat distinctions as "no one" signals that the speaker feels somehow that the world has or could have access to the questions of the heart. "No one" implies that if "everyone" were presented with this evidence, not one person could determine the answer. The internal personal conflict has a public or archetypal dimension as well.

Stanza two sets up another binary from the very beginning as the awkward word "uninnocent" forces the reader to pay attention to it. The sense of the line is that this tumultuous dialogue/monologue has happened many times before: these "conversations" start with full knowledge of where they will end and they follow a familiar pattern. By using the word "uninnocent" instead of "familiarily" or "knowingly," the speaker suggests a realm not innocent, but not necessarily jaded. To be "not innocent" is not absolutely to be experienced. Stanza two opens then with a nod both to the neurotic familiarity of the speaker's mind game and the vulnerability engendered by not being able to stay the chaos and tumult of the heart.

From "uninnocence," the conversations move to "engage the senses," but they only "half" mean to. In a poem so concerned with binaries, the reader cannot ignore that Bishop isolates "half-meaning to" in a line by itself. The senses and the mind each produce "half" a meaning. One is

incomplete without the other. Yet "engaged," they are an incomplete, ambivalent and "half-meaning" as well (to/too). This ambivalent resonance between mind and body, this "tumult," first negates choice, and then "sense," the repetition of the word suggesting both the earlier connotation of sensual emotion and "making sense," meaning.

This punning double-entendre sets up the final stanza as the speaker's concerns become strangely linguistic. Beginning with torment of the heart, the poem moves to the more abstract discussion of the rhetorical nature of the conversations in the second stanza, and finally to the questions of naming in the final stanza. As the speaker's pain and confusion increase, the level of formal, verbal control increases. In order to keep writing, the speaker must control the contradictions, the chaos, the entropy, and move forward. What was a whirling vortex of unanswered and unanswerable questions in stanza one is now a name and its connotation. The signifier "signals" one thing (a singular thing) but it connotes many things--which initiates stanza one's chicken and egg dilemma again. Which comes first, the name or the connotations that inform and define the name?

Commenting on what he views as the "failure" of Bishop's love poetry, Alan Williamson hears Bishop saying, via her "asceticism," that reciprocal love is impossible (97). She certainly points out the problems in the relationship in "Conversation," but her whole point is to undo absolute distinctions between reciprocated or

unreciprocated love, possibility and impossibility. He also objects to what he sees as her abruptness in the face of painful feeling, her "jauntiness which insists on representing defeat" as some sort of triumph (98). What Williamson is objecting to is Bishop's plurality: she temporarily controls anxiety and pain through rhetoric and language to fuel progress--she keeps writing. But she creates poems in which the contradictions are never fully resolved. The same energy that fuels progress fuels the movement that eventually undermines the binary oppositions that are the essence of language and western culture. Bishop does not want to destroy culture in the way that a more radical poet/feminist such as Adrienne Rich does, replacing it instead with a non-hierarchical community of women. Instead, she wants to question our assumptions about culture, to create a space for a more variable use of language, tradition, and convention.

This is in fact one of the things that alienated poets such as Rich from Bishop's work. In her review of The Complete Poems, Rich notes that she initially resisted Bishop's work both because Bishop was the one woman poet whom the "establishment" accepted and because she did not see how Bishop could be a model for a young poet such as herself (15). Knowing nothing of Bishop's life and resenting the fact that "Miss Bishop" was someone of whom her "patriarchal" college professors approved, Rich felt initially as if she were reading yet another timid American

woman writer. Looking back at Bishop's work, however, Rich senses that it was much more "courageous" than it had initially appeared to be. Underneath the "triumphs" of a survivor, Rich finally notes in Bishop the struggle that allowed that difficult and hard-won progress (15).

One of the reasons that young female poets had a hard time understanding Bishop, Rich suggests, is that instead of presenting her problems and dilemmas and pain from the inside in a lyric, for example, Bishop chose to approach her life in poetry from the vantage point of an "outsider." Rich posits that "Outsiderhood defines her vision and lets her see dilemmas of other outsiders" (16). Writing from the safe distance of the outside (the "voicelessness" of earlier poems), under what Rich calls the "false universal of heterosexuality" (16), Bishop could approach difficult and painful issues such as the one presented in "Conversation" without the personal revelation that would have made this exploration emotionally dangerous. Control and abstraction allow her to explore the troublesome nature of these relationships, recognize that there are no absolute solutions, and move on.

Rich's 1983 analysis of the ambivalent feminist response to Bishop is very perceptive: it is in fact echoed almost exactly by a young lesbian critic nine years later who describes initial alienation from Bishop, only to compare her later "epiphany" of understanding to "getting attention from the smart, popular girl I thought was too

good for me" (Selman 17). Rich's assumption that Bishop wrote exclusively "in the closet" or under the "false universal" of heterosexuality, however, is uncharacteristically imprecise.

Although no overt gender identifications are made in "Four Poems," pronouns and physiological details are used in such a way as to defy absolute gender identification, creating a very genderless and thus potentially homo-erotic space. By creating language that defies easy categorization or definition, Bishop writes in Cixous' "between" space; she accepts binaries and their deconstruction at the same time. Neither is valorized; the "two as well as the both" ("Laugh of the Medusa" 487) exist simultaneously. Thus, Bishop does not offer a destruction of culture but a means of continuously interrogating it.

In "Rain Towards Morning," for example, the "unsuspected hand" that is the catalyst for the orgasm that opens the poem is of unidentified gender, as is the "pale face" of its owner:

The great light cage has broken up
 in the air, [t/o]
 freeing, I think, about a million birds
 whose wild ascending shadows will
 not be back, [t/o]
 and all the wires come falling down.
 No cage, no frightening birds; the rain
 is brightening now. The face is pale

that tried the puzzle of their prison
 and solved it with an unexpected kiss,
 whose freckled, unsuspected hands alit.

(1-9)

Lorrie Goldensohn reads this poem allegorically, seeing the face as heaven's face and the cage as the cage of human existence in which we pass all of our days (37). She also sees the "event" not as an orgasm but a kiss, "a grand affair that has more to do with meteorology and clearing skies than with a terrestrial erotic invitation" (37). Yet even as she pins down metaphysical details, Goldensohn cannot find a place for the detail of those hands:

those freckled hands are obdurately,
 humanly present, hard to fit into tenor
 and vehicle; that terminal alit sets off
 another train of response, quite
 separate from the giant, ghostly
 figures, neither human nor animal that
 occupy the poems literal and figurative
 upper space. (37)

The reason that Goldensohn has trouble making them "fit in" with her scheme is that the poem itself sets up and then defies a neat binary scheme, whether metaphoric or thematic.

The poem initially seems divided into two neat parts and almost exactly in half. The first four lines describe a moment of orgasmic ecstasy, accompanied on the literal level by a crash of thunder and lightning, and the final five

lines describe "the moment after" when the rain falls and the lover returns to a more conscious, "rational" state. Such reading is basically sound and defensible: the cage of sexual tension "broken up in the air," the wildly ascending shadows of birds, the simultaneous falling away of the "wires" of rain combine to create an image of dizzying, radiating sexual bliss. The flashing images of cage, light, birds, and wires suggest the unconscious, "irrational" state of mind that accompanies physical desire.

This symbolic collage is interrupted abruptly in line two, however, as the subjectivity of the speaker breaks in with deflating exactitude: the number of wild, ascending birds is "I think, about a million." Amidst the ecstatic metaphors, this subjectivity intrudes to suggest that there is no such thing as a completely irrational, or thoughtless moment, even during sexual climax. The "I," so rare in a Bishop poem, causes the reader to pause as well. Is the "I" speaker the one having the orgasm? The reference to the hands and face of the "other" in the next section suggests this. This injects an additional note of subjectivity into the poem. The person experiencing the "great light cage" breaking has the intellectual distance to create the imagistic metaphor, and, on the literal level, to step back and objectively comment on the proportions of that metaphor. All of this happens, of course, in sudden flashes (like lightening and rainstorms) but this is exactly Bishop's point. One can never completely divorce the mind/body,

conscious/unconscious, rational/irrational connections.

The final lines support this reading as well. In the "post-coital" moment there is "No cage, no frightening birds; the rain/is brightening now." This definition by negation signals a return to the everyday, systematic world of the conscious and rational mind. In keeping with this, empirical details which attempt to explain what has just happened will finish the poem:

. . . The face is pale
 that tried the puzzle of their prison
 and solved it with an unexpected kiss,
 whose freckled unsuspected hands alit.

(6-9)

The lover's face is pale, a detail that can be explained by either its reflection of the light of the moon or the approaching dawn. What follows this simple empirical move is problematic in its very attempt at simplicity. All the details of the lovemaking that produced the explosion of the first lines are enclosed in very binary, logical metaphors: "tried" suggests not only "testing," but carries connotations of opening something that is locked. "Puzzle" connotes a purposeful jumbling of pieces that can and will be put back together (a direct inversion of the "broken" of the first line). "Prison" suggests a cause/effect logic of crime/incarceration or inside/outside, and "solved" carries not only causal tags of problem/solution, but very definite chemical rules and limits: "likes dissolve likes"; there is

a limit to how much can be dissolved in a known volume; solutions are limited by condition: temperature, pressure, and mixing.

The "catalyst" for undoing all of these binaries is binary itself. Again in this section, definition by negation is used: "unexpected kiss" and "unsuspected hands." The mysterious potentiality suggested by the "rhyming" of expect/suspect is neatly negated by a linguistic prefix--or is it? The rational, logical negation and description of these lines are undone in a sense by the final word "alit." Literally, the owner of the pale face solved or unlocked (with a kiss) the prison in which the metaphoric birds were caged and by implication started the lovemaking that led to the climax of the first line. The "freckled hands," grammatically speaking, however, have nothing directly to do with this process. The pale face solved it with a kiss, the poem tells us, and then, the "freckled unsuspected hands alit."

The isolation of this verb without an object leaves the possibilities for both denotation and connotation wide open. One possibility is the connotation of touching: the hands alit on the lover's body--but where? The poem leads us to view this alighting as a sexual caress--the kiss unlocked the prison, but it was the touch that sent the birds wildly from their cages. A secondary meaning of this verb enriches the poem even further. "Alit" also carries the connotation of descent or coming down after a flight.

This reading also carries a connotation of sexual touching--the unsuspected hand was metaphorically a part of the ecstatic flight of the first lines. An additional connotation finally dissolves the pretenses of post-coital rationality and logic in these lines as "alit" connotes fire--the touch of these hands ignited the "great light" that opens the poem.

The binaries of before and after, rational and irrational, spirit and body dissolve as Bishop shows us the impossibility of one absolute state of mind and body or of isolating either state--even in language. More intriguing, perhaps, is the fact that the primary binary, men and women, is conspicuously absent in this poem about oppositions and sex and love. Whose hand, the poem obliquely asks, is doing what to whom? For a reader ignorant about Bishop's sexual orientation (and when this poem was written that was almost all readers) this poem offers no clues; or rather, it leaves open the possibility of hetero or homosexuality. Bishop had ample metaphoric opportunity in this poem for phallic imagery--keys to cages, lightening--but she instead uses only neutral sexual clues. Hands and kisses and pale faces could belong to either sex.

While Adrienne Rich would see this gender neutrality as "in the closet" behavior, Joanne Feit Diehl sees it in another way. Diehl describes Bishop's "fluidity of gender" in the following way:

Rather than establish the lesbian as an

overt erotic position from which to write (Adrienne Rich's choice), Bishop distinguishes between eroticism and sexual identity, a distinction that allows her to deflect sexual identification while simultaneously sustaining a powerful erotic presence.

(Women Poets 92)

In an earlier article, Diehl sees this fluidity as a way of avoiding the "secondariness" associated with female and lesbian poetry ("At Home with Loss" 126). Ideas of primary or secondary, however, are exactly what Bishop hopes to deflate in these poems. She purposefully lets issues of gender remain questionable and unstated in order to foreground erotic tension without valorizing either lifestyle--and thus creating another hierarchy.

She immediately complicates even this "two, as well as both" paradigm in the third poem in the series "While Someone Telephones." On the literal level, the poem presents a scenario in which two lovers are together, one receives a phone call, and the "other" goes into the bathroom to allow the first privacy during the call. One of the players in this scenario is a man, identified by the "his" in the last line, but just who the man is and what gender the other two are remain unstated--even confusing.

Wasted, wasted minutes that couldn't be

worse,

[t/o]

minutes of barbaric condescension.

--Stare out the bathroom window at the

 fir-trees, [t/o]

at their dark needles, accretions to no

 purpose [t/o]

woodenly crystallized, and where two

 fireflies [t/o]

are only lost.

Hear nothing but a train that goes by,

 must go by, like tension; [t/o]

nothing. And wait;

maybe even now these minutes' host

emerges, some relaxed uncondescending

 stranger, [t/o]

the heart's release.

And while the fireflies

are failing to illuminate these

 nightmare trees [t/o]

might they not be his green gay eyes.

(1-14)

Readers trained in a literary canon filled with post-Freudian symbology will be tempted, and rightly so, to read this poem with an eye to its symbol pattern. The opening of the poem finds the speaker angry and hurt, cursing the incredible waste of hiding in the bathroom for politeness' sake. Exploding with the hyperbole that things "couldn't be worse," the speaker goes on to describe the minutes as

filled with "barbaric condescension." Modern readers may associate the violence and aggression of the word barbaric with the Freudian definition of the male--the active, aggressive sex. This phallic identification is strengthened in subsequent lines: the speaker stares at "fir-trees," sees their "needles" as "accretions to no purpose," describes them as significantly "wooden" and "crystallized," and listens to a "train that goes by, must go by." These overtly phallic images lead the reader initially to conclude that a female speaker is in the bathroom brooding because her female lover is receiving a telephone call from a man--a man in the bathroom feeling jealous over the same thing would not presumably fixate on his rival's penis.

This easy Freudian symbol pattern is undercut, however, by the positioning of the speaker and the two fireflies. While looking at the trees, the speaker sees two fireflies which "are only lost," a phrase which is isolated in a line by itself. The wording of this phrase is complicated in and of itself. Worded as it is, "only" could be read as merely--the fireflies are merely lost; they will find their way eventually. The primary meaning of "only," however, is "alone" or "by itself." Read with this connotation in mind, "only lost" suggests that the fireflies (and the speaker and her lover) are alone and lost. They are together physically, like the fireflies, but lost and alone in a permanent emotional or psychological way. The simultaneity of alone/together/lost refutes the simple binary symbolism

of the earlier phallic formula. It may well be a man who is telephoning, but the simple connection of train/phallic, phallic/man, man/aggression is being undercut.

This undermining continues as the train is compared to "tension," the connotation being that both are inevitable, penetrating. Tension is described in the following line, however, as emphatically "nothing" and "waiting." The phallic connotations of the train are in a sense neutralized or at least halted by the "female," passive, "emptiness." Tension is as inevitable as the passing of a train and it is a liminal lack.

When the "other" on the telephone is finally directly referred to, the line is significantly ambiguous as well: "maybe even now these minutes' host/emerges, some relaxed uncondescending stranger, /the heart's release"(9-10). Although the use of the word "host" is obviously an ironic product of the speaker's anger, the "double vision" that the speaker experiences, causing fir trees to turn to "nightmare trees" by the end of the poem, opens a space for another subtle connotation. The unhealthy tension and madness that the speaker feels as she hides in the bathroom suggests a reading of the word "host" with its biological, parasitic connotations as well. The inevitability suggested by the train imagery and liminal anxiety that suffuses the poem would support this glimmer of unhealthy symbiosis at least as a tonal echo.

This host, the poem goes on to tell us, may be

emerging, ostensibly from the room in which she was telephoning--but is it she who is the host of all of this anxiety? The poem up to this point leads us to believe that she is, but the appositive in the following line complicates this conclusion. The grammatical construction defines the host as "some relaxed uncondescending stranger,/the heart's release" (10-11). Why would the speaker's lover be a "stranger"? She could be a stranger in the sense that, after the phone call, she resumes her usual demeanor and is no longer condescending; instead she is the "heart's release" for the speaker again. As plausible, however, is a reading that sees the stranger as the man telephoning. He emerges in the sense that the speaker and, presumably, the woman on the phone both visualize him. He is relaxed and "uncondescending" because he does not know about the woman hiding in the bathroom--despite the fact that the last line suggests that she has definitely met him and his green eyes. "Heart's release" in this context would refer to the speaker's jealous summation that he is the heart's release for her lover.

This additional level of meaning would be supported by the final image pattern in which the fireflies that "fail to illuminate" are compared to the man's eyes. His eyes are green and gay but fail to really see what is in front of them. The speaker can see them, glowing and happy, but he cannot see her as she really is, as the other woman's lover, because this woman is keeping it from him. She must hide

her relationship in the nightmarish dark both literally and figuratively.

By using ambivalent grammatical constructions and teasing the reader with oblique, complicated gender-defining pronoun references, Bishop presents sexuality and its problems without offering a paradigm in which these problems will easily fit. By foregrounding the problem itself, emphasizing the universality of the painful emotion instead of the gender of the players, Bishop lures even an ostensibly homophobic reader into empathy. Just as the pastoral was "deconstructed" in earlier poems when the speakers found its traditional promises of refuge were empty, gender-based assumptions about sexuality, love, infidelity, and pain are dissolved in favor of a humanistic view of these issues.

In the final poem in this group, "O Breath," Bishop will be even more obvious about loading the poem with binary oppositions--this time even in structure--only to tease other deconstructive possibilities out of these very oppositions. Like Cixous, Luce Irigaray advocates theories of reading and sexuality that support this interpretation of the poem. Irigaray is a psychoanalytic critic who values Freud's frankness about sex in general, but refutes his negation of women as the passive, empty, "lacking" sex. Instead, she offers a "plural" view of women's sexuality, a view which abandons the teleological, phallogocentric linearity of male sexuality and focuses instead on the

spectrum of possibility in female sexuality. Using the female genitalia as her "paradigm," Irigaray will argue that it is possible to be separate and connected, two and one, signifier and signified all at the same time (This Sex Which Is Not One 23-24).¹

In "O Breath," Bishop will use markedly separate and opposite pairs of words and images--she goes so far as to create a dividing space through the middle of the poem via caesuras--only to show that our assumptions about these binaries must be unpacked and closely examined. This is evident from the first line of the poem as the speaker takes us literally to the heart of the matter:

Beneath that loved and celebrated
 breast, [t/o]
 silent, bored really blindly veined,
 grieves, maybe lives and lets
 live, passes bets,
 something moving but invisibly,
 and with what clamor why restrained
 I cannot fathom even a ripple.
 (See the thin flying of nine black
 hairs [t/o]
 four around one five the other nipple,
 flying almost intolerably on your own
 breath.) [t/o]
 Equivocal, but what we have in
 common's bound to be there, [t/o]

whatever we must own equivalents for,
something that maybe I could bargain

with [t/o]

and make a separate peace beneath
within if never with. (1-15)

What seems to be a nice tidy opposition--two lovers, two ideas about love--is complicated as the implications of those things being opposed are considered.

The poem begins with a discussion of the heart, the most logical scenario being that the speaker has his/her head on the lover's chest. Later, we will see that both/one are naked. The speaker begins by speaking of the nature of the heart "beneath that loved and celebrated breast" (1). Love and celebrity are not necessary opposites: the breast could be loved and celebrated by the speaking lover, or the loved-one could be famous and loved by all and the speaker. As the poem progresses, the tone becomes more complex.

The oppositions used to describe the heart could also be used to describe the relationship between the speaker and his/her lover: "silent" and "bored" (with the relationship? with the speaker?) and yet "blindly veined" (helpless and "blind" to the needs of the other?). The heart "grieves," but only "maybe" and "lives and lets/live." By qualifying with "maybe" and enjambing and isolating "lives and lets," the speaker reinforces the imperviousness of the lover that was implied with "blindly veined." The following line continues this impression as, on the literal level, the

heart beats and pauses, "passes bets," while on the connotative level the speaker sees the working of the lover's heart as being governed by chance-- a gamble.

The heart is in line five "moving" but "invisibly," a detail that suggests that the speaker is troubled and emotional, while the lover's heart beats physically, but is "unmoved" by the pain the speaker feels: the speaker cannot understand this silence (not "even a ripple"). The muted heartbeat, its "clamor" "restrained" by the insulating body, becomes a metaphor for the lover's silent imperviousness and the speaker's inability or unwillingness to understand it.

Having set up the scenario and the gulf between the two personae through the metaphor of the heart, the speaker moves outside the body to describe the chest of the lover. The speaker sees "nine black hairs/four around one five the other nipple,/flying almost intolerably on your own breath" (8-10). Initially, hair on a chest or a nipple suggests male to the average reader, but another glance at the poem reminds us that "breast" not chest is the word being used. Since most women have some hair around the nipple, this detail also testifies to the "absolute accuracy" for which critics have always praised Bishop. But in this case it seems to be used in the romantic, poetic sense: "tortured breast," "heart beating madly within my breast," et cetera? If this is truly a breast, then what is the gender of the speaker?

This question is answered by the non-answer that opens

the next line: "equivocal." Equivocal of course means not only "undecided," but that more than one interpretation is possible, which is precisely the point. The gender of the lovers is undecided, undefined, deferred by the poem, and this deferral continues until the end as the speaker baits the reader with language that can never be absolutely defined or positioned. We see that "what we have in common's bound to be there," a statement that could be read in a variety of ways. On the most literal level, the common interests of the lovers are a given even if the relationship is having problems--they can "work it out." Another reading suggests that the caesura emphasizing "common's" and "bound" is significant: what they have in common (gender?) is not only binding in a positive sense but constrictive. They are bound by convention from expressing their love, a reading supported by the previous poems. The next line supports this reading as well: whatever they possess (or connotatively, must admit) "equivalents for" is perhaps something that the speaker could "bargain with." The peace could perhaps be made within this relationship if the speaker were willing to admit and deal with the implications of their love. This "peace," the speaker warns, however, will be a "separate peace beneath/within if never with" (14-15). This conclusion could be read in at least two ways: the lovers could make peace between one another, separate from society, but be doomed in the homophobic age in which Bishop was writing to be seen as "beneath," lower

than everyone else, and never a real "part" of the culture. Or, because of the gulf between them, they could come to terms, separately, with their feelings, although they can never really be "with" one another. Either way, the poem gently indicts a society that would make this relationship so difficult. It does so, however, very subtly, by inviting the reader to make a judgment and then pointing out the perhaps unconscious biases in that judgment. Just as the reader must jump over the gulf of the caesuras, bridge the between space in order to understand the poem, the meaning is composed of plural possibilities, each significant in and of itself but connected to the other equally significant readings.

Although Bishop's dismantling of gender assumptions is most consistent and obvious in "Four Poems," there are two other slightly less successful love poems in Cold Spring that should be noted briefly. In Both "Insomnia" and "The Shampoo," Bishop uses images of the moon and water and reflection to perhaps suggest her lesbianism, while shying away from explicitly referring to it. Bishop does not disguise her sexual preference because she is ashamed of it. Instead, she lets gender remain unstated in order to deconstruct or dismantle the idea that a lesbian or gay love poem would be different from a heterosexual one. Lorrie Goldensohn notes that in "Insomnia," images of an angry, deserted moon reflected first in a bureau mirror and then a "body of water" signal a problematic love between two women:

the moon of course being "female" and the reflection signifying that both lovers are female (30-31). What Goldensohn fails to discuss, however, is the vulnerability with which this position is presented in the last stanzas:

So wrap up care in a cobweb
and drop it down the well

into that world inverted
where left is always right
where the shadows are really the body,
where we stay awake all night,
where the heavens are shallow as the sea
is now deep, and you love me. (11-18)

The last stanza presents the obvious inversions and reflections upon which Goldensohn perceptively bases her homoerotic reading of the poem, but these inversions, this "ideal" world are all conditional and the "care," the problems of the lovers are in real jeopardy if they are only wrapped cavalierly in a "cobweb." This sense of danger is signalled in the final line as the conditional dream is punctured: in this inverted world, the heavens would be as shallow "as the sea/is now deep." The enjambment reinforces and emphasized the important word "now." "Now" none of this idealistic inversion is possible, and the "love" between the pair "by the Universe deserted" (7) is in peril.

In "The Shampoo," a similar danger is emphasized as the unfolding of the love between two people is compared to the

"still explosions on the rocks" as delicate lichens grow by "spreading, gray, concentric shocks." Again, images of the moon signal that this may be two women in the poem and again, the delicate, fine metaphor used to describe and "enclose" the relationship. Stanza two of the poem will tell us that "Time is/nothing if not amenable." and stanza three:

The shooting stars in your black hair
 in bright formation
 are flocking where,
 so straight, so soon?

--Come, let me wash it in this big tin

basin,

[t/o]

battered and shiny like the moon. (11-

18)

The glib tone that told the "other" to wrap "care in a cobweb" could lead the lover to believe that time is her friend, but the images suggest something different. The idyll of the shampoo, like all pastoral images in Bishop, is imperfect. The speaker is glibly confident, but has no control over the path of the "stars," grey hairs in the shiny black as they flock to an unknown destination "so straight, so soon." Bishop's affectionate portrait of even happy lovers is woven with threads of caution and warning and possible danger.

One of the things that seems to have bothered lesbian and feminist critics most about Bishop's work is their

impression that she took the easy way out. By seeming to pass as a straight woman in her objective, descriptive poetry, she avoided the critical, social, and perhaps financial and vocational implications of being lesbian in twentieth-century America. As her first two books have proven, she did take chances and challenge the canon through linguistic deconstructions of both conventions and reader's assumptions about these conventions. She relies on the contradictions, the energizing oppositions of these inconsistencies and problems to open up a space in overly boundaried traditions and ideas.

Bishop's ability to accept and indict simultaneously will be especially significant as she moves to Questions of Travel and finally confronts the disorienting pain and confusion of her childhood. In this important book, she finds a poetic vehicle to express for the first time the terror and pain of being orphaned, ill, and alone for most of her life. Abandoning the idea of how her childhood should have been and broadening her view of adulthood, Bishop was happy during the years of writing Questions for the first time in her life.

Notes

1. Irigaray critiques Freud in detail in the following passages:

female sexuality has always been conceptualized on the basis of masculine parameters. Thus the opposition between "masculine" clitoral activity and "feminine" vaginal passivity, an opposition which Freud--and many others--saw as stages, or alternatives in the development of a sexually "normal" woman, seems rather too clearly required by the practice of male sexuality. For the clitoris is conceived as a little penis pleasant to masturbate so long as castration anxiety does not exist (for the boy child), and the vagina is valued for the "lodging" it offers the male organ when the forbidden hand has to find a replacement for pleasure-giving.

In these terms, women's erogenous zones never amount to anything by a clitoris-sex that is not comparable to the noble phallic organ, or a hole-envelope that

serves to sheathe and massage the penis in intercourse: a non-sex, or a masculine organ turned back upon itself, self-embracing.

About woman and her pleasure, this view of sexual relation has nothing to say. Her lot is that of "lack," "atrophy" (of the sexual organ), and "penis envy," the penis being the only sexual organ of recognized value. Thus she attempts by every means available to appropriate that organ for herself: through her somewhat servile love of the father-husband capable of giving her one, through her desire for a child-penis, preferably a boy, through access to the cultural values still reserved by right to males alone and therefore always masculine, and so on. Woman lives her own desire only as the expectation that she may at last come to possess an equivalent of the male organ.

Yet all this appears quite foreign to her own pleasure, unless it remains

within the dominant phallic economy. Thus, for example, woman's autoeroticism is very different from man's. In order to touch himself, man needs an instrument: his hand, a woman's body, language . . . And this self-caressing requires at least a minimum of activity. As for woman, she touches herself in and of herself without any need for mediation, and before there is any way to distinguish activity from passivity. Woman "touches herself" all the time, and moreover no one can forbid her to do so, for her genitals are formed of the two lips in continuous contact. Thus, within herself, she is already two--but not divisible into one(s)--that caress each other. (This Sex Which Is Not One 23-24)

CHAPTER V

QUESTIONS OF HOME: Liminality in "Brazil" in Questions of Travel

In Cold Spring and North & South, Bishop worked to dismantle our assumptions about reading and writing, reality and imagination, gender and sex: she warned that the easy answers are usually the wrong ones--that making polemic distinctions is not only incorrect and oversimplified, but also "dangerous" in an emotional way. Clumsy, perfunctory readers will trip themselves if they do not use care in reading Bishop's poems. Attentive readers, however, will find themselves inhabiting the ambivalent realm of the Man-Moth: neither squarely planted in postulated objective terrestrial reality, nor dwelling in the translunar world of "meaning."

Having shown the reader this "between space" and its importance in the rather abstract issues of language, convention (pastoralism), and gender, Bishop concentrates on the ambivalence, the contradictions that surround issues that are literally closer to home. In Questions of Travel, Bishop approaches issues of home and homelessness in two distinct sections, "Brazil" and "Elsewhere." Dividing this book into two separately and oppositely titled "books," Bishop sets up another fallacious binary that she spends the

bulk of the book interrogating.

The poems of "Brazil" deal with the anxieties of tourists and travellers, with images of invasion versus visiting, and with the idea of travel itself as a sort of destination. Here and in "Elsewhere," the dominant image is that of liminality: having shown us the importance of care and attention to ambivalent, liminal language, Bishop takes us, in this book, to actual thresholds to illustrate how this ambivalence works in concrete terms. The poems of "Brazil" explore "foreign" locales and ports, while "Elsewhere" takes the reader to Bishop's childhood home in Nova Scotia. It is ironically significant that she calls neither place "home," a point that will be explored later in the chapter. In the Nova Scotia poems, a specific kind of liminality reigns: "uninnocent" childhood; tense ambivalent moments; epiphanies which never lead to any action.

Positioning herself at the center of these anxious contradictions, Bishop finally confronts, at least implicitly, the pain of her childhood, controls it via language and form, and continues to write--continues to explore what these issues mean and have meant so that she can move forward. She does not posit an absolute (and therefore fallacious in her terms) solution to these issues, but instead comes to terms with the ambivalence. She reluctantly accepts the fact there is going to be a distinction between what is/was and what should have been and becomes more comfortable with the "plurality" of it all.

At first, it seems ironic that she came to these conclusions only after leaving her ostensible home: the United States. Bishop wrote most of Questions of Travel while living in Brazil with her companion, Lota de Macedo Soares, an upper-class, politically active Brazilian whom Bishop had met in New York. Bishop's years in Brazil were not the product of deliberate political expatriation or exile. In fact, as Goldensohn notes, Bishop had not intended to stay in Brazil, only to vacation there:

It was clear from reading her letters and other prose that Elizabeth Bishop had never intended a lengthy residence in Brazil. At the outset, she had taken passage for a long-desired steamer trip around the world. She was forty, and had spent years and months of her life since college in transit through Paris, New York, Key West, and Mexico City. The two years preceding her travel had been particularly unhappy, marked by loneliness, self-doubt, and alcoholism. In Washington, a bad bout of drinking had ended in a five-day hospital stay.

(2)

Goldensohn adds that Bishop saw her upcoming trip as a way to literally "change her mind" and relieve her depression by changing her scenery. Thus, she stepped onto the S.S.

Bowplate hoping that her trip would be a means of discovering a new, healthier self, a catalyst for healing. It turned initially into just the opposite. Goldensohn adds that shortly after disembarking in Brazil, Bishop ate the fruit of the cashew and had such a violent allergic reaction that she had to be hospitalized. During a lengthy convalescence she was attended to by Lota and other friends. Goldensohn notes that "surrounded, and surrendering to the solicitude and kindness of her hosts, for a few days she lay in bed in an apartment in Copacabana, then got up, and stayed on for years" (3). These years were to turn into almost two decades.

What kept Bishop there is debatable. She and Lota fell in love and lived happily for many years, and Brazil appealed to Bishop's sense of the remote and exotic, but there was more to her decision than that. We cannot ignore the fact that Bishop required absence from familiar surroundings in order to encounter those familiar surroundings in fiction and poetry. What first appears to be exile or escape may in fact be something else.

In a 1966 interview in Brazil, shortly before Bishop was to return to the United States, Ashley Brown asked Bishop how her years of travel had affected her writing and her poetic style. Admitting that she had certainly been influenced in some way, Bishop nevertheless labelled herself a "completely American poet" (5) and bragged jokingly that she had once won a five dollar gold piece as a child for an

essay on Americanism (6). Eschewing the expatriate rhetoric of her modernist heroes, she claimed her citizenship but preferred not to live in North America. Irish poet Eavan Boland explores this apparent contradiction contending that Bishop is glad to be American and critical of America at the same time. As a woman, Bishop does not share the controlling, ego-centered poetic persona of her romantic ancestors and contemporaries (85), but she chooses not to disassociate herself from the national ideal altogether. Boland asks:

In what sense is Elizabeth Bishop to be considered an American poet? The answer is obliquely. Certainly her work adds definition and texture to the tradition of American poetry. More importantly, I feel, she defines her country, as so many good Irish writers do, by her absence from it . . . She knew, in short, that she was an American poet, but not a national poet. (90)

Boland's point about defining from a distance is key. Bishop is not in exile from America, but on a kind of errand. Her special errand is to discover or recreate a sense of self, to put all of her voyaging selves back together, and to find meaning in her present by unravelling the meaning of the past. She is escaping to define, leaving home to find home. These oppositions between celebration

and criticism, escape and discovery create a new, moving, liminal space in which Bishop can separate herself from the binary "shoulds" of her life and exploit the power of "betweenness."

Lloyd Schwartz notes that in Questions of Travel, Bishop demonstrates how far she has come from her emotional and physical roots, but how hard it is to leave those roots entirely behind ("Annals" 86). For Bishop, it is the liminality of such a position, the fluidity, the contradiction that is the point. Having explored the linguistic and metaphoric power of liminality and ambiguity in the earlier books, Bishop has gained the courage and experience to stand at her domestic, childhood threshold and let this power work for her: she can finally look both outward at the "foreign" world and inward at the even more alienating domestic sphere. Poised on the threshold, she can find a kind of liberation instead of the torture of indecision. Bishop still steps back and controls these disorienting, painful feelings, but her small, formal move to acknowledge her past opens a space for the more explicit exploration in Geography III.

In a sense, Bishop can be seen going through a rite of passage in Questions of Travel. Almost all adults look back at their childhoods with ambivalent feelings--Bishop is not alone there--but not all adults have such tragic memories and not all adults have devoted their lives to writing in a public medium. Additionally, most of us resolve the

solvable issues about our childhoods, and then ignore or repress those we cannot solve. This is where Bishop is different. Instead of ignoring the unfinished business, the liminality, the ambiguity, she dwells in it. Her metaphors of travel, her child personae, her ambivalent endings all emphasize liminality and use it to fuel further liminal exploration.

Anthropologist Victor Turner sheds an interesting light on this topic as he describes the stages of "passage" that all human beings go through periodically. Studying the rituals of different African and Indian societies, Turner notes that rites of passage are marked by three stages: separation, margin (limen), and aggregation. During the liminal period, the "passenger" is in an "ambiguous realm unlike society. Upon aggregation, he is stable again, accepted and expected to behave based on norms of social structure" (95). Turner describes how various societies use these rites as tools to teach the value and importance of social rules and mores, but what is interesting with reference to Bishop is the way that he describes the liminal period itself.

On one hand, Bishop may be seen as stalling out in the second phase, never reaching the desired social goal of aggregation, but on the other, she can be seen as exploiting the particular energy and power and potentiality of the margin. Turner suggests that liminal people are "necessarily ambiguous"; they have no defined cultural space

or convention. Lacking strong bonds with society, they develop strong bonds with one another (95). In a sense, they are bound together by the combination of "lowliness and sacredness" that characterizes the liminal outcast (96). Turner distinguishes between this "communitas," this intimate connection, and the more abstract "structure" of society:

communitas has an existential quality;
it involves the whole man in relation to
the other whole man. Structure, on the
other hand, has a cognitive
quality . . . a set of classifications,
a model for thinking about culture and
nature and ordering one's public life.
Communitas has also an aspect of
potentiality. (127)

Later, Turner notes that communitas is the most direct expression of the Bergsonian idea of the elan vital, the life force behind evolution (128). This force, Turner argues, is most strong in marginal peoples, "edgemen, who strive with passionate sincerity to rid themselves of the cliches associated with status incumbency and role playing" (128). They hope instead to "enter into vital relations with other men in fact or imagination" (128).

Bishop's earlier exploration of liminality and ambiguity in language dismantled tired literary and social conventions and brought her words into life and motion. By

more overtly exploring the liminality of orphanhood, loneliness, and "foreignness," Bishop opens an even larger space in which other liminal types, other "outsiders" can find *communitas* and identification. Instead of languishing in the pain of her troubled childhood and her nomadic adulthood, she looks away from the teleology that argues for "aggregation" as the final step and chooses liminality.

Turner adds:

communitas breaks in through the interstices of structure, in liminality; at the edges of structure, in marginality; and from beneath structure, in inferiority. It is almost everywhere held to be sacred or 'holy,' possibly because it transgresses or dissolves the norms that govern structured and institutionalized relationships and is accompanied by experiences of unprecedented potency. (128)

Bishop recasts her alienation. She names it "holy" in a sense and lets it work for her. Bishop's tacit verbal invitations to the reader in North & South, her destruction of pastoral convention, and her genderlessness in Cold Spring comprise her exploration of the potential of liminality and her understanding of the power of the margin and of another power that Turner mentions: the power to criticize. Turner suggests that:

if liminality is regarded as a time and place of withdrawal from normal modes of social action, it can be seen as potentially a period of scrutinization of the central values and axioms of the culture in which it occurs. (167)

Liminality, as Bishop has shown, has the power to critique and indict as well as to bind. Questions of Travel examines this power from a closer distance.

It is tempting to use Turner's discussions of liminality and passage as a paradigm to model the "feminine," liminal space described by Irigaray and Cixous. The problems with doing this are obvious: first, Turner does not single out women as liminal beings. Second, his model could be seen as patriarchal and oppressive because it is teleological and linear. Finally, according to his model, women such as Bishop are seen as "stalled" in stage two, having failed to make the correct, complete passage. But as feminist psychologist Carol Gilligan notes, just because a woman "flunks" a particular paradigm does not mean either the paradigm or the woman is wrong: it just means that the paradigm, or model, or test was written with someone other than women in mind (105). Turner's description of the power of liminality can be useful with reference to Bishop if we devalue or invalidate the teleology as the "correct" way that things should happen. Turner, in fact, seems to anticipate post-structuralist

reading of his model, as he warns that "the facets of [communitas] can never be pinned down and defined" (153). He adds that "communitas can bind and bond people only momentarily" before it becomes conventionalized and turns into the structure of social more (153). Like Bishop in her earlier work, Turner warns against making hasty, generalized, or absolute assumptions.

From the very beginning, the Brazil section of Questions of Travel explores liminality and challenges the assumptions and the controlling power of rhetoric and language as "Arrival at Santos" and "Brazil, January 1, 1502" present two very different versions of visiting and invasion, tourist and terrorist. "Arrival" begins in a "classic" Bishop frame by making three direct and simply-stated observations and then briefly elaborating:

Here is a coast; here is a harbor;
 here, after a meager diet of horizon, is
 some scenery: [t/o]
 impractically shaped and--who knows?--
 self-pitying mountains, [t/o]
 sad and harsh beneath their frivolous
 greenery,

 with a little church on top of one. And
 warehouses, [t/o]
 some of them painted a feeble pink, or
 blue, [t/o]

and some tall, uncertain palms. Oh
 tourist, [t/o]
 is this how this country is going to
 answer you [t/o]

and your immodest demands for
 a different world, [t/o]
 and a better life, and complete
 comprehension [t/o]
 of both and last, and immediately,
 after eighteen days suspension? (1-12)

Initially, these rather bald observations seem the work of a bored traveller comparing the "sights" to the listed attractions in a travel brochure: one coast ("check!"), one harbor ("check!"), some scenery ("check!"). The illustration of that scenery in the final two lines of the stanza presents a different picture altogether. The objective listing has turned into subjective and even troubled evaluation. The mountains are "impractically shaped"--that is, they do not respond to the traveller's expectations; they are awkward in their roles as "host scenery" to arriving visitors. After this odd bit of description, the traveller continues in the same strange vein: the mountains are, for lack of a better phrase ("who knows?"), "self-pitying" and "sad and harsh beneath their frivolous greenery." This odd personification can be chalked up to "boat lag" or the traveller's disappointment

as well, but the abrupt juxtaposition of the subjective and the objective as well as the poem's form lead us to another possibility as well.

Within four lines, the poem has set up the now familiar initial binary: objective/subjective, list/elaboration, empirical view/mediated view. It has also given us another binary pattern: throughout the poem lines one and three of the ballad stanzas do not rhyme while lines two and four rhyme almost exactly. Both the objective listing and the rhyme work to control or limit the liminal anxiety suggested by the traveller's question in the third line. After the directness of the opening lines and the sure description of the mountains, the isolated "who knows?" injects a personal, unsure, troubled tone into the poem that will continue and intensify. The exact, bouncy dactylic rhyme of "scenery/greenery" emphasizes both the traveller's uncertainty and the "unrhymed" lone mountains and harbor that end the stanza's other lines.

Despite the exact, tight rhyme, however, the force of this uncertainty cannot be contained within the stanza and instead spills over from the enjambed line four into the second stanza. Here the uncertainty only suggested by the first stanza is cemented in the reader's imagination: objective listing is replaced by blurriness. There are "some" warehouses, and "some" of them are painted a "feeble" color. There are also "some" significantly "uncertain" palms. The liminal anxiety suggested in these details

explodes in line three of this stanza as the traveller's apostrophe reminds the reader of the moment in "The Map" when "emotion too far exceeds its cause." The uncertainty of the scenery and the ambivalence of the viewer's perception of it force a momentary lapse in which the traveller's "immodest demands" for "a different world,/and a better life and complete comprehension/of both at last, and immediately" erupt in a seemingly disjointed stream of compound phrases. The irrationality of demanding a better, more well-understood life from a landscape leads the reader to re-evaluate that which has come before. The details describing the mountains and the scenery may just as well apply to the troubled speaker as the "foreign" and alien landscape. Bishop emphasizes the power and problems in her traveller's perceptions as she rhymes "comprehension" with "suspension": changing locales does not necessarily lead to "changing your mind." In fact, such a neat and complete switch seems to be impossible in Bishop's world. It will always be suspended, delayed by our inability to be actually in the moment we live in.

Apparently embarrassed at the outburst in stanza three, the traveller makes another move to control in stanza four as she commands "Finish your breakfast" and tries to become absorbed in the routine of the port.

Finish your breakfast. The tender is

coming,

[t/o]

a strange and ancient craft, flying a

strange and brilliant rag. [t/o]

So that's the flag. I never saw it
before. [t/o]

I somehow never thought of there being
a flag. [t/o]

but of course there was, all along. And
coins I presume, [t/o]

and paper money; they remain to be seen.
And gingerly now we climb down the
ladder backward, [t/o]

myself and a fellow passenger named Miss
Breen, [t/o]

descending into the midst of twenty-six
freighters [t/o]

waiting to be loaded with green coffee
beans. [t/o]

Please, boy, do be more careful with
that boat hook!

Watch out! Oh! It has caught Miss
Breen's

skirt! There! Miss Breen is about
seventy, [t/o]

a retired police lieutenant, six feet
tall, [t/o]

with beautiful bright blue eyes and a
kind expression. [t/o]

Her home, when she is at home, is Glens
Fall [t/o]

s, New York. There. We are settled.
The customs officials will speak
English, we hope, [t/o]

and leave us our bourbon and cigarettes.
Ports are necessities, like postage
stamps, or soap, [t/o]

but they seldom seem to care what
impression they make, [t/o]

or, like this, only attempt, since it
does not matter, [t/o]

the unassertive colors of soap, or
postage stamps-- [t/o]

wasting away like the former, slipping
the way the latter [t/o]

do when we mail the letters we wrote on
the boat, [t/o]

either because the glue here is very
inferior [t/o]

or because of the heat. We leave Santos
at once; [t/o]

we are driving to the interior. (13-40)

The hypnotic, controlled (and controlling) listing of the details of this routine works for several lines as musing on the flag and the money and the boats occupies the traveller. As she and Miss Breen disembark from the boat, however, this control slips. As they descend down the ladder, the focus is on chaos: twenty-six freighters unloading and loading; the boy with the errant boat hook. It is with the detail of the boat hook that Bishop somewhat naughtily suggests that the form of the poem (and by symbolic extension, the traveller's mind) is not equal to this chaos.

Bishop enjambes the last line of stanza six, leaving Miss Breen's relationship with the boathook significantly undefined: just what of or on Miss Breen has it caught? When the reader gets the answer to this question in stanza seven, and finds out it is her skirt spanning the enjambment, the resulting image is bawdy and comic. Within the deliberate comedy, however, is a rhetorical strategy that is very serious. Stanza six cannot contain the chaos of the scene any better than stanza seven can contain that largeness of body and spirit that is Miss Breen. In order to force the exact rhyme that has attempted to control and regularize this scene from the poem's beginning, Bishop awkwardly enjambes the "s" of "Glens Falls (emphasis mine), New York." The resulting tall/fall rhyme comically emphasizes the physical comedy potential of the boathook scene, but it foreshadows the more troubling tensions at the

end of the poem as well.

Having forced the rhyme at the expense of sound and sense and meaning, the traveller says "There. We are settled," an oddly incongruous statement given the fact that she has just desperately divided a word from its plural suffix in the interest of exact rhyme. The rest of the poem, in fact, is a kind of mantra, in which the traveller tries to convince herself that her reaction is "typical": "ports are necessities," she says. "They are not meant to be impressive. They are like soap or postage stamps: their very liminality makes the details of their existence (color, for example) unimportant. The customs officials will treat us well. All this failure of glue and liminality and melting soap and chaos is because of the heat, isn't it? It has a simple cause, doesn't it?"

The listed details that express these sentiments suggest things that are too volatile, too dangerous to even be expressed in the apostrophe of the second stanza. Instead the still exact rhymes express the anxiety through contradiction: hope dissolves as it rhymes with soap. First impressions that "do not matter" rhyme with "latter"-- the last impressions presumably do not matter either. Most important, however, the interior which the traveller focuses her attention on is "inferior." The liminal details of the final stanza create anxiety that makes the speaker once again command herself to continue: she will leave at once and drive to the interior. The intense disappointment and

liminal anxiety that accompanied this arrival make the reader doubt the possibility that this trip will provide the new world and new comprehension that the traveller seeks.

Within this liminal anxiety, however, lies ambivalent possibility. The traveller's despair and anxiety at bringing her troubles with her does not paralyze or silence her. Using form, although at times awkwardly, she hangs on (literally by the hem of a skirt!) and continues to write--she finishes the poem and despite her panic finishes the poem in the manner in which she started it. Up until this point, Bishop's combination of control and "movement" has been implicit in the rhetorical, linguistic moves that she made in her poems. From Questions of Travel forward, this seemingly contradictory simultaneity will be much more obvious on the surface of the text. The troubling difference between expectation and reality will produce anxiety--but Bishop will control and channel that anxiety to fuel emotional and linguistic progress. Specifically, form and a sense of comfort and definiteness will always be accompanied by their opposite (or at least the threat of their opposite)--and that opposition will fuel further exploration and open up a space for feminist liminal potential.

Bishop uses tantalizing details from her own experience to model how this space is created emotionally as well as linguistically. She uses only fragments and clues, however, to insure that the reader's eye stays on the

contradiction and not on juicy tidbits of Bishop's biography. In the article detailing his "discovery" of a new, unpublished Bishop poem in Brazil, Lloyd Schwartz notes that this poem expresses directly what so many of her poems express obliquely: the necessity--in fact the inability to escape being in two places at one time both psychologically and emotionally. Written in Brazil, the poem begins "Dear, my compass/still points north/to wooden houses/and blue eyes" and continues through five four-line stanzas. It concludes, however, in the unfamiliar (for published Bishop) world of the directly erotic: "--Cold as it is, we'd/go to bed, dear,/early, but never/to keep warm" ("Annals" 86).¹ Schwartz suggests that the poem was written in the early fifties when Bishop was settling into permanent residence in Brazil and falling in love with Lota. The longing for Nova Scotia at the poem's opening and the erotic intensity of her relationship with Lota at the end exist simultaneously and energize the poem, exhibiting the positive side of Bishop's position and providing a foil to the destructive potential implied by "Arrival at Santos." Significantly, however, she chose not to publish this poem. Schwartz could not even find a copy of it, and he suggests that Bishop felt that "such an overtly erotic poem may still have been too personal to make public" ("Annals" 86). This fact brings us back to the control exhibited in "Arrival." Bishop understands the positive power of unresolved contradiction, but she is careful to avoid exploiting or revealing that

power in a context that could be potentially painful. Instead, she controls, keeps the poem secret, and publishes much more well-disguised versions of the same idea, such as the earlier "Four Poems."

Vendler describes this subtle cloaking in Bishop's poetry as a "sinister" combination of the "domestic and the strange": neither identified with the alien jungle of Brazil, nor the pastoral idyll of Nova Scotia ("Poems" 828)-neither at one with the wilderness, nor completely safe in the "city on the hill." In the "alien" world of "foreigners," Bishop's eye is on the cottages of Canada; in Nova Scotia, the alien and terrifying always threatens to intrude. Bishop, like her poetic American ancestors Anne Bradstreet and Emily Dickinson, can fill a scene of childhood or domesticity with echoes of terror, fear, and tremendous self-doubt.

Nowhere is this combination of the domestic and the terrifying more jarring than in the second poem in this first section, "Brazil, January 1, 1502." This poem describes another group of "travellers" landing in Brazil, as it counterpoints images of the "domestic" art of embroidery with the rapacious behavior of Portuguese explorers. Schwartz notes that of all of Bishop's books, Questions of Travel is the most "arranged": Bishop's notebooks indicate that she was more interested in the order of the poems in this book than in the ones before or after ("Annals" 91). Thus, by deliberately placing "Arrival at

Santos" next to "Brazil, January 1," Bishop emphasizes the differences and similarities between the two poems.

"Brazil, January 1" opens with an epigraph: ". . . embroidered nature . . . tapestried landscape.--Landscape into Art, by Sir Kenneth Clark." As she did in the very early poem "The Map," Bishop foregrounds the fact that an "artistic" entity--a created, formed representation of reality will be the poem's ostensible topic. Given "The Map" as a model, readers understand that the ethics, problems, and "realities" of this representation will make up the poem's rhetorical purpose. This Bakhtinian "dialogue" between signifier and signified, apparent subject and implication begins before the poem even starts. The date that opens the poem is a significant one in Brazil's history. William Halsey notes that Brazil was "discovered" in 1494, when the Treaty of Tordesillas divided the "non-Christian" world into two areas of influence: one Spanish, one Portuguese. Portugal was given control of what is now Brazil. On April 22, 1500, Pedro Alvares Cabral, a Portuguese admiral landed on the coast near what is now Santos and, recognizing a "brazilwood" tree, called the country Brazil. Although a permanent settlement was not established until 1532, the Portuguese were a presence in Brazil from 1494 forward, settling primarily along the coast and only sparsely populating the rugged "interior" (387-404).

Thus, the date of Bishop's poem is New Year's Day, just

after the Portuguese had invaded and taken possession of Brazil but before any "civilized" settlement--a very liminal time indeed. The dominant metaphor, however, that of embroidery, is highly "civilized," feminine, and filled with domestic connotations. Just as Bishop used rhyme in "Arrival" to control the desperation and disappointment of that speaker, she will use metaphor in this poem to control and interrogate the colored, constructed perspectives of these invaders. The poem opens with a contemporary traveller musing on how the country must have looked to these first "visitors":

Januaries, Nature greets our eyes
 exactly as she must have greeted theirs:
 every square inch filling in with
 foliage-- [t/o]
 big leaves, little leaves, and giant
 leaves, [t/o]
 blue, blue-green, and olive,
 with occasional lighter veins and edges,
 or a satin underleaf turned over;
 monster ferns
 in silver-gray relief,
 and flowers, too, like giant water
 lilies [t/o]
 up in the air--up, rather, in the
 leaves-- [t/o]
 purple, yellow, two yellows, pink,

rust red and greenish white;
 solid, but airy; fresh as if just
 finished

[t/o]

and taken off the frame. (1-15)

With the plural "Januaries," Bishop bridges the gap between that January and "now": over all the months (and years) between then and the "now" of the poem, "Nature" has remained consistent. She then begins to describe the scene, using the distancing language of needlework: "filling in," specific designation of yarn color ("blue, blue-green, and olive"), "relief" (the raised parts of the design), "taken off the frame." The choice of the word frame, instead of "hoop", as the final one in the stanza is significant one. Bishop has used multiple rhetorical frames in this poem: the distorted view of the conquerors as presented by a modern traveller who is interpreting it through metaphors of needlework, which is a graphic interpretation through yarn. The lush details of this first stanza set the stage for interrogating the implications of these frames both at a rhetorical and ethical level in the subsequent stanzas.

It is just these frames, however, that trouble feminist critic Alicia Ostriker about this poem. Ostriker suggests that by framing (in metaphors of embroidery) the rape and genocide that will be implied by later stanzas, Bishop distances both her own and the reader's horror at such acts. Bishop, says Ostriker, is emotionally removed from the poem and has internalized the masculine "will toward empire" that

drives the conquerors she describes ("Dancing" 585). While the multiple frames of stanza one do create distance via "objective" aesthetic detail, the implications of the date in the title and the fact that Bishop takes pains to tell us these are "exactly" the same details suggest that the invasion and violation that happened then are still possible. Bishop creates the oppositions--then and now, civilized and uncivilized, nature and art--only to deconstruct those oppositions via implication. If things are "exactly" the same and the created image in stanza one is "fresh" as if just created, the possibility still exists for similar acts. The neurotic ethnocentrism of the disappointed speaker of "Arrival" in a sense sets the reader up for this idea: the expectations and wishes of even contemporary "visitors" to Brazil have much to do with their wishes and little to do with Brazil and her people.

The second stanza supports this idea as we move from the details to a larger view of the needlework and see that the artist has worked ominous designs into her fabric:

A blue-white sky, a simple web,
 backing for feathery detail:
 brief arcs, a pale-green broken wheel,
 a few palms, swarthy, squat, but
 delicate; [t/o]
 and perching there in profile, beaks
 agape, [t/o]
 the big symbolic birds keep quiet,

each showing only half his puffed and
 padded, [t/o]

pure-colored or spotted breast.

Still in the foreground there is Sin:
 five sooty dragons near some massy
 rocks. [t/o]

The rocks are worked with lichens, gray
 moonbursts [t/o]

splattered and overlapping,
 threatened from underneath by moss
 in lovely hell-green flames,
 attacked above

by scaling-ladder vines, oblique and
 neat, [t/o]

"one leaf yes and one leaf no"
 (in Portuguese).

The lizards scarcely breathe; all eyes
 are on the smaller, female one, back-to,
 her wicked tail straight up and over,
 red as a red-hot wire. (16-36)

Against the feathery, "neutral" background, gender-inflected images start to interact. Nature, we are told in the first stanza, is female. The first gender-determining pronoun we encounter in the second stanza is male: the "big symbolic birds" who each show "only half his puffed and padded, / pure-colored or spotted breast." While these birds are significantly quiet, having no response to the scene that

will follow, they only show half of themselves: beneath those puffed and padded and comfortable breasts is there something insidious or complicitous hiding?

Following this ominous clue, "Sin" itself does emerge in the form of the sooty dragons. In the phrase introducing this sin, the word "Still" implies that despite the fact that the birds remain silent, turned away from the image that follows, the sin still exists. Their silence does not make it invisible or absent. While these sinful dragons do not actively do anything in the embroidery or the poem, they are surrounded with violent analogous information that indicts both them and the male images that they represent. Covering the rocks upon which these "sooty" dragons rest are lichens, which are described in literally explosive terms. First they are "moonbursts," widening concentric circles; then they are more violently "splattered and overlapping," as if they had been haphazardly dashed against the rocks. Violence below them, they are "threatened" from above by "hell-green flames" of moss and "scaling" and aggressive ladder vines. All the imagery surrounding these lizards is intrusive and violent, counterpointing their stillness as they are mesmerized by the female lizard perched near them.

She is "smaller," and faces away from them, her tail lifted in a gesture simultaneously sexual and defensive: she seems at the same time waiting and poised for attack. If nature, as the poem suggests, is to be seen as feminine, then this female lizard can be associated with the calm,

constant, "safe" image suggested by the symbolic embroidery of the first stanza. The male lizards, then, "rhyme" with the "Christians" that will intrude into stanza three. Just as nature in the first stanza is simultaneously changeable over time and static--the same as when the Portuguese came in 1502, but four hundred years older--the female lizard, and the women of the jungle are simultaneously vulnerable as victims and elusive.

To the Christians, "hard as nails" and "glinting,/in creaking armor," the scenery is different, but the context is much the same as that of their home:

no lovers' walks, no bowers,
 no cherries to be picked, no lute music,
 but corresponding, nevertheless,
 to an old dream of wealth and luxury
 already out of style when they left
 home-- [t/o]
 wealth, plus a brand new pleasure.
 Directly after Mass, humming perhaps
L'Homme arme, or some such tune,
 they ripped away into the hanging
 fabric, [t/o]
 each out to catch an Indian for
 himself-- [t/o]
 those maddening little women who kept
 calling, [t/o]
 calling to each other (or had the birds

waked up?)

[t/o]

and retreating, always retreating,
behind it. (37-53)

Bishop's irony against these "pious" Christians is obvious as she looks in on them plotting their debauchery after Mass and refers to "lovers' walks" and "pleasure" when describing forced rape. More interesting is her manipulation of the poem's metaphors. Singing their martial tunes, the soldiers rip into the "hanging fabric/each out to catch an Indian for himself." The fabric, the poem tells us, is a metaphor for the natural scene. Thus, the soldiers literally and figuratively rip their way into the vines of the jungle and rip apart the artistic rendition of that jungle scene. The artist/needleworker, like the jungle itself, is associated with the female. The actual Indian women in the poem call to one another in a language that the soldiers do not understand (they confuse it with the birds) and this communication is concomitant with their retreat behind the "hanging fabric" of the jungle/tapestry.

The placid embroidered scene of the first stanza in a sense distances the reader by controlling and projecting the horrifying scene into a graphic, static, and therefore only approximate representation, but it is this "fabric," this created women's needle-work that helps the women in the final stanza elude their conquerors. The fabric is ripped and penetrated, but because it is of their construction, they are able to retreat behind it. They are maddening

because they communicate in words meaningful to each other, but incomprehensible to the men (much like Cixous' writing from the body). The way that the final stanza is written, both the "calling" and the "fabric" could be the antecedent for the indefinite "it" at the poem's close. They can retreat and escape behind both their communication with each other and their female art--their vision of the world.

Bishop certainly does not see this as a solution: the fact that a few escape and retreat does not change the fact that women then and now are enslaved and raped. But her resonating images of both the violent penetration of the "fabric" and the continuous movement, escape, and language of the women suggests that she understands the power of the liminal, non-linear energy that has been deemed female. Ostriker is right. Bishop (and every other woman in modern western culture) has to at least a limited extent absorbed the phallogentric norms of that culture: what Ostriker fails to note is that Bishop recognizes those traits in herself, identifies them and counterpoints them with the more plural elements of the female. It is odd that Ostriker, the very critic who popularized the notion of "stealing" and utilizing the male paradigm, cannot see how this works with reference to Bishop.

In both "Arrival at Santos" and "Brazil, January 1," Bishop uses a distinctive scenario of "foreigners" entering a new land. The first poem's female tourist comes as visitor, looking to find (or impose her ideas of) herself on

the landscape. "Brazil, January 1," on the other hand, gives us invaders bent on taking what they want from the retreating women. Despite their different particulars, both poems use liminality as the dominant image and both place the females in very troubling and liminal positions. Bonnie Costello argues that this sense of indefiniteness is present in everything Bishop does. Costello uses the paradigm of questioning and posits that Bishop veers from minutiae to panoramas in her poems, never fully resting at either pole and leaving the reader with new questions to ask instead of answers (Questions of Mastery 2-3). "Questions of Travel," the next poem in the book, explores the power and potential in these questions and introduces a new problem. This questioning, curious energy is compared with the childish, a comparison that simultaneously indicts and emphasizes the liminal nature of Bishop's vision and sets up her discussion of her own childhood in "Elsewhere."

"Questions of Travel" probes the reasons why people leave home and in doing so, undercuts and destabilizes the concept that a stable home exists. Like the voyager in "Arrival at Santos," the traveller in this poem carries with her a static image of what she is supposed to find at the end of her travels. Arriving at her intended destination, she is unnerved and shaken by the fact that she left home for a reason, but does not feel as if she ever truly arrives at the place she expected to visit:

There are too many waterfalls here;

the crowded streams [t/o]
 hurry too rapidly down to the sea,
 and the pressure of so many clouds on
 the mountaintops [t/o]
 makes them spill over the sides in soft
 slow-motion, [t/o]
 turning to waterfalls under our very
 eyes. [t/o]
 --For if those streaks, those mile-long,
 shiny, tearstains, [t/o]
 aren't waterfalls yet,
 in a quick age or so, as ages go here,
 they probably will be.
 But if the streams and clouds keep
 travelling, travelling, [t/o]
 the mountains look like the hulls of
 capsized ships, [t/o]
 slime-hung and barnacled. (1-12)

From the very first line, this traveller is overwhelmed by an odd sense that there is "too much" in the landscape. Initially, there are too many waterfalls, they crowd each other, and they are moving too fast on their way to the sea. Additional pressure is added to this scene by the clouds that hang over the mountain and "pressure" the streams to spill even faster over the side of the mountain. When they do spill, however, the movement is soft and slow--just the opposite of the movement that so bothered the onlooker in

the first lines. This strange fact sends us back to re-read these strange lines: is it the streams or the clouds ("them") that are spilling languidly over the sides of the mountains. Both are grammatically possible. The fact that the movement is soft and slow connotes the clouds; even fast-moving streams, however, would look misty, or as if they were moving slowly if they were viewed from a distance. What seems like an opposition begins to move and gives the reader a third, "between" image to carry into the next lines.

The line following this "clouding" of meaning and image is similarly "plural" in its meaning. As the streams/clouds spill over the mountainsides, they turn "to waterfalls under our very eyes": they become waterfalls; the incredible lushness of this setting "accelerates" natural processes and new waterfalls seem to emerge even as the traveller watches the mountain--or, at least, the great profusion of natural phenomena, seen through the limited perspective of the "tourist," makes it seem as if new waterfalls are emerging out of the great fecundity of the scene. Simultaneously, however, by connotation, the waterfalls are emerging "under our very eyes"--"as we look at the mountain" and, literally, under our eyes in the form of tears. In these first five lines of the poem, the onlooker is overwhelmed both by the lush surroundings and the disappointment or panic he or she feels regarding the scene. "Too many," "too rapidly," "crowded," and "so many" suggest that the scene somehow

violates the traveller's expectations. Like the traveller in "Arrival," this voyager has brought with her the problems and perspectives that she has sought to escape.

After this emotionally-charged opening, the reader is finally introduced to the catalytic image--the source of the initial panic. The traveller's emotional crisis, described in terms of surface tension--rivers and clouds and eyes and emotions all ready to "spill over"--is precipitated by "streaks," "mile-long, shiny tearstains" down the mountain. Yet as the traveller stutters to elucidate just what these marks (signs?) mean, she complicates things even further. Beginning with the conditional "if," she cannot decide what to name these marks: are they streaks or are they tearstains? Does she want to privilege the literal or the metaphorical? Or is the literal metaphorical in that she's simultaneously referring us to the streaks on the mountain and the streaks under her eyes implied by the previous stanza? All of these possibilities exist simultaneously because the language and tense of the passage cannot be arrested and fixed: if the streaks aren't waterfalls yet, they will be, probably, in a quick age or when the particular time scheme here allows them to. The piling of qualifying words makes this passage read as one big question: "they're waterfalls . . . aren't they?"

The traveller seems so shaken by the hanging question of these lines that even the weak "if . . . then" syntax falls apart in the final lines of this first stanza. The

final three lines begin with the conditional musing of the earlier lines, but this is soon undercut: "But if the streams and clouds keep travelling, travelling,/the mountains look like the hulls of capsized ships,/slime-hung and barnacled" (10-12). The distinction between streams and clouds in the first lines has dissolved and now both are seen moving down the mountain--spilling over as was implied by the initial images. The diction here, however, is particularly significant. When the tourist says the clouds and streams are "travelling" down the mountain, she seems to get caught in this specific word choice. She repeats this word, in an attempt to force herself to complete the "then" part of this conditional sentence, but cannot, and instead focuses her eyes and her attention via a simile.

Ostensibly, she meant this to be a sentence of cause and effect: if the streams and clouds keep travelling down the mountain, then the ensuing humidity and moisture will make the mountain look slimy and barnacled like the hull of an old ship. The "then" term is missing, however, suggesting that this possibility--the possibility of "travelling" period--fills the traveller with an unspeakable, overwhelming emotion of some kind. Thus, she repeats the word "travelling," the import of it sinks in, and she looks up at the mountain, hoping the solidity of the image and the rhetorical figure will stabilize her. Even the image itself, however, subtly suggests the liminal, interrogative anxiety she is feeling. The ship is old and dysfunctional,

but slime and barnacles, like the slow tearstains, are "alive" and insidiously, slowly moving and changing shape and appearance and form.

Shaken by the tension and liminality and the unanswered questions of this first stanza, the speaker tacitly implies the obvious "solution" to her state in the first lines of the second stanza:

Think of the long trip home.
 Should we have stayed at home and
 thought of here? [t/o]
 Where should we be today?
 Is it right to be watching strangers in
 a play [t/o]
 in this strangest of theatres?
 What childishness is it that while
 there's a breath of life [t/o]
 in our bodies, we are determined to rush
 to see the sun the other way around?
 The tiniest green hummingbird in the
 world? [t/o]
 To stare at some inexplicable old
 stonework, [t/o]
 inexplicable, and impenetrable,
 at any view,
 instantly seen and always, always
 delightful? [t/o]
 Oh, must we dream our dreams

and have them, too?

And have we room

for one more folded sunset, still

quite warm? (13-29)

[t/o]

If the resonating implications of the repeated and enjambed "travelling" are so disquieting, the traveller suggests as this stanza opens, what about "home"? The conditional tense of the first stanza has been replaced by questions.

Meditating on the long voyage home, the traveller asks: should we have stayed home? Where should we be? Should we be observing foreigners for our own amusement? Shouldn't we be more grown up than this?

The series of questions, like the initial "if/then" construction of stanza one, tries to channel the anxiety into a rational, controlling form--the question. The "should" stated or implied in all of these questions, however, adds a subtle note of expectation or obligation that recalls the first stanza. Uncomfortable with the liminal anxiety suggested by the scenery, the traveller looks outward for some normative idea of what "should" be happening. She looks for some standard or rule to indicate how to act in a situation such as this. Her first question--"should we have stayed at home and thought of here?"--implies both that her actual journey may be improper and that "here" in this foreign locale, her thoughts are somehow constantly vibrating between here and home. Her second question--"where should we be"--carries similar double

implications: where physically, psychologically, spiritually, should she locate and position herself? Her question as to the propriety of "watching strangers" in the "strangest of theatres" adds to the sense that there is some expected, linear, formal component to "sightseeing" or tourism that she is just missing.

With the word "childishness" in the next line, she tacitly answers her own questions in the negative. The word "childish" connotes all that is worst about childhood, implying petulance, impatience, short attention spans, and an unending quest for novelty. This "childishness" extends to the entire time we have "breath of life," however, a detail that suggests that travel encourages a childishness that is never outgrown. These negative connotations in turn lead the reader to conclude that the answer to all of the "should" questions is a resounding "No!"

The images that close the stanza, however, will complicate this certainty as tired, cliched images compete for the reader's (and traveller's) attention with new and unique images. The "rush/to see the sun the other way around" is counterpointed with the exquisite image of the "tiniest green hummingbird in the world." Understanding or deciphering "inexplicable and impenetrable" stonework is compared to just seeing it, and being "instantly" delighted at the sight. Childish thirst for the novelty of the guidebook balances with the naive, "childlike" delight of seeing something for the first time. Moaning about the

necessity of dreaming dreams and "having them" too, the traveller expresses the poem's central conflict: can we explore terrain (psychological or geographical) and look for epiphanies and answers without our journey being formalized and named and diminished. Can we exist in Turner's liminal space of travel and exploration without that space becoming a structured one that takes the breathtaking sunset and folds and packs it with the rest of our "necessities?"

The poem's final stanza refuses to answer this question and, in fact, introduces other, more troubling questions. Stanza three reacts to the "childish" tragedy of the neatly folded and diminished sunset by relating a string of images similar to the "childlike" vision of the hummingbird in stanza two:

But surely it would have been a pity
 not to have seen the trees along this
 road,
 really exaggerated in their beauty,
 not to have seen them gesturing
 like noble pantomimists, robed in pink.
 --Not to have had to stop for gas and
 heard
 the sad, two-noted, wooden tune
 of disparate wooden clogs
 carelessly clacking over
 a grease-stained filling-station floor.
 (In another country the clogs would all

[t/o]

[t/o]

be tested. [t/o]

Each pair there would have identical
pitch.) [t/o]

--A pity not to have heard
the other, less primitive music of the
fat brown bird [t/o]

who sings above the broken gasoline pump
in a bamboo church of Jesuit baroque:
three towers, five silver crosses.

--Yes, a pity not to have pondered,
blurr'dly and inconclusively,
on what connection can exist for
centuries [t/o]

between the crudest wooden footwear
and, careful and finicky,
the whittled fantasies of wooden cages.

--Never to have studied history in
the weak calligraphy of songbirds'
cages. [t/o]

--And never to have had to listen to
rain [t/o]

so much like politicians' speeches:
two hours of unrelenting oratory
and then a sudden golden silence
in which the traveller takes a notebook,
writes: [t/o]

"Is it lack of imagination that makes us
 come [t/o]
 to imagined places, not just stay at
 home? [t/o]
 Or could Pascal have been not entirely
 right [t/o]
 about just sitting quietly in one's
 room?

Continent, city, country, society:
 the choice is never wide and never free.
 And here, or there . . . No. Should we
 have stayed at home, [t/o]
 wherever that may be? (30-67)

In the images of the clogs and the birdcage and the rain, the reader discovers that all of the "shoulds" and contradictions and binaries that the traveller hoped to escape from are an integral part of the landscape. Even the childlike view of the "real" and the unique carries with it its own contradictions: the same craftsmen use wood to make both the unique clogs, the vehicle for locomotion and travel and the birdcage, whose "weak calligraphy" tells the story of religion and domesticity and imprisonment and all that the traveller is voyaging to escape. The rain, the source of all of the liminal tension of the streams and clouds of the opening stanza, is also just like "politicians' speeches"--unrelenting and monotonous.

When the traveller tries to come to terms with these contradictions by writing about them, the real dilemma is emphasized. She counterpoints lack of imagination with the "mental travel" of meditation, but within this example lies ironic contradiction. Having no imagination is bounced off of "Pascal's" notion about quiet contemplation. Bishop seems to be referring to Pascal's Pensees, a work which ironically focuses on liminal, energizing contradictions: Pascal's topic is the tension between choice and destiny and the contradiction implicit therein (Black 424-25). Both the reference to Pascal and the final lines undercut the notion that there is a concrete difference between imagination and the lack of imagination. These elements also undermine the idea that one can freely choose between physical or emotional/spiritual travel.

Although the last stanza does not negate the concept of choice, it argues that in issues of nationality, class, and even geographical location, our choice is "never, never" completely open or completely free. The romantic ideal that diminishes "here" in favor of the superior qualities of "there" is a fallacious opposition. The question of staying home and all the other "questions of travel" are moot questions because the "master question" is the one that closes the poem: "home,/wherever that may be."

Reading the poem from the beginning with this question vibrating in our minds, we see that the questions and anxieties and fears that trip the traveller are not

questions of travel but questions of home: where, the poem and its bewildered speaker ask, is the place in which the contradictions and fears and sense of alienation won't occur? The only answer Bishop will give lies in the questions themselves. Bouncing between the binaries of childlike/childish, travel/home, here/there, foreign/domestic, Bishop refuses to come down squarely in favor of either side, preferring instead to raise questions. The only tragedy--the only "wasted trip"--is the one in which there are no contradictions, no problems, no inconsistencies. When there is no urge to roam and explore and challenge, Bishop suggests in the second stanza, there is literally and figuratively no "breath of life."

This issue of travel as psychological/geographical destination is explored by French deconstructionist Michel Butor in his essay on travel and writing. Butor deconstructs the lines between travel, reading, and writing, using the French word "ou" as his resonating, changing symbolic sign. "Ou" means or/where/either depending on from which direction the accent is pointing. Butor crosses the accents when he writes the word, creating a "sign" that connotes all three meanings simultaneously. To travel, for Butor, is to write and vice versa--there is no difference. Both activities are taking the reader/traveller from sign to sign (2-3). The "there" of the printed word interacts with the "elsewhere" of the white space, creating what he calls "terme": both word and destination or terminus (6).

Travel and writing and reading, as Butor sees it, are all "life affirming" because the interaction of signs and here's and elsewhere's and word and page is never static--it never stops moving because one sign leads to another sign and one word leads to another, which refutes another, and so on. "Arrival"--actually stopping reading/writing/travelling--is associated for Butor with death (6). The alternative to this spiritual/physical death is travel/writing/reading, constantly "refreshing" our own tongue with other languages and experiences (8). Using the metaphor of pilgrimage, Butor sees travel/writing/reading as a way of seeking out our histories, of encountering our origins and "selves" with eyes freshened by other "reading" and life experiences (9). He equates writing, reading, and living then with "scansion": reading the signs and signifiers with an eye to how they give clues to meaning--how they can lead and guide, but also have only temporary control over the signifiers that surround them (12).

Like most post-structuralist texts, Butor's is so complex and dense in spots as to need a thorough "scansion" or explication itself², but its message is helpful with reference to the liminal way in which Bishop sees travel. The only true destination for the living, breathing writer/reader/traveller is travel and writing itself: the questions of travel and home provide the liminal energy and contradiction that catalyze future progress--that allow a writer to keep writing and a woman, with a contradictory,

painful life in which none of the "shoulds" apply, to keep living.

Although Bishop understands that for her and others, questions and resonant, destabilized meaning are the only means of survival, the closer her work comes to "home," the more potentially dangerous and scary the questions become: resonance and contradiction threaten to become explosion and total annihilation. She keeps asking questions as she approaches her Nova Scotia roots in "Elsewhere," but she puts these questions literally in the mouths of babes. In "Questions of Travel," she counterpoints the childish with the childlike, finding positive traits in the selfish curiosity of the former and the naive, clear vision of the latter. In "Squatter's Children," the poem following "Questions," she uses children again to symbolize possibility and promise. Against the fury of a storm, utter poverty, and their Mother's voice "ugly as sin" (23), these children have (literally) the world at their feet:

Children, the threshold of the storm
has slid beneath your muddy shoes;
wet and beguiled, you stand among
the mansions you may choose
out of a bigger house than yours,
whose lawfulness endures.
Its soggy documents retain
your rights in rooms of falling rain.

(25-32)

Standing at the threshold, these children may be in for storm or clear weather; they may inherit their parents' poverty or escape it. Bishop will not tell us. They do have "rights," but the documents are "soggy" with the storm and the "rooms" that are theirs will disappear until the next storm comes. Childhood is not a time of greeting-card sentimentality and opportunity for Bishop, but it is the primary metaphor for the plural, feminine energy that she has only implied in earlier poems. In "Elsewhere," her child figure approaches "home" directly for the first time.

Notes

1. Here is the unpublished poem in its entirety:

Dear, my compass
still points north
to wooden houses
and blue eyes,

fairy-tales where
flaxen-headed
younger sons
bring home the goose,

love in hay-lofts,
Protestants, and
heavy-drinkers . . .
Springs are backward,

but crab-apples
ripen to rubies,
cranberries
to drops of blood,

and swans can paddle
icy water
so hot the blood

in those webbed feet.

--Cold as it is, we'd
go to bed, dear,
early, but never
to keep warm.

2. For more "traditional" information on the relationship between travel and writing, see these works: Literature as a Mode of Travel: Five Essays and a Postscript. Ed. Warner G. Rice; Travel, Quest, and Pilgrimage as a Literary Theme: Studies in Honor of Reino Virtanen. Eds. Frans C. Amelinckx and Joyce N Megay; The Art of Travel: Essays on Travel Writing, by Philip Dodd. All of these books trace the history of travel literature, dividing it into travelogue (emphasis on sights and scenery), journeys of and to the self (bildungsromans), and journeys into foreign lands for the purpose of satire and social critique via comparison. Dodd's book contains an excellent bibliographical essay by Joanne Shattock entitled "Travel Writing Victorian and Modern: A Review of Recent Research" (151-164). Haunted Journeys: Desire and Transgression in European Travel Writing, a recent book by Dennis Porter, uses the theories of Foucault to examine travel literature. Porter makes some provocative points similar to those of Butor, but since his writing is specifically about male European writers, I have chosen not to use it to aid in the discussion of Bishop.

CHAPTER VI

QUESTIONS AT HOME: Ambivalent Domesticity in "Elsewhere"

To a reader who knows Bishop's biographical history, the title of the second section of Questions of Travel seems odd. "Brazil," on the surface at least, is about Brazil. The poems of "Elsewhere" seem to be about something diametrically opposed to the exotic jungle: they are filled with Nova Scotia village houses and children and domestic rituals. They seem to be about Bishop's childhood home--yet she assiduously avoids calling this book "home." If the poems of "Brazil" explore the nature and purpose of travel, "Elsewhere" carefully ventures into the perhaps more frightening territory from whence we venture out: our childhood homes. Although the actual geographical terrain that she describes corresponds to the place she spent much of her childhood, Bishop complicates the idea and reality of home. Houses and towns and villages and people one loves create a comfortable domestic sphere, she suggests, but "home" has much more to do with the mind and the heart than with the actual living space.

Bishop's insistence that "home" is a complicated concept goes far beyond the conventional wisdom which asserts that it is "heaps of living" that make houses homes.

The ambivalence of "home" is, in fact, the least of Bishop's problems with the concept. Home as we traditionally think of it was the locus for some of the most terrifying and scarring episodes of Bishop's life: the death of her father; her mother's continuous bout with insanity; her constant "uprooting" and transfer between Nova Scotia and Boston. Even when she was securely in Great Village or in Worcester with her grandparents, the mother and father and siblings that make up the traditional picture of a "family" were conspicuous by their absence.

After moving to Brazil and feeling finally "safe"¹--perhaps for the first time--in the domestic sphere that she created with Lota, Bishop is finally able to approach these troubling issues in Questions, but she does it obliquely. The poems of "Elsewhere" allude to her fear and sadness and quickly control and focus these anxious emotions through figure and form. While this deliberate imposition of structure works on a formal, linguistic level--the rhymes and patterns and meters are maintained--it is inadequate to resolve or enclose the ambivalence generated at the level of meaning and connotation. The form holds together at the surface of the text, but Bakhtin's "heteroglossia," the whirling of unresolved ambivalence continues. Bishop "revisits" her childhood home and sees it through the eyes of a rational and "happy" adult, but she is troubled by memories and pain and disappointment--she still longs for what she thought should have been.

French psychoanalytic scholar Jacques Lacan discusses a similar phenomenon in his work on the formation of ego or self. Lacan argues that the "self" in humans is recognized in what he calls the "mirror stage":

The child, at an age when he is for a time, however short, outdone by the chimpanzee in instrumental intelligence, can nevertheless already recognize as such his own image in a mirror . . . This act, far from exhausting itself, as in the case of the monkey, once the image has been mastered and found empty, immediately rebounds in the case of the child in a series of gestures in which he experiences in play the relation between the movements assumed in the image and the reflected environment, and between this virtual complex and the reality it reduplicates--the child's own body, and the persons and things, around him. (Latimer 502)

The child, in other words, experiences for the first time the differentiation between his body and the image of his "self," that which is other than his body. Commenting on Lacan's idea, Dan Latimer interprets:

We discover the self, but when we do, it is outside. No matter that the child is jubilant at first, its joy will soon turn to anxiety as it projects itself into history, toward the future, and toward a specular ideal with which it will

never coincide until its death collapses the difference, the future is erased, and it becomes precisely what it has become. (501-502)

Applying this theory to Bishop's work, we can see Bishop as a child recognizing both the ideal of home and the self which identifies with it, but never feeling as if she has arrived there--never feeling as if she has lived in or created the "home" that she completely identifies with. Voyaging after an idea that retreated as she reached for it, Bishop had two choices: despair (depression and alcoholism in her case) or coping. She chose both. She endured the despair and coped by learning to dwell in the ambivalent--by controlling what she could and learning to accept the flux of all the rest. Unable to define or arrive at the concrete concept of home, Bishop accepts the ambivalence and, as she has done abstractly in earlier books, lets it empower her and her poems.

"Manners," "Sestina," and "First Death in Nova Scotia," the three "Nova Scotia" poems that open "Elsewhere," have a significant, autobiographical trait in common: all three are dominated by the persona of a child. This is true as well of "Gwendolyn" and "In the Village," short stories published with Questions of Travel. The speaking voice that strove to be transparent or neutral in earlier work has assumed the tone and manner of a child in these pieces--that is, it recalls a childhood mediated through the lens of adult experience. "Sestina," the only poem of the group not to

have a child actually speaking, focuses directly in the third person on a child and on the particular empirical clarity and specificity of a child's vision. Bishop's decision to encounter elements of her past in the guise of a vulnerable child instead of clothed in the distance of a "grown up" speaker demands further scrutiny.

Gilbert and Gubar argue that many women writers create personae who are other than adult women because women writers lack positive adult female models: they look to literature and find only monsters like Medusa or long-suffering, angelic virgins (xii). This lack would apply to the widely-read Bishop as would the fact that throughout her life she lacked a stable adult female role model in the form of a mother. While other poets, as Margaret Homans notes, strive to fend off their images of themselves as "other" and try to avoid becoming what their mothers had been (15), Bishop had no real image to fend off other than that of an unstable woman remembered through very young eyes. Private and reticent as usual, she perhaps felt uncomfortable portraying her adult self in her poems because she somehow lacked a stable internalized female standard against which to compare and evaluate it. Ostriker sheds light on this possibility as she argues that American women's writing grows out of a "subterranean tradition of female self-protection and self-exploration" ("The Thieves of Language" 14). Shielding her adult self from the possibility of criticism or exposure, Bishop nevertheless explores the

important issues of home and belonging and alienation through the persona of a child-self from which she can (temporarily) gain some psychological and emotional distance.

The children who appear in these first Nova Scotia poems have little in common with the shouting children foreshadowed in "Squatter's Children." They are well-mannered, if inquisitive little girls who never wander far from the domestic sphere. It is this very "narrowness" that some critics have seen as cowardice or lack in Bishop's work. Robert Dale Parker judges that Bishop seems "cautious, finicky" and "all those feminine things," but also "terrified" (2). In a similar vein, Ostriker indicts Bishop as a poet who would sacrifice sincerity for etiquette (Stealing the Language 54). Bishop chooses to encounter her past through the persona of a child not because she can hide behind that limited image, but because the traits associated with her child personae allow her to recognize anxiety and pain, limit and focus it, and survive (psychologically) to write again. These are the same moves implicit in the linguistic ambivalence and rhetorical contradiction of the previous books. Through the perspective of an adult remembering the traumas and pains of childhood, Bishop can recall and explore the questions and fears and doubts surrounding the whole issue of "home" without fearing the public curiosity and sense of vulnerability threatened in a more directly confessional mode.

She is not an emotional "coward" as Parker suggests, but merely demands complete control over the vehicle through which she will explore the dangerous places in her psyche. Feminist critic Elaine Showalter divides women's writing into two "camps": "tight-lipped Olympian intelligence" and free-flowing, lyrical texts of the body ("Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness" 252). With reference to Bishop this is a fallacious distinction. Endowed with an exquisitely clear-seeing, curious, empirical vision, Bishop's children explore the exquisite, lyrical world of the sensual; they just do not have a consciousness of its erotic potential. In a sense, their unconsciousness serves as a foil for the adult reader's awareness and thus emphasizes the lush, poignant flashes. Bishop can be controlled and focused in her autobiographical encounters without sacrificing the possibility of lyric moments. In fact, form in these particular poems intensifies these sensual glimpses; it does not diminish them.

Speaking of Emily Dickinson, as well as Bishop, Lynn Keller and Cristanne Miller argue that these women "so clearly recognize[d] the psychological and social pressures working against them as women poets and so skillfully counter[ed] those pressures in their strategies of indirection that a strong feminism is implicit in their stance" (535). As she did when dealing with the nebulous gender of the lovers in "Four Poems," Bishop chooses to encounter the concept of home through child personae not

because she is ladylike or frightened, but because it is the most effective vehicle to display the controlled anxiety and progress that make up her personal, feminist paradigm.

Perhaps the best thematic generalization for these Nova Scotia poems, specifically "Manners," is a paraphrase from "Over 2,000 Illustrations": thus should have been our childhoods. "Manners" serves much the same function in "Elsewhere" as "The Map" did in North & South. It sets up a pattern, a traditional way of looking at an issue that will be complicated and undercut by the poems that follow. In this case, the pattern is that of manners and etiquette: conventional social rules on what is required or acceptable in a given situation. Implicit in the whole idea of manners is the notion that acceptance of prescribed behavior on the part of a person will carry with it some reward: social acceptance, graciousness from others, entrance into certain echelons of society. At the very least, accordance with mores of etiquette protects against the punishment of a social gaffe or alienation from a particular group. With this in mind, "Manners" is a particularly good opener for this section because it establishes that the child knows and understands the rules of society. She therefore has reason to believe that she has some vested interest in behaving in accordance with those rules.

Bishop uses a very regular modified ballad stanza (that most traditional of forms) with its familiar beat and exact rhyme in order to emphasize the power of this kind of

control. The child learns strict rules and behaves according to those rules. The poem sets up a rhetorical pattern and sticks strictly to that pattern. But neither rhetoric nor society has the power to completely quell the terror and anguish that will suffuse the poems that follow. "Manners," like "The Map," however, opens objectively, not initially hinting at what is to follow:

My grandfather said to me
as we sat on the wagon seat,
"Be sure to remember to always
speak to everyone you meet."

We met a stranger on foot.
My grandfather's whip tapped his hat.
"Good day, sir. Good day. A fine day."
And I said it and bowed where I sat.

Then we overtook a boy we knew
with his big pet crow on his shoulder.
"Always offer everyone a ride;
don't forget that when you get older,"

my grandfather said. So Willy
climbed up with us, but the crow
gave a "Caw!" and flew off. I was
worried,

[t/o]

How would he know where to go?

But he flew a little way at a time
from fence post to fence post, ahead;
and when Willy whistled he answered.
"A fine bird," my grandfather said,

"And he's well brought up. See, he
answers

[t/o]

nicely when he's spoken to.
Man or beast, that's good manners.
Be sure that you both always do."

When automobiles went by,
the dust hid the people's faces,
but we shouted "Good day! Good day!
Fine day!" at the top of our voices.

When we came to Hustler Hill,
he said that the mare was tired,
so we all got down and walked,
as our good manners required. (1-32)

In the controlled and conventional world of this poem,
convention and causality seem to work: the grandfather
gives an instruction, the child obeys, and they proceed down
the road. A social transaction has taken place and the
implicit social contract of "manners" has been validated.
The grandfather gives a second instruction, "offer everyone
a ride," and Willy climbs up in the wagon, but his pet crow

is more recalcitrant. He flies off and refuses in a sense to play by the rules. The child is bothered by this violation. He or she significantly wonders "How would he know where to go," unconsciously implying that outside of the context of contracted manners and rules, there is no direction. He "chirps" back at his owner in the following stanza and the child is calmed, but he refuses to stay with the wagon and its occupants, always remaining a little ahead of them.

When the wagon encounters an automobile, the grandfather and the child shout their greetings, but dust significantly hides the faces of the motorists and the reader is unsure as to whether or not they have answered. In fact, the stranger that they meet on foot never actually answers them--we just assume that he does because, as the last line of the poem states, that is what "our good manners require." The grandfather gives the child instructions about what ought to happen in given situations, but as the poem shows, the reader can never be sure if those rules will "hold" and whether anybody else will play by them. There is always the possibility that, like the crow and the suspiciously silent motorists, the person or situation that the child encounters will be outside the reach of manners and rules. As the poem closes, we have an image of the grandfather murmuring his mantra of rural etiquette in very controlled meter and rhyme while all that is outside of the purview of "manners" whizzes uncontrolled around the wagon.

"Sestina" makes the same basic thematic point, but with much more tragic and drastic implications. "Sestina" is obviously written in form: in this case a very restrictive and specific form. The modified ballad stanza of "Manners" required alternating rhyme and regular rhythm; what makes the sestina such a difficult form is the patterned repetition: the end-words in each stanza must be the same, although arranged each time in a different sequence. The "envoi," the last three lines of a sestina, must be made up of these combined end-words. The sestina is a particularly effective poem for Bishop's theme because no matter how the elements in the scenario are arranged, the basic lack is still acutely felt and still the same.

The poem opens with a troubled grandmother reading to a small child at twilight in a rainstorm:

September rain falls on the house.

In the failing light, the old

grandmother

[t/o]

sits in the kitchen with the child

beside the Little Marvel Stove,

reading the jokes from the almanac,

laughing and talking to hide her tears.

She thinks that her equinoctial tears

and the rain that beats on the roof

of the house

[t/o]

were both foretold by the almanac,

but only known to a grandmother.

The iron kettle sings on the stove.

She cuts some bread and says to the

child,

[t/o]

It's time for tea now; but the child

is watching the teakettle's small

hard tears

[t/o]

dance like mad on the hot black stove,

the way the rain must dance on the

house.

[t/o]

Tidying up, the old grandmother

hangs up the clever almanac

on its string. Birdlike, the almanac

hovers half-open above the child,

hovers above the old grandmother

and her teacup full of dark brown tears.

She shivers and says she thinks the

house

[t/o]

feels chilly, and puts more wood in the

stove.

[t/o]

It was to be, says the Marvel Stove.

I know what I know, says the almanac.

With crayons the child draws a rigid

house

[t/o]

and a winding pathway. Then the child
 puts in a man with buttons like tears
 and shows it proudly to the grandmother.

But secretly, while the grandmother
 busies herself about the stove,
 the little moons fall down like tears
 from between the pages of the almanac
 into the flower bed the child
 has carefully placed in front of the
 house.

[t/o]

Time to plant tears, says the almanac.

The grandmother sings to the marvelous
 stove

[t/o]

and the child draws another inscrutable
 house. (1-39)

From the very first stanza where the grandmother is "talking to hide her tears," Bishop creates a tension in the poem between the demands of the form and the uncertainty of the child. The grandmother talks to hide tears, the source of which is significantly unstated. The whole first stanza, in fact, seems poised in a tense moment: it is twilight (neither night nor day); September rain falls (but in Fall, the snow is never far away); jokes, tears, and talking vie to control the grandmother's emotions.

The second stanza only reinforces this sense of

"balance," as Bishop pits the "equinoctial tears" of the grandmother against the controlling power of the predictions of the almanac. Like the "manners" of the first poem, the almanac is supposed to predict what is going to happen, meteorologically, in the coming year. The power of this almanac is limited, however, by the fact that the poem is positioned between seasons: equinoctial tears could only occur during an equinox, during which the days are almost exactly the same length, neither in one season or another. Balanced delicately between day and night, summer and fall, the setting of this poem does much to undermine the insistent pattern of its form and the predicting power of the almanac.

Stanza three presents us with another conventional ritual, tea time, only to blur the distinction between the liquid elements we have so far seen in the poem: rain metamorphized into tears in stanza one; the rain and the tears are equated in stanza two; in stanza three, the tears and the rain will insinuate themselves into the tea until in stanza four, the grandmother's teacup is full of tears. If we follow the symbolic implication or equation, then the tears literally surround the grandmother and the child.

Attempts at control by the figures in the poem are as ultimately futile as those exerted by the form: the grandmother tries to "tidy up" by hanging the almanac, but it is "clever" and still liminally "hovers half open," balanced above the child. In the final stanza before the

envoi, this liminal balancing will fail as well, as the almanac secretly rains down the moons that mark its days: "the moons fell down like tears." Stanza five finds the child's mind working fancifully to make sense of all of these elements--or, more to the point, to separate and categorize them in order to hold at bay the ubiquitous tears.

For the child, the objects in the scene carry hidden messages. The stove says "It was to be," referring to something outside of the realm of the text. Whatever "was" seems, however, to be the cause of the "hidden" but omnipresent tears. The almanac's insistent "I know what I know" reinforces this idea. Despite the attempts at control and form and disguise, whatever "was" still "is" and no amount of covering or rearranging or joking will change it. Nevertheless, the child, like the grandmother, tries: she draws a tragically "rigid" house that will later be described as "inscrutable." She even draws a pathway: like the child in "Manners," she knows what is supposed to be--her life just does not reflect that reality.

What is supposed to happen on rainy September afternoons is that mothers and fathers and children sit down and draw houses together--or barring that, the mothers and fathers eventually return up the path and reconnect with the child. Parents are conspicuous by their absence in this domestic scene and no amount of action on the part of the rhetoric or the personae can change the tragedy of that

fact. Helen Vendler wisely notes that "nothing is more enigmatic than the heart of the domestic scene" ("Domestication" 98).

Bishop does not end, however, with the conclusion that these emotions and tragedies are the child's "destiny." Behind the adult grandmother's back, the child is consciously working to thwart the ubiquitous tears. She has, the poem is careful to tell us, "carefully placed" the flowerbed in front of her house so that it will catch the teary moons that fall from the almanac. These tear/moons are equated with seeds in the envoi as the almanac whispers "Time to plant tears." Following this line, the repetition of the form and the actions of the personae continue: the grandmother continues to distract herself with singing and tidying and the child draws another futile and inscrutable house. A tension has been created, however, that cannot be ignored. The seeds that were moons have been planted: the combination of elements in the scenario makes it almost certain that these seeds will sprout. There is rain and the moon image suggests that there will be cycles and seasons. Maybe the resulting seedling will be nipped by the impending fall frosts, but the child will continue making her pictures. The reader is left in a liminal place similar to that in which the poem began: the poem will not divulge which will "win"--the planted possibility of the tears or the inscrutable alienation and loneliness of the houses--but the repetitious sestina form suggests that this ambivalent

cycle will be played out again and again. Liminality, Bishop tells us, contains both the possibility of future success and the seeds of a doubtful, worrisome conclusion. Survival, then, depends on one's reaction to the given paradigm: whether the model is manners or rhetorical form, one can use it to focus and quell anxiety, while at all times understanding that the control it exhibits is temporary and limited. Control and focus what you can, implies Bishop, but work like the child to let the hovering betweenness empower you with possibility.

Readers could argue that Bishop remains optimistic about the possibilities for survival and change because her personae in this section are children: with their whole lives ahead of them, children's tragedies are ultimately "fixable." Two things thwart this easy answer. First, the perspective of these poems is not wholly that of a child. The arrangement and control and logic of the ideas are not that of a child, but of an adult remembering childhood. The fact that the pain is presented so keenly suggests that the hoped for optimistic resolve has not been accomplished. With that point in mind, however, the fact that the adult holds out any hope at all suggests that even from the jaded adult perspective, some hope for future success still remains. The second and most obvious refutation of the view that Bishop views children as the bearers of unclouded optimism appears in the poem that follows "Sestina," "First Death in Nova Scotia." In this poem, one child tries to

cope with and understand the death of another equally young child.

About Bishop's "maritime" Nova Scotia poems, Peter Sanger says:

The apparent artless side of her lines
may suddenly be seen to have been
cannily directed to show how simple
things and the almost worn out words
that name them can again be given
complicated associations of pathos,
regret, humor, dignity, loss, and a
strangely independent purity, as if they
were at last being rightly valued. (18)

This sense of epiphany from the small and mundane is especially apparent in "First Death" because it is the only poem of the three that shows us a child speaking extensively in the first person. The child in "Manners" spoke in first person, of course, but it was in direct response to the grandfather. In this poem, the funeral of little Arthur is seen completely through the eyes of a child:

In the cold, cold parlor
my mother laid out Arthur
beneath the chromographs:
Edward, Prince of Wales,
with Princess Alexandra,
and King George with Queen Mary.
Below them on the table

stood a stuffed loon
 shot and stuffed by Uncle

Arthur, Arthur's father. (1-10)

The vision of this first stanza is very childlike. With a methodical, empirical eye, this child surveys the physical elements of the scene, dwelling longer on the subjects of the photographs and the history of the fascinating loon than she does on the dead body of Arthur. Bishop, of course, complicates that simple impression. Counterpointing the curious empirical listing of the child is the sound of the language of the stanza. The repeated "cold, cold" in the first line is followed by the "stuffed/stuffed" of lines eight and nine, and the "Arthur, Arthur" of line ten. Like a slow, spondaic dirge, these pairs intone "cold, stuffed, Arthur," a phrase that is characteristically ambiguous: simultaneously absurd and tragic.

This sense of the absurd continues in the second stanza as the child, preoccupied with the loon, seems to forget about the other dead child. Opening with the unconsciously comic "he hadn't said a word" and "he kept his own counsel," this stanza soon verges into the eerily macabre:

Since Uncle Arthur fired
 a bullet into him,
 he hadn't said a word.
 He kept his own counsel
 on his white, frozen lake,
 the marble-topped table.

His breast was deep and white,
 cold and caressable;
 his eyes were red glass,
 much to be desired. (11-20)

The strange juxtaposition of the dead child of the first stanza and the cold, but caressable red-eyed loon of the second stanza emphasizes the child's empirical eye for detail and gives the poem a rather macabre edge, but the most jarring element enters with the mother's voice in the third stanza. The child's vision of the marble table as a "white frozen lake" or his comment that the loon has "kept his own counsel" are childlike fantasy, but at least they are based in empirical fact--the loon has been silent and the marble is cold and white. The mother's perspective, however, contains an element of delusion and deliberate falsity that confuses the child and points out the limited usefulness of so-called adult wisdom:

"Come," said my mother,
 "Come and say good-bye
 to your little cousin Arthur."
 I was lifted up and given
 one lily of the valley
 to put in Arthur's hand.
 Arthur's coffin was a little frosted
 cake,
 and the red-eyed loon eyed it
 from his white frozen lake. (21-30)

[t/o]

Bishop balances the mother's exhortations with the child's vision of the coffin to underscore the delusion and fantasy that exist in both worlds, but she tips the scales in favor of the child as she exits the stanza. Responding to the adult's address to the corpse as if it were alive, the child animates the loon and sees it "eyeing" the cake-like coffin. She then tries to reconcile the empirical evidence with the adult fantasy in the confused concluding stanzas. Because she is a child, the speaker tries to process and relate all of the information she receives as if it contained the same degree of truth. In this light, the adult perspective merits as much consideration as the observed, if limited visual evidence about death. The trouble with this association is that the child has a hard time assimilating adult euphemism into her thinking about "dead things."

Taking her mother's cue, the child spends stanza four describing Arthur's dead body in terms more reminiscent of fairy tales than elegies. She views his reddish hair as having been "painted" by "Jack Frost" (33-34) just like the "Maple Leaf (Forever)" (36), but puzzles significantly over why Jack Frost left him so "white, forever" (40). This echoing "forever" brings back the ominous mood of the earlier stanzas and foreshadows the poignant confusion of the final stanza where:

The gracious royal couples
were warm in red and ermine;

their feet were well wrapped up
 in the ladies' ermine trains.
 They invited Arthur to be
 the smallest page at court.
 But how could Arthur go,
 clutching his tiny lily,
 with his eyes shut up so tight
 and the roads deep in snow. (41-50)

Although the poem has come full circle, the mood and focus of the child bear little resemblance to the opening stanza's. Instead of fanciful, concrete discussion of the loon, the child expresses genuine anxiety about the tragic dichotomy between the royalty and the dead cousin. Trying to juggle the physical reality of death and snowy weather with the stupid adult idea of "the smallest page," the child expresses the most honest response to death in the poem. Instead of crying out directly against the delusions of adulthood or the remarkable capacities of children, Bishop juxtaposes sinister loons, coffin cakes, and ermine wrapped ladies to jar the reader into active perception. Neither the childlike curiosity nor the platitudes of "mannerly" adulthood are enough to deal with issues like loss and death. Lloyd Schwartz reiterates this idea when he speaks of Bishop's tone:

. . . we face a double tone--the
 dramatic irony of a speaker who doesn't
 fathom the full implications of what he

reports [and] the poet's own voice,
 laconically indicating her own capacity
 for perception. ("One Art" 144)

Somewhere between the focused, objective world of childhood and the "shoulds" and cliches of conventional adulthood lies a space that encompasses the capacities of both. The child's question, like the seeds at the end of "Sestina," slowly germinates in the reader's mind, fueling a subsequent questioning of convention and rule and category.

Within this double tone, however, resonates another ambivalent and troubling issue--one that will be an issue in the interpretation of "In the Village." The setting of this story is a small Nova Scotia village. The story tells of a young female child whose suspiciously crazy mother screams while being fitted for a new dress and is later taken away to a mental hospital. While Bishop does not "mention any names," it is difficult not to read this story as straight autobiography and to associate the child with the young Elizabeth. Recent autobiographical theory, of course, reminds us that all autobiography is fiction in some sense and that within a fictive medium, autobiographical details must be considered with reference to the distorting filters of memory and motive.² Even so, the effect of such familiar details cannot be ignored. Even if we do not read with an autobiographical equation in mind (the child is Bishop; the screaming woman is her mother) we must account for the effect that even fictionalizing such a scenario

would have on Bishop. In fact, the very act of fictionalizing such a scenario is in keeping with the pattern of her fictional/poetic work up to this point. Bishop has used form and objective observation to try to quell troubling rhetorical and emotional issues. The form focuses and controls without ever really neutralizing the ambivalent contradictions. It is only natural then that the "real" emotional and psychological issues that trouble her should get the same treatment. Just as she has dismantled the ideas of one-to-one representation and the conventions of the pastoral, she will complicate her own attitudes about the "shoulds" of her childhood by presenting a "version" of it and then showing the limits of rhetoric to record fully or make concrete sense of it. As she has earlier, she approaches these troubling issues, forms and focuses them, without ever really solving them. In a sense this move gains her double power: the power of temporary control and progress and the power of the linguistic, rhetorical energy that refuses to be static.

Lloyd Schwartz argues that "what Miss Bishop sees, where she is, is her self-portrait; geography is autobiography" ("That Sense" 9); or, in other words, her description of place reflects the themes and conflicts with which she regularly does battle. Nowhere is this more evident than in the opening sentences of "In the Village":

A scream, the echo of a scream, hangs
over that Nova Scotian village. No one

hears it; it hangs there forever, a slight stain in those pure blue skies, skies that travelers compare to those of Switzerland, too dark, too blue, so that they seem to keep on darkening a little more around the horizon--or is it around the rims of the eyes?--the color of the cloud of bloom on the elm trees, the violet on the fields of oats; something darkening over the woods and waters as well as the sky. The scream hangs like that, unheard, in memory--in the past, in the present, and those years between. It was not even loud to begin with, perhaps. It just came to live there forever--not loud, just alive forever. Its pitch would be the pitch of my village. Flick the lightning rod on top of the church steeple with your fingernail and you will hear it.

(Collected Prose 251).

The passage opens with a literal resonance: the scream and the echo of the scream exist simultaneously, just as do the child's reaction to the scream, and the adult speaker's memory of that scream heard and packaged through memory as an echo. Bishop significantly does not say "or" in this phrase--a scream or an echo of a scream--because her point

is that they exist together. The child's and the adult's perception cannot be separated. This rather ominous simultaneity sets the pattern for the entire paragraph as the skies are at once "pure blue," "too blue," and changing, "darkening" a little. Even precisely what is darkening, however, cannot be determined as the darkening horizon becomes mid-sentence "the rims of the eyes." Whose eyes are these? The speaker's? The mother's? Both? Refusing to give a static answer, the passage continues, comparing the scream to the skies: "The scream hangs like that." This comparison reinforces the reverberation within the scream itself.

What started as movement between two conflicting elements has become more plural and complicated by the end of the passage. The scream not only resonates and vibrates with sound waves in the same way that the light waves of color and reflection vibrate and change in the sky; it is simultaneously "unheard, in memory--in the past, in the present, and those years between." Logically speaking the scream cannot be both unheard at all and in memory. Without hearing it, the speaker would have nothing to remember. Thus, the unheard could mean two things: either it is unheard in memory because the memory of it has been repressed by the narrator, or the silent, insidiously insistent thought has tenaciously dominated the narrator's sub-conscious ever since it happened (or both).

As the narrator tries to describe the scream itself,

the passage becomes even more ambivalent. The fact that the scream was "not loud" is undercut both by the word "perhaps" and by the juxtaposition of the "unheard" scream with the fact that it is "alive" "forever" in the literal buildings of the town. As she has in previous poems, Bishop is setting up a pattern of destabilization that will affect the reader's subsequent encounters with the content and style of a given piece.

The final line of this paragraph introduces an interesting dynamic into the text as the reader is invited to literally enter the text and flick the lightning rod on top of the church steeple. With this move, the reader starts the rhetorical and thematic volleying, and by implication, puts the story itself into motion. As she did in "The Map," Bishop is inviting the reader into the text in the hope of raising his or her consciousness about reading and representation, and about the ways in which most of us approach our respective childhoods. At the same time that Bishop is inviting us in, however, she is reminding us in this last phrase that we are seeing her story, her life, perhaps our own childhoods from a distance. She does this by the very act of asking us to flick the church steeple: this would only be possible if we were of gigantic size (implying adulthood and its subsequent distancing) or if the town were created in miniature (implying that the memories had been formed, fictionalized, and concentrated). Inviting us to participate and identify, she nevertheless reminds us

of the multiple lenses through which we are seeing her story. Past experience with the limited controlling power of these frames makes the attentive reader pay close attention to both structure and meaning in this important story. Neither, this stunning passage tells us, can be taken for granted.

Penelope Mortimer sees "In the Village" as "an invocation of childhood ending with the cry of an adult heart" (18). While the adult cry is in fact evident from this first passage, the story does invoke or recall the world of the childhood speaker from the second paragraph forward. The scene is a bedroom filled with a tense group of women anxiously attending to another shaky woman trying on a purple dress. The paragraphs are dominated by euphemism about the woman trying on the dress: her sisters stay on to vaguely "help"; "In spite of the doctors, in spite of the frightening expenses, she had not got any better" (252). The woman herself only speaks in indefinites: "Is it a good shade for me? Is it too bright? I don't know" (252). Later in the story, we will discover that the narrator of the story, the one speaking in third person initially, is this woman's child.

For now, however, she speaks of the mother only as "her" or "she" and speaks of herself as well in the third person as "the child": "First, she had come home, with her child. Then, she had gone away again, alone, and left the child. Then, she had gone away again" (252). The child,

faced with the mother's return, uses this strict, methodical chronology for the same reason that she employs the third person: to keep the events and their import tightly and logically under control and to distance them, via language.

Even this approach proves ineffective as the child watches the mother grow agitated. Sensing the anxiety of everyone in the room, the child forces herself to look out the window into the blacksmith's shop of her friend Nate. As she does so, however, the "clang" of Nate's hammer seems to intrude. In terms of the literal chronology of the story, the child has not yet heard the mother's scream. The adult remembering narrator, however, has. This creates an intriguing tension between the child's predicament in the story and the adult narrator's trouble in telling the story: the adult is agitated by the sound similarity of the "clang" and the scream even as he or she is using it as a controlling focal point for the child.

This juxtaposition of anxiety and control, the "clang" and the scream directly precede the scream itself:

Clang.

The pure note: pure and angelic.

The dress was all wrong. She screamed.

The child vanishes. (253)

For an awful moment, the scream and the clang, the catalyst for the child's fright and her refuge from it, collide and mesh and when this happens, the child vanishes. This important and dense juxtaposition implies several things:

first, that the focusing of anxiety, the literal turn of the head away from the tragedy is just as dangerous, just as frightening as the scream itself. By implication, writing about this event is just as painful and frightening and disorienting as enduring it the first time--perhaps more, given the fact that the narrator is now a rational adult and "above" being affected by a memory. The fact that the child "vanishes" suggests several things as well. The child vanishes literally, a fact that the child's appearance in the blacksmith's shop two paragraphs later will support, and the child vanishes for that moment in the text: in other words, the created narrative persona disappears as the remembering adult "arranger" encounters this horribly painful memory.

From this point forward in the story, all such moves to control, to focus, to turn away from the implications of the scream will be met with similar ambivalence: the narrator will focus on a "controlling" bit of minutiae or a diverting story only to have the anxiety intrude. This happens in the blacksmith shop, where the dogs and horses almost touch, almost connect and communicate, but somehow cannot and when the stones outside the shop look inviting, but are too hot to touch (253). This intrusion will occur later when the child takes her cow to pasture to avoid confronting her mother, only to have her focusing, controlling linear path disrupted by the cow who wants to scratch his back on a neighbor's lilac bush (261-63) and when the seamstress

bastes the dress, trying to chat with the child through her tears (254).

This uncontrollable anxiety causes the narrator to move back in time, significantly before the mother had returned from the institution and before the scream. As she moves into this "before" time, the narrator uses the first person for the first time. In a sense, the "child" the narrator refers to only existed as such before the trauma of the scream:

Before my older aunt had brought her
back, I had watched my grandmother and
younger aunt unpacking her clothes, her
"things." (254)

As these women unpack the mother's boxes, the narrator sets up a string of binaries that the rest of the story will explode. Everything in the trunk is black and white (255), an ironic oversimplification of the complexity of the situation. The child confuses "mourning" with "morning" and cannot understand why one would wear different clothes in the morning than at any other time (255). Even the oppositions of this comic mix-up are undercut. The life-giving implications of morning and the mortal connotations of mourning blend and blur. The child's father is dead--of that we can be sure--but the mother, in her "mourning" has become "dead" in a way. She might as well be dead because she is completely unavailable to the child. Like the "unheard" but living scream of the first paragraph, she is

alive, but not living.

As the women unpack her trunks, the black/white, inside/outside, living/dead binaries are also destabilized by the mother's insistent and insidious presence. Absent in fact, she is present in the brown perfume stains in the trunk and the glitter covered postcards that significantly disintegrate (deconstruct) as the child tries to "read" them--tries unsuccessfully to communicate in some way with the mother. These post cards, like the opening paragraph, tell the narrator's story in miniature:

The crystals outline the buildings on the cards in a way buildings never are outlined but should be--if there were any way of making the crystals stick. But probably not; they would fall to the ground, never to be seen again. Some cards, instead of lines around the buildings, have words written in their skies with the same stuff, crumbling, dazzling, and crumbling, raining down on little people who sometimes stand below." (255)

"Thus should have been our childhoods": outlined and boundaried and understandable. Lacking these outlines, words to describe, quantify, and make real the trauma would be the next best thing, but even they disintegrate and fall from the page. Even language is unequal to this task.

Language and observation failing, the child/narrator tries to internalize, to repress and somehow, through this literal and figurative process, come to terms with her abandonment. The most obvious and literal example occurs as the aunts and grandmother continue to unpack the trunk. Like the postcards, the rest of the contents suggest instability. As the adults dig through the trunk, the child notices a frail, translucent china tea cup. The grandmother tells her to hold it up to the light:

"See the grains of rice?" says my grandmother, showing me the cup against the light.

Could you poke the grains out? No, it seems they aren't really there any more. They were put there just for a while and then they left something or other behind. What odd things people do with grains of rice, so innocent and small! My aunt says that she has heard they write the Lord's prayer on them. (256)

There "for a while" and leaving "something or other behind," these cups are a poignant symbol of the empty connection between this mother and child. Like the scream in the opening paragraph and the mother (and Bishop's writing), these grains of rice are neither there or completely gone, but instead hovering somewhere in the memory and pain of the in between.

A similar example closes the same scene. The ladies find a significantly unfinished embroidered tablecloth at the bottom of the mother's trunk. While the adult women admire the mother's handiwork, the child grabs the needle:

Two pale wooden hoops are pressed
together in the linen. There is a case
of little ivory embroidery tools.
I abscond with a little ivory stick with
a sharp point. To keep it forever I
bury it under the bleeding heart by the
crabapple tree, but it is never found
again. (257)

The narrator never comments on why she wants this token, a fact that seems odd given this child's penchant for exhaustively describing everything that she sees. Instead, she relies exclusively on symbol to fill in the story. Although the idea of burying a sharp ivory needle in a bleeding heart seems almost gothic in its sentimentality or melodrama, and thus, out of character for the normally "reticent" Bishop, two things must be considered: first, this is a child's action--despite the melodrama the adult rememberer is still moved enough by the memory as to be unable or unwilling to mediate its rhetoric. Second, despite its cliched symbolism, the bleeding heart is the perfect vehicle to send the double message of the scream in the first paragraph. Even in cold northern climates, the bleeding heart is a dependable perennial, appearing

faithfully in early spring. The needle in this plant is never seen again, but the plant will keep coming back--this cycle suggesting both renewal and possibility and the fact that the "heart" of this plant is being freshly pierced every year by the needle so that it can bloom. The implications with reference to the child are obvious.

Directly counterpointing this liminal, ambiguous example is one that is opposite. In the paragraph after the needle hiding scene, the child enters Nate's blacksmith shop. In this world, unlike that of the mother, strict, predictable causality reigns:

Nate sings and pumps the bellows with
one hand. I try to help, but he really
does it all, from behind me, and laughs
when the coals blow red and wild.

"Make me a ring! Make me a ring, Nate!"

Instantly it is made; it is mine. (257)

Men chew tobacco and then spit; the horse eats and then "manure piles up behind him, suddenly, neatly"; iron is heated and a shoe for the horse is made (257-58). In the dressmaker's shop, as well, there is no mystery, no tension, just piles of lace and buttons and a chaos of thread (258) that is much preferable to the strained "routine" of the child's home. These "safe" details are framed, however, by another example of the child's attempt to control by

internalizing as she, for "greater safety on the way home," swallows the nickel the dressmaker gives her, later thinking that it is "transmuting all its precious metal into my growing teeth and hair" (259). Lacking a mother to attend to her needs, the child tries to keep safe that which is valuable, hoping that it will benefit her, a sad defensive posture for such a small child, but an emblem of the duality of this story's vision: that which is tragic still contains within it the possibility of future good and progress.

As the story draws to a close, various images of boxes and enclosure counterpoint the child's roaming and foreshadow the mother's return to the hospital. The child is mesmerized by boxes full of pastel, chalk-colored shoes in the store window, noting significantly that one shoe is exposed, while one remains covered (262). Houses are compared to boxes with mysterious treasures inside (262). The fence around the Presbyterian church is compared to a bird cage (263). All this while the child is taking Nelly the cow in a direct linear route to the pasture. When she gets there, this obsession with insides and outsides catches up with the child as:

For a while I entertain the idea of not going home today at all, of staying safely here in the pasture all day, playing in the brook and climbing on the squishy, moss-covered hummocks in the swampy part. But an immense, sibilant,

glistening loneliness suddenly faces me,
 and the cows are moving off to the shade
 of the fir trees, their bells chiming
 softly, individually. (265)

Even when she is away from the house, having "escaped" contact with the troubling mother, the child carries with her internalized pain and loneliness and the knowledge that despite her own freedom, the mother will always be locked away, imprisoning the child in her own sense of alienation.

Early in the story, the child literally "vanishes" when the mother screams. Later, when the mother, in a calm moment, touches the child, she disappears from the scene by focusing herself outside:

Hands are on my head, pushing me down; I
 slide out from under them. Nelly is
 waiting for me in the yard, holding her
 nose just under in the watering trough.
 My stick waits against the door frame,
 clad in bark. (261)

The incredible confusion and pain engendered by actual contact with the mother is controlled and focused through the image of the stick. Unable to internalize in the same way that she did with the needle or the nickel, the child instead emphasizes the protective layer of bark covering the stick. Again, the double move: the bark encloses and covers and protects the tender insides of the stick, but it also makes the stick much stronger and easier to hold onto

as a weapon or a tool for cow "whacking." In the image of the stick, the contradiction of anxiety and control, instead of neutralizing, creates a whirling meaning that suggests danger and possibility at the same time.

This same message is delivered in a much more narrative way as the story closes:

Clang.

And everything except the river holds
its breath.

Now there is no scream. Once there was
one and it settled slowly to earth one
hot summer afternoon; or did it float
up, into that dark, too dark, blue sky?
But surely it has gone away, forever.

It sounds like an empty bell buoy out at
sea.

It is the elements speaking: earth,
air, fire, water.

All those other things--clothes,
crumbling postcards, broken china;
things damaged and lost, sickened or
destroyed; even the frail almost-lost
scream--are they too frail for us to
hear their voices long, too mortal?

Nate!

Oh, beautiful sound, strike again!

(274)

With the sound of Nate's hammer, the fear of the scream returns and the narrator--even the landscape itself, except the river--tenses. But the scream is not synonymous with the "clang" anymore, it seems. As the narrator muses about where it has gone, into what it has been absorbed, she moves from speaking through the child persona to speaking again as an adult of the "too dark, blue sky." As an adult, she retains the uncertainty and ambivalence of the child/narrator, but her motives are different. The child used her power to focus, to pattern, to control as a means of survival, as a way of continuing to exist despite overwhelming tragedy. The adult has survived, but at what cost?

The scream is no longer as frightening and threatening, but the speaker longs for something, some sort of connection to that time and to her lost mother. The scream has been absorbed into the environment: like the "elements" it is always present, but largely ignored. Like a buoy at sea, it makes a noise that few will hear or understand. Divorced from the now meaningless stuff of the trunk and "almost lost" in the details of memory, the scream has become a symbol, an icon instead of what it was: a real cry of anguish from a real woman.

As a grown woman, the speaker can empathize with the pain of her mother as woman, but she is still haunted by the pain of her girlhood. When she asks for Nate and the

beautiful sound to strike again, she is asking simultaneously for a second chance to hear the scream and the obfuscating sound, the symbolic comfort of the blacksmith's refuge. Fear and longing, identification and alienation, childhood and adulthood fuse in this last line and bring the story full circle. As the sound strikes at the end, we are pushed around into the beginning and the cycle of ambivalence and inherent possibility that is the story's theme.

In his study of Bishop's letters to Moore and Lowell, David Kalstone notes that "disorientation and the threat of abandonment are very close in her mind . . . reconstituting the world was a way to combat or express" that which haunted and confused her (Becoming 21-22). Bishop's trip to Brazil and her subsequent stay there were not desperate escapes from a world that she was unequipped to handle. They can be seen instead as an errand, a mission through which Bishop hoped to pull her identity together, to gather the pieces of her life, look at them for the first time, and reconstruct herself. Carole Kiler Doreski argues that images of Nova Scotia allowed Bishop to "re-call" and reconstitute her own identity (152). Nova Scotia is certainly a big part of her identity, but it took Brazil, a "foreign," but safe haven to allow Bishop to name that which most frightened her and make it a part of her identity.

In the story "Gwendolyn," written at about the same time as "In the Village," a small child loses her friend

Gwendolyn to death from childhood-onset diabetes. Observing Gwendolyn's funeral from a distance, the child experiences a sensation that she can only describe metaphorically. A year earlier, she had been looking for some beautiful, beloved marbles in a small basket. When she found them, they were not as she had remembered them. Instead of being glossy and "shiny glazed pink, like crockery" (224), they were scratched and faded and covered with dirt and mildew (225). The feeling she experiences is that of horror at the clashing of expectation and reality: loved toys are supposed to exist in reality as they exist in our memory. Little girls are not supposed to die. And by extension, little girls named Elizabeth are supposed to have mothers and fathers at home and grown women are supposed to "get over" this lack. Bishop recognizes the ambivalence of her life, the contradictions and the pain and unresolvable suffering, and she chooses to control what can be controlled and to use this concentrated energy for poetry and psychological progress. Yet, as a feminist, she understands that power lies in this contradictory "between" space, this gap in which the ambivalence that cannot be controlled can be used to create.

Notes

1. In letters to good friends Kit and Ilse Barker during the first two years of her stay in Brazil, Bishop reveals a happiness and contentment to which she seems unaccustomed. Victoria Harrison notes that Bishop met Ilse and Kit, German-born writer and painter, respectively,

while at Yaddo in 1950, during one of the more difficult periods of her life. She had come there after a physically and emotionally straining year as poetry consultant at the Library of Congress, where she had often been ill and had felt surrounded by poets constantly more productive than she, a fear which kept her panicked and depressed. (500)

Intimate with her during a time when alcohol and loneliness threatened to ruin her, the Barkers provided the perfect sounding board for her new-found and unfamiliar tranquility.

In a letter written while in Alcobaca, Petropolis, dated February 7, 1952 (shortly after her arrival), Bishop tells the Barkers "I have liked it so much here, thanks entirely to my friends, that I've stayed on and on" Later in the same letter, she literally raves about a birthday gift from one of Lota's neighbors: "And then, later on, a neighbor whom I scarcely know--because we have no known language in common, for one thing--came bringing me

my life-long dream . . . a TOUCAN." She goes on excitedly in a mistake-riddled page about the bird and then says "I hadn't meant to go on so but you are the 1st persons to tell about this and as you see I'm still too excited to type properly . . ." After more bird details and an explanation of the violent allergic reaction that had initially detained her, Bishop asks: "Is everybody working--more than I am I hope, but I have been so happy that it takes a great deal of time getting used to. My troubles, or trouble, seems to have disappeared completely since leaving New York." Her last comment seems to refer to the excessive drinking that left her hospitalized before her trip.

In another letter, dated October 12 of the same year, Bishop tells with wry amusement of her new life:

the social life up here where I am is very limited--a few friends make it up the mountain over the week-end, and arrive with their cars spouting boiling water, but the rest of the time we go to bed at 9:30, surrounded by oil lamps, dogs, moths, mice, blood-sucking bats, etc. I like it so much that I keep thinking I have died and gone to heaven, completely undeservedly. My New England blood tells me that no, it isn't true-- Escape does not work: if you really are

happy, you should just naturally go to pieces and never write a line--but apparently that--and most psychological theories on the subject, too--is all wrong, and that in itself is a great help.

Her "New England blood," it seems, moves her toward control and focus even when it is happiness that "needs" to be controlled. Despite her teasing details about bats, her happiness is evident. Reading her "early bedtime" comment with the unpublished "Dear my compass still points north" poem in mind adds a delightful edge to her stated glee.

Later in the same letter, she notes that

It is funny to come to Brazil to experience total recall about Nova Scotia--geography must be more mysterious than we realize, even. The book of poems, "A Cold Spring" should really be out this spring now. But it is wonderful to be able to work, isn't it--I hadn't been, really, for so many years.

On Good Friday of the following year, Bishop breaks a long silence with the Barkers and writes:

Please please forgive me for not writing to you all this time, but believe that it has been a very good sign, really--I tend to write too many letters and not enough poems, or to write letters

and not LIVE, etc,.

What follows is a manically crowded list of parties and remodeling and gardens and details that suggests Bishop has truly emerged from the isolation that debilitated her in Washington. In the same letter, Bishop expresses jealousy over the attention a mutual friend received from a red-haired man and chatters on about the beauty of place, people, scenery. Amidst all this "news," she indicates that she is working on a story. This story will be the masterful, poignant "In the Village." Only within the security of this new-found haven and her new love, it seems, could she approach that most painful of days when her mother left for the insane asylum, never to return.

On June 17 of the same year, Bishop describes her beloved Lota to the Barkers:

Lota now feels that she will not have lived until she has attended an auctionShe is delightful--extremely funny, energetic, and as her friends keep telling me "the most intelligent woman in Brazil"--& from what I have seen of them it is certainly true, and an extremely hard position to be in a country like this one where women can't even witness documents, etc.--it would make anyone into some kind of a feminist in no time.

The woman who seems to have mistrusted happiness in her

earlier poetry is happy for a time at least in her new residence.

Bishop's letters to the Barkers are housed in the Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library. There are twenty-eight folders of letters in one box spanning the years between 1952 and 1979, the year of Bishop's death. Since the folders are labelled chronologically by year, I will refer to the dates of letters instead of to folder numbers.

2. Paul John Eakin argues that readers are conditioned to view autobiography as "the truth" as told by the person who knows it best. He adds:

We want autobiography to be true, we expect it to be true more or less, and most of us are content to leave untested the validity of its claim to a basis in verifiable fact; most of the time we are not in a position to make such a test anyway. In those cases when we are forced to recognize that autobiography is only fiction, we may feel cheated of the promised encounter with biographical reality. (9-10)

Janet Varner Gunn suggests that the debate about autobiography should focus on authors' readings of themselves, not whether or not they are being deliberately fictitious. She sees the creation of autobiography as an "act of reading" that involves both the author and the

intended audience (8). The text becomes increasingly more fictive as authors "read" and interpret their lives and then present them to readers, who, based on their own experience, read and interpret again (8). This cumulative process is further complicated by what Eakin calls the "unconscious workings of the memory" (17), which distort and select events until the newly created "whole" is merely a fictive version of "real" life.

Estelle Jelinek expands on this argument and suggests that the success of autobiography, like any other fictive discourse, depends on the skill of the author in creating believable, well-rounded characters (xi). Both autobiographers and fiction writers try to find patterns or types that best express their themes, and then analyze themselves or their protagonists to see how well they fit these patterns (5). The final product, in Jelinek's mind, resembles the type or archetype much more than the autobiographer (5).

Although these theories of autobiography deal exclusively with fiction, they apply to the autobiographical scenes that Bishop employs in her poetry as well. Richard Coe notes that:

. . . if the autobiographical element,
however memorable, provides merely a
background, while the essential
structure of action or of psychological

development is drawn from other sources,
then we may . . . assign the work to the
domain of fiction. (5)

Susanna Egan agrees and adds that autobiographical "facts" serve as prompts that aid in the author's creation of a myth of self. Shaped by both the author's perception of himself and the audience's expectations, the product cannot escape being labelled as fiction (20). Admittedly, the previous theories concern work purposefully written as autobiography, but they illuminate the blurred lines between memory, fact, and fiction.

CHAPTER VII

THE GEOGRAPHY OF SELF: Resonating

Selves in Geography III

Throughout Questions of Travel, Bishop examined the power that exists in liminal states: travel, childhood, foreignness. She presented personae and speakers poised between escape and discovery, adulthood and remembered childhood, and delusion and self-awareness. Dismantling the easy opposition between these states, Bishop instead offered texts and ideas in motion: her juxtapositions and metaphors and connotations did not allow for a static meaning to "stick" to poems or exist absolutely within them. In Geography III, she maintains and exploits the power of this liminal "between" space. She once again sets up oppositional binaries, only to undo their absolute opposition. She even teases the reader with "red herring" details about her life and even goes further. In this last book Bishop uses the power of the between to fuel the creation of a kind of personal topography, a mapping of the self. Using her own name in a poem such as "In the Waiting Room" or making reference, through adult speakers, to Nova Scotia and Great Village, she seems to be "driving to the interior" in a much more direct way than was evident in the oblique, muffled references in the "Elsewhere" poems.

Readers familiar with the way Bishop has manipulated and dissolved easy interpretations and correspondences in earlier books, however, approach such conclusions about "autobiographical truth" in Bishop's work quite cautiously. This book is after all titled Geography III, and the first poem in her first book did destabilize the relationship between maps and the places they describe, observation and reality, language and referent.

Whether or not Bishop intended to present herself in a portrait of autobiographical "truth" in Geography III is really moot. Her rhetorical moves do suggest, however, that she was attempting to record and examine the topography of a self, if not her self. Whereas Questions of Travel presented an adult self trying to come to terms with the keen-edged pain of unresolved childhood issues and the impossibility of escaping those issues, Geography III presents a tentative mastery. Bishop purposefully titled this volume: this is not beginning or intermediate geography, this is the third in a series--the advanced class. Going beyond the "basic" techniques (memorizing, listing, objective observation, theory), the advanced geography student shows his or her mastery of the subject by creating actual maps.

Bishop's previous books laid a foundation for this advanced work: she explored objectivity and listing in North & South; she undercut literary and sexual convention in Cold Spring; and she read and followed maps with varying

degrees of success in Questions. Geography III finds her charting an original course to the self, fully aware of the tentativeness and ambivalence of the map she is creating. Writing in what Annette Kolodny calls the "plurality" of women's voices ("Dancing" 161), Bishop constructs a map that (like Irigaray's conception of language) "is always in the process of weaving itself, of embracing itself with words, but also of getting rid of words in order not to become fixed, congealed in them" (This Sex 29).

As she has in all of the other books, Bishop uses the first poem of this volume, "In the Waiting Room," to establish a structural and thematic pattern and a dominant tone. This poem begins with a now familiar Bishop motif: listing of "objective detail" or stage setting:

In Worcester, Massachusetts,
I went with Aunt Consuelo
to keep her dentist's appointment
and sat and waited for her
in the dentist's waiting room.
It was winter. It got dark
early. The waiting room
was full of grown-up people,
arctics and overcoats,
lamps and magazines. (1-10)

The first thing that the poem presents is a place-- Worcester, Massachusetts. As the lines proceed, however, we find that the real setting of the poem is the waiting room

of a dentist's office, which looks presumably the same in Worcester, Massachusetts as it does in Salt Lake City, Utah or Stillwater, Oklahoma. Why then does Bishop use the first, specifically geographical detail?

As the poem proceeds, frightening epiphanies about the speaker's fears of becoming a woman will destabilize the focus and syntax and logic--even the room will seem to move and be swallowed up. The speaker's loss of perceptive consciousness, her literal "identity crisis" will be tied intimately to how she perceives the people surrounding her and the details of the room she is in. Bonnie Costello notes this trend in the poems of Geography III. She says: "Bishop's poetry accepts our uncertain relation to other times, places, and things, suggesting we have no 'self' otherwise, and no home" ("Impersonal" 109). Patricia Wallace echoes this idea as she notes that the self is not necessarily equivalent to the world in Bishop's work, but neither the self nor the world is portrayed without reference to the other (97). Bishop's concept of self, identity, "ego" is intimately tied to identification with important physical places and scenes.

With this in mind, we are prepared to understand and be acutely perceptive as to how the waiting room, the locus of the internal conflict, is an important place in the world of this poem. But why a waiting room in Worcester, Massachusetts? Bishop seems to be inviting the reader familiar with her biographical background to see her as the

persona in the poem--later, however, she paradoxically identifies the speaker as "Elizabeth" and gives the reader "biographical" details that turn out to be false. Before this ambivalent dropping of "red herrings" can be understood, the nature of the relation between self and place must be explored.

Some of the most provocative theory concerning the psychology of place comes from the relatively new field of "humanistic" or behavioral geography. Theorists in this field use case studies and theories about people's relations with place in order to discover and solve problems within existing communities and project effective plans for new zoning and new communities. David Seamon asserts that self identity is directly determined by identity with the "lifeworld," the geographical and social space within which we all live (191). Anne Buttmer describes her work as an investigation of how "people's sense of both personal and cultural identity is intimately bound up with place identity" (167). Instead of seeing place and community as static, finite entities, she sees them "in dynamic terms, as horizons for basic life processes rather than artifacts or nouns" (186). Communities, in other words, are the poles between which "life" and the flux of movement take place. Buttmer's use of the linguistic term is neither accidental nor arbitrary. Humanistic geographers speak of text and meaning and signifiers and "betweenness" in much the same way as current literary theorists. Linda Hutcheon notes that

in the post-modern world, theorists are turning away from external criticisms and exploring how self-reflexiveness (in perception, language, and naming) operates within their various theories (1). Courtice Rose, for example, suggests that human geography consists of "interpreting texts--an act much like ordinary reading" (124). A text, she says, can be considered any set of linguistic or physical or geographic signs organized in a pattern of meaning (124). Edward Gibson explores the idea of "betweenness" as he posits that our identities, our sense of a separate self, is formed as we experience how our environment affects us and observe how others interact with it. He adds that we always have in mind our ideal, but we "perceive the great gulf between the places we can thus idealize and those in which we live . . . In seeing [the gulf] we come to understand who we are" (153). It is in the Lacanian, feminist "between space" that this recognition of the relational self exists.

If Bishop's goal then is to create what geographer Roger Downs calls "mental maps" (97), she does so in order to more explicitly explore the "gulf" between place and identity, then and now, public self and private self. She uses place as a base--a traditionally static entity off of which she can bounce ideas of flux and plurality. She holds up place as a stabilizing agent, that which is definable and "given" only to undermine the static nature, the controlling power of space and place. Geographer Denis Wood supports this concept of a destabilized sense of place. He notes

that because description and perception of place are individual and "mediated," there is no clear distinction between the "world within the head and the world without" (207). Arguing that all geography is "cognitive geography," he says that "human experience is the only valid measure of the world. Implied by this is the second principle, that the real world is accessible only to each of us alone" (207). A "cartography of reality," he suggests, would account for this always mediated perception, this relational reality (217). The variable, resonating reality of human experience then is the source of our perceptions of space.

Humanistic geographer Douglas Pocock echoes this idea as he notes that in literature, portraits of place are often "false geographies": the actual details of a place do not correspond to the way that the place is described in the fiction. Through the lens of literature, especially in conventions such as the pastoral and anti-pastoral, a "refraction" occurs: the perceived space is not so much "cleansed" of details that "don't fit" the author's intention, as it is seen anew. Place as a static "stage" is replaced by place as a "dialectic between rest and movement." In other words, "physical place is 'replaced' through our sensibilities by an image of place, which is no less real" (15). Thus, for Pocock, and by extension for Bishop, the "truth of yearning for home lies not in things or persons yearned for, but in the very process of yearning itself" (17). The details of the actual place described or

alluded to by the fiction are less important than the author or character's relational processing or perception of them.

In all of her books, Bishop has used "objective" description of things and places to tease and chastise the reader: she presents seemingly irrefutable empirical truth only to illustrate how this truth is conditional or somehow more complex than it initially seems. The use of the biographically significant details in "In the Waiting Room" works in much the same way. At both the beginning and end of this poem, the child speaker uses references to place to stabilize and focus herself: in both cases, she reminds herself that she is "in Worcester, Massachusetts" (line one and line ninety-six). Bishop, the adult poet, and we, the adult readers, however, can understand how this sense of place is fluid, relative, and not absolutely concrete.

If we read this poem as straight autobiographical "truth," then we fall into a trap similar to the ones set in "The Map," and "Four Poems," and "Arrival at Santos." "In the Waiting Room" has as much to do with women's discovery of their relationship with other women or young women's fears about becoming adults as it does Bishop's own coming of age. It is a poem about the sudden realization of connection and the ambivalent nature of that connection: connection to the female means both connection to the power of the plural and the cultural oppression that accompanies it. As Kristeva and others have noted, success for women depends on their ability to recognize the oppression against

women and continuously interrogate it. The terror that the child in this poem experiences is due in part to the fact that she does not have the language and experience to name what is frightening her and then do battle with it. Instead, she must rely on the ultimately powerless lines and names and boundaries with which she is familiar.

After these initial "locating details," the poem proceeds to describe the "inside":

My aunt was inside
what seemed like a long time
and while I waited I read
the National Geographic
(I could read) and carefully
studied the photographs:
the inside of a volcano,
black, and full of ashes;
then it was spilling over
in rivulets of fire.
Osa and Martin Johnson
dressed in riding breeches,
laced boots, and pith helmets.
A dead man slung on a pole
--"Long Pig," the caption said.
Babies with pointed heads
wound round and round with string;
black, naked women with necks
wound round and round with wire

like the necks of light bulbs.
Their breasts were horrifying.
I read it right straight through.
I was too shy to stop.
And then I looked at the cover:
the yellow margins, the date.
Suddenly, from inside,
came an oh! of pain
--Aunt Consuelo's voice--
not very loud or long.
I wasn't at all surprised;
even then I knew she was
a foolish, timid woman.
I might have been embarrassed,
but wasn't. What took me
completely by surprise
was that it was me:
my voice, in my mouth.
Without thinking at all
I was my foolish aunt,
I--we--were falling, falling,
our eyes glued to the cover
of the National Geographic,
February, 1918. (11-53)

Lee Edelman very perceptively notes that the details that Bishop dwells on in this passage are wrong: the issue of National Geographic to which she is referring does not

contain the articles and photographs that the poem says that it does (184). Edelman suggests that Bishop uses "wrong" details in order to undermine both the child's and the reader's expectations about reading--specifically, that there is a one to one relationship between reading and representation (188).

In a sense, it is this very discrepancy and the subsequent realization of ambivalence that form the developing female self in Bishop's poem. This is clear on several levels. In terms of sound, an interesting dialogue emerges between the use of the first person and the internal and end rhymes. The speaker repeatedly uses "I" to refer to herself, but that naming, that statement of self, is complicated by the other "I" rhymes: inside (three times), time, fire, wire, horrifying, surprise (twice). The "I" who can read, who trusts the power of reading, who looks at margins and dates and edges hoping to gain some sort of framing and control is counterpointed with the sound and sense of these rhymes. "Inside" or beneath this tentative "mastery" of signs lies rapidly passing time, uncontrolled lava and fire, horrifying wire, and altogether frightening "surprise." The "I" expressed with childish confidence is simultaneously an "aaayyyeee," a cry of pain and surprise.

This conflation of the "I" self and pain encompasses more than just the speaker. The heads of the children in the fictitious issue of the magazine are wound with string, which is horrifying, as it signifies disfigurement and,

symbolically, attempts to control thought or intelligence. The adult women, however, are bound with wire and this wire is around their necks--it is not just limiting them, but ostensibly, if it were too tight or if it were pulled, threatening their lives. Literally, of course, the wire rings and the string are forms of ritual cosmetic mutilation--just as Chinese women bound their feet, these women distort their bodies in keeping with cultural or religious dogma. This custom is given ominous overtones by Bishop, however, as the particular distortions are potentially life threatening. She could have chosen women with rings in their lips or pierced noses, but she chose the image of potential strangulation. The image of light bulbs intensifies this fearful horror as the woman's head is identified with the brittleness, thinness, and fragility of this object. Juxtaposed with these alienating details, the breasts of the women seem to frighten the child most of all. Consistent in her description and cataloguing up until this point, the child must stop and attempt to center herself after she sees these horrifying breasts. It is then that she looks to the journal and its geometrically framing cover for support. This fearful moment is directly followed by her aunt's cry: it is the juxtapositioning of these two moments that produces the epiphany, the connection that literally sends the child spinning off into the next stanza.

The "I" that can read is not replaced, but put into dialogue with the "I" associated with the breasts and with

the pain of the "inside." Although completely "surprised," the child can accept her connection with her aunt: "It was me:/my voice in my mouth./Without thinking at all/I was my foolish aunt" (46-49). In the lines that follow, however, the connection with the aunt does not justify the terror that the child feels: "I--we--were falling, falling,/our eyes glued to the cover" (50-51). Connection with a foolish and embarrassing aunt would be disconcerting, but it is the connection to womanhood, to those breasts and the women in the Geographic that seems to be most frightening. The "we" who are falling includes the women with wires several lines earlier.

What frightens the child about the breasts can be directly tied to the patterns of inside versus outside that the poem has already set up. Lee Edelman suggests that the child first approaches the breasts from within patriarchal norms: she can read and thus master texts and thus, she looks at the breasts as a sign of the erotic, commodified place that women occupy in society. When she makes the epiphanic connection that she is a female child and thus will be an adult woman, she realizes her necessary implication in the system of signs she had thought to master by being able to read (192). Seeing these women as "texts" on which patriarchal domination is inscribed, "Elizabeth finds herself located by the text, inside the text, and as a text" (193).

In an attempt to quell the vertigo that results from

this terrifying revelation, the child resorts to linear,
numerical data:

I said to myself: three days
and you'll be seven years old.

I was saying it to stop
the sensation of falling off
the round, turning world
into cold, blue-black space.

But I felt: you are an I,
you are an Elizabeth,
you are one of them.

Why should you be one too?

I scarcely dared to look
to see what it was I was.

I gave a sidelong glance
--I couldn't look any higher--
at shadowy gray knees,
trousers and skirts and boots
and different pairs of hands
lying under the lamps.

I knew nothing stranger
had ever happened, that nothing
stranger could ever happen.

Why should I be my aunt,
or me, or anyone?

What similarities--
boots, hands, the family voice

I felt in my throat, or even
 the National Geographic
 and those awful hanging breasts--
 held us all together
 or made us all just one?
 How--I didn't know any
 word for it--how "unlikely" . . .
 How had I come to be here,
 like them, and overhear
 a cry of pain that could have
 got loud and worse but hadn't. (54-89)

Putting her faith in the power of hierarchies and linear scales, the child attempts to stop the spinning by reminding herself that she is "seven": presumably too old for fear and other such nonsense and very far in years from the possibility of adult breasts and foolishness. She finds no comfort in the numbers, however, and subsequently makes a direct distinction between the failed numerical mantra ("I said to myself: three days/and you'll be seven years old") and the way that she feels ("But I felt: you are an I,/you are an Elizabeth,/you are one of them").

Just as the child's meditation on the margins and dates was an inadequate distraction from her fear of the horrifying breasts, her age is little comfort against her recognition of connection. The use of articles within this epiphany is particularly significant. Despite what she "says," she feels that she is "an I," "an Elizabeth," "one

of them." She finds no comfort in the world of lines and dates and boundaries, but she cannot quite connect with the world of "them" either. Instead she is "an I"--a self, an ego that is somehow outside of her perceptual consciousness. She is "an Elizabeth"--one of the many bearers of that name, but not a necessarily connected "signified" to that signifier. She is ironically "one of them," but the very distinction of them as them suggests that she does not see herself as really a part of them.

Bishop sets up the boundaries between child and adult, naive and informed consciousness, self and other. She then attempts to cross these boundaries via the child's epiphany, and ends up actually strengthening the sense of division. Images of the Lacanian mirror stage come to mind. Instead of dissolving the boundaries between these binaries, the child's language during the epiphany underscores the fact that despite her fright and horror, the complete connection that the child thinks she experiences is not happening. This poem then is not about Elizabeth Bishop realizing one day that she is Elizabeth Bishop, that she is female, that she shares this femaleness with all women. It is about Elizabeths and Frans and Marys recognizing that there are choices, that there are selves. There is the world of numbers and formulas and borders and the world of feeling and falling and "Them," and both worlds exist simultaneously. The child can neither be wholly in one nor the other: instead, she vacillates from one perception to

another.

Thus, the "why" that she asks in the next lines questions the child's predicament and asks a deeper question as well: "Why should you be one too?" The child ostensibly continues the "out of consciousness" experience she began when she used the distancing articles: her "new," disoriented self asks her old "childish" self "Why should you be one of them too?" The connotations of this question are plural: why, she asks, should you be one of them? In other words, why is it necessary to make the transition between what the child perceives as "separate," discreet consciousness and a collective adult mentality? Implicit also is the question of why it is necessary to make the transition "too"--why does she need to do it just because everybody else seems to have done it? Both of these connotations have their referent in the impulse that made the child look to numbers and margins and boundaries for support. Within this hierarchical system is the assumption that each individual is an autonomous unit separate from every other unit on the linear scale. Children, adults, men, women, foolish people, wise people are all separate and definable on this scale.

At the same time that the child forces this distinction via her question, however, the wording undermines the hierarchical logic that underpins the question. Very subtly, this first "why" will join with the repeated "why's" and "how's" in the remainder of the stanza to form a long

vowel "howl" that will echo the cry of disorientation and pain in the "i" rhymes of the first stanza. In addition, the "you" brings readers out of their roles as mere spectators and forces them to question as well. The "you," of course, refers to the child talking to herself but can be seen as a direct address to the adult reader. "Why," the poem asks, "do you participate in this system, this "adult" role playing, these binary oppositions? Even this neat distinction between working within the hierarchy or abandoning it is undercut, however, within the question itself. The question is not "why should you be one of them too" but "why should you be one, too?" The direct juxtaposition of one/too also suggests one/two, simultaneity, Irigaray's two in one. It also suggests a sequence--one, two, three--and a return to numbers and rules as a way of quelling the inevitable entrance into adulthood. Once again a distinction is being made at the same time that it is being undercut.

This doubleness continues until the end of the poem. The child firmly asserts that "nothing stranger" could or had ever happened, only to have that absolute undermined in the next lines by a mushrooming sense of connection:

Why should I be my aunt,
or me, or anyone?
What similarities--
boots, hand, the family voice
I felt in my throat, or even

the National Geographic
and those awful hanging breasts
held us all together
or made us all just one? (75-83)

The looming specter of being an "adult" has completely disoriented the child: the epiphany that began with a startling connection with the aunt has caused her to veer to opposite extremes of alienation. She does not recognize her connection to herself (why should I be me?) or to anyone. Even as this existential despair is named, however, it is vitiated. As she searches for the connecting factor, the "glue" that "holds us all together," she undoes the distinction between voices and breasts and boots and hands and everything else with the phrase "just one." The colloquial connotations of this phrase are both "only one"--alone and alienated and by yourself as one--and a plethora of others: deservedly one, rightfully one, neither more nor less than one, exactly one. The imprecision with which a child would use this malleable word leaves open a spectrum of possible definition. Instead of answering the question she asks, this phrase sets in motion a host of possibilities. That is "just" the point. The connection between girl children and women, children and adult, text and reader is not a simple or easily definable one.

Thus, at the same time that the child is "here" to "overhear" the cry, she is both "here" and "over here"--in the moment and perceiving the moment from a perceptual

distance. At the same time that she understands that the cry "could" have worsened and forced an action or shocked her out of her liminal anxiety, she accepts that it didn't-- that it is the very "middleness" of it, the ring of familiarity that caused her reaction. These musings, however, take the form of a question, the last in a series of questions that close the stanza. The questions and the entire poem set up oppositions, undermine them and then won't let the reader rest on this destabilized ground as the questions set the whole poem whirling.

Unable to answer these questions or even to keep questioning, the child instead ends the poem with two images:

The waiting room was bright
and too hot. It was sliding
beneath a big black wave,
another, and another.

Then I was back in it.
The War was on. Outside,
in Worcester, Massachusetts,
were night and slush and cold,
and it was still the fifth
of February, 1918. (90-99)

The series of questions in the previous stanza disorients the child to the point that she disappears in the penultimate stanza. All we have are her perceptions--the

room is being swallowed by giant black waves--uttered in ironically simple phrases. Amidst all of this moving ambivalence, the emerging "I" consciousness has disappeared.

The final stanza brings it back with a force and a simplicity that must be suspected. The binary, linear focus that failed the child earlier in the poem seems to be the solution. Freed from her vertigo, she is, in this final stanza, "back in it." The "it" here is presumably the room and its familiar surroundings. She recognizes the room again; it has stopped moving; she has regained her composure. The indefinite pronoun, however, makes this simple conclusion a dubious one. The closest noun to the "it" in this phrase is not the room but the big, black wave of the previous stanza. Before that is another indefinite "it." The preposition is complicating as well. "In" has been a loaded concept in this poem: it was in Massachusetts and in the waiting room, and inside the covers of the Geographic that all of the disorientation started. Additionally, Aunt Consuelo screams when the dentist probes and drills inside her mouth--details that are concealed from us because she is hidden inside the examination room. Consistently in this poem, the inside is being associated with the female (the child, the Aunt, the disfigured women) and with pain. Elaine Showalter notes that pain is an important concept for feminists. Speaking of Florence Nightingale, Showalter explains that Nightingale valorized the "pain of feminist awakening as its essence, as the

guarantee of progress and free will." Protesting against the protected, unconscious lives of middle-class Victorian women, Nightingale "demanded the restoration of their suffering" ("Toward a Feminist Poetics" 30), deeming suffering as preferable to paralysis. Pain, she reasoned, is symptomatic of development, experience, awareness. It is a means, not an end. Anne Stevenson agrees as she suggests that, for many women writers, pain and tension are the catalysts for writing ("Writing" 175). Elizabeth Spires argues that for Bishop, valuable knowledge is always "an outgrowth of pain or adversity" (22). Once again, a dialogue is being set up: pain is both a sign of the power of the patriarchy and a signal to the reader that the child has made the first step in her journey toward awareness. Her awareness of herself as potential text arms her to dismantle the possibility of that text. Patricia Yaeger reminds us that while language is indisputably "dangerous" for women in the sense that it forces them within patriarchal modes, recognition of this danger lets women use it as a weapon against aggression (37). The "inside" then is both a place of pain and a place of energized and energizing awareness.

She is back "in it," but the "it" is both the diurnal world of the waiting room and the whirling conflict. She gives us the rote recitation of the "orienting" places and dates to close the poem calmly, but the failure of these hierarchical touchstones earlier in the poem makes us doubt

their power now. Thus, the War and the slush and the night may well be "outside" the waiting room, but they are inside of the child as well.

Speaking of Geography III, Helen Vendler notes the "vibration" always present in Bishop's work:

the poems in Geography III put into relief the continuing vibration of her work between two frequencies--the domestic and the strange. In another poet the alternation might seem a debate, but Bishop drifts rather than divides, gazes rather than chooses.

("Domestication" 97)

Robert Lowell echoes this sentiment as he argues Bishop's poetry is characterized by moments in which movement and terminus occur simultaneously ("Thomas" 498). Within "In the Waiting Room," of course, this "moving" opposition vacillates between space as a finite location and the fluidity and variability that human experience and perception add to space. The drama that surrounds this vibration is partly due to the fact that the speaker is a child. By making the persona a child and manipulating the "wrong" details so that the reader mistrusts the "truth" of the text, and then portraying the fear and anxiety of the child, Bishop can "have it both ways." She can illustrate the anxiety associated with the state between child and woman and shield herself from public scrutiny of her own

life or direct identification of her life with her personae. She can instruct the reader on how to analyze and construct a self without actually exposing herself.

In "One Art," "Crusoe in England," "Poem," and "The Moose," Bishop's focus shifts slightly. The concept of "self" is explored and charted through adult speakers who consciously and unconsciously use references to space as centering devices, as vehicles to express either a lack or an abundance of self-control. Bishop retreats from the "direct" approach to issues such as gender or loss in these poems, favoring instead metaphors or symbols of space and place to express her personae's mental states. References to frightening breasts or direct metaphysical "Why" questions will be replaced by forms and rhetoric and figures that cannot quite prevent panic and anxiety from leaking out around the textual edges. Like the child in "In the Waiting Room," these speakers search for a stable, safe sense of self-consciousness, but they approach the issue with a much more adult sang froid--or so they think. The reader is invited to view their exercises in "self-control," discover through reverberating language how tentative this control is, and, by extension, question the power and purpose of representative language.

If "In the Waiting Room" mapped the emerging consciousness of a seven-year old child, poems such as "Crusoe in England" and "One Art" chart already formed adult selves in action. Both poems, in fact, use metaphors of

mapping and geography to illustrate the topography of these mapped selves. "Crusoe," in fact, is obsessed with recording, mapping, and naming. Bishop noted in an interview with George Starbuck that the idea for this poem came to her while she was re-reading the Defoe novel in Aruba. She says: "I had forgotten it was so moral. All that Christianity. So I think I wanted to re-see it with all that left out" (319). With the Christianity removed, what is left in the poem is a self looking for a defining icon, a complement to the obsessive, unifocal view of the speaker.

Until Friday comes, Crusoe attempts that connection through listing, memorizing, and "recording" the physical "place" that surrounds him:

Well, I had fifty-two
 miserable, small volcanoes
 I could climb [t/o]
 with a few slithery slides--
 volcanoes dead as ash heaps.
 I used to sit on the edge of the highest
 one [t/o]
 and count the others standing up,
 naked and leaden, with their
 heads blown off. [t/o]
 I'd think that if they were the size
 I thought volcanoes should be, then
 I had [t/o]

become a giant,
 I couldn't bear to think what size
 the goats and turtles were,
 or the gulls, or the overlapping rollers
 closing and closing in, but never quite,
 glittering and glittering, though the

sky

[t/o]

was mostly overcast. (11-28)

After complaining in the first stanza that "my poor island's still/un-rediscovered, un-renamable./None of the books has ever got it right" (8-10), Crusoe presents the reader with a list of more precise, "correct" details. Even within this catalogue, however, his emotions intrude and blur the focus of his list. Describing the exact number of volcanoes and their shape and form, he becomes overwhelmed by a wave of solipsistic relativism: if they are not the size that he thinks that they are supposed to be, then does that make him a giant in his own or somebody else's eyes? With no other opinion or measure than his own, he cannot accurately judge himself or anything else. As he considers the implications of this size displacement for the other animals on the island, his emotional lens changes the reality of what he sees and reports. His emotion makes it seem as if an impossible simultaneity is occurring: the breakers are "closing in," but they never quite reach the shore. These waves are "glittering," but there is no sun in the clouded sky. His fear of isolation and entrapment by these waves

make them seem to "close in" at the same time that his obsession about what is beyond them makes them glitter with untold implication and importance.

This dislocated perspective continues throughout most of the poem as he confuses the familiar (kettles) with the unfamiliar (hissing turtles) and gives in to self-pity: "'Pity should begin at home.' So the more/pity I felt, the more I felt at home" (63-64). Misreading cliches with his own best interests in mind, he uses circular logic to justify his sadness. This important statement brings up one of the most central issues in the poem. Because it is a dramatic monologue, we expect there to be a dislocation between the speaker's ideas and feelings and our own as readers. We expect to feel empathy for the man who, like Tennyson's "Ulysses" cannot be happy in the home that he longed for, but we also expect this sentiment to be portrayed through the lens of irony. This poem encourages the reader's empathy, but only to a point.

It is a commonplace of travel literature that the traveller returns to his or her homeland changed: things look different, but in this poem, Bishop carefully emphasizes, home is a very relative, very psychological state. Defined first as the place where pity happens, home for Crusoe is a concept that exists by negation: home is not the island where there is only "one kind of everything" (68), nor is it England, "another island,/that doesn't seem like one" (154-55). Even in dreams, Crusoe sees not home in

England, but "islands, islands spawning islands,/like frogs' eggs turning into polliwogs/of islands . . ." (136-38).

Only when Friday comes does Crusoe abandon this obsessive listing of minutiae:

Just when I thought I couldn't stand it
another minute longer, Friday came.

(Accounts of that have everything all
wrong.)

[t/o]

Friday was nice.

Friday was nice and we were friends.

If only he had been a woman!

I wanted to propagate my kind,
and so did he, I think, poor boy.

He'd pet the baby goats sometimes,
and race with them, or carry one around.
--Pretty to watch; he had a pretty body.

And then one day they came and took us
off. (142-53)

[t/o]

His genuine feelings for Friday are overwhelmed by his refusal of any connection but a heterosexual one--he wants to "propagate his own kind." His use of the scientific word "propagate" suggests that his uni-dimensional view of the world of the island extends to matters emotional as well. He is unwilling to pursue an intimate friendship with Friday because (like his expectations about volcanoes) it does not "fit" his idea of what should happen.

He is deeply touched by Friday: Crusoe's syntax fails when he tries to describe Friday. He resorts to broken sentences: "--Pretty to watch" and then forces himself to continue: "He had a pretty body." With this sentiment hanging in the air, he then breaks the thought completely and moves to when they parted and left the island. He cannot or will not make the connection he desires with Friday because he cannot make it reconcile with the idea of how things should be. Unable to record his life with Friday in the empirical language he so favors, he stops writing about him (or anything else on the island) at all. The rest of the poem is set in his room back in England.

Although Crusoe's physical isolation becomes symbolically clear as he thinks constantly about "islands," Crusoe senses that his isolation is not just physical as he says

I felt a deep affection for
the smallest of my island industries.
No, not exactly, since the smallest was
a miserable philosophy. (86-89)

He may not be able to verbalize how his unidimensional, systematic mindset isolates him from emotional intimacy with Friday, but he has some inkling that his "misery" and the narrow, hierarchical nature of his "philosophy" are linked. This becomes clear as he equates home with pity and then drunkenly chants: "Home-made, home-made! But aren't we all?" (85). He is "made" of pity and self-absorption, but he

rationalizes that everyone else is as well. He cannot look outside of himself, however, long enough to appreciate that this isolation is not a necessary state.

Lorrie Goldensohn argues that Crusoe attempts to control the ennui he feels through art: by writing about phenomena and listing them, he avoids the pain associated with remembering Friday. Bishop's point, she reasons, is that such attempts are always failures:

Without love grounded in a human,
 natural, and continuously civil and
 domestic environment, art does not
 transfigure experience; in the sinister
 moonscape of disconnection the writer's
 pen proves only a reed to lean on.

(260)

Whereas the child in "In the Waiting Room," Goldensohn notes, loses perception after an "involuntary bond" with the women in the Geographic, Crusoe "clearly loses his bearings through involuntary isolation" (248). Crusoe's isolation on the island was certainly involuntary, but the way that he chose to perceive that isolation during his stay on the island and afterward was his choice. Purposefully removing the moral determinism that so bothered her upon rereading the story, Bishop replaces it with issues of choice.

Crusoe chooses emotional and physical survival when he tries to "control" his world by obsessively mapping its minutiae and details. Size and color and texture and

appearance all have meaning when compared with traditional or empirical standards. Even when things don't "fit"--there is only "one of each kind" in this isolated island "ark" instead of the "two of each" of Biblical legend--he defines neatly by negation. Where Friday is concerned, however, he refuses a new, "uncharted" choice. Without an absolute standard to fall back on, he refuses to act at all. His description of the volcanoes, and of the pity, and of his unsatisfactory home in England show readers that his logic has been relative and fluid all along. But within his frame of reference in the world of this dramatic monologue only the linear, familiar, binary boundaries have meaning: man/woman, home/not home, one/two, friends/lovers. Unable or unwilling to create a "mental map" of the space between these alternatives, Crusoe remains trapped. Like his island, the self he carries with him after meeting Friday is changed: it is "un-renameable, un-rediscovered" and "none of the books ever got it right." His blood is "full of islands" and his brain "breeds islands" (156-57) because he is trapped in the isolating binary logic of his own consciousness. He is intellectually capable of the relational logic of the "volcano talk," but he cannot connect this fluidity with his feelings for Friday.

A similar kind of negation takes place in "One Art," a poem that replaces the ironic structure of Crusoe's dramatic monologue with the much stricter form of the villanelle. In "Crusoe" and "Waiting Room," Bishop dramatizes her

psychological topographies using personae: a fictional character and a child. While the speaker in "One Art" is arguably a "persona" as well, the first person voice is secondary to the repetitious listing required by the villanelle form:

The art of losing isn't hard to master;
 so many things seem filled with
 the intent [t/o]

to be lost that their loss is
 no disaster. [t/o]

Lose something everyday. Accept
 the fluster [t/o]
 of lost door keys, the hour badly spent.
 The art of losing isn't hard to master.

Then practice losing farther, losing
 faster: [t/o]

places, and names, and where it
 was you meant [t/o]

to travel. None of these will bring
 disaster. [t/o]

I lost my mother's watch. And look! my
 last, or [t/o]

next-to-last, of three loved houses
 went. [t/o]

The art of losing isn't hard to master.

I lost two cities, lovely ones. And

vaster, [t/o]

some realms I owned, two rivers, a

continent. [t/o]

I miss them, but it wasn't a disaster.

--Even losing you (the joking voice, a

gesture [t/o]

I love) I shan't have lied. It's

evident [t/o]

the art of losing's not too hard

to master [t/o]

though it may look like (Write it!) like

disaster. (1-19) [t/o]

The attempts to lose the voice in repetition backfire, however, as the repetition, the hyperbole, and the faltering control of the speaker overwhelm the glib dismissal and the formal regularity.

In the first stanza, the speaker is so calm, in fact, that he or she does not even appear as an "I"; instead this stanza consists of a series of blandly stated observations about "losing things." The convoluted, "academic" logic that "things" can be filled with the "intent" to be lost even renders this passage slightly comic. Having broached the subject of loss with relative safety, the speaker

becomes more bold in the second stanza, overtly giving instructions to the reader on just how to master this useful art. These instructions are believable--we are convinced as the speaker urges us with the voice of a pop psychology paperback to "accept" lost keys and hours and then reassures: "The art of losing isn't hard to master."

By the third stanza, the speaker is really gaining bravado as we are encouraged to lose farther, faster, more. The tone, however, begins to shift. The calmness of the first two stanzas begins to sound slightly brittle by this third stanza. Accepting loss is one thing, but the speaker's encouragement to practice new and improved methods of losing sounds like masochism. With the mention of "places and names" in this stanza, the manic mood only intensifies in the one following.

Stanza four mentions for the first time an object with emotional attachment--the mother's watch--and this further unhinges the speaker who exclaims "look!" and then details the convoluted, syntactically awkward history of lost and left houses. As the stanzas become more fragmented and intense, the advice that this art is not disaster, that it is "easy" loses force and begins to emphasize actually just how out of control and troubled the speaker is. By stanza five, the speaker is still listing, but the lists are tragically hyperbolic: lost continents, cities, rivers, realms. The impossibility of the speaker's owning such things undermines his or her authority about loss and

mastery and emphasizes just how disoriented he or she really feels.

By the final stanza, the interrupted syntax tries to list and evaluate and instruct, but the speaker's uncontrollable emotions keep intruding. Departing from the simple statements of the earlier stanzas, the speaker forces the familiar refrain: "It's evident/the art of losing's not too hard to master." The phrase has lost whatever fallacious power it had and now echoes as a reminder of the bitter irony of its failure to control anything. The phrase "it's evident" has the same effect--the ease of losing is everything but evident by this part of the poem. Despite the awkwardness of the last stanza and the stumbles earlier, it is only with the parenthetical "(Write it!)" that the speaker actually admits or explodes with true emotion. Following this outburst, the phrase "like disaster" emphasizes and defines the previous phrase. The exclamation point and the awkward parenthetical interruption are juxtaposed with "like disaster" to emphasize that for this speaker, to admit the loss is a disaster. In terms of the structure, however, the phrase creates the rhyme necessary to close the pattern of the form. The speaker ironically "masters" the disaster and admits it at the same time.

The rhymes demanded by the repetition of the villanelle emphasize this point as well. Line three in all of the prescribed stanzas alternates between the rhyme master/disaster, underscoring the fact that the control and

the pain are happening at the same time. In addition, the rhymes *intent/spent/meant/went* emphasize the liminal, between state of this troubled speaker, while *master/fluster/faster/last, or/vaster* underline the insistent, uncontrollable force of the pain that the speaker is feeling. Just as Crusoe was trapped in the prescribed mental map of what he thought was supposed to happen and supposed to be, this speaker is caught up in his or her need to control, to be strong, to not admit weakness. This is not only "one art" of many, but the art of those who are alone, who prefer control to troublesome connection. It is the art, however, of survivors.

Brett Millier notes this doubleness in "One Art" as she describes it as an elegy for Bishop's whole life: "it explores the means of having one's loss and mastering it, too--which is the privilege of the elegist" ("Elusive" 128). Whether we want to read this as a direct elegy for Bishop's personal life or not, Millier's idea of the elegy is an interesting one. An elegy attempts to impose form on the inchoate experience of grief and thus is an "art of losing" of sorts, but it has another side as well. One of the central tenets of the elegy is that it mourns and celebrates simultaneously: it expresses sadness and affection, pain and admiration all at the same time. If "One Art" then is an elegy for that which is lost, it celebrates the survival, the strength of the "loser" at the same time that it mourns the pain caused by that which is lost.

Whereas "Crusoe in England" narrated the story of a man who could unconsciously experience but not admit the plurality and flux of contradictory or paradoxical emotion, this poem presents the simultaneity much more directly. Even so, both Crusoe and this speaker have mapped very distinctive boundaries around their speaking selves. Crusoe illustrates this directly as his obsession with "islands" is a synecdoche for a larger habit of mind--that of systematically and hierarchically processing all data according to size and shape and color and "what it should be" and excluding things (such as his feelings for Friday) which do not fit into a standardized scheme. The speaker of "One Art" was "marooned" unwillingly as well--the pathos of the poem suggests that the speaker was unwilling to make the break--but like Crusoe, he or she reinforces this literal isolation with a psychological (and in this case rhetorical) isolation. The speaker turns inward, remembering how "control" has been gained over difficult moments in the past, in order to try to survive the present loss. Writing, a very solitary activity, is offered as a means of confronting and thereby mastering the intense pain. The form that this writing takes, the villanelle, reinforces this painful solipsism. The repetition, repeated rhymes, and restrictive stanza patterns that this complex form demands create a sort of chanting chorus. Instead of controlling the memories and the pain and the longing, this form keeps the loss fresh and specific and moving in the

speaker's mind. That which is intended to control the pain intensifies it.

Cheryl Walker notes that this elegiac tone/form was used by many woman poets, especially in the nineteenth century, as a means to express intense, dramatic emotion and still preserve their "feminine" appearances (17). Sorrow or longing, it seems, were "appropriate" female emotions. Bishop uses her forms and metaphors to control and focus suffering, but her poems from the very beginning have illustrated just how tenuous this kind of control can be. The surface calm and the apparent control is maintained, but once the reader begins listening to the "dialogue" within the poem, that static control is undermined. Underneath the sorrow, anger and frustration lie waiting. The boundaries and borders that the controlled speaking self of these poems creates blur and waver when the "mental maps" are closely examined.

Within Bishop's scheme, control and form and hierarchy and logic do not work by themselves--at least their "framing" is temporary and limiting. "One Art," and "Crusoe," and "In the Waiting Room" elegantly illustrate how these controls often function only at psychological and textual surfaces and sometimes even intensify a given problem or emotion. Geography III contains poems, however, that map other alternatives as well. Bishop complements the solitary, control-oriented speakers with two who have chosen another alternative. In "Poem" and "The Moose," Bishop does

not provide the "answer," the ultimate way to deal with painful memories and anxiety, but she does offer an additional choice. Faced with the past, these speakers choose to connect with these memories instead of trying to control them. Connection does not stay the movement or resonance or flux, but these poems portray that flux in a much different light than the previous pain-oriented poems. If we read the poems of Geography III with reference to one another, these two poems can be seen as yet another voice in the polylogue that Bishop has created. Connection is temporary and relative and brief and has as many problems as control, but it is one more way to learn to process life experience, to move on, to survive and create.

"Poem" not only urges the reader to associate it with the other "autobiographical" poems in Geography III but also refers back to previous poems as well. Again, "place" is a metaphor and catalyst for the mapping of the speaking self. In addition, the "great-uncle" who painted the "Large Bad Picture" in North & South is presumably the same one who is later referred to as the author of this work:

About the size of an old-style dollar

bill, [t/o]

American or Canadian,

mostly the same whites, gray greens, and

steel grays [t/o]

--this little painting (a sketch for a

larger one?) [t/o]

has never earned any money in its life.

Useless and free, it has spent

seventy years [t/o]

as a minor family relic

handed along collaterally to owners

who looked at it sometimes, or

didn't bother to. (1-9) [t/o]

Initially, this poem is constructed in the familiar Bishop pattern of listed, objective description. Indeed, the focus of this first stanza is on the painting as lumpish object. Its size, color, uselessness, and nomadic journeying from one back closet to another emphasize that this is a thing, like a blender or a broom, and not necessarily a created piece of "art." The indefinite, bored tone of the description emphasizes this point: the painting is "about" the same size as a dollar; it is "mostly" the same color; the owners looked at it occasionally--or maybe they didn't even bother to.

The tone changes slightly as the actual painted figures are described:

It must be Nova Scotia; only there

does one see gabled wooden houses

painted that awful shade of brown.

The other houses, the bits that show,

are white. [t/o]

Elm trees, low hills, a thin church

steeple [t/o]

--that gray-blue wisp--or is it?

In the foreground [t/o]

a water meadow with some tiny cows
two-brushstrokes each, but confidently

cows; [t/o]

two minuscule white geese in the blue
water, [t/o]

back-to-back, feeding, and a slanting
stick. [t/o]

Up closer, a wild iris, white and
yellow, [t/o]

fresh-squiggled from the tube.

The air is fresh and cold; cold early
spring [t/o]

clear as gray glass; a half inch of blue
sky [t/o]

below the steel-gray storm clouds.

(They were the artist's specialty.)

A specklike bird is flying to the left.

Or is it a flyspeck looking like a bird?

(10-27)

The indefinite, dismissive tone of stanza one continues into the first part of this stanza as the speaker checks off the identifiable, "vintage Nova Scotia" details: awful wooden houses, elm trees, churches.

As the speaker concentrates on the church, the tone shifts slightly. Squinting to determine if the "gray-blue

wisp" is indeed a church steeple, the speaker begins to focus more closely on the details of the painting. In the "foreground" (an artistic term that has not been used up until this point) there are cows, "two brushstrokes each." The fact that they are "confidently cows" signals the speaker's identification with the creator of this painting. This important connection will be significantly juxtaposed with the speaker's recognition of the painting's setting in the next stanza.

Before this epiphany, the speaker moves from the highly objective language of the stanza's opening to a more immediate description. "Squinting" and moving physically closer to the painting, the speaker also "enters" the scene: "the air is fresh and cold; cold early spring." The sensory details suggest a connection with the painting and the place that has not existed before now, but the continued reference to "artistic" terms suggests that the speaker has not "suspended disbelief" or entered entirely into the world of the painting: she is stepping into the world of the painting much more than in the first stanza, but words such as "fresh squiggled" and references to the "artist's specialty," remind the reader that this is literally a framed, created artistic object. They are also a reminder of the speaker's identification with the painter.

Even the speaker's moment of recognition is interrupted, in a sense, by the focus on artistic minutiae:

Heavens, I recognize the place, I know

it! [t/o]

It's behind--I can almost remember the
farmer's name. [t/o]

His barn backed on that meadow. There it
is, [t/o]

titanium white, one dab. The hint of
steeple, [t/o]

filaments of brush-hairs, barely there,
must be the Presbyterian church.

Would that be Miss Gillespie's house?

Those particular geese and cows

are naturally before my time. (28-36)

The speaker's initial jolt of recognition is undercut by references to "dabs" of paint and "brush-hairs" and by the mention of time. The speaker is separated from the scene by the years that separate her and the artist: the geese and cows in the painting are not, she reminds us, the same geese and cows that she saw.

With this mention of time, however, the speaker seems to pause. Reminding herself that this is an insignificant "sketch done in an hour," she nevertheless hesitates as she enters into a remembered conversation:

A sketch done in an hour, "in one
breath," [t/o]

once taken from a trunk and handed over.

Would you like this? I'll probably
never [t/o]

have room to hang these things again.

Your Uncle George, no mine, my Uncle

George,

[t/o]

he'd be your great-uncle, left them all

with Mother

[t/o]

when he went back to England.

You know, he was quite famous, an

R.A. . . . (37-44)

The first two lines of this stanza seem unnecessarily directive: the speaker has already told us that the painting is an insignificant object. With that in mind, this "reminder" piques the reader's curiosity. Directly following this apparent redundancy is a snippet of conversation about how the speaker came to possess the painting. Lorrie Goldensohn says directly that the great-uncle in this poem is Bishop's great-uncle George Hutchinson (261). If this is true, then the "Mother" referred to is Bishop's Grandmother Bulmer (the Nova Scotia grandmother) and the speaker is either one of Bishop's Aunts, or her own Mother. Readers familiar with "In the Village" and "In the Waiting Room" have already come in contact with just how complicated the issue of autobiography is for Bishop. Bishop's interrogation of the one-to-one relationship between art/representation, signifier/signified makes this problem even more complex. Even so, readers cannot ignore the clues that the poem presents. In a poem that merely questioned the distorting/preserving power of art and

memory, Bishop could have used any name for the artist and any locale for the painting. She chose to refer to both Uncle George and Nova Scotia. For readers who know the details of Bishop's life, this choice adds another dimension to the poem.

If the remembered conversation is read as being with her mother, or even if it is seen as being with one of the Aunts who serially "replaced" her mother, then the ending of the poem can be seen as a sort of alternative to the ambivalent control that has characterized the poems up to this point. Hearing the mother's voice in "In the Village," the child (through the memory and pen of the adult speaker) disappears. The careful, overly directive tone at the opening of stanza four signals that just such a move might lay ahead. Instead, the speaker recovers and recalls the conversation. There is another tense moment at the end of this passage as the speaking voice trails off in an ellipsis that is enjambed over the stanza break. Hanging in the indefinite space of the ellipsis, the reader wonders what the speaker is going to do. In "Poem," however, the mother's voice is heard, and the effect is a positive one. After hearing the voice in stanza four, the speaker examines her connection with Uncle George and with the painting and experiences a moment that encompasses both:

I never knew him. We both knew this

place,

[t/o]

apparently, this literal small

backwater, [t/o]
 looked at it long enough to memorize it,
 our years apart. How strange. And it's
 still loved, [t/o]
 or its memory is (it must have changed
 a lot). [t/o]
 Our visions coincided--"visions" is
 too serious a word--our looks, two
 looks: [t/o]
 art "copying from life" and life itself,
 life and memory of it so compressed
 they've turned into each other. Which is
 which? [t/o]
 Life and the memory of it cramped,
 dim, on a piece of Bristol board,
 dim, but how live, how touching in
 detail [t/o]
 --the little that we get for free,
 the little of our earthly trust. Not
 much. [t/o]
 About the size of our abidance
 along with theirs: the munching cows,
 the iris, crisp and shivering, the water
 still standing from spring freshets,
 the yet-to-be-dismantled elms, the
 geese. (45-64)

The speaker's memory of the place and the uncle connects

with memories of the mother's voice. This in turn creates a series of contradictions and revisions that lead to a moment of artistic synergism at the poem's close.

The speaker and the uncle are connected through their memories of this place, but their memories are "years apart." The place, the memory, and the memory of the place for both are "still loved." The "looks" and "visions," the observation and mediated perception of both artists "coincide," yet each artist has a separate memory of "looking" at the place. By mid-stanza, the question in line fifty four, "Which is which?" becomes an abbreviation of sorts for the whole stanza. "Life" and "memory" have become so "compressed" that "they've turned into each other"--one cannot exist without the other. In addition, neither can be viewed statically: life and memory are "cramped" on the small piece of "Bristol board" because they are constantly in dialogue with each other--there is not room enough on this small, two-dimensional board for the constantly changing meaning and memory. Perception and understanding of one demand definition and reference to the other. This is illustrated through the descriptive detail that the speaker notes in the painting: the painting is "dim, but how live, how touching." "Dim" ostensibly refers to the faded colors of this amateur work, but it also describes the limited way in which art can represent reality--the painting is only a dim, approximate view of the Uncle's perception of the scene--and this perception is mediated once again

through the eyes and language and memory of the speaker. This detail, however, is "dim" as well as "live," and this "life" comes from the speaker's memory and connection and interaction with the visual "text" and its author. It is only after the speaker has "made contact" with her uncle (through the memory of her mother's words) that she views the painting as "touching": in this case both sentimentally moving and "touching" in the sense that she interacts with the painting and its "meaning" via her memory.

This interaction is, in the speaker's view, "the little that we get for free,/ the little of our earthly trust. Not much" (58-59). Despite the realistic cynicism of the "Not much" and "little," the speaker understands that what we "get for free" is "about the size of our abidance." This odd phrase is particularly precise. "Abide" has connotations of stay/continue, wait, and "live up to." When it is used, as this speaker does, as a noun, it is impossible to tell which of these meanings is intended. All three meanings exist simultaneously. What we get from life and memory, then, depends on how we live, how long (and how well) we wait, and how long we will persevere: moments such as that which closes the poem are available to survivors who will look up from the pain and problems of memory and connect, instead of focusing memory and pain and experience and mapping boundaries around themselves.

Even within this moment of lyric immediacy, however, lies the potential for its destruction. The "crisp and

shivering iris" and "munching cows" exist anew for just a moment as the poem and the painting and the speaker and the artist all come together by their connection to the same scene. Alive with the resonance of meaning and life and memory, this instant is undercut as the "irises" suggest the earlier "squiggled irises," the world of "art" intrudes, and the host of problems associated with representation in Bishop's work is again set in motion. This whirling intensifies when we move outside of the world of this poem to the other poems in Geography III and the other books. As the texts begin to "speak" with one another, it becomes clear that just as the control and calm at the end of "In the Waiting Room" were fallacious, the resonant lyric moment at the end of this poem is all the more poignant because it is temporary. It is simultaneously modified, negated, and recreated by the words and phrases and texts that surround it.

The Bakhtinian moves that have been demonstrated throughout Bishop's works are particularly notable in Geography III. Michael Holquist reminds us that

all transcription systems--including the speaking voice in a living utterance--are inadequate to the multiplicity of meanings they seek to convey. My voice gives the illusion of unity to what I say; I am, in fact, constantly expressing a plenitude of meanings, some

intended, others of which I am unaware.

(xx).

Bakhtin reinforces this idea in his own words:

active participation of every utterance in living heteroglossia determines the linguistic profile and style of the utterance to no less a degree than its inclusion in any normative-centralizing system of unitary language.

Every utterance participates in the "unitary language" (in its centripetal forces and tendencies) and at the same time partakes of social and historical heteroglossia (the centrifugal, stratifying forces). (272)

Despite this resonant, dialogical quality (what Linda Hutcheon calls "double voicing" [4]), "Poem" uses place mediated through time and memory and two kinds of art to map a much more optimistic surviving self than Bishop has presented before. Her previous speakers were definitely survivors. They used their skills at focus and control to structure pain and confusion and keep living and writing. This speaker and the one who follows in "The Moose" survive in a way that allows them much more possibility for connection with the world and the people who surround them. Bishop puts no more absolute faith in this "solution" than she does in any other "absolute," but instead offers it as

another way to bound and define and chart the path of the self.

In "The Moose," the speaker experiences a "connection" that involves letting go of the binary connotations of connection and accepting a more "plural" sense of connection--a sense of community rather than a connected diad. In "In the Waiting Room," the issue was involuntary connection: the child experienced terror at being one of "them." The seemingly dualistic oppositions of child/adult, girl/woman, then/now, in/out caused the child's anxiety. Similarly in "Crusoe in England," the isolation of the speaker was intensified by Crusoe's limiting binary mindset: island/sea, man/woman, friend/lover. "One Art" presents a speaker who vainly tries to control her pain and panic after losing the one person she loves. Even "Poem" privileges the connection of one person and one scene: the lush, lyric moment that the speaker "gets for free" is the product of her connection with the art and the memories of her uncle. These binaries are of course set in motion and blurred, but they are set up purposefully by Bishop. She illustrates the power of the plural by showing just how fragile and fallacious these oppositions really are.

In the "Moose," however, she presents the plurality, the movement, from the poem's beginning. Instead of illustrating how this plurality "leaks out" despite the best efforts of the personae in "In the Village" or "Sestina," Bishop shows this speaker remembering potentially painful

things in a "dangerous" setting and then embracing ambivalent, significantly female power and selfhood. The power of simultaneity, of Irigaray's "two-in one" has moved from its "between space" to a more central, obvious place in the text as the speaker recognizes the impossibility of absolutes and accepts the ambiguity. This "plural" movement is clear from the first lines of the poem:

From the narrow provinces
of fish and bread and tea,
home of the long tides
where the bay leaves the sea
twice a day and takes
the herrings long rides,

where if the river
enters or retreats
in a wall of brown foam
depends on if it meets
the bay coming in,
the bay not at home;

where, silted red,
sometimes the sun sets
facing a red sea,
and others, veins the flats'
lavender, rich mud
in burning rivulets;

on red, gravelly roads,
 down rows of sugar maples,
 past clapboard farmhouses
 and neat, clapboard churches,
 bleached, ridged as clamshells,
 past twin silver birches,

through late afternoon
 a bus journeys west,
 the windshield flashing pink,
 pink glancing off of metal,
 brushing the dented flank
 of blue, beat-up enamel. (1-30)

The long series of prepositions that connects these enjambed stanzas and the precise, much-modified description combine to form a liquid, lyric "ride" through five literally and figuratively "moving" stanzas.

Beginning with an extended illustration of scene, this poem literally describes a bus ride: lines one and twenty-six tell us "From narrow provinces" "a bus journeys west." The first line's reference to "narrow provinces" provides an ironic backdrop for the expansive and thorough description that will make up the rest of the poem. This "narrow" territory of "fish and bread and tea" is also the "home of the long tides." Tides are an almost cliched metaphor for the cycles and passage of time that will later catalyze the speaker's epiphany, but they also serve as the perfect

metaphor for the movement of the entire poem. This bay "leaves the sea/twice a day and takes/the herrings long rides" (4-6). Literally, of course, the bay does not "leave" the sea but extends onto the land and then retreats. By using this word, however, Bishop introduces an important image of simultaneous separation and connection.

This apparently happens "twice a day," but in reality it never ceases happening. The tides are a continuous process--they don't "whoosh" in the morning and then out again suddenly at night. They never actually reach their destination of "in" or "out" but are in process all of the time. Similarly, the herring take "rides" on the tides, but unless they are dead herring, they swim with and against this tide as well. These images of simultaneous, differing motion reinforce a point that was made in Questions of Travel: interest and energy and power lie in motion and "travel," not in the traditional idea of destination.

With this in mind, Bishop enjambes the last line of the first stanza and carries the "ride" of the herring into the next line. Images of suspension and liminality are reinforced in this stanza as the very flowing of a river is halted by the conditional "if" in "if the river/enters or retreats." Physically, this second stanza describes the currents and eddies formed by the collision of the river's flow and the bay's: if the tide is out, the river flows in unencumbered; if the tide is in, the force of the tide creates currents and disturbance and the "wall of brown

foam." The way the lines are broken in this stanza, however, suggests that the motion is temporarily suspended. Breaking the line after "if the river" and "enters or retreats" and using the phrase "depends on," Bishop creates a liminal moment between the lines in which the river and the foam and the bay are all suspended. It is significantly the collision, the "connection" of the river and the bay that cause this suspension, a fact that foreshadows the significant connection later in the poem.

Rhetorically, these first stanzas introduce images of liminality and suspension, but structurally, they form part of the initial, extended description/definition of the "narrow provinces." The third stanza serves this purpose as well, as the sunsets become part of the vivid description of the Bay of Fundy. Instead of saying that sometimes the sunset makes the sea seem "red," while at other times the mudflats seem red and "burning," Bishop tells us that "silted red,/sometimes the sun sets/facing a red sea." This inverted syntax, like the "river" example of the previous stanza, momentarily accomplishes the physically impossible: "Sometimes the sun sets." Through a twist in the syntax, basic daily cycles are blithely interrupted. The burning mud works in much the same way, as the wet mud and fire exist simultaneously in the image of "burning rivulets."

The suspension of these initial lines is complicated by the linear, geometrical images in the next stanza. The repeated prepositions and broken short lines in previous

stanzas have created a sort of "flashing" sensation as nouns and adjectives flash by the reader's eye like the sights out of the window of a speeding bus. The linear, parallel images in this stanza make this flashing seem to pick up speed as roads and rows of trees and rigid shells and neat churches serve as foils to the foam and failing light of the previous stanzas. This simply-stated, brief list of prepositional and "locating" phrases seems to channel or focus the movement of the poem through its linear images. These images do not halt or contain the movement of the images, however, but instead increase the speed with which we read.

In fact, the sense of surreal liminality returns in stanza five as the bus journeys through the "late afternoon" and flashes "pink" instead of "blue, beat up enamel." In this pink flash hangs the liminal magic of the previous stanzas. The reader knows that this flashing is an optical illusion created by the sun and reflection and the angle of the light--but just for a moment, the bus is a surreal pink piece of metal sailing through a landscape in which the sea and the sun and the rivers briefly "hesitate."

Even when the bus stops, this focus on the powerful "between" continues. Stanza six presents us with the bus stopping and another passenger entering:

down hollows, up rises,
and waits, patient, while
a lone traveller gives

kisses and embraces
to seven relatives
and a collie supervises.

Goodbye to the elms,
to the farm, to the dog.
The bus starts. The light
grows richer; the fog,
shifting, salty, thin,
comes closing in.

Its cold, round crystals
form and slide and settle
in the white hens' feathers,
in gray glazed cabbages,
on the cabbage roses
and lupins like apostles;

the sweet peas cling
to their wet, white string
on the whitewashed fences;
bumblebees creep
inside the foxgloves
and evening commences. (31-54)

The scene with the family and the collie is all movement, despite the fact that the bus has stopped. This liminal "goodbye" scene among the humans is directly reinforced by

the natural details that follow it. The light is "richer" because the time is now closer to twilight and a fog is creeping in. Fog in itself would be a usefully "blurring" detail, but Bishop almost exaggerates her message of simultaneity by analyzing the fog. The fog as a cloud is "closing in," but its individual, "cold, round crystals" are insidiously settling into flowers and between feathers as well. The fog is both individual particles and a cloud; it is both inside the objects and in the air. Stanza nine's image of sweet peas makes a similar point. The obvious liminal implications of the plant suspended on a string are underlined by the verb "cling," which forces the reader to recognize the tropic "hanging on" of the plant.

Subsequent stanzas work in exactly the same way as the bus travels west and images of women shaking tablecloths (59), "loose planks" (65), ship's lights in the dark, and "dogs giving one bark" complement the flickering, moving, "balanced" images of the poem's beginning.

When the focus moves inside the bus, this sense of liminality and plurality continues. The speaker overhears conversations that she is not participating in and these conversations make her remember nighttime conversations from her past:

In the creakings and noises,
 an old conversation
 --not concerning us,
 but recognizable, somewhere,

back in the bus:

Grandparents' voices

uninterruptedly

talking, in Eternity:

names being mentioned,

things cleared up finally;

what he said, what she said,

who got pensioned;

deaths, deaths and sicknesses;

the year he remarried;

the year (something) happened.

She died in childbirth.

That was the son lost

when the schooner foundered.

He took to drink. Yes.

She went to the bad.

When Amos began to pray

even in the store and

finally the family had

to put him away.

"Yes . . . "that peculiar

affirmative. "Yes . . . "

A sharp, indrawn breath,

half groan, half acceptance,
 that means "Life's like that.
 We know it (also death)."

Talking the way they talked
 in the old featherbed,
 peacefully, on and on,
 dim lamplight in the hall,
 down in the kitchen, the dog
 tucked in her shawl.

Now, it's all right now
 even to fall asleep
 just as on those nights.
 --Suddenly the bus driver
 stops with a jolt,
 turns off his lights. (91-132)

One hesitates to make autobiographical equations, but Bishop did juxtapose the maritime landscape with memories of grandparents' voices. Readers familiar with her biography cannot help but at least think of Bishop as being some part of the persona of the fictional poetic speaker. She used these familiar details to focus the reader on the fact that it is the memory and not the actual "talking grandparents" which is the key here. In previous poems, the Nova Scotia landscape has threatened speakers with its familiarity: it brought back memories that had to be (most of the time

unsuccessfully) buried by means of form and control. In this poem, the speaker can encounter Nova Scotia and grandparents and talk of deaths and crazy people without making a formal move toward control. Instead she embraces and accepts these memories in all of their ambivalence. The repeated "yes" signals her acceptance: it is "half-groan" but that is finally "acceptable" to the speaker. The "shoulds" of childhood it seems are forgiven, or at least released. The pain of death and insanity is still there, but it is accompanied by the memory of warm kitchens and dogs comfortably wrapped in shawls. The focus shifts from what should have been and wasn't ("Sestina," "In the Village") to a balance between the good and bad of what was. This acceptance of the contradiction, the complexity makes it finally "all right now/even to fall asleep."

Finally, all of the Bishop's "maps" can coincide. The details of this landscape mesh with the mapped territory of memory to form a new and more resilient outline of the adult self. The catalyst for this connection is particularly significant. Bishop's speaker does not directly make peace with her grandparents or her childhood--she tells us outright that the grandparents' conversation is "not concerning us" (93). She makes peace with her memories by recognizing the plurality of her condition. The people on the bus are not talking about her, but they could be. Tragedy is a human experience, not an exclusive one. It is this connection with a community of strangers that allows

her to react, not an insistence that each and every inequity and memory be resolved and reversed.

This setting aside of the binary ideas of reversal and apology and forgiveness prepares the reader for the encounter with the moose:

A moose has come out of
the impenetrable wood
and stands there, looms rather,
in the middle of the road.
It approaches; it sniffs at
the bus's hot hood.

Towering, antlerless,
high as a church,
homely as a house
(or, safe as houses).
A man's voice assures us
"Perfectly harmless . . . "

Some of the passengers
exclaim in soft whispers,
childish, softly,
"Sure are big creatures."
"It's awful plain."
"Look! It's a she!"

Taking her time,

she looks the bus over,
 grand, otherworldly.
 Why, shy do we feel
 (we all feel) this sweet
 sensation of joy?

"Curious creatures,"
 says our quiet driver,
 rolling his r's.
 "Look at that, would you."
 Then he shifts gears.
 For a moment longer,

by craning backward,
 the moose can be seen
 on the moonlit macadam;
 then there's a dim
 smell of moose, an acrid
 smell of gasoline. (133-68)

The speaker's acceptance of plurality and ambiguity and community in a sense allows the moose to emerge. Initially, the entrance of the moose is ominous: it impossibly emerges from an "impenetrable wood"; it "looms." These details are quickly juxtaposed with seemingly contradictory ones: it is "towering" and "high as a church," but it is also "homely," "safe" and "harmless." The ellipsis after "harmless" casts doubt on this didactic opinion. After the ambivalent

description, we find out that the big, plain creature is a "she." Bishop deliberately withholds gender identification until after the ambivalence and "plural," contradictory description has been firmly established. The "she" that Bishop finally uses can apply as much to the ambivalence and contradiction as to the moose herself.

The speaker's acceptance of plurality and ambiguity produces this new female self symbolized in the moose. Letting go of the binaries of then/now, child/adult, memory/reality, family/stranger, the speaker discovers the power of liminality and ambivalence. The moose is "grand and otherworldly" but "safe as houses": she is domestic and strange at the same time because one is contained in the other. They are not absolutely opposite states. Acceptance of this fact produces "sensations of joy," not the falling and fear that previous poems have predicted. The bus driver's comment secures this idea. "Curious" means not only inquisitive, but also "careful" or diligent. The root of the word, "cura," means "care." The moose and the feminist plurality that she represents can be both controlled and inquisitive, safe and threatening, familiar and unfamiliar. Her power lies in the liminality. The last lines of the poem beautifully illustrate this. When the bus moves away from the moose, the speaker cranes her neck over the enjambed stanzas "for a moment longer" and senses a dim "smell of moose, an acrid/smell of gasoline" (168). For just a moment, these smells exist simultaneously. The

speaker smells them together, but she can separate them and distinguish between them. It is just this image that undermines the joy of this optimistic poem. This connection and acceptance produce joy, but it is no more a solution than the control of the earlier poems is an absolute solution. The smells and the joy hang in the air at the end of this poem, but they are temporary and fleeting as were all the images in the poem. They are a part of the journey, not the destination.

Geography III then is a lesson in letting go of binary logic and the need for one answer. Bishop gives us two, seemingly contradictory answers and even undermines their authority by making their power situational, relative, part of an ever-changing, whirling polylogue. Like the "art of losing," learning to accept this flux is difficult. Bishop illustrates this difficulty with wit and empathy in "Sandpiper," a poem in Questions of Travel. In this poem, a sandpiper runs along the beach watching his toes or

--Watching, rather, the spaces of sand

between them, [t/o]

where (no detail too small) the Atlantic

drains [t/o]

rapidly backwards and downwards. As

he runs, [t/o]

he stares at the dragging grains.

The world is a mist. And then the world

is [t/o]
 minute and vast and clear. The tide
 is higher or lower. He couldn't
 tell you which. [t/o]
 His beak is focused; he is preoccupied,
 looking for something, something,
 something. [t/o]
 Poor bird, he is obsessed!
 The millions of grains are black,
 white, tan, and gray, [t/o]
 mixed with quartz grains, rose,
 and amethyst. (9-20)

In Geography III, Bishop's speakers vacillate between staring at the reality of their toes and worrying about the danger and potential lying in the grains of sand between them. It is only by accepting both the binary poles and what is between them, she suggests in the last line of "Sandpiper," that we see the precious fragments of quartz and amethyst, mixed in amongst the "hissing" of the tide and the other "millions" of grains. It is only by giving careful attention both to drawing boundaries and to what is inside of them, that an accurate, if "temporary," map of the self can be constructed.

CHAPTER VIII

CONCLUSION

In his article "Studying with Miss Bishop," Dana Gioia relates affectionate stories of an odd, but intriguing class he took with Bishop in 1975. Noting Bishop's "propriety" and the "sharp division between her professional and her social identities," Gioia determined that Bishop "dreaded all literary conversation" (98) and that "she wanted us to see poems, not ideas" (101)--to "experience" poetry instead of "interpreting" it. Randall Jarrell makes a similar point as he suggests:

Instead of crying, with justice, "this is a world in which no one can get along," Miss Bishop's poems show that it is barely but perfectly possible--has been that is for her. Her work is unusually personal and honest in its wit, perception, and sensitivity--and in its restrictions too; all her poems have written underneath, I have seen it.

(235)

Gioia and Jarrell are not guilty of trying to undercut or diminish Bishop's importance--both admire and value Bishop's work--yet in their enthusiasm to laud Bishop's precise,

empirical recording of the "felt strangeness of life" (Hemenway xi), they miss the dialogue, the "double voicing" that form an integral part of Bishop's resonant feminist work. Bishop wants us to see poems and ideas; she wants us to experience poetry and interpret it. Her poems certainly demonstrate that she has seen and experienced much, but they also question the power of poets and poetry to accurately record and convey those sights. Bishop uses the plurality of language and connotation to question her poetic observations even as she makes them.

In a letter to the Barkers (Oct. 12, 1952), Bishop muses that "geography must be more mysterious than we realize." This conversational statement is in many ways a pithy summary of Bishop's poetic philosophy. Geography is, of course, a dominant metaphor in Bishop's work, but the idea that the seemingly static, boundaried science of maps and locations is "mysterious" and variable is the key to interpreting Bishop's work. Whether charting and recording finite objects or places or events, Bishop portrays facts and images in language that implicitly interrogates, diminishes, or enlarges them. Nowhere is this more elegantly portrayed than in "Santarem," a poem written a year before Bishop died. Using rivers as her geographical touchstone, Bishop comes closer than she ever has before to making a statement of literary criticism:

Of course I may be remembering it all

wrong

[t/o]

after, after--how many years?

That golden evening I really wanted to
go no farther; [t/o]
more than anything else I wanted to stay
awhile [t/o]
in that conflux of two great rivers,
Tapajos, Amazon, [t/o]
grand, silently flowing, flowing east.
Suddenly there'd been houses, people,
and lots of mongrel [t/o]
riverboats skittering back and forth
under a sky of gorgeous, under-lit
clouds, [t/o]
with everything gilded, burnished along
one side, [t/o]
and everything bright, cheerful, casual
--or so it looked. [t/o]
I liked the place; I liked the idea of
the place. [t/o]
Two rivers. Hadn't two rivers sprung
from the Garden of Eden? No, that was
four [t/o]
and they'd diverged. Here only two
and coming together. Even if one were
tempted [t/o]
to literary interpretations
such as: life/death, right/wrong,
male/female [t/o]
--such notions would have resolved,

dissolved, straight off [t/o]
 in that watery, dazzling dialectic. (1-
 20)

Beginning with the questioning, ingenuous disclaimer that perhaps, all of this is wrong, Bishop goes on to create a stanza that can be seen as a synecdoche for the rest of her work: the ambivalent observation of North & South, the literary critique of Cold Spring, the mediated memory and evolving selves of Questions of Travel and Geography III all lie in concentrated form in this important poem.

The question of the initial two lines inserts the filters of memory and time and ambiguity that have dominated Bishop's poems and commentary since the "The Map." Following this framing question, she sets up a binary, this time two rivers, only to immediately blur their boundaries: this is the "conflux" of two great rivers; boats skitter back and forth; everything is "burnished" and "gilded"--"or so it looked." The rivers' edges are blurred by their conflux and the boats and the light, but the entire scene is rendered ambivalent by the speaker's awareness that this vision is merely her perception of the scene.

Bishop quickly reinforces this idea in the next line as the speaker likes "the place" and the "idea of the place." Dividing these statements with a semi-colon instead of a period or a conjunction, Bishop emphasizes that they exist separately and simultaneously. The place and the idea of the place are constantly in dialogue: one cannot exist or have meaning without the other. With this idea in mind,

Bishop injects a significant "place" which arguably exists only as an idea--the Garden of Eden. As she did in Cold Spring, Bishop refers to this pastoral ideal only to critique it: this place is paradise but it is significantly not the Garden of Eden. This detail works in another way as well. Having mentioned this Christian symbol, Bishop adds a plethora of meanings to the word "tempted" that she will use to introduce the idea of literary criticism.

Directly juxtaposed with the fleeting image of the Garden, the "temptation" to literary criticism becomes intriguingly complicated: looking for traditional binary distinctions ("life/death, right/wrong, male/female") leads to "the Fall," damnation, incorrect interpretation, but also a "happy fall"--the opportunity to live and learn rich, plural meanings. As she has throughout her work, Bishop sets up the oppositions, the conventional ideas and then complicates them. The binaries of literary interpretation "would have resolved, dissolved, straight off/in that watery, dazzling dialectic," but the dialectic, the binary dialogue must be there before the "dazzling" resonance can occur. Frames and limits and Aristotelian boundaries are limited and temporary in Bishop's poetic world, but they are a necessary part of her critical poetic dialogue.

Even when the poetic subject is gender, this idea applies. Like Kristeva, Bishop believes that to critique the patriarchy, one must use the language of the patriarchy, while at all times questioning and complicating that language. In "Pink Dog," written the year of her death,

Bishop illustrates this point in the poignant image of a disease ridden dog running the streets of Rio de Janeiro at Carnival time:

Oh, never have I seen a dog so bare!
Naked and pink, without a single
hair . . . [t/o]

Startled, the passersby draw back and
stare. [t/o]

Of course they're mortally afraid
of rabies. [t/o]

You are not mad; you have a bad case of
scabies [t/o]

but look intelligent. Where are your
babies? [t/o]

(A nursing mother, by those hanging
teats.) [t/o]

In what slum have you hidden them,
poor bitch, [t/o]

while you go begging, living by your
wits? (4-12) [t/o]

The speaker tells us that all beggars during carnival are in danger because the government wants to eliminate them: they are unsightly and are in danger of being thrown in the river. The poem supplies an answer to this problem:

Now look, the practical, the sensible

solution is to wear a fantasia.

Tonight you simply can't afford to

be a-

[t/o]

n eyesore. But no one will ever see a

dog in mascara this time of year.

Ash Wednesday'll come but Carnival is

here.

[t/o]

What sambas can you dance? What will you

wear?

[t/o]

They say that Carnival's degenerating

--radios, Americans, or something,

have ruined it completely. They're just

talking.

[t/o]

Carnival is always wonderful!

A depilated dog would not look well.

Dress up! Dress up and dance at

Carnival!

[t/o]

Lorrie Goldensohn says of this poem:

In the painful ironies of this poem the

feminine game of dress-up, the

injunction to dance, comes cruelly to

the sick and wounded for whom society

has no other or kinder commands. (280)

Bishop certainly indicts the society that would urge this

sick mother to dress up and dance while her body is ravaged

and her children go hungry, but another theme exists simultaneously with this critical one. Along with the rabies and scabies are the dog's babies: amidst the disease is also possibility. This dog is miserable and unfairly treated but she is also a survivor, living by her wits in a world that is frightened of her. She is not mad; she is intelligent--intelligent enough to know that to survive, she must play along with the Carnival-goers.

This intelligence and understanding are underscored in the awkwardly broken article in lines 29 and 30: "Tonight you simply can't afford to be a-/n eyesore. But no one will ever see a." Bishop breaks the line to preserve the forced rhyme between "be a" and "see a" and to emphasize that she can "play along" and follow the rules of rhyme and rhetoric and form, while remaining fully aware of how empty and meaningless they ultimately are. Like her pink dog, she wears a mask and dance to survive, while implicitly undercutting and questioning the culture that makes this participation necessary.

WORKS CITED

- Amelinckx, Frans. C. and Joyce N. Megay, eds. Travel, Quest, and Pilgrimage as a Literary Theme: Studies in Honor of Reino Virtanen. Ann Arbor: Society of Spanish American Studies, 1978.
- Auden, W.H. Selected Poems. Ed. Edward Mendelson. New York: Random House, 1979.
- Baym, Nina. "Melodramas of Beset Manhood: How Theories of American Fiction Exclude Women Authors." Showalter, New Feminist Criticism 63-80.
- Bishop, Elizabeth. "The Art of Poetry XXVII: Elizabeth Bishop." With Elizabeth Spires. Paris Review 23 (1981): 56-83.
- . The Collected Prose, ed. Robert Giroux. London: Chatto and Windus, 1984.
- . The Complete Poems: 1927-1979. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1979.
- . "An Interview with Elizabeth Bishop." With Ashley Brown. Shenandoah 17 (1966): 3-19. Schwartz and Estess 289-302.
- . Letter to Anne Stevenson. Schwartz and Estess 288.
- . "On 'The Man-Moth.'" Poet's Choice. Paul Engle and Joseph Langland, eds. New York: Dial Press, 1962, 103. Schwartz and Estess 286.

- . "Poets." Time 2 June 1967: 35-42. Schwartz and Estess 303.
- . "'The Work!': A Conversation with Elizabeth Bishop." With George Starbuck. Ploughshares 3 (1977): 11-29. Schwartz and Estess 312-330.
- Black, Max. "Pascal." Merit Students' Encyclopedia. 1980 ed.
- Bloom, Harold, ed. "Introduction." American Woman Poets. New York: Chelsea House, 1986. 1-8.
- Bogan, Louise. "On North & South." New Yorker 5 Oct. 1946: 113. Schwartz and Estess 182-83.
- Boland, Eavan. "An Unromantic American." Parnassus: Poetry in Review 14 (1988): 73-92.
- Boruch, Marianne. "From Bishop's Blue Pharmacy." New England Review 13 (1990): 112-20.
- Butor, Michel. "Travel and Writing." Mosaic 8 (1974): 1-16.
- Buttimer, Anne. "Home, Reach, and the Sense of Place." Buttimer and Seamon 166-187.
- Buttimer, Anne and David Seamon, eds. The Human Experience of Space and Place. New York: St. Martin's, 1980.
- Cixous, Helene. "The Laugh of the Medusa." Women's Voices: Visions and Perspectives. Eds. Pat C. Hoy, II, Esther H. Schor, and Robert Di Yanni. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1990. 481-96.
- . "Sorties: Out and Out: Attacks/Ways Out/Forays."

- Latimer 559-78.
- Coe, Richard N. When the Grass Was Taller: Autobiography and the Experience of Childhood. New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 1984.
- Colie, Rosalie. "My Ecchoing Song": Andrew Marvell's Poetry of Criticism. Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1970.
- Costello, Bonnie. Elizabeth Bishop: Questions of Mastery. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1991.
- . "The Impersonal and the Interrogative in the Poetry of Elizabeth Bishop." Schwartz and Estess 109-32.
- Cucullu, Lois. "Trompe L'Oeil: Elizabeth Bishop's Radical 'I.'" Texas Studies in Language and Literature 30 (1988): 246-71.
- De Beauvoir, Simone. The Second Sex. Trans. H.M. Parshley. New York: Vintage, 1952.
- Derrida, Jacques. Dissemination. Trans. Barbara Johnson. Chicago, IL: U of Chicago P, 1981.
- Diehl, Joanne Feit. "At Home with Loss: Elizabeth Bishop and the American Sublime." Middlebrook and Yalom 123-37.
- . Women Poets and the American Sublime. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1980.
- Dodd, Philip. The Art of Travel: Essays on Travel Writing. London: Frank Cass and Company Ltd., 1982.
- Doreski, Carole Kiler. "'Back to Boston': Elizabeth Bishop's Journeys form the Maritimes." Colby

- Library Quarterly 24 (1988): 151-61.
- Downs, Roger M. "Cognitive Mapping: A Thematic Analysis." Behavioral Problems in Geography Revisited. Kevin Cox and Reginald G. Golledge, eds. New York: Methuen, 1981. 92-103.
- Eakin, Paul John. Fictions in Autobiography. Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1985.
- Edelman, Lee. "The Geography of Gender: Elizabeth Bishop's 'In the Waiting Room.'" Contemporary Literature 26 (1985): 179-196.
- Egan, Susanna. Patterns of Experience in Autobiography. Chapel Hill: U of NCP, 1984.
- Gibson, Edward. "Understanding the Subjective Meaning of Places." Ley and Samuels 138-54.
- Gilbert, Sandra M. and Susan Gubar. The Madwoman in the Attic: The woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination. New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 1979.
- Gilligan, Carol. In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1982.
- Gioia, Dana. "Studying with Miss Bishop." New Yorker 15 Sept. 1986: 90-101.
- Goldensohn, Lorrie. Elizabeth Bishop: The Biography of a Poetry. New York: Columbia UP, 1992.
- Gunn, Janet Varner. Autobiography: Toward a Poetics of Experience. Philadelphia: Pennsylvania UP, 1982.

- Halsey, William D. "Brazil." Merit Students' Encyclopedia.
1980 ed.
- Handa, Carolyn. "Elizabeth Bishop and Women's Poetry."
South Atlantic Quarterly 82 (1983): 269-81.
- Harrison, Victoria. "Recording a Life: Elizabeth Bishop's
Letters to Ilse and Kit Barker." Contemporary
Literature 29 (1988): 498-517.
- Heaney, Seamus. "The Government of the Tongue." Partisan
Review 55 (1988): 292-308.
- Hemenway, Robert. "Preface." Kalstone, Becoming a Poet,
ix-xiv.
- Holman, C. Hugh. A Handbook to Literature. Fourth ed.
Indianapolis, IN: Bobbs-Merrill, 1980.
- Holquist, Michael, ed. "Introduction." The Dialogic
Imagination: Four Essays, by M. M. Bakhtin.
Trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist.
Austin: U od Texas P, 1981. xv-xxxiv.
- Homans, Margaret. Women Writers and Poetic Identity:
Dorothy Wordsworth, Emily Bronte, and Emily
Dickinson. Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1980.
- Hutcheon, Linda. A Theory of Parody: The Teachings of
Twentieth-Century Art Forms. New York: Methuen,
1985.
- Irigaray, Luce. "Sexual Difference." French Feminist
Thought: A Reader. Toril Moi, ed. Oxford:
Basil Blackwell Ltd., 1987. 118-30.
- . This Sex Which Is Not One. Trans. Catherine Porter.

- Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1985.
- Jacobus, Mary. "The Difference of View." Women Writing and Writing About Women. Ed. Mary Jacobus. New York: Barnes & Noble, 1979. 10-21.
- Jardine, Alice. "Introduction to Julia Kristeva's 'Women's Time.'" Signs 7 (1981): 5-12.
- Jarrell, Randall. "On North & South." Poetry and the Age. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1972. Schwartz and Estess 180-81.
- Jelinek, Estelle. The Tradition of Women's Autobiography: From Antiquity to the Present. Boston: Twayne, 1986.
- Joplin, Patricia Klindienst. "Epilogue." Middlebrook and Yalom 254-67.
- Juhasz, Suzanne. Naked and Fiery Forms: Modern American Poetry By Women, A New Tradition. New York: Octagon Books, 1976.
- Kalstone, David. Becoming a Poet: Elizabeth Bishop, with Marianne Moore and Robert Lowell. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1989.
- . "Conjuring with Nature: Some Twentieth-Century Readings of Pastoral." Twentieth-Century Literature in Retrospect. Reuben Brower, ed. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1971. 247-68.
- Keller, Lynn. Re-making it New: Contemporary American Poetry and the Modernist Tradition. Cambridge, ENG: Cambridge UP, 1987.

- Keller, Lynn and Cristanne Miller. "Emily Dickinson, Elizabeth Bishop, and the Rewards of Indirection." New England Quarterly 57 (1984): 533-53.
- Kolodny, Annette. "Dancing Through the Minefield: Some Observations on the Theory, Practice, and Politics of Feminist Literary Criticism." Showalter, New Feminist Criticism 144-67.
- . "A Map For Re-reading: Gender and Interpretation of Literary Texts." Showalter, New Feminist Criticism 46-62.
- Kristeva, Julia. "Il n'y a pas de maitre a langage." Nouvelle Revue de Psychanalyse 20 (1982): 119-40.
- . "Women's Time." The Kristeva Reader. Ed Toril Moi. New York: Columbia UP, 1986. 188-213.
- Lacan, Jacques. "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the I as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience." Latimer 502-09. Contemporary Critical Theory. Ed. Dan Latimer. San Diego, CA: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1989.
- Latimer, Dan, ed. Contemporary Critical Theory. San Diego, CA: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1989.
- Ley, David and Marwyn S. Samuels, eds. Humanistic Geography: Prospects and Problems. Chicago, IL: Maaroufa Press, Inc., 1978.
- Lowell, Robert. "On The Complete Poems." Schwartz and Estess 206.
- . "Thomas, Bishop, and Williams." Sewanee

- Review 55 (Summer 1947): 497-99. Schwartz and Estess 186-89.
- Mazzaro, Jerome. "The Poetics of Impediment." Postmodern American Poetry. Urbana: U of I Press, 1980. 166-98.
- Merrin, Jeredith. An Enabling Humility: Marianne Moore, Elizabeth Bishop and the Uses of Tradition. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers UP, 1990.
- Middlebrook, Diane Wood. "Prologue." Middlebrook and Yalom 1-9.
- Middlebrook, Diane Wood and Marilyn Yalom, eds. Coming to Light: American Women Poets in the Twentieth Century. Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 1985.
- Millier, Brett Candlish. "Elusive Mastery: The Crafts of Elizabeth Bishop's 'One Art.'" New England Review 13 (1990): 121-29.
- . "Modesty and Morality: George Herbert, Gerard Manley Hopkins, and Elizabeth Bishop." Kenyon Review 11 (1989): 47-56.
- Monmonier, Mark. How to Lie with Maps. Chicago, IL: U of Chicago P, 1991.
- Montefiore, Jan. Feminism and Poetry: Language, Experience, and Identity in Women's Writing. London: Pandora, 1987.
- Moore, Marianne. "A Modest Expert: North & South." The Nation 28 Sept. 1946: 354. Schwartz and Estess 177.

- Mortimer, Penelope. "Elizabeth Bishop's Prose." World Literature Today 51 (1977): 17-18.
- Mykyta, Larysa. "Lacan, Literature, and the Look: Women in the Eye of Psychoanalysis." Sub-Stance 39 (1983): 49-57.
- Nye, Andrea. Feminist Theory and the Philosophies of Man. New York: Routledge, 1988.
- Oates, Joyce Carol. "Is There a Female Voice? Joyce Carol Oates Replies." Gender and Literary Voice. Ed. Janet Todd. New York: Holmes & Meier Publishers, Inc., 1980. 10-11.
- Orr, Gregory. "'The Two-way Ladder': On the Friendship and Mutual Influence Between Elizabeth Bishop and Robert Lowell." New Republic Sept./Oct. 1991: 31-35.
- Ostriker, Alicia. "Dancing at the Devil's Party: Some Notes on Politics and Poetry." Critical Inquiry 13 (Spring 1987): 579-96.
- . Stealing the Language: The Emergence of Women's Poetry in America. Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1986.
- . "The Thieves of Language: Women Poets and Revisionist Mythmaking." Middlebrook and Yalom 10-36.
- Parker, Dale Robert. The Unbeliever: The Poetry of Elizabeth Bishop. Urbana: U of I Press, 1988.
- Pocock, Douglas C.D., ed. Humanistic Geography and Literature: Essays in the Experience of Place.

- London: Barnes & Noble, 1981.
- Porter, Dennis. Haunted Journeys: Desire and Transgression in European Travel Writing. Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1991.
- Relph, E. Place and Placelessness. London: Pion Limited, 1976.
- Rice, Warner G., ed. Literature as a Mode of Travel: Five Essays and a Postscript. New York: New York Public Library, 1963.
- Rich, Adrienne. "The Eye of the Outsider: The Poetry of Elizabeth Bishop." Rev. of The Complete Poems: 1927-1979, by Elizabeth Bishop. Boston Review 8 (1983): 15-17.
- Richter, David H. "Dialogism and Poetry." Studies in the Literary Imagination 23 (1990): 9-27.
- Rose, Courtice. "Human Geography as Text Interpretation." Buttimer and Seamon 123-134.
- Sack, Robert David. Conceptions of Space in Social Thought: A Geographic Perspective. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1980.
- Sanger, Peter. "Elizabeth Bishop and Nova Scotia." Antigonish Review 60 (1985): 15-27.
- Schwartz, Lloyd. "Annals of Poetry: Elizabeth Bishop and Brazil." New Yorker 30 Sept. 1991: 85-97.
- . "One Art: the Poetry of Elizabeth Bishop, 1971-1976." Schwartz and Estess 133-53.
- . "That Sense of Constant Readjustment": Elizabeth

- Bishop's North & South. New York: Garland, 1987.
- Schwartz, Lloyd and Sybil P. Estess, eds. Elizabeth Bishop and Her Art. Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 1983.
- Scott, Nathan A. "Elizabeth Bishop: Poet Without Myth." Virginia Quarterly Review 60 (1984): 255-75.
- Seamon, David. "Afterword: Community, Place, and Environment." Buttimer and Seamon 188-96.
- Selman, Robyn. "Silence of the Lambs: Elizabeth Bishop Between the Lines." Voice Literary Supplement 103 (1992): 17-18.
- Shore, Jane. "Elizabeth Bishop: The Art of Changing Your Mind." Ploughshares 5 (1979): 178-91.
- Showalter, Elaine. "Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness." Showalter, New Feminist Criticism 243-70.
- , ed. The New Feminist Criticism: Essays on Women, Literature, and Theory. New York: Pantheon, 1985.
- . Sister's Choice: Tradition and Change in American Women's Writing. Oxford: Clarendon, 1991.
- . "Toward a Feminist Poetics." Jacobus 22-41.
- Spires, Elizabeth. "Questions of Knowledge." Field 31 (1984): 20-23.
- Stevenson, Anne. Elizabeth Bishop. New Haven, CT: Twayne, 1966.
- . "Writing as a Woman." Jacobus 159-176.
- Summers, Joseph. "Marvell's 'Nature.'" ELH 10 (1953): 121-35.

- Tong, Rosemarie. Feminist Thought: A Comprehensive Introduction. Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1989.
- Tuan, Yi-Fu. "Language and the Making of Place: A Narrative-Descriptive Approach." Annals of the Association of American Geographers 81 (1991): 684-96.
- . Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1977.
- Turner, Victor. The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure. Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1969.
- Van Dyne, Susan R. "Double Monologues: Voices in American Women's Poetry." Massachusetts Review 23 (1982): 461-85.
- Vendler, Helen. "Domestication, Domesticity, and the Otherworldly." Part of Nature, Part of Us. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1980. 97-110.
- . "The Poems of Elizabeth Bishop." Critical Inquiry 13 (1987): 825-38.
- Walker, Cheryl. The Nightingale's Burden: Women Poets and American Culture Before 1900. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1982.
- Wallace, Patricia. "The Wildness of Elizabeth Bishop." Sewanee Review 93 (1985): 95-115.
- Watts, Emily Stipes. The Poetry of American Women from 1632 to 1945. Austin: U of Texas P, 1977.
- Wehr, Wesley. "Elizabeth Bishop: Conversations and Class Notes." Antioch Review 39 (1981): 319-28.

- Williams, Oscar. "North but South." Rev. of North & South,
by Elizabeth Bishop. New Republic 21 Oct. 1946:
525. Schwartz and Estess 184-85.
- Williamson, Alan. "A Cold Spring: The Poet of Feeling."
Schwartz and Estess 96-108.
- Wood, Denis. "Introducing the Cartography of Reality." Ley
and Samuels 207-19.
- Yaeger, Patricia. Honey-Mad Women: Emancipatory Strategies
in Women's Writing, New York: Columbia UP, 1988.

2
VITA

Sally Bishop Shigley

Candidate for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Thesis: "DAZZLING DIALECTICS": ELIZABETH BISHOP'S
RESONATING FEMINIST REALITY

Major Field: English

Biographical:

Personal Data: Born in Salt Lake City, Utah,
March 20 1962, the daughter of James and Enid
Bishop.

Education: Received Bachelor of Arts degree in
English from University of Utah in August,
1984; received Master of Arts degree from
Oklahoma State University in December, 1987;
completed requirements for Doctor of
Philosophy degree in English from Oklahoma
State University in December, 1992.

Professional Experience: Oklahoma State
University Foundation Fellow, 1985. Teaching
Assistant, Department of English, Oklahoma
State University, August 1985-May 1990.
Assistant Director of Composition, Oklahoma
State University, 1987-1988. Adjunct
Faculty, Weber State University, 1990-May
1992. Instructor, Weber State University,
July 1992 to present.