

"MY REAL HOPES AND AMBITIONS":
ELIZABETH BISHOP'S POETICS OF
DIALOGISM

CENTRE FOR NEWFOUNDLAND STUDIES

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"MY REAL HOPES AND AMBITIONS":
ELIZABETH BISHOP'S POETICS OF DIALOGISM

BY

ZHOU XIAOJING

A dissertation submitted to the School of Graduate
Studies in partial fulfilment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

Department of English
Memorial University of Newfoundland

June 1995

St. John's

Newfoundland



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ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines Elizabeth Bishop's poetics and its development in her poems. Bishop indirectly articulates her confidence in her artistic talents and expresses her literary ambitions and her theories of how to fulfil them in her prose piece "In Prison." The principles and methods elaborated in this prose piece reveal Bishop's basic conceptions of artistic originality and creative activity, which can be better understood in terms of Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of dialogism. Bakhtinian dialogism provides an encompassing set of theories concerning both literary and extra-literary conditions for aesthetic activity and creative production. These theories offer an approach to literary works, which goes beyond the limitations of a purely thematic and formalist methodology.

My discussion of Bishop's poetics follows five major concerns central to the development of her poetry: 1) how to make limited commonplace material perform to its utmost capability; 2) how to make a poetry which, in Bishop's own words, "is in action, within itself" as opposed to poetry "at rest"; 3) how to apply her notions of "experience-time" in her poems so as to show the "constant process of adjustment" in one's perception over time and through experience; 4) how to make her poems more "serious," more

"real and fresh"; and 5) how to express complicated ideas and feelings through simple language and visual images. These major concerns are expressed and revealed in Bishop's notebooks, essays, letters, and interviews which are used as major sources for my exploration and discussion of Bishop's poetics.

My basic method in examining Bishop's poetics, though guided by theory, is close-reading of her poems, which are discussed in five chapters according to the publication order of her five books of poetry. Chapter One examines how Bishop deals with material for poetry, movement within poems, and surrealism. Bishop's earliest attempts at portraying "experience-time" in her poems are also examined in this chapter. Chapter Two continues examining Bishop's treatment of "experience-time" and traces her other developments. Chapter Three explores Bishop's further artistic growth in connection to her life in Brazil and her reading. Chapter Four discusses her poetics and poems in relation to American "confessional" poetry. Chapter Five examines Bishop's masterful integration in her final poems of the technical and thematic concerns she explored and developed from the beginning of her poetic career.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to thank my supervisory committee, Dr. Mark Cumming, Dr. Phillip Gardner, and Dr. Jerry Varsava for their patience, encouragement, valuable advice, and especially for upholding a high standard of scholarship for my work. I am thankful to the School of Graduate Studies, Memorial University of Newfoundland for a three-year fellowship which helped make my studies and research possible. Special thanks are extended to Alice Methfessel, Literary Executor of the Estate of Elizabeth Bishop, and to Marianne Craig Moore, Literary Executor of the Estate of Marianne Moore, for their helpful assistance. Nancy MacKechnie, Curator of Special Collections at Vassar College Libraries, Evelyn Feldman, Keeper of the Marianne Moore Archive at the Rosenbach Museum & Library, and Margaret Sherry, Archivist of Rare Books and Special Collections at Princeton University Libraries, provided very gracious help for which I am grateful. I deeply appreciate my friend Dr. Robert C. Cosbey's scrupulous proofreading. Finally, I thank my family, especially my husband, Michael Capurso, whose unflinching support and understanding have been invaluable.

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Permission to quote from his unpublished lecture on Elizabeth Bishop granted by Professor Joseph H. Summers.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	Page ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iv
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS	vii
INTRODUCTION	
I. Thesis and Methodology	1
II. Bishop Criticism	5
III. Bishop's Manifesto in Disguise	30
IV. Bakhtinian Dialogism	42
V. Organization	57
CHAPTER ONE: <i>North & South</i> (1946)	
1.1. "I'm 'Finding Myself'"	69
1.2. "Too Real to Be a Dream"	88
1.3. "The Armored Cars of Dreams"	100
1.4. "Experience-Time"	111
CHAPTER TWO: <i>A Cold Spring</i> (1955)	
2.1. "Our Knowledge Is Historical"	136
2.2. "More Directly on Real People"	163
CHAPTER THREE: <i>Questions of Travel</i> (1965)	
3.1. "See the Sun the Other Way Around"	178
3.2. "Significant, Illustrative, American"	215
CHAPTER FOUR: "Uncollected Work" included in <i>The Complete Poems</i> (1969)	
4.1. "The Oblique, the Indirect Approach"	243
4.2. "A Peripheral Vision"	272
CHAPTER FIVE: <i>Geography III</i> (1976) & "New Poems" (1979)	
5.1. "Dress Up and Dance at Carnival"	295
5.2. "Un-rediscovered, Un-renamable"	320
5.3. "Art 'Copying from Life' and Life Itself"	337
CONCLUSION	364
BIBLIOGRAPHY	380

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

- AA *Art and Answerability: Early Philosophical Essays* (1990) by Mikhail M. Bakhtin.
- BAP *Becoming A Poet: Elizabeth Bishop with Marianne Moore and Robert Lowell* (1989) by David Kalstone.
- CP *The Complete Poems, 1927-1979* (1987) by Elizabeth Bishop.
- CPr *The Collected Prose* (1984) by Elizabeth Bishop.
- DI *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays* (1990) by Mikhail M. Bakhtin.
- FT *Five Temperaments: Elizabeth Bishop, Robert Lowell, James Merrill, Adrienne Rich, John Ashbery* (1977) by David Kalstone.
- L *One Art: Letters* (1994) by Elizabeth Bishop.
- PDP *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* (1989) by Mikhail M. Bakhtin.
- RHW *Rabelais and His World* (1968) by Mikhail M. Bakhtin.
- RM Rosenbach Museum & Library. Philadelphia, PA. (The Marianne Moore Archive)
- SG *Speech Genres & Other Late Essays* (1992) by Mikhail M. Bakhtin.
- TPH *Toward a Philosophy of the Act* (1993) by Mikhail M. Bakhtin.
- VC Vassar College Libraries. Poughkeepsie, NY. (The Elizabeth Bishop Papers in The Special Collections)

INTRODUCTION

I. Thesis and Methodology

Elizabeth Bishop was intent on continually discovering new possibilities for artistic creation in her medium. Throughout her career, Bishop sought to stretch the limits of poetry by fully exploiting the potential of her subject matter. She persistently searched for new material and new ways to express complicated feelings and ideas, to portray people and their social conflicts and cultural diversity, and to show the wonder and mystery in the world through the power of her art. The relatively small body of her work, just over one hundred poems, is marked by a great variety in form, style, and thematic concerns, and by an increasing capacity for multiple perspectives and fluid, complex experience.

Bishop's poetry contains technical and thematic elements which can be identified with several literary traditions, but it eludes all of their labels. She puts each of her borrowings from heterogeneous sources to her own use, incorporating them into a mode of descriptive poetry that is uniquely her own. I shall argue that Bishop's interactions with and appropriations of others' works are a necessary condition for her creative production and artistic originality. Her artistic goals, technical innovations, and continual search to renew poetic conventions are motivated

and shaped by her responses to various aspects of other writers' works. Indeed, others' works have a generative function in the formation of Bishop's own poetics--her concepts, principles, and technical strategies concerning the making of poetry. They inspire her ambition, provoke her to question their assumptions, and challenge her to seek new subject matter and techniques so as to go beyond her own and others' limitations. In addition, other writers' particular texts and utterances provide Bishop with thematic material, expressive means, and additional effects.

Bishop's various ways of appropriating others' words and methods are not simply a matter of thematic concerns or technical necessity. They are also determined by her epistemology, her values, and her life. These multifaceted generative and determinative elements are themselves mediated by the epistemological and sociopolitical climate of her time. The cultural and social context of Bishop's time, like others' words, techniques, and styles, has a shaping effect on both the form and content of her poems. At the same time, Bishop's conscious assimilation of various elements from artists' and writers' works of different traditions gives her poetry an eclectic quality.

This eclectic quality and its consequent impact on Bishop's own poems can be illuminated by Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of dialogism, which will provide a theoretical and

methodological basis for this dissertation. Bakhtin emphasizes the concrete and unique situatedness of individual consciousness within a particular historical social, and cultural context. He regards the interactions between these particular individual consciousnesses as dialogic and creatively productive, and points out that they are inherent in language and all human activity. In his essay "The Problem of the Text," Bakhtin contends that

The transcription of thinking in the human sciences is always the transcription of a special dialogue: the complex interrelations between the text (the object of study and reflection) and the created, framing context (questioning, refuting, and so forth) in which the scholar's cognizing and evaluating thought takes place. This is the meeting of two texts--of the ready-made and the creative text being created--and, consequently, the meeting of two subjects and two authors. (SG 106-107)

For Bakhtin, one text is always responsive to another and one author's work always contains a certain amount of other authors' ideas and words. In his essay "The Problem of Speech Genres," Bakhtin points out that "In each epoch, in all areas of life and activity, there are particular traditions that are expressed and retained in verbal vestments: in written works, in utterances, in sayings, and so forth" (SG 88-89). This unavoidable inheritance has a shaping effect on individual expressions. Therefore, Bakhtin contends:

Our speech, that is, all our utterances (including

creative works), is filled with others' words, varying degrees of otherness or varying degrees of "our-ownness," varying degrees of awareness and detachment. These words of others carry with them their own expression, their own evaluative tone, which we assimilate, rework, and re-accentuate. (SG 89)

The ideas, values, and attitudes in one person's discourse, as well as his or her manner of expression, are reexamined, represented, and revised in another person's discourse and mode of expression. This process is creatively productive in generating new ideas and styles. Creative production, then, takes place not in the isolated single consciousness of the author, but in the author's interaction with others and the inventions and conventions of various traditions. In many of her poems, Bishop evaluates, assimilates, revises, and re-accentuates "varying degrees of otherness" in order to express different ideas, values, and emotions, and to create a style of her own. Recognition of creative activity as a process which inevitably involves the reworking of what has already been uttered suggests that an analysis of Bishop's appropriation and revision of others' words and methods will yield insights into the process of her creative production. A study of Bishop's creative assimilation and reworking of the "otherness" and their consequent effects in her own work will further our understanding of her poetry, which is at once so eclectic and so unique.

II. Bishop Criticism

The history of Bishop criticism has been marked by continual revisions in placing her poetry within different literary traditions and re-evaluations of her position in the American literary canon. Although by the time of her death in 1979, at the age of sixty-eight, Bishop had won nearly every major literary prize and received the high praise of critics and her fellow poets, it is only in recent years that critics have begun to study her differences from the literary precursors--Wordsworth, Robert Frost, Marianne Moore, and Wallace Stevens--with whom she has usually been identified.

Bishop used to be praised for her modesty, moral restraint, and formal elegance. In her review of Bishop's first book *North & South* (1946), entitled "A Modest Expert," Marianne Moore praised Bishop for being "accurate and modest" and for being "someone who knows, who is not didactic" (406, 408). Louise Bogan pointed out similar qualities in poems of *North & South*, which "strike no attitudes and have not an ounce of superfluous emotional weight, and . . . combine an unforced ironic humor with a naturalist's accuracy of observation . . ." (182). Randall Jarrell emphasized Bishop's emotional control and formal mastery, asserting that "Miss Bishop's poems are almost

never forced; in her best work restraint, calm, and proportion are implicit in every detail of organization and workmanship" (180-81). His summary of the salient characteristics of Bishop's poems--"all her poems have written underneath, *I have seen it*" (181)--was often quoted by critics.

Nevertheless, Bishop's poems were considered by other critics as lacking in substance, and her poetic merit was supposed to be more a matter of craftsmanship and revision than innovation. In his 1956 review of Bishop's second book, which was issued together with a reprint of her first as *Poems: North & South--A Cold Spring* (1955), Edwin Honig said that "Elizabeth Bishop's poetry aspires to a very high order of craft and sensibility--to a perch, say, which only Marianne Moore, among living women poets, precariously occupies" (115). He complimented Bishop for her "considerable verbal skill, a gift for independent perception, and a habit of making commonplace things appear either charming or unique," but he disparaged Bishop's poems as mere "brilliant surfaces and transparency" underneath which "is a curious rigidity, a disturbing lack of movement and affective life, betraying a sprained and uneasy patience" (115). Nancy McNally paid similar attention to the brilliant surface of Bishop's descriptions and labelled Bishop a "minor" descriptive poet. In her essay "Elizabeth

Bishop: *The Discipline of Description*," (1965), McNally asserted that Bishop's "originality lies not in large innovations of form or language--the proper domain of the major poet--but in more subtle mutations of tradition." Therefore, she contended,

Elizabeth Bishop occupies a peculiar place among contemporary American poets: having written neither many, nor very "important" poems, but rather a few smaller poems of exquisite craftsmanship, she fits very well the traditional definition of the minor poet, and remains relatively obscure in comparison with the larger figures of the period. (189)

This view of Bishop's "obscure" position as a "minor poet," and the notion that her poems consisted of only "brilliant surfaces and transparency," have been increasingly challenged since the late 1960s, especially in the last decade. With the publication of her more mature poems following the first two books, Bishop reached a larger audience and her works won wider critical acclaim. In his review of Bishop's fifth book, *Geography III* (1976), Harold Bloom said that, "Of her own generation of poets, which included Roethke, Lowell, Berryman and Jarrell, Bishop alone seems beyond dispute." He added that "Bishop's art is as unmistakable in its authority as the poetry of Wallace Stevens and Marianne Moore demonstrated itself to be, at an earlier time" ("*Geography III*" 29). The first anthology of comments and essays on and interviews with Bishop, entitled

Elizabeth Bishop and Her Art, appeared in 1983. As Lloyd Schwartz and Sybil Estess noted in their introduction to this anthology, "After years of critical misconception, effusion, or condescension . . . [Bishop] has finally come to be regarded as one of the major voices of our century" (xvii). The high praise Bishop received from critics and a younger generation of poets marked a new stage in the evaluation of her artistic achievement and her position among American poets. Mark Strand referred to Bishop as "our greatest national treasure" (243). John Ashbery, in his "Second Presentation of Elizabeth Bishop" to the prize jury for the 1976 Neustadt International Prize for Literature, called Bishop "a writer's writer's writer." Ashbery noted that Bishop's poems had won admiration from very different poets like Robert Duncan and James Tate, and from "poet-critics of undeniable authority like Marianne Moore, Randall Jarrell, Richard Wilbur and Robert Lowell" ("Second Presentation" 8).

That Bishop has won admiration from diverse schools of writers underscores the versatility and uniqueness of her poetry. These qualities are reflected in the heterogeneity of the writers and artists with whose works Bishop's poems have been compared. In his 1947 article "Thomas, Bishop, and Williams," Robert Lowell remarked that in reading Bishop's poems "One is reminded of Kafka and certain

abstract paintings, and is left rather at sea about the actual subjects of the poems" (186). Lowell also found that "in her marvellous command of shifting speech-tones, Bishop resembles Robert Frost." And "In her bare objective language, she also reminds one at times of William Carlos Williams; but it is obvious that her most important model is Marianne Moore." However, he emphasized that "Her dependence should not be defined as imitation, but as one of development and transformation" (187). In his preface to David Kalstone's posthumously published book *Becoming A Poet: Elizabeth Bishop with Marianne Moore and Robert Lowell* (1989), Robert Hemenway gave a partial list of those who are Bishop's "'influences'": George Herbert, William Cowper, Charles Darwin, Charles Baudelaire, Anton Chekhov, Gerard Manley Hopkins, Max Jacob, Marianne Moore, Joseph Cornell, Paul Klee, and Robert Lowell (xi).

The eclectic nature of Bishop's sources of "influence" renders her poetry resistant to being placed within any single literary tradition. As David Kalstone once said, "Elizabeth Bishop, to her credit, has always been hard to 'place'" (FT 12). Bishop criticism is characterized by plurality and indeterminacy in defining her poetry. In *A History of Modern Poetry: Modernism and After* (1987), David Perkins discovered in Bishop's poems various elements which belonged to different literary traditions and characterized

several individual poets' styles. Perkins wrote that "Bishop did not follow the neo-Metaphysical, Symbolist style of the 1930s--she was never a follower of anything--but many of her poems . . . especially pleased devotees of this style" (376). He also pointed out that "Many of Bishop's poems enact an archetypal Romantic experience" (378). There were other elements in Bishop's poems, which Perkins identified with Marianne Moore's kind of "close, particular, and witty descriptions of objects . . ." (374). Perkins also noted that some lines in Bishop's poem "The Bight" "are in the world of William Carlos Williams more than of any other modern poet, though of course Bishop does not resemble Williams" (377). Besides, Perkins observed that "The ideal to which Bishop aspired in many poems was a complete receptivity to whatever appeared, somewhat akin to that desiderated by Charles Olson and Robert Duncan in their theorizing about 'open' form" (378). Like Perkins, Helen McNeil found heterogeneous and elusive elements in Bishop's poems. In her article "Elizabeth Bishop" (1987), McNeil pointed out that "Bishop exhibits many resemblances, none of them definitive, to her modernist contemporaries" (395). She noted that there were conflicting elements in Bishop's "discoveries," which "recall both surrealism and its ostensible opposite, the attentive, 'scientific,' objectivist gaze of Williams" (395, 397).

Critical approaches to Bishop's poetry, especially those in the last two decades, tended to categorize Bishop's poetry by focusing on certain aspects of individual poems, identifying them with one or several predecessors or literary traditions. Some critics discovered a kinship in Bishop's poems to the Romantic tradition; others discerned a departure instead. There were still others who argued that Bishop's relationship to the Romantic tradition was revisionist.¹ In his 1975 article "Landscape and Knowledge: The Poetry of Elizabeth Bishop," Willard Spiegelman contended that Bishop was "an epistemological poet in the tradition of William Wordsworth and S. T. Coleridge" (203). Spiegelman continued this line of inquiry in his 1978 article "Elizabeth Bishop's 'Natural Heroism'," in which he argued that "her hero replaces traditional ideas of bravery with a blend of domestic and imaginative strength" (154). He discussed Bishop's "natural heroism" by identifying her "kinship with, yet movement beyond, Wordsworth" (154-55). In her 1983 article on the "prosodic transformations" in Bishop's poems, Penelope Laurans argued that "The sense of the mind actively encountering reality, giving off the impression of involved, immediate discovery, is one of Bishop's links to the Romantics . . ." (75). Laurans also found thematic similarities between Bishop and the Romantics in her "Romantic subject matter," such as "problems of

isolation, of loss, of the quest for union with something beyond the self." However, Laurans noted that "Bishop exercises her technical proficiency to cut her poetry off from any of that 'spontaneous overflow of powerful feeling' so immediately central to the Romantic imagination" (76).

Other critics have placed Bishop in the American poetic tradition. In his introduction to a 1985 collection of critical essays on Bishop, Harold Bloom states that "Bishop stands . . . securely in a tradition of American poetry that began with Emerson, Very, and Dickinson, and culminated in aspects of Frost as well as Stevens and Moore"--a tradition which "is marked by firm rhetorical control, overt moral authority, and sometimes by a fairly strict economy of means" ("Introduction" 1). Likewise, Guy Rotella in his recent study *Reading & Writing Nature: The Poetry of Robert Frost, Wallace Stevens, Marianne Moore, and Elizabeth Bishop* (1991) places Bishop in the tradition of American poetry which he traces back to Emerson and Dickinson--a tradition which turns to nature "in order to pose epistemological and aesthetic questions" (ix). Rotella discusses how this tradition is continued and contested by twentieth-century American poets such as Frost, Stevens, Moore and Bishop. C. K. Doreski makes a similar placement in *Elizabeth Bishop: The Restraints of Language* (1993) and considers Bishop "a descendent of Thoreau, Hawthorne,

Melville, and Frost" (4) and "a severe critic of the [British] romantic poets" (5). Doreski argues that "Bishop uses her descriptive language to critique the presumptions of epiphany, the illusion of plentitude in the sublime, the superficial and premature insights of the picturesque" (5).

Surrealism has been a persistent topic in criticism on Bishop's work. Since Anne Stevenson's discussion of surrealism in Bishop's poems in her book *Elizabeth Bishop* (1966), other critics such as Thomas Travisano, David Kalstone, Lorrie Goldensohn, Bonnie Costello, and Brett Millier continue to find a surrealist influence on Bishop's poems in their respective studies. Examination of Bishop's connection to surrealism has generally been devoted to identifying sources or comparing similar technical features. Criticism concerning Bishop's assimilation of and divergence from the orthodox surrealists has been mostly devoted to her interest in dreams and employment of uncanny images. Travisano, for instance, asserts that "while a fascination with dream-like states is the main interest Bishop and the surrealists have in common, there are some fundamental differences in the way Bishop handles dreams" (42). A similar point has been made by Richard Mullen, who writes that

Some of the enchanted mystery which permeates Elizabeth Bishop's poetry arises from her preoccupation with dreams, sleep, and the borders between sleeping and

waking. Her poems contain much of the magic, uncanniness and displacement associated with the works of the surrealists, for she too explores the workings of the unconscious and the interplay between conscious perception and dream. (63)

Mullen's article on Bishop's surrealist inheritance employs evidence of source influence in his detailed discussion of Bishop's poems such as "The Monument," "The Weed," and "Rainy Season; Sub-Tropics."

Both Goldensohn and Costello have found further evidence of Bishop's interest in surrealism and her use of it in her poems. However, Goldensohn dismisses Bishop's interest in surrealism as merely a passing phase in her youth.² Costello finds that in Bishop's poems "Dream imagery and distortion are the most conspicuous features" of surrealist influence by visual artists such as de Chirico, Paul Klee, and Max Ernst. "But," she concludes, "as many critics have observed, Bishop's surrealist images and subjects do not constitute a surrealist technique or testify to shared beliefs about the nature of the creative unconscious" (27). This summary of surrealism in Bishop's poems again reflects the dialogic nature of Bishop's creative assimilation of various traditions.

Although Bishop's poems contain all of the elements singled out by critics as related to one literary tradition or another, critical attention to locating Bishop's literary parentage or affiliations tends to overlook Bishop's own

artistic goals and innovative techniques. Bishop herself rejected being placed within any school of poetry, saying, in a 1977 interview:

I've gone up and down the East Coast, living everywhere from Nova Scotia to Key West, but I've never seemed to live long enough in one place to become a member of a poetry "group," and when I was in Brazil there weren't any groups handy. I've been a friend of Marianne Moore's and Robert Lowell's but not a part of any school.³

The fact that Bishop's poetry is distinct from any established school is not simply a matter of circumstance, as Bishop modestly suggested. It is the result of her ongoing struggle against conformity and her careful cultivation of a manner different from those of other poets. Even before her graduation from college in 1934, Bishop expressed her firm belief in developing her own poetic style when her poems submitted to *Hound & Horn* were rejected. Writing to her friend, Frani Blough, Bishop said,

I know they're not wonderful poems but even so I think that to try to develop a manner of one's own, to say the most difficult things . . . is more to one's credit than to go on the way all the young *H & H* poets do with "One sweetly solemn thought" coming to them o'er and o'er. (2 March 1934, L 17)

All her life, Bishop sought to "develop a manner of [her] own," while assimilating and rejecting elements from various literary and artistic movements or schools.

Book-length studies devoted to the unique quality of

Bishop's poetry have generally adopted a multifaceted approach which is thematic, formalist, biographical, and psychoanalytical. The comparative method continues to dominate these studies even though their specific comparisons of Bishop with different poets and various literary traditions differ. In *Elizabeth Bishop* (1966), Anne Stevenson observed that the kind of poetry Bishop writes at her best is "a style of poetry which owes as much to the French poets Apollinaire and Laforgue as it does to Wallace Stevens, Marianne Moore and other American poets of her generation . . ." (*Bishop* 49). What set Bishop's poetry apart, Stevenson claimed, was her faithful observation and acceptance of what she had seen without developing her observations "into a philosophy" or associating them explicitly "with a central core of thought or belief." But this "reluctance to theorize," according to Stevenson, led to a "disadvantage" for Bishop because "it is difficult for a poet to come to terms with life, with its moral and emotional problems, without some theoretical apparatus." For Stevenson, this "disadvantage" resulted in a lack of "growth" or "development in understanding" in Bishop's poetry, which failed to achieve the kind of "organic unity" shown in the poetry of W. B. Yeats and T. S. Eliot (*Bishop* 31).

Stevenson's view of Bishop's lack of "growth" and

"organic unity" has been challenged by Thomas Travisano's study *Elizabeth Bishop: Her Artistic Development* (1988), as well as by other recent Bishop criticism. Travisano contends:

[Bishop's] art went through important stylistic and expressive changes. One must assess these changes if one is to appreciate not just her delicacy, craft, and precision, which have long been valued, but the coherent and consistent approach she took to fundamental human problems. To analyze the stages of her development is to bring into bolder relief concerns that underlay her life's work and give it artistic unity. (3)

Travisano examines Bishop's poems chronologically according to three phases he discerns in her development. The first phase consists of Bishop's early poems in the first half of *North & South*, which Travisano considers "introspective" and "sealed imaginary worlds." The second phase begins with the second half of *North & South* and runs through Bishop's second book, *A Cold Spring* (1955). This middle phase, Travisano argues, "breaks through early enclosures and engages imaginatively with actual places and people." The last phase, including Bishop's last two books, *Questions of Travel* (1965) and *Geography III* (1976), shows Bishop's confrontation with personal history (3). In exploring this history, Travisano says, Bishop faces up to her "deepest feelings" such as "loss" and "fear" (4). Travisano's examination of the development of Bishop's poetry leads to

his emphasis on Bishop's singularity: "Her mature work is really postneoclassical, postromantic, postsymbolist, and even postsurrealist in that she derives much from each of these movements . . . but she is really of none of them" (11). Travisano's examination of Bishop's artistic achievement marks a shift in Bishop scholarship which now begins to emphasize her departure from, and even subversive revision of, various literary traditions.

David Kalstone intends to show Bishop's "intense difference" as a poet in *Becoming a Poet: Elizabeth Bishop with Marianne Moore and Robert Lowell* (1989). As he writes in the draft of his unfinished introduction: "It becomes increasingly clear, the more we know about Elizabeth Bishop, that she makes us describe poetry in a different light" While discussing the significant influence of Moore and Lowell on Bishop, Kalstone reveals Bishop's evolving independence and difference from the other two poets. Continuing Kalstone's line of inquiry, Lorrie Goldensohn devotes two chapters to Bishop's friendships with Moore and Lowell in her recent biographical and textual study *Elizabeth Bishop: The Biography of a Poetry* (1992). Like Kalstone, Goldensohn examines the impact the other two poets have on Bishop's poems, but her view lacks Kalstone's sensitivity and is limited by an emphasis on narrowly defined forms and subject matter. For instance, Goldensohn

concludes her examination of Moore's relationship with Bishop by saying that "Perhaps the broadest difference between the two poets lies in Bishop's steady adoption of a more heavily narrative and dramatic poetry" (160). And Bishop's friendship with Lowell, Goldensohn asserts, leads to her becoming "increasingly interested in his more autobiographical work, and a little less interested in the emblematic objects and animals that comprised Moore's more familiar reticences" (161).

Critics whose methods are comparative have also related their examinations of Bishop's poems to a central theme. Robert Dale Parker's book *The Unbeliever: The Poetry of Elizabeth Bishop* (1988) focuses on anxiety in Bishop's poems. For Parker, Bishop's poems are "full of confusion and wonder about things she can never make quite clear-- about sexuality, politics, the burdens of imagination, the fate of the self." He sees Bishop's career as "dividing roughly into three stages of contention with that anxiety over poetic occasion" (ix). Throughout his book, Parker compares Bishop's poems with her prose and with the work of other writers such as Dickinson, Whitman, Frost, Stevens, and Robert Lowell. Bonnie Costello focuses her study *Elizabeth Bishop: Questions of Mastery* (1991) on the theme of mastery. Costello argues that "Bishop concerned herself, throughout her career, with questions of mastery--artistic,

personal, and cultural. Her poems portray both the desire for mastery and the dangers and illusions to which such desire is prone" (2). Costello explores cognitive and aesthetic questions for Bishop as "a visual poet" (5) and asserts that "emerging from a tradition of seeing that idealizes it to Vision, Bishop's is a poetry of looks" (6). While noting how the religious "approach to visual experience as a sign of the invisible" influenced Bishop's "view of the world" (7), Costello contends that Bishop's poetry is doubtful about "some forms of mastery and transcendency offered in devotional and Romantic traditions" and "is equally skeptical about the symbolist and objectivist absolutes which shaped modernist thinking" (8).

Recently, more detailed and comprehensive studies of Bishop's life and unpublished letters and manuscripts have shed new light on how Bishop's life, lesbianism, and interactions with other writers shaped her art. Brett Millier's critical biography *Elizabeth Bishop: Life and the Memory of It* (1993) is a substantial contribution to the study of the relation between Bishop's life and work. It provides valuable biographical information which illuminates particular poems by showing their connections to the events in Bishop's life. In *Elizabeth Bishop's Poetics of Intimacy* (1993), Victoria Harrison offers further insights into Bishop's poems by examining her unpublished manuscripts,

journals, and letters in relation to her feelings and anxieties about being a lesbian. Harrison discusses Bishop's poetics in relation not only to Bishop's sexual orientation, but also to her lived experience--her childhood relationship with her mother and contact with different cultures in Brazil. Harrison asserts that "[Bishop's] poetry inevitably listens to the voices of layered and changeable subjectivities, so as to explore their daily and profound connections" (11), and that "her poems inevitably concern themselves with the dynamics that bind and distance her speakers and her subjects in relationships of power, possession, and love" (182). In her recent study *Elizabeth Bishop: Her Poetics of Loss* (1994), Susan McCabe also attempts to connect Bishop's poetics to her life and sense of self by drawing from an eclectic source of theories from Freud to Jacques Lacan, including French and Anglo-American feminists. McCabe examines how Bishop's early experience of loss, her struggle with a lesbian sexual identity, and her relation to communities and cultures govern the themes, images, and language of Bishop's work and determine her increasingly autobiographical stance. Bishop's selected correspondence, *One Art: Letters* (1994), edited by Robert Giroux, provides more important information about Bishop's preoccupations with developing her own kind of poetry. Much of her correspondence with other poets reveals Bishop's

responses to criticism of her work and to other writers' works, and her positions concerning poetics and politics.

The connections between Bishop's life and work, between her gender and her art, between her lesbianism and the sense of alienation in her poetry, are further explored in feminist criticism. Rather than identifying Bishop with any dominant poetic traditions, feminist critics emphasize the subversiveness and outsiderhood of Bishop's poetry. In her review of Bishop's *Complete Poems, 1927-1979* (1983), Adrienne Rich calls attention to Bishop's "experience of outsiderhood, closely--though not exclusively--linked with the essential outsiderhood of a lesbian identity . . ." (127). Rich points out that "through most of her life, Bishop was critically and consciously trying to explore marginality, power and powerlessness, often in poetry of great beauty and sensuousness" (135). She argues that Bishop "deserves to be read and valued not only for her language and images or for her personality within the poems, but for the way she locates herself in the world" (127). Joanne Feit Diehl, on the other hand, intends "to account both for the influence of gender and the importance of tradition in [Bishop's] work" (175). In her article "At Home With Loss: Elizabeth Bishop and the American Sublime" (1985), Diehl observes that Bishop applies a rhetoric of "asexuality in order to find an adequate defense against the

secondariness to which the American Sublime would sentence her." This "asexual self," Diehl argues, makes it possible for Bishop to evade "being diminished, exiled, or isolated from the tradition" of the American Sublime (178).

An alternative view of Bishop's relation to both male and female poetic traditions is presented by Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar in their book *No Man's Land: The Place of the Woman Writer in the Twentieth Century--Volume 1: The War of Words* (1988). Gilbert and Gubar use Bishop's "subversively celebratory" poem "Invitation to Miss Marianne Moore" as "a particularly magical example of a poem that blesses the female precursor" who is portrayed "like a woman Orpheus" (211-2). Instead of the kind of apotheosis of the Emersonian sublime Diehl has discussed in relation to Bishop's poetry, Gilbert and Gubar contend that "Moore offers Bishop a cleansing apotheosis of linguistic destruction" (212). Gilbert and Gubar claim that Bishop "devoutly wishes to achieve in her confrontation with this woman artist [Moore]" something "apocalyptic"--"apocalyptic" because Moore's coming heralds "what Adrienne Rich calls 'a whole new poetry beginning here'" (211-2). This new poetry, Gilbert and Gubar suggest, involves the destruction of the male-dominated literary tradition: "Not only must the female precursor be invoked, then, but by implication, threatening male precursors and contemporaries must be

annihilated, their 'dynasties of negative constructions' must darken and die" (214).

This view of Bishop's bliss in her relation to "the female precursor" is shown to be more complicated than Gilbert and Gubar have assumed by other recent studies of Bishop (such as Kalstone's *Becoming A Poet*), which explore more incisively the complexity of the relationship between Moore and Bishop.⁵ In *Re-making It New: Contemporary American Poetry and Modernist Tradition* (1987), Lynn Keller examines in detail numerous thematic and technical aspects of Bishop's poems which show her "continuity" with and "divergence" from Moore and modernism. Keller's examination of their "poetic affinities" focuses on their descriptive skills, arguing that while Bishop "appears to have adopted from Moore" many of the descriptive techniques in her first book (81), elements in Bishop's poems such as "a nonrational way of knowing" and an exploration of "the fearful and gruesome aspects of experience" are absent from Moore's poetry (115).

The basic assumption of "a female precursor" and a female literary tradition in Gilbert's and Gubar's discussion of the Bishop-Moore relationship is directly challenged and questioned by Diehl in her recent book *Elizabeth Bishop and Marianne Moore: The Psychodynamics of Creativity* (1993). Diehl points out that "In response to

Bloom's male-identified Oedipal model of influence relations, Gilbert and Gubar posit an alternative paradigm which they label the 'female affiliation complex.'" Even though they "contextualize Freud's theories of female sexuality and modulate his premise of female insufficiency," Diehl contends, "Gilbert and Gubar's analysis remains tied to Freudian theory . . ." (3). Diehl argues that a reexamination of "the dynamics of women's relation to the literary tradition" must go beyond "the historically implicated Freudian model." She finds, by drawing on Melanie Klein's essay "A Study of Envy and Gratitude" (1956), that the emphasis upon the infant's internalized relationship with the mother "can serve as a guide to an inquiry into women's literary relations" (4-5). Diehl claims that "Klein's emphasis on the importance of envy in terms of creativeness beyond the originatory feeding situation is pertinent not only to questions of literary production in general but to influence relations in particular" (5). Based on the assumption that "literary creativity is a psychological task," Diehl analyzes Bishop's prose piece "Efforts of Affection" in order to show how "the lineaments" of Bishop's portrayal of her "deeply ambivalent" relationship to Moore are "informed by the originary, oppositional tensions inherent in the Kleinian view of creativity" (6-7). Her readings of Bishop's prose piece "In

the Village" and poem "Crusoe in England" are also based on the theory that Bishop's psychological needs result in her artistic production. Diehl believes that "the interpretative advantage such as a gender-inflected model of poetic influence and psychodynamics offers" can "illuminate an alternative, female modernism" (8).

But the theories Diehl applies also presuppose Freudian infantile fixation in the individual's psycho-sexual development, and this limits her analysis of Bishop's work and keeps her ideas still "tied to Freudian theory."⁶ Making a psychological hypothesis about one kind of mother-daughter relationship into a paradigm for literary analysis reduces the complexity of literature and the productive potential of unique, multifaceted individual experience. Bishop always refused to be included in anthologies consisting of only women's works, insisting that gender should not become an evaluative standard for art. Writing to her friend Joan Keefe on 8 June 1977, Bishop said, "I believe I have been strongly feminist since the age of six, however, I also believe that art is art, and no matter how great a part these ineluctable facts play in its creation, the ages, races and sexes should not be segregated."⁷

A polarized division between a male literary tradition and a female one as suggested in Diehl's and Gilbert and Gubar's discussions of Bishop's relationship with Moore has

been abandoned in other recent feminist criticism such as Jeredith Merrin's *An Enabling Humility: Marianne Moore, Elizabeth Bishop, and the Use of Tradition* (1990). Merrin discusses "how two of the most gifted twentieth-century American women poets made use of the Anglo-American literary tradition, and particularly of their Renaissance and Romantic precursors." Although Merrin believes that "gendered experience may affect the activities of reading and writing," she argues that "sweeping statements about what necessarily characterizes all male or all female authorship, about so-called and neatly separated patriarchal or matriarchal traditions, are ill-advised when we are speaking about the alembic of the imagination" (1). Merrin's comparative study of Moore's and Bishop's poems with those of George Herbert and Wordsworth is based on her contention that "For both Moore and Bishop, humility consists not merely of self-effacing modesty. . . . It is, paradoxically, bound up with both writers' sense of ambition, with their respective efforts to" renew their inheritance (7). Merrin's discussion of Moore's and Bishop's use of literary tradition leads to the issue of literary influence and raises questions about the problematic implications ignored by criticism which insists on a literary parentage separated by gender.⁸ Merrin points out that

To study Bishop's, or Marianne Moore's, use of tradition is to observe bewilderingly complicated overlappings and intersections of various "influences": English and American; Renaissance, Romantic, and modern; scientific and spiritual; male and female. It is to see how an individually invented artistic stance may baffle any attempt at neat categorization under the rubric of "matriarchal" or "patriarchal." (120-21)

Similar questions about a woman writer's relation to literary traditions are also raised in a collection of essays on Bishop's work, *Elizabeth Bishop: The Geography of Gender* (1993). In the "Prologue" to this collection, Marilyn May Lombardi asks: "Can an autonomous woman's tradition in American literature be defined without arguing for some problematic notion of feminine essence?" Lombardi states that "[Bishop's] art expands our narrow definitions of the 'woman poet' or 'woman's poetry' and so poses a greater challenge to feminist orthodoxies than earlier readers may have been willing to admit" (5). To broaden and diversify feminist criticism, Lombardi has brought together essays of various topics and approaches, all relating to Bishop's gender. These essays "consider the ways in which the poet's art confronts the imprisonings and problematic releases of the female body, the sexual politics of a male dominated literary tradition, and the pleasures and the perils of language itself," by drawing on issues in Bishop's life such as "her early sense of maternal deprivation, her lesbianism, her struggles with alcoholism and debilitating

asthma" (5).

Various critical approaches to Bishop's poetry to date reveal that analysis of Bishop's poems only in relation to one particular tradition or another, or to one particular literary ancestor or another, risk giving a narrow or even misleading picture of Bishop's poetry as a whole. Critical efforts devoted to identifying sources of influence may help illuminate the particular images in Bishop's poems, but focusing on them for an explanation of Bishop's poems tends to bypass the transformation which elements from those sources undergo, once combined with other alien elements, to enter into a new creation.

The difficulty critics have in placing Bishop within any definite school of poetry, and the contradictions and heterogeneous elements critics find in identifying Bishop's poetry indicate the need for a different approach to her oeuvre. I will depart from the dominant comparative method by drawing from Bakhtin's theory of dialogism. My discussion of Bishop's poems will be based on my contention that her affinities with and divergences from various predecessors and traditions are dialogic interactions crucial to literary creation. Bishop herself articulates this poetics of dialogism in her widely misunderstood, but seminal prose piece, "In Prison."

III. Bishop's Manifesto in Disguise

Elizabeth Bishop's correspondence with Robert Lowell is one of the major sources of documents that reveal her struggle with the problems of artistic innovation and originality. In his 1961 *Paris Review* interview, Lowell complained that the work of poets of his generation, "particularly younger ones," had become "too much something specialized that can't handle much experience. It's become a craft, purely a craft, and there must be some breakthrough back into life" (Siedel 111-12). In the same interview, Lowell looked back on an earlier period with admiration for its explosive revolutionary creativity, a period of "Schönberg and Picasso and Joyce and the early Eliot." Even "rather minor but very good writers such as Williams and Marianne Moore" did their work in the spirit of this period. "Their kind of protest and queerness," Lowell added, "has hardly been repeated. . . . You wouldn't see anyone as strange as Marianne again, not for a long while. Conservative and Jamesian as she is, it was a terrible, private, and strange revolutionary poetry. There isn't the motive to do that now" (Siedel 129). Lowell's last rueful comment on his generation's lack of rebellious spirit provoked Bishop to disagree in a letter to him.

But I wonder--isn't there? Isn't there even more--only

its terribly hard to find the exact and right and surprising enough, or un-surprising enough, point at which to revolt now? The beats have just fallen back on an old corpse-strewn or monument-strewn battlefield--the real real protest I suspect is something quite different--(If only I could find it. Klee's picture called FEAR seems close to it, I think.) (25 June 1961, Houghton Library, qtd. in Harrison 26)⁹

Although Bishop found it difficult to define clearly her idea of the kind of "protest" she saw in Paul Klee's work, she was able to articulate allegorically the "real real protest" in her prose piece "In Prison," written in 1938.

"In Prison" contains Bishop's articulation of her ambitions, her artistic principles, and her dialogic stance in relation to both past and contemporary literary traditions. It reveals Bishop's confidence in her literary talent and her theory of how to produce and maintain a unique individual style. This significant aspect of "In Prison" remained overlooked until Jacqueline Vaught Brogan pointed out in her recent article "Elizabeth Bishop: Perversity as Voice" (1993) that "In Prison" is "an ironically concealed manifesto" (184).¹⁰ This fable-like story's surface meaning of imprisonment, and the disguise of a male speaker it employs, have contributed to much misleading critical attention.

Critics in general consider "refuge and retreat" as the major theme of "In Prison."¹¹ David Kalstone contends that what Bishop does in this story "is to ritualize her nomadic

separatist existence and her cravings for withdrawal" (BAP 59). Thomas Travisano argues that "In Prison" deals with "the safety of enclosure" as opposed to "the ambiguous freedom and danger of life at large" (25). Brett Millier regards "In Prison" as "the first and most vivid manifestation of Elizabeth's lifelong daydream of solitary retirement" (*Life* 134). David Lehman analyses the paradox of physical confinement and spiritual freedom, of isolation and imagination. Lehman concludes that "As a theory of imagination which is necessarily a theory of absence, 'In Prison' prepares us well for the projects of Miss Bishop's mature poetry" (71). Emphasis on imagination as the only essential source of poetic creation tends to designate the poet as the single source of poetic texts. "In Prison" undermines this notion by suggesting that a text is produced out of the author's creative recombination of fragments from a previous text and multiple voices from different speaking subjects, rather than growing out of one single original source.

Indeed, the "theory" Bishop postulates in this story is not so much about imagination as about originality and how to achieve it. Bishop's remarks about the sources of her inspiration for "In Prison" can help illuminate its double meaning. Responding to Marianne Moore's comments, Bishop explained: "I was curious to hear what you thought of the

story, because it is the first conscious attempt at something according to a theory I have been thinking up down here--out of a combination of Poe's theories and reading 17th century prose!"¹² Bishop did not clarify what this "theory" might be, nor did she offer any specific information about Poe's theories or 17th-century prose. But Edgar Allan Poe's ideas about "originality" and textual "suggestiveness" provide significant clues to Bishop's "theory." Poe argues, in "The Philosophy of Composition," that "originality . . . is by no means a matter, as some suppose, of impulse or intuition." He continues: "In general, to be found, it must be elaborately sought, and although a positive merit of the highest class, demands in its attainment less of invention than negation" (1264). Bishop cites this passage from Poe's essay in her article on Marianne Moore, "As We Like It," for a 1948 issue of *Quarterly Review of Literature*. Her remarks on Moore's originality reveal her familiarity with Poe's essay and her agreement with Poe on the concept of originality.¹³ "Miss Moore and Poe are our two most original writers," Bishop contends, "and one feels that Miss Moore would cheerfully subscribe to Poe's remark on Originality" (133). Poe's theory of originality as something "elaborately sought," something that involves more "negation" than "invention," is echoed and transformed into a carefully cultivated revolt

against established norms as a necessary condition for cultivating a distinctive individual style in Bishop's "In Prison." Bishop also seems to have assimilated another of Poe's theories in the allegorical manner of her writing. In the same essay, Poe emphasizes that it is "some amount of suggestiveness--some under current, however indefinite, of meaning," in particular "which imparts to a work of art so much of that *richness* . . . which we are too fond of confounding with *the ideal*" (1266). This notion of the "under current" of meaning necessary for the "*richness*" of art is appropriated in both the form and contents of the story, which conveys Bishop's own ideas of what literary creativity and originality entail.

The other element--"17th-century prose"--Bishop combined with "Poe's theories" can also shed light on the meditative narration of "In Prison." In her 1930's notebook, Bishop copied passages from "The Baroque Style in Prose" by Morris W. Croll, which discusses a new prose form Croll calls "Anti-Ciceronian, or baroque" in writers such as Pascal, Montaigne, and Sir Thomas Browne (208-209). Croll observes, in one passage Bishop copied, that "Their purpose was to portray, not a thought, but a mind thinking. . . . They knew that an idea separated from the act of experiencing it is not the idea that was experienced. The ardor of its conception in the mind is a necessary part of

its truth . . ." (210). The meditative narration of "In Prison" portrays "a mind thinking," revealing "the act of experiencing" the conception of ideas "in the mind."

"In Prison," written with the distance of irony, the disguise of a male speaker, and a Hawthornesque swerve of "romance" from the actuality of everyday life, expresses Bishop's confidence in her own talent and her ambitions with daring directness. It begins with the male speaker's meditation on the prospect of his imprisonment.

As Nathaniel Hawthorne says in *The Intelligence-Office*, "I want my place, my own place, my true place in the world, my proper sphere, my thing which Nature intended me to perform . . . and which I have vainly sought all my life-time." But I am not that nostalgic about it, nor have I searched in vain "all my life-time." I have known for many years in what direction lie my talents and my "proper sphere," and I have always eagerly desired to enter it. Once that day has arrived and the formalities are over, I shall know exactly how to set about those duties "Nature intended me to perform."
(CPr 181)

The day the speaker waits for impatiently is paradoxically the day of his "imprisonment" and the day on which, the speaker says, "my life, my real life, will begin" (CPr 181). Once he is in prison, he can fulfil this "real life," make use of his talents, and perform his duties, by creating something out of the available material in an unconventional manner.

I hope I am not being too reactionary when I say that my one desire is to be given one very dull book to

read, the duller the better. A book, moreover, on a subject completely foreign to me; perhaps the second volume, if the first would familiarize me too well with the terms and purpose of the work. Then I shall be able to experience with a free conscience the pleasure, perverse, I suppose, of interpreting it not at all according to its intent. (CPr 187-88)

A boring and unfamiliar text gives the speaker the necessary distance and freedom to deconstruct it in order to create something new out of its fragments in combination with his own writing and with the fragmentary utterances around him within the prison.

From my detached rock-like book I shall be able to draw vast generalizations, abstractions of the grandest, most illuminating sort, like allegories or poems, and by posing fragments of it against the surroundings and conversations of my prison, I shall be able to form my own examples of surrealist art!--something I should never know how to do outside, where the sources are so bewildering. (CPr 188)

The speaker's intended method of misreading and collage-like composition reveals Bishop's familiarity with the surrealists' parodic and subversive intertextual revisions both in literature and visual arts. The speaker's emphasis on "my own examples of surrealist art!" indicates an intention to create texts which appropriate surrealist art while deliberately distancing them from orthodox surrealism.¹⁴

This deliberate misreading as a method of creative production, David Lehman notes, "makes the case for creative

misreading, for what Harold Bloom . . . calls 'misprision'" (65). But unlike Bloom's theory of poetic influence, the misreading of Bishop's speaker is not motivated by any agon between the speaker and a precursor whose poetic power threatens to overshadow the speaker's. In fact, the author of the text chosen to be rewritten is anonymous; no interest is shown in knowing anything about the origin of the text, which should be as unfamiliar as possible. Younger poets' misreading and revising of older poets' texts in Bloom's theory shows the dialogic nature of discourse and creative activity Bakhtin emphasizes. Nevertheless, Bloom's theory of poetic influence mainly concerns "the life-cycle of the poet-as-poet" and "the relations between poets as cases akin to what Freud called the family romance" (*Influence* 7-8). The life-cycle of the poet, according to Bloom's theory, is renewed by the strong younger poet's revision of the precursor poem or poems. Thus, "poetic misreading" is generated by the strong younger poet's admiration for, borrowing from, and resistance to a strong, father-like poetic precursor's poems.

To Bishop's speaker, however, the author of the text deconstructed may belong to a field unrelated to art or literature--the text may be "a book on the cure of a disease, or an industrial technique," the subject matter totally new so that the speaker can experience "the

sensation of wave-like freshness" (CPr 188). In addition, these deconstructed fragments will be posed "against the surroundings and conversations of my prison," in which the speakers are multiple, and their identities are of no concern. The misreading of "In Prison" goes beyond the circle of Bloom's poetic "family romance." The speaker's method of composition demonstrates a mode of artistic creativity that involves appropriation of what has been produced in the past and what is being produced at present. As Bakhtin argues, discourse "cannot fail to be oriented toward the 'already uttered,' the 'already known,' the 'common opinion' and so forth. The dialogic orientation of discourse is . . . the natural orientation of any living discourse" (DI 279). The speaker of "In Prison" makes clear that this "dialogic orientation" is basic to his artistic compositions. This mode of composing a text by assimilating, combining, and transforming elements from various sources, through an orientation toward others' opinions and discourse, characterizes Bishop's method of making poetry.

But more importantly, the collage the speaker of "In Prison" plans to construct is not simply an assemblage of unrelated words and utterances. As the speaker says, he has no intention to unify all diverse voices under a single point of view. His composition is intended to be dialogic

in the sense that no single point of view will be allowed to dominate or exclude others' opinions. To make sure that the foreseen writing is not monologic, the speaker says:

even before looking into the book mentioned above, I shall read very carefully (or try to read, since they may be partly obliterated, or in a foreign language) the inscriptions already there. Then I shall adapt my own compositions, in order that they may not conflict with those written by the prisoner before me. The voice of a new inmate will be noticeable, but there will be no contradictions or criticisms of what has already been laid down, rather a "commentary."
(CPr 188)

The careful deliberation in the speaker's decision about the manner, content, and meaning of his envisioned art shows the significant role others' words will play in shaping his style and subject matter. As Bakhtin points out, "The individual manner in which a person structures his own speech is determined to a significant degree by his peculiar awareness of another's words, and by his means for reacting to them." Bakhtin argues that "One word acutely senses alongside it someone else's word speaking about the same object, and this awareness determines its structure." He notes that "the word with a sideward glance at someone else's hostile word" is "extremely widespread in practical everyday speech as well as in literary speech, and has enormous style shaping significance" (PDP 196).

This assimilation of what has already been said and written in the speaker's process of composing his own work

is the kind of dialogic interaction Bakhtin considers fundamental to creative activity.¹⁵ According to Bakhtinian dialogism, the new is always created out of the old. The difference between the two is not merely a matter of fashion; it is always related to values. Bakhtin argues that

An utterance is never just a reflection or an expression of something already existing outside it that is given and final. It always creates something that never existed before, something absolutely new and unrepeatable, and, moreover, it always has some relation to value (the true, the good, the beautiful, and so forth). (SG 119-20)

This dialogic relationship of creative activity with the "given" underlies creative production in general, and particularly characterizes the method of artistic creation which the speaker of "In Prison" will use. Creation and renewal involve a simultaneous continuity and transformation of the given. Just as the speaker expects to leave his own "works" as a legacy to the prisoners after him, he intends to appropriate in his "compositions" the inheritance from the "inscriptions" left on the prison walls by former inmates. He decides that his writings on the prison wall and floor "will be brief, suggestive, anguished, but full of the lights of revelations," and he hopes that "no small part of the joy these writings will give me will be to think of the person coming after me--the legacy of thoughts I shall

leave him, like an old bundle tossed carelessly into a corner!" (CPr 189). Literary creativity, according to Bakhtin, involves a process which continues and revises inheritances from the past. A present literary work will become part of the literary legacy and a point of departure for future development. As Bakhtin says:

There is neither a first nor a last word and there are no limits to the dialogic context (it extends into the boundless past and the boundless future). Even past meanings, that is, those born in the dialogue of past centuries, can never be stable (finalized, ended once and for all)--they will always change (be renewed) in the process of subsequent, future development of the dialogue. At any moment in the development of the dialogue there are immense, boundless masses of forgotten contextual meanings, but at certain moments of the dialogue's subsequent development along the way they are recalled and invigorated in renewed form (in a new context). (SG 170)

Bishop's speaker takes his own work so seriously because he anticipates that his art will become part of the whole bequeathed to posterity. He regards his contribution to the previous writings on the wall in his cell as an "important aspect of prison life" (CPr 188).

Clearly the imprisonment of "In Prison" is not so much a retreat from life as a necessary condition for the speaker to realize his talents within the sphere of literature. "In Prison" articulates Bishop's ambitions and expounds her theory about the dialogic relation between the individual artist and tradition, between one's own creation and that of

others. The speaker's specific descriptions of how he should create his own art and what will be included also reveal the dialogic nature of discourse and creativity. Bakhtin's theory of dialogism can provide valuable insights into the dialogic interactions involved in the development of Bishop's poetics.¹⁶

IV. Bakhtinian Dialogism

Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of dialogism is based on the social, communal nature of language and life itself. "As a living, socio-ideological concrete thing," Bakhtin asserts, "as heteroglot opinion, language, for the individual consciousness, lies on the borderline between oneself and the other" (*DI* 293). Different from the dictionary definition of a word, the meaning of the living word is emotionally, ideologically, and axiologically saturated. "Who speaks and under what conditions he speaks: this is what determines the word's actual meaning," Bakhtin emphasizes (*DI* 401). He studies the word as utterance because it presupposes a speaking subject, whose emotions, ideas, and values shape its meaning and expression.

Like the speaking subject's thoughts and feelings, others' words also have an impact on determining the

meanings and expressions of a speaker's particular utterance. Bakhtin regards utterances as responses to what has already been uttered, and the living word as dialogic. "The word in language is half someone else's," Bakhtin argues (*DI* 293). He points out that "the word does not exist in a neutral and impersonal language [...], but rather it exists in other people's mouths, in other people's contexts, serving other people's intentions . . ." (*DI* 294). To make the word serve one's own intentions, one must take it from other people's contexts and intentions, and reaccentuate it.

In literary creation, then, the appropriation and subversion of others' words and manners are inevitable. Bakhtin asserts that "Concrete socio-ideological language consciousness, as it becomes creative--that is, as it becomes active as literature--discovers itself already surrounded by heteroglossia and not at all a single, unitary language, inviolable and indisputable" (*DI* 295). By "heteroglossia," Bakhtin means "speech diversity," a "multiplicity of 'language' and verbal-ideological belief systems--generic, professional, class-and-interest-group (the language of the nobleman, the farmer, the merchant, the peasant) . . ." (*DI* 311). In short, "heteroglossia" refers to the distinctive types of speech characterized by the speakers' social positions, occupations, values, and

For Bakhtin, the discourse of the novel is marked by its use of heteroglossia. "In Turgenev," Bakhtin says, "social heteroglossia enters the novel primarily in the direct speeches of his characters, in dialogues." Heteroglossia can also be introduced in a discourse "from various forms for hidden transmission of someone else's speech, from scattered words and sayings belonging to someone else's speech, from those invasions into authorial speech of others' expressive indicators (ellipsis, questions, exclamations)" (DI 316). When heteroglossia is introduced into a text, the discourse will be dialogized.

Heteroglossia, once incorporated into the novel . . . is *another's speech in another's language*, serving to express authorial intentions but in a refracted way. Such speech constitutes a special type of *double-voiced discourse*. It serves two speakers at the same time and expresses simultaneously two different intentions: the direct intention of the character who is speaking, and the refracted intention of the author. In such discourse there are two voices, two meanings and two expressions. (DI 324)

Moreover, "all the while these two voices are dialogically interrelated [...]; it is as if they actually hold a conversation with each other. Double-voiced discourse is always internally dialogized" (DI 324).

Nevertheless, Bakhtin contends that the dialogic nature of discourse can be repressed and monologized by dogmatic views, by a self-enclosed language system, by systematic abstractions, generalized rules, and an authoritarian

position that assumes the possession of truth and superiority. Bakhtin defines "monologism" as "A denial of the equal rights of consciousnesses vis-à-vis truth (understood abstractly and systematically)." In a monologic discourse, the author's argument "finalizes" and "drowns out the other's voice" (PDP 285). But "Truth is not born nor is it to be found inside the head of an individual person," Bakhtin argues; "it is born *between people* collectively searching for truth, in the process of their dialogic interaction" (PDP 110).

Bakhtin sees any dogmatic system of ideas or beliefs which assumes the possession of truth or takes for granted the unity of consciousness as inadequate to deal with the irreducible chaos and the non-causal phenomena of life. This systematic artificial unity, for Bakhtin, is typical of idealistic philosophy: "the affirmation of the unity of existence, is, in idealism, transformed into the unity of the *consciousness*." A monologic world is created on the basis of this unitary single consciousness, in which "a thought is either affirmed or repudiated" (PDP 80). Real living dialogue among multiple consciousnesses is excluded from this monologic principle that recognizes no need, and provides no basis, for any dialogic interactions between independent, autonomous consciousnesses, representing different points of view. Bakhtin contends that

In an environment of philosophical monologism the genuine interaction of consciousnesses is impossible, and thus genuine dialogue is impossible as well. In essence idealism knows only a single mode of cognitive interaction among consciousnesses: someone who knows and possesses the truth instructs someone who is ignorant of it and in error; that is, it is the interaction of a teacher and a pupil, which, it follows can be only a pedagogical dialogue. (PDP 81)

This superior position is characteristic of the author of a monologic discourse which is meant to teach or persuade. Such a monologic discourse may assume the form of a dialogue, but no dialogic interaction is involved. This essentially monologic dialogue represents only a single consciousness and allows a single point of view.

In literary works, a monolithic world view and monologic discourse eliminate the concrete unique events of life and the rich diversity of social voices. As a result, creativity is greatly limited and literary works become self-enclosed and impoverished. The closer an artistic work moves to theoretical unity and abstract generalization, the poorer and emptier it becomes; the further an artistic work moves away from this impoverishing unity and generality, the more concrete and full it becomes. For Bakhtin, individual uniqueness, like social diversity and cultural heterogeneity, gives life and enrichment to literary works and their characters. He points out that when an artist such as Dostoevsky discovers "dialogicality as a special

form of interaction among autonomous and equally signifying consciousnesses," he "destroys the flatness of the earlier artistic depiction of the world." In Dostoevsky's multi-voiced novels, the depiction of the world becomes "multidimensional" (PDP 284-85). The merit of Dostoevsky's polyphonic novels, Bakhtin maintains, lies in the fact that his "form-shaping ideology lacks those two basic elements upon which any ideology is built: *the separate thought*, and a unified world of objects giving rise to a *system of thoughts*." In his novels, Dostoevsky develops a thought dialogically "not in a dry logical dialogue but by juxtaposing whole, profoundly individualized voices" (PDP 93). His characters are whole personalities with autonomous consciousnesses, whose points of view are made to collide with one another. Rather than being mouthpieces for the author's ideology, Dostoevsky's characters are interlocutors in a living, open-ended dialogue orchestrated and participated in by the author. Bakhtin contends that Dostoevsky's polyphonic novels are dialogic because for Dostoevsky, "the idea is inter-individual and inter-subjective--the realm of its existence is not individual consciousness but dialogic communion *between consciousnesses*" (PDP 88).

Bakhtinian dialogism involves much more than the form of dialogue. To regard dialogism as merely "argument,

polemics, or parody," Bakhtin stresses, is a "narrow understanding of dialogism" (SG 121). He points out that "dialogic relations, of course, do not in any way coincide with relations among rejoinders of real dialogue--they are much broader, more diverse, and more complex" (SG 124). He explains:

One cannot . . . understand dialogic relations simplistically and unilaterally, reducing them to contradiction, conflict, polemics, a disagreement. Agreement is very rich in varieties and shadings. Two utterances that are identical in all aspects [...], if they are really two utterances belonging to different voices and not one, are linked by dialogic relations of agreement. This is a definite dialogic event in the interrelations of the two, and not an echo. . . .

Dialogic relations are thus much broader than dialogic speech in the narrow sense of the word. And dialogic relations are always present, even among profoundly monologic speech works. (SG 125)

Therefore, monologues can be dialogic in nature just as dialogues can be monologic. Moreover, Bakhtinian dialogism concerns itself with much more than the double-voicedness in discourse. It has significant implications for the nature of literary creation which entails more than the author's manipulation of technical devices.

In accordance with his theory of the dialogic nature of consciousness and existence, Bakhtin insists on the connection between literary work and extraliterary concepts, between artistic creation and the values of a lived life in a particular world. He argues that since "the artist

fashions the world by means of words," words "must become an expression of the world of others and of the author's relationship to that world" (AA 195). Hence, Bakhtin emphasizes that "Artistic style works not with words, but with constituent features of the world, with the values of the world and of life" (AA 195). Bakhtin notes that

The author is compelled to contend with old or with more recent literary forms, compelled to overcome their resistance or to find support in them, yet what underlies this movement is the most essential, the determining, the *primary artistic contention*--the contention with the cognitive-ethical directedness of a life and its valid persistence as a distinct life.
(AA 197)

Bakhtin finds in the emergence of the novel an example of the determining role of authorial cognition in literary creation. He contends that "The novel, from the very beginning, developed as a genre that had at its core a new way of conceptualizing time" (DI 38). In the fixed, self-enclosed concept of "epic time," the past and tradition are "absolute," "hierarchical" in their unchanging form. He points out that

The novel took shape precisely at the point when epic distance was disintegrating, when both the world and man were assuming a degree of comic familiarity, when the object of artistic representation was being degraded to the level of a contemporary reality that was inconclusive and fluid. (DI 39)

The concept of an inclusive and openended present, Bakhtin

suggests, marks a revolutionary turning point in literary creation. "The present, in its all openendedness, taken as a starting point and center for artistic and ideological orientation, is an enormous revolution in the creative consciousness of man" (DI 38).

Like the artist's concept of time and view of the world, the artist's values play an important part in his or her artistic work. Bakhtin notes that

What needs to be understood, however, is not the technical apparatus, but the *immanent logic of creative activity*, and what needs to be understood first of all is the value-and-meaning structure in which creative activity comes to pass and in which it gains an axiological awareness of itself--that is, the context in which the act of creation becomes meaningful.

(AA 194)

Bakhtin emphasizes the importance of values in creative activity because "In reality, the author's creative value-and-meaning context (the context that renders the work he produces meaningful) does not in the least coincide with the purely literary context. . . ." The latter context, Bakhtin writes, enters the author's creative production not as "a determining but an entirely determined context" (AA 196-97). To achieve "a real understanding of creative activity as creative activity," Bakhtin argues, one must examine "that axiological world in which the artistic task is set and actualized" (AA 194).

For Bakhtin, the validity of values and aesthetic

experience depends on the interaction between oneself and others. Bakhtin contends that "all forms of the aesthetic embodiment of inner life . . . are in principle incapable of being forms of pure *self-expression*. . . . Rather, they are forms of my relationship to the other and to the other's self-expression" (AA 134). Bakhtin explains that from another person's position, which is different from mine and outside of me, another person "can see and know what I myself do not see and do not know from my own place, and he can essentially enrich the event of my own life" (AA 87). Artistic creation and aesthetic events, Bakhtin emphasizes, always involve more than the artist's own consciousness or point of view.

The artist's appropriation of others' values and viewpoints is sometimes manifested in the form of parody or satire. For Bakhtin, parodic expressions in literature, folk art or festivals can be a form of subverting the "official," the serious, dogmatic, hierarchical view of the world. Bakhtin contends that the grotesque images which appeared during the carnival festivals in the medieval markets can be assimilated in literary works as a technique to subvert established values. He argues that "the carnival-grotesque form" can be used

to consecrate inventive freedom, to permit the combination of a variety of different elements and their rapprochement, to liberate from the prevailing

point of view of the world, from conventions and established truths, from clichés, from all that is humdrum and universally accepted. (RHW 34)

The deliberate breaking down of old rules and logic in presenting the grotesque suggests a new mode of technical strategy, a challenge to established notions, and a shift in world outlook.

Like heteroglossia, such parodic and satirical visual images can bring different values and viewpoints into dialogic interaction, making artistic creation dynamic and multidimensional. Nevertheless, Bakhtin contends that heteroglossia or parody cannot be used to any significant extent in poetry whose discourse he considers monologic, "hermetic, pure and unitary." Even though "Double-voiced, internally dialogized discourse is also possible . . . in the purely poetic genres," Bakhtin argues, it is only "poetic and rhetorical double-voicedness, cut off from any process of linguistic stratification" (DI 325). For Bakhtin, double-voicedness in poetry can at most be only a stylistic and formal means to some rhetorical argument's end. It cannot reflect socially and historically determined heterogeneity in a given society.

Bakhtin's opinion of poetry as essentially monologic seems to refer to a particular kind of poetry belonging to a specific historical period--"the time when poetry was accomplishing the task of cultural, national and political

centralization of the verbal-ideological world in the higher official socio-ideological levels . . ." (*DI* 273). Just as Bakhtin maintains that the form of Dostoevsky's polyphonic novels of living dialogue is shaped by the author's "principle for seeing and representing the world" (*PDP* 92), in the same way the mode of poetic discourse can also change with the poet's values, epistemology, and position in society. Bakhtin's remarks on the monologic nature of poetry reflect his reaction to the Russian formalists' study which focuses on the "literariness" and "poetic language" as "primary features of a literary work" (*Pomorska* 274). For instance, Roman Jakobson declares that "The definition of the aesthetic function as the dominant of a poetic work permits us to determine the hierarchy of diverse linguistic functions within the poetic work" (84). Bakhtin's study of the dialogization of the discourse in the novel challenged the formalists' view of language as a system of linguistic rules and their focus on the prosodic structure of poetry. Even though Bakhtin rejected the formalists' emphasis on poetic language, his definition of poetry was limited to that of the formalists.¹⁷

In his later works, Bakhtin himself questions and dismisses his assumption about the monologic nature of poetry. Rather than being accepted as a dogmatic precept, Bakhtin's view of poetry should be regarded within its

historical context as a response to certain notions postulated by the Russian formalists during the 1920's and early 1930's. Bakhtin's remarks about the monologic nature of poetry should not prevent poetry critics from drawing on his theory of dialogism which concerns discourse and creative activity in general. Indeed, Bakhtinian dialogism itself rejects "dogmatism in interpretation and evaluation," and emphasizes that a written text will be renewed by the reader of varied periods in history (*DI* 253).

Bakhtinian dialogism has been applied in criticism on poetry, and the limitations of his views on poetic discourse have been discussed and challenged." In "Discourse in Poetry: Bakhtin and Extensions of the Dialogical" (1983), Michael Davidson notes that "Bakhtin's view of poetry seems based largely upon nineteenth-century lyric poetry. . . ." Davidson believes that "we may expand [Bakhtin's] method to encompass much more than the novel and, more importantly, to apply his theory of social heteroglossia to recent developments in poetry" (144). Davidson points out that "The techniques of modernist collage and montage are perhaps the most obvious examples of discursive dialogization in poetry" (146). Furthermore, Davidson sees the possibility that "Bakhtin's categories might be adapted to more recent modes of writing in which language is brought to the foreground and for which the interaction of contextual

frames is central to its structure" (146). Similarly, Gerald Bruns points out that *The Waste Land*, *The Cantos*, and William Carlos Williams's *Spring and All* are "obvious examples" of "heteroglot poems."¹⁹ Bruns contends that "Bakhtin's thesis presupposes a formalist poetics, and, more generally, a European outlook that contrasts sharply with much of American poetic practice" (31). Bakhtin's theory has also been applied to British Romantic poetry. In his article "Wordsworth's Dialogic Art" (1989), Don Bialostosky asserts that his discovery of Bakhtin helped him "make sense of Wordsworth's narrative experiments" (140). Bialostosky contends that in poems like "The Thorn" and "The Sailor's Mother," Wordsworth combines "poetic diction and prosaic speech" and reveals an "awareness of ideological diversity" through different voices (142-43).

Critics have also pointed out that Bakhtin's view of poetry, expressed in his studies of discourse in the novel during the middle phase of his career, should not be taken as his only approach to poetry. In "Dialogism and Poetry" (1990), David Richter observes that "at both the beginning and the end of his working life, Bakhtin seems to have taken a somewhat different approach to poetry."²⁰ Richter points out that "In [Bakhtin's] earliest published essay, 'Toward a Philosophy of Act' (1917), there appears an analysis of Pushkin's famous lyric, 'Parting,' that clearly looks

forward to the idea of heteroglossia" (11). Richter considers Bakhtin's view of poetry within its historical context, and points out that in opposing the Russian Formalists, Bakhtin "valorize[d] prose and prose fiction, and consequently" he devalued "those aspects of poetry which could not be made consonant with prose" (26), so he identified poetry "entirely with its tropological use of language" (27). As a result, "many elements which poetry shared with prose" were ignored and shelved "for the sake of the polemic." Richter calls for a dialogue within critical approaches in order to "broaden the application of Bakhtin's rich philosophical system" (27). Like Davidson and Bialostosky, Richter believes that Bakhtin's theory and approach can be applied to the analysis of poetry.²¹ "Since poetry may be prosified by the author's sensibility, by the particular 'low' or 'comic' genre in which a particular text is written, by the forces of literary history which have in our own day prosified poetry in general," Richter argues, "it is difficult to conceive what would prevent one from applying Bakhtin's method of dialogical analysis to poetry" (13).

V. Organization

My discussion of Bishop's poetics of dialogism will follow five major concerns central to the development of her poetry: 1) how to make limited commonplace material perform to its utmost capacity through description; 2) how to create a sense of movement within the poem to capture the immediacy of experiencing an idea in the process of being conceived; 3) how to introduce her notions of time as related to experience and perception into her poems to portray changes in both the interior and exterior worlds; 4) how to make her poems more "serious," more "real and fresh"; and 5) how to express complicated ideas and feelings through simple language and visual images. These major pursuits grew out of Bishop's reading of other poets from various literary traditions. The works of other artists, including prose writers and visual artists, helped Bishop develop her own technical strategies and poetic style. Bishop's life experience also had a shaping impact on the form and content of her poetry as well. My examination of Bishop's poetics will be both textual and contextual since the interactions which generate Bishop's artistic exploration and shape her creative production take place both in and out of her poems.

The basic approach of this dissertation will be close reading of Bishop's poems in connection with her artistic

goals and technical concerns, her values and world-outlook, and her responses to particular anterior and contemporary literary practices. These artistic goals and technical concerns are revealed in Bishop's letters, notebooks, essays, and interviews which will serve as major sources of reference for my discussion of Bishop's poetics and specific poems. This study will examine how others' works inspired or provoked Bishop to seek new ways of making poetry, and how Bishop made use of others' methods, styles, materials, and ideas in writing her poems while striving to achieve her own artistic goals. Bishop's preoccupations with certain technical problems in composition and the possibilities of material for poetry, and her responses to contemporary social and cultural issues in her poems, emerge in her first book and continue to develop throughout her poetic career.

My examination of the development of Bishop's poetics and poems will proceed chronologically according to the publication order of her five books of poetry, which will be dealt with in five chapters. Selection of Bishop's poems to be discussed in each chapter is basically determined by their relevance to the major thematic and technical concerns and historical context in each volume of her poetry. Chapter One deals with poems in *North & South* (1946), the volume that contains the largest number of her poems and establishes Bishop's major thematic and technical concerns.

During this early period of her career, Bishop was exploring several concepts and technical strategies in her poems. Her reading of British romantic poetry, and of poems by Gerard Manley Hopkins and Marianne Moore, led her to tackle the question of how to make poetry out of limited commonplace material. Her discovery of Morris Croll's essay "The Baroque Style in Prose" motivated her to seek various ways of creating a sense of movement within the poem. At the same time, Bishop attempted dealing with personal experience and social issues through unstable and multi-layered implications of visual images and by engaging in intertextual dialogues. She learned to give compact meanings and multiple functions to visual images from poets like George Herbert and visual artists like Picasso and Ernst. During this period, surrealism was a major source of inspiration and a liberating force for Bishop's poetry. Bishop went to France in 1935 and studied surrealists' works seriously.²² Her encounter with surrealist art, poetry, and prose left a lasting effect on her work, which enabled her to break away from the kind of poetry favored by New Critical theories that were dominant in the American literary scene when Bishop started her career as a poet during the 1930's. Bishop's first book of poetry also contains her earliest attempts to add a sense of time to her poems. Her interest in and dissatisfaction with the

treatment of time in the works of novelists such as Thomas Hardy, Dorothy Richardson, Gertrude Stein, James Joyce, and Marcel Proust motivated her to explore various techniques which materialize her notions of time in her own work.

Chapter Two focuses on two major aspects of Bishop's development in *A Cold Spring* (1955): her treatment of time and interpersonal relationships through more direct and immediate experience in the everyday social world--a direction in which her later poems continue to develop. While further exploring the possibilities of adding a sense of time to her poems, Bishop expanded the possibilities of collage and began to introduce a narrative element into her predominantly descriptive poems. During this time, her poems began to show an interest in interpersonal relationships shaped by race and class when she lived in Key West and directly observed class and racial divisions.

Chapter Three discusses Bishop's poems in her third book of poetry, *Questions of Travel* (1965) in relation to Bishop's continuing concern with making her poetry "more serious," her interest in inter-personal relationships against particular social backgrounds, and her artistic development in portraying characters through narratives and descriptions. Bishop's poems in this book are increasingly diversified, multi-voiced, and more directly engaged in historical, cultural, and social issues. At the same time,

her reading of numerous prose writers helped her develop the art of portraying characters and improve her narrative technique in poetry. During this middle period of her career, Bishop also began to explore the possibilities of making art out of autobiographical material. Her thematic and technical development in this book are discussed in connection with the impact of her encounter with a different culture and her life in Brazil. Like her encounter with surrealism in France, Bishop's contact with Brazilian people and culture left a lasting impact on her poetry.

Chapter Four examines the techniques and voices in those new poems which are included in Bishop's fourth book *The Complete Poems* (1969), as her responses to the confessional trend in American poetry. Bishop's comments on the so called "confessional" poets and their poetic practice reveal not only Bishop's aesthetics, but also her outlook on the world and her sense of responsibility as a poet. Analysis of Bishop's poems written during this period in connection with her reaction to the "confessional" poetry indicates how Bishop's values play an important role in shaping the way she presents her material.

Chapter Five discusses poems in *Geography III* (1976), including a few "New Poems" which appeared in 1978 and 1979, and examines Bishop's further development and synthesis of the major technical and thematic concerns that emerged in

her previous books. This last volume contains Bishop's most directly autobiographical poems, which deal with painful emotions and psychological experience without being nakedly confessional. Each of Bishop's best and final poems shows her masterful integration of various technical strategies explored and developed over the years.

While continuing the lines of inquiry carried out in previous critical works which examine Bishop's artistic development with regard to her studies of the Baroque style in prose, surrealism, other artists' and writers' works and her encounter with Brazil, my analysis of Bishop's poems will focus on Bishop's assimilation, revision, and transformation of the various elements of "otherness" in her poems. Rather than merely attempting to identify sources of material for Bishop's poems, my study will examine the necessary conditions for and consequences of Bishop's appropriation of and response to others' texts and techniques by drawing on Bakhtinian dialogism. I hope that my application of Bakhtinian dialogism will shed more light on the development of Bishop's poetry, and that my approach to Bishop's poems will further illuminate Bishop's poetics and challenge evaluations of Bishop as a "submissive" poet, or one more traditional than innovative.²³ From the vantage point established by using Bakhtin's theory of dialogism, I hope my investigations will yield some new insights into

certain important features of Bishop's poems and their relations to their enabling conditions and shaping contexts. My employment of Bakhtinian dialogism is not meant to suggest that it is the only proper approach to Bishop's poetry. As Bakhtin asserts:

It should be emphasized here that literature is too complex and multifaceted a phenomenon and literary scholarship is still too young for it to be possible to speak of any single "redeeming" method in literary scholarship. Various approaches are justified and are even quite necessary as long as they are serious and reveal something new in the literary phenomenon being studied, as long as they promote a deeper understanding of it. (SG 3)

I believe that a study of Bishop's poetics of dialogism, which pays attention to the conditions and context of her creative activity will further our understanding of her poetry, and will increase our recognition of Bishop's poetic accomplishment and her significant contribution to the development of poetry.

Notes to Introduction

1. See Kathleen Brogan, "Elizabeth Bishop: Romantic Revisionism," diss., Yale U, 1989, DAI 50 (1989): 3586A. For more discussion of Bishop's poems in relation to Wordsworth, see Robert Pinsky, "The Idiom of a Self: Elizabeth Bishop and Wordsworth" in *American Poetry Review* (January-February 1980): 6-8; Nathaniel Barron, "'Another Faith' ('Prelude' BK. II. 435). The Wordsworthian Tradition in 20th-Century American Poetry: Robert Frost, Elizabeth Bishop, James Wright and a Few Other Poets," diss., Indiana U, 1990, DAI 52 (1990): 536A.

2. Goldensohn quoted from one of Bishop's letters to her publisher as an example of Bishop's "eventual resistance to surrealist practice":

In 1946, in a letter to Ferris Greenslet, her editor at Houghton Mifflin, she rushes in to avert a public association with Max Ernst by way of jacket copy. In some obvious distress she writes: "In the letter that Marianne Moore wrote for me she commented on some likeness to the painter Max Ernst. Although many years ago I once admired one of Ernst's albums I believe that Miss Moore is mistaken about his having been an influence and since I have disliked all of his painting intensely and am not a surrealist I think it would be misleading to mention my name in connection with his."
(123)

It seems that Bishop wanted to avoid the "misleading" implications in connecting her poems to Ernst. Her dislike of Ernst's paintings did not prevent her from making use of certain surrealist methods even though she resisted, among other things, surrealist exuberant irrationality. For Goldensohn's discussion of Bishop's relationship with surrealism, see *Elizabeth Bishop: The Biography of a Poetry*, 120-21, 123-28.

3. See Bishop, interview with David W. McCullough, *Book-of-the-Month Club* (May 1977), reprinted in Schwartz and Estess, 309.

4. See Robert Hemenway, "Preface" in Kalstone, *Becoming A Poet*, ix.

5. For more discussions of the relationship between Moore and Bishop, see Bonnie Costello, "Marianne Moore and Elizabeth Bishop: Friendship and Influence," *Twentieth*

Century Literature 30.2-3 (Summer/Fall 1984): 130-149. Costello argues for a more complex consideration of the two poets' relationship, and points out that "we should also recognize how multi-faceted their common interests were, addressed to both wider and more specific issues than the experience of women in patriarchal society" (131). Also see Lynn Keller, "Words Worth a Thousand Postcards: The Bishop/Moore Correspondence," *American Literature* 55 (1983): 405-429.

6. For an insightful study of gender as both biological and social, see Ruth Hubbard, *The Politics of Women's Biology* (New Brunswick: Rutgers Univ. Press, 1990), especially Chapter 10 "The Social Construction of Sexuality" and Chapter 11 "Constructing Sex Difference."

7. Bishop to Joan Keefe, 8 June 1977 (VC), quoted in Lois Cucullu, "Trompe l'Oeil: Elizabeth Bishop's Radical 'I'," *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 30.2 (1988): 266.

8. In her essay, "Trompe l'Oeil: Elizabeth Bishop's Radical 'I'," Lois Cucullu points out: "Both the literary establishment and those feminist critics intent on constructing a female tradition have privileged in Bishop's poetry an aesthetic and metaphysic that her poetry does not entirely support and, therefore, have underestimated the subversive features of her practice" (247).

9. This quotation of Bishop's letter to Lowell is from Victoria Harrison's published dissertation *Rebel in "shades and shadows": The Poetics and Politics of Elizabeth Bishop* (Ann Arbor: UMI, 1988) 26. I disagree with Harrison's assertion that "Bishop never was able to articulate what the 'real real protest' was for her" (26). I contend that Bishop was able to do so indirectly through her allegorical short story "In Prison."

10. In her article "Elizabeth Bishop: Perversity as Voice," Jacqueline Vaught Brogan argues that "as an ironically concealed manifesto, 'In Prison' provides additional insight" into many of Bishop's lyrics (184) which "expose the lyric voice itself, with its implicit and traditional associations with authenticity, originality, and authority, as a manifestation of a traditionally dominant (and dominating) phallic poetics" (176). Brogan's interpretation of "In Prison" emphasizes the subversive intent of Bishop in relation to "phallic poetics." I have reservations about such claims which define poetics by gender and I argue that "In Prison" articulates more than Bishop's intent to undermine the traditional male dominated

poetics.

11. See Robert Giroux's "Introduction" to *Bishop's The Collected Prose* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1984) xx. In her discussion of "In Prison," Lorrie Goldensohn notes that the theme of ambition "is introduced" through the image of the caged bird which suggests Bishop's "self-consciously acknowledged parody ambition of the caged singer." But Goldensohn emphasizes that "the deep sense of the self as constricted, and not unpleasantly so, remains" (47-48).

12. Bishop to Moore, 5 May 1938, L 73. After submitting "In Prison" to *Partisan Review* in January 1938, Bishop wrote to Marianne Moore: "I finished a story a few days ago which I wanted to send to you to see what you thought of it. . . .

It is called 'In Prison' and is another one of these horrible 'fable' ideas that seem to obsess me" (31 January 1938, L 67-68). In her response to "In Prison," Moore praised Bishop for her technical strength, but expressed her concerns about the lack of moral message. "The golden eggs can't be dealt with theoretically, by presumptuous mass-salvation formula. But I do feel that tentativeness and interiorizing are your danger as well as your strength" (1 May 1938, RM). Published by permission of Marianne Craig Moore, Literary Executor for the Estate of Marianne Moore, and of Evelyn Feldman of the Marianne Moore Archive, Rosenbach Museum & Library. Almost all of Moore's letters to Bishop are in the Elizabeth Bishop Papers, Special Collections of Vassar College Libraries, Poughkeepsie, New York. But a few, including the one cited here, are in the Marianne Moore Archive at the Rosenbach Museum & Library, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, cited as "RM."

13. See Bishop, "As We Like It," *Quarterly Review of Literature* (Marianne Moore Issue 1948): 129-35.

14. As Peter Bürger has pointed out in *Theory of the Avant-Garde* (1989), collage, or montage, undermined the concept of the organic unity of an artistic work and "most consciously destroyed the representational system that had prevailed since the Renaissance" (73). Rather than representing reality, the "reality fragments" inserted into the work of art, "are no longer signs pointing to reality, they are reality" (78). Surrealists developed the Cubists' technique of collage both in their writings and visual arts, often creating, with humour and profanation, the effect of undermining established moral, axiological and belief systems. For abundant examples of the intertextual practice of surrealists both in their verbal and visual collage, see

Renée Riese Hubert, *Surrealism and the Book* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1988); Susan Rubin Suleiman, *Subversive Intent: Gender, Politics, and the Avant-Garde* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1990).

15. For extensions of Bakhtin's dialogism into "intertextuality," see Leon S. Roudiez, ed., *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art* by Julia Kristeva, trans. Thomas Gora et al. (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1980); Patrick O'Donnell and Robert Con Davis, eds., *Intertextuality and Contemporary American Fiction* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1989); Jay Clayton and Eric Rothstein, eds., *Influence and Intertextuality in Literary History* (Madison: The Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1991).

16. In *Dialogism: Bakhtin and His World* (1990), Michael Holquist points out that "the interconnected set of concerns that dominate Bakhtin's thinking is 'dialogism,'" and that dialogism "is itself not a systematic philosophy" (15-16). A much earlier discussion of Bakhtinian dialogism and its implications is carried out by Julia Kristeva in her article "Word, Dialogue, and Novel," published in 1969 in French. Expounding Bakhtinian dialogism, Kristeva emphasizes that dialogism "implies a categorical tearing from the norm and a relationship of nonexclusive opposites." She contends that "using that [Bakhtinian dialogism] as point of departure, we can outline a new approach to poetic texts" (71). See *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art* by Julia Kristeva (1980), 64-91.

17. For examples of Russian formalists' theories and practice see *Russian Formalist Criticism: Four Essays*, trans. and intro. Lee T. Lemon and Marion J. Reis (Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 1965); *Readings in Russian Poetics: Formalist and Structuralist Views*, ed. Ladislav Matejka and Krystyna Pomorska (Ann Arbor: The U of Michigan, 1978).

18. For interpretations and challenges of Bakhtin's basic notions of dialogism, see Gary Saul Morson, ed. *Bakhtin: Essays and Dialogues on His Work* (Chicago: The U of Chicago P, 1986); Gary Saul Morson and Caryl Emerson, eds. *Rethinking Bakhtin: Extensions and Challenges* (Evanston: Northwestern UP, 1989); Ken Hirschkop and David Shepherd, eds. *Bakhtin and Cultural Theory* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1989). For a discussion of Bakhtin's career and extensive examination of the stages in the development of Bakhtin's ideas over time, see Gary Saul Morson and Caryl Emerson, *Mikhail Bakhtin: Creation of a Prosaic* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1990).

19. In his discussion of Wallace Stevens's poems, Gerald Bruns says that Stevens's "antivernacular sentiments" are "inspired by Williams' poetics" (31). He argues that "heteroglossia" "characterizes much of American writing" (37). See Gerald L. Bruns, "Stevens without Epistemology," in Albert Gelpi, ed. *Wallace Stevens: The Poetics of Modernism* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1990) 24-40.

20. In his analysis of Pushkin's lyric "Parting," Bakhtin also discusses how values and emotions color the speaker's perception and presentation of the world, and how the speaking subject's "outside-situatedness (spatial, temporal, and valutive)" makes possible "the aesthetic activity of forming" (TPA 67).

21. For more examples of applying Bakhtinian dialogism in the analysis of poetry, see David B. Morris, "Burns and Heteroglossia," *The Eighteenth Century: Theory and Interpretation*, 28:1 (1987): 3-27; Paul Allen Miller, "Beauty, Tragedy and the Grotesque: A Dialogical Esthetics in Three Sonnets by Baudelaire," *French Forum* 18.3 (September 1993): 319-33.

22. In 1935, soon after she graduated from Vassar College, Bishop went to France where she read, in her own words, "a lot of surrealist poetry and prose" (Brown 297). David Kalstone finds among Bishop's "notebook entries of 1934-35 many that, if not directly indebted to surrealism, show a mind disposed to absorb its lessons" (BAP 13-14). According to Bonnie Costello, Bishop's library "contained volumes of Apollinaire, Baudelaire, Char, Corbière, Jacob, Proust, Reverdy and Rimbaud," all of whom had important connections to surrealism. Costello has also noted that Bishop "kept fliers of numerous exhibitions at the Julian Levy gallery in New York, which attest to her continuing interest in surrealist art" (26-27).

23. David Kalstone, for instance, says that "Bishop had a more submissive mentality" than Robert Lowell's (BAP 237). In her discussion of surrealist influences on Bishop, Lorrie Goldensohn emphasizes Bishop's "conservative habits, her fondness for conventional, traditional poetic forms, her comfort and dexterity in original deployments of conventional logic and conventional syntactical arrangements" (125).

CHAPTER ONE: *North & South* (1946)

1.1. "I Am 'Finding Myself'"

When Elizabeth Bishop's first book, *North & South*, was published in 1946, it met with general critical acclaim and won the Houghton Mifflin Literary Fellowship Award. Randall Jarrell wrote that "The best poems in . . . *North & South* are so good that it takes a geological event like *Faterson* to overshadow them" (180). Louise Bogan pointed out that "It is a hopeful sign when judges unanimously and with enthusiasm make an award to a young, fresh book of verse instead of to an old, stale one" (182). Bishop earned this praise and recognition through more than a decade's hard work. She searched for more possible material for poetry by studying both earlier and contemporary prose, poetry, and visual arts. As Bakhtin makes clear, such a dialogic orientation, which generates new artistic forms, is characteristic of any living discourse and creative consciousness. The merit of *North & South* results from Bishop's dialogic engagement with poetic and artistic conventions and innovations.

Even before her early encounter with surrealism in France, Bishop was already considering the possibilities of departure from conventional modes of writing poetry. When she was still an undergraduate at Vassar in 1933, Bishop began to take a serious interest in writing poetry, and to

think about developing her individual style and finding the proper subject matter for her poems. "I have never thought of myself as writing poetry purposely until the last two years" (29 October 1933, L 10), she wrote to a friend, Donald E. Stanford, a student at Harvard.¹ She confided to Stanford that she was grappling with a problem in writing poems: "If I try to write smoothly I find myself perverting the meaning for the sake of the smoothness." And she shared with him her thoughts on what was to become one of her major preoccupations for the rest of her career:

for me there are two kinds of poetry, that (I think yours is of this sort) at rest, and that which is in action, within itself. At present it is too hard for me to get this feeling of action within the poem unless I just go ahead with it and let the meters find their way through. (20 November 1933, L 11)

In the same letter, Bishop shared with Stanford her excitement at finding M. W. Croll's essay "The Baroque Style in Prose." In this essay, Croll used the word "'baroque'" to describe a "'new' style" that emerged in the arts of Western Europe during the latter years of the sixteenth century as "a revolt against the classicism of the high Renaissance" (207). He contended that this new style "preferred the forms that express the energy and labor of minds seeking the truth . . . to the forms that express a contented sense of the enjoyment and possession of it." In short, Croll argued that "the motions of souls, not their

states of rest, had become the themes of art" (208). Bishop copied passages from Croll's essay in her letter to Stanford, and singled out a few sentences as "the best part, which perfectly describes the sort of poetic convention I should like to make for myself (and which explains, I think, something of Hopkins)":

"Their purpose [writers of Baroque style] was to portray, not a thought, but a mind thinking.... They knew that an idea separated from the act of experiencing it is not the idea that was experienced. The ardor of its conception in the mind is a necessary part of its truth." (20 November 1933, L 12)

Bishop continued her discussion of poetry "at rest" as opposed to poetry "in action" in another letter, saying that "the 'at rest' sort occup[ies] properly almost the entire history and field of poetry." Asserting that only Donne, Hopkins, and Chatterton occasionally "have done the kind of thing I mean," she told Stanford what she planned to achieve: "I made a point of it because I wanted to tell you what I am trying to do, and I think if I have any talent at all it is along these narrow lines." In closing this letter, Bishop mentioned another of her major concerns: "I should very much like to know what you think about subject matter. . . . Recently I have been working out my own ideas on the proper things for me to write about" (29 November 1933, L 13).

After her graduation in 1934, Bishop continued to think

about what might be the "proper things" to use as material for her poetry. She recorded her ideas on this matter as "Cuttyhunk, July 1934" in a notebook during eighteen days of vacation on Cuttyhunk Island, Massachusetts before moving into her new apartment in New York City. The way of life on an island led Bishop to reflect on how poems should be made:

On an island you live all the time in this Robinson Crusoe atmosphere; making this do for that, and contriving and inventing. . . . A poem should be made about making things in a pinch. . . .

The idea of making things do--of using things in unthought of ways because it is necessary--has a lot more to it. It is an *island* feeling, certainly. "We play with paste till qualified for pearl--". . . . The awful tears a man must shed when he carves his house with a jackknife. Using oleomargarine during the War. Doing it deliberately different from accepting that it is *all* that way. (You aren't really denying yourself much no matter what you deny yourself.)²

This passage contains Bishop's seminal idea about the paradox of confinement and creation; it also prefigures the rebellious attitude expressed in her later prose piece "In Prison."

For Bishop, the poems of Marianne Moore suggested new possibilities for using materials in "unthought of ways" and confirmed her belief in finding creative freedom within limited materials and poetic forms. In her essay "Efforts of Affection: A Memoir of Marianne Moore," Bishop recalls that before she read Moore's poetry for the first time, "I hadn't known poetry could be like that" (CPr 121). She

wrote to Moore in a letter of October 24, 1954: "when I began to read your poetry in college I think it immediately opened up my eyes to the possibility of the subject-matter I could use and might never have thought of using if it hadn't been for you"³ (RM). But as her later entries in her 1934 notebook indicate, Bishop found Moore's practice unsatisfactory.

It's a question of using the poet's proper materials, with which he is equipped by nature . . . --to express something not of them--something I suppose, *spiritual*. But it proceeds from the material, the material eaten out with acid, pulled down from underneath, made to perform and always kept in order, in its place. Sometimes it cannot be made to indicate its spiritual goal clearly (Some of Hopkins, say, where the point seems to be missing) but even then the spiritual must be felt. Miss Moore does this--but occasionally I think, the super-material content in her poems is too easy for the material involved,--it could have meant more. The other way--of using the supposedly "spiritual"--the beautiful, the nostalgic, the ideal and poetic, to produce the material--is the way of the Romantic, I think--and a great perversity.⁴ (VC)

These ideas of what material should be used and how it should be used in poetry become a thematic concern in Bishop's work, particularly in her early poems.

In her first post-college poem, "The Imaginary Iceberg,"⁵ Bishop rehearses her idea of "the way the Romantic" used the "supposedly 'spiritual'--the beautiful" and "the ideal and poetic, to produce the material" of poetry. She also subtly expresses, by the end of the poem, her attitude toward the poetics embodied in the central

image of the poem--the imaginary iceberg. The plural noun "we" employed in the poem strikes an impersonal tone which suggests an aesthetic and axiological preference of a generation or tradition rather than a personal view. The poem begins by emphasizing "our" desire to possess this symbol of beauty and soul at the expense of experience: "We'd rather have the iceberg than the ship, / although it meant the end of travel." The second part continues to stress the value of the imaginary over that of the visible. "This is a scene a sailor'd give his eyes for. / The ship's ignored." Here, the speaker boasts about the eloquent attraction of this imaginary artifact whose power challenges even that of nature: "The wits of these white peaks / spar with the sun. Its weight the iceberg dares / upon a shifting stage and stands and stares" (CP 4). However, this lofty symbol of the imagination "we" esteem more than the "ship" which makes "our travel" possible at the beginning of the poem is left behind apparently without regret in the closing lines.

This iceberg cuts its facets from within.
 Like jewelry from a grave
 it saves itself perpetually and adorns
 only itself, perhaps the snows
 which so surprise us lying on the sea.
 Good-bye, we say, good-bye, the ship steers off
 where waves give in to one another's waves
 and clouds run in a warmer sky.
 Icebergs behoove the soul
 (both being self-made from elements least visible)
 to see them so: fleshed, fair, erected indivisible.

(CP 4)

Bishop's description of this self-contained and self-sufficient imaginary iceberg indicates an absolute autonomy and unity of art. The notion of "art for art's sake" is implied by the iceberg's self-reflexiveness and removal from social praxis and historical contexts. The idea of the organic form of art is suggested in the iceberg's being "self-made from elements least visible" and its "indivisible" formation. These qualities of the imaginary iceberg also parallel the kind of New Critical aesthetics John Crowe Ransom advocated. In "Criticism, Inc," Ransom called for an "objective" criticism freed from historical and moral concerns and emphasized "the autonomy of the artist as one who interests himself in the artistic object in his own right, and likewise the autonomy of the work itself as existing for its own sake" (342-43). This idea of art is typical of what Bakhtin refers to as the "language of the poetic genre" which he defines as "a unitary and singular Ptolemaic world outside of which nothing else exists and nothing else is needed" (DI 286). Such exclusive purity and autonomy characterizes the imaginary iceberg, which David Kalstone calls "that tempting self-enclosed world, a frosty palace of art. . . ." This art, as Kalstone points out, is depicted "in an idiom fraught with danger, 'a scene a sailor'd give his eyes for'" (FT 26-27). The

qualities of the imaginary iceberg, though described as attractive, are implicitly questioned and finally rejected toward the end of the poem through an almost comforting farewell to this symbol of the ideal: "Good-bye, we say, good-bye, the ship steers off / where waves give in to one another's waves / and clouds run in a warmer sky" (CP 4). As her notebook reveals, Bishop regards the kind of Romantic poetics embodied in the imaginary iceberg as "a great perversity," and prefers another way of making poetry--the using of commonplace material to express things spiritual.⁶

Bishop explores this other way of making poetry in another early poem, "The Map." In this poem, she illustrates her idea of letting the abstract or the "spiritual" proceed "from the material" while making the visible material suggest something more than itself and perform "in unthought of ways." "The Map" is the first poem in which Bishop found her own voice; it consists of a mode of observation which she continued to employ and develop throughout her career. She significantly placed "The Map" as the opening poem of her first volume *North & South*. By 1940, Bishop was confident about finding her own poetic voice, though she showed some doubt about the seriousness of her subject matter in a letter to Marianne Moore written on 8 June 1940. Referring to a letter to her editor, Bishop wrote: "I, probably unwisely, said that I was afraid the

general impression was one of slightness of subject matter, but that I felt that in the work I am doing now I am 'finding myself' and that it is more serious . . ." (L 91).

"The Map" marks Bishop's departure from the poetics idealized in "The Imaginary Iceberg." The symbol of imagination, autonomy, and unity of the iceberg is replaced by an ordinary object--a map. Bishop said in an interview that "My first poem in my first book was inspired when I was sitting on the floor, one New Year's Eve in Greenwich Village. . . . I was staring at a map. The poem wrote itself" (Johnson 20). A sense of spontaneity runs throughout the poem which progresses with the speaker's exploratory observation and contemplation of the continents, oceans, and countries on the map. Such simultaneous movement of looking and thinking reflects the action of the mind. This expression of the process of thought is a skill Bishop has developed from what she learned from the "baroque style" in prose and Hopkins's poetry. Her assimilation of Croll's ideas in her thinking and practice is also shown in her college essay "Gerard Manley Hopkins: Notes on Timing in His Poetry," which appeared in *Vassar Review* (February 1934). Bishop writes that "the poet is set on bringing down onto the paper his poem, which occurs to him not as a sudden fixed apparition of a poem, but as a moving, changing idea or series of ideas" ("Hopkins" 6). In "The Map," the

apparently random movement of observation expresses the process of "a moving, changing idea or series of ideas." An absolute point of view is shown to be impossible in the poem, where the seemingly stable and fixed topography of the map becomes elusive and indeterminate from the observer's constantly shifting vantage point.

Land lies in water; it is shadowed green.
 Shadows, or are they shallows, at its edges
 showing the line of long sea-weeded ledges
 where weeds hang to the simple blue from green.
 Or does the land lean down to lift the sea from under,
 drawing it unperturbed around itself?
 Along the fine tan sandy shelf
 is the land tugging at the sea from under? (CP 3)

No sooner are matter-of-fact statements made about the appearance of land and water than they are challenged by questions raised from an alternative point of view. The speaker's observation and its concurrent questions point to more possible ways of looking and seeing while conveying the speaker's experience of conceiving a series of ideas. At the same time, the constant shifts in point of view and the interplay between observation and contemplation spur the movement of the poem.

Rather than being treated as a fixed object, the map becomes interactive in the speaker's exploratory observation.

Mapped waters are more quiet than the land is,
 lending the land their waves' own conformation:

and Norway's hare runs south in agitation,
 profiles investigate the sea, where land is.
 Are they assigned, or can the countries pick their
 colors?

--What suits the character or the native waters best.
 Topography displays no favourites; North's as near as
 West.

More delicate than the historians' are the map-makers'
 colors. (CP 3)

The speaker's descriptions and questions suggest an undercurrent of meaning, which gives the poem's visual details a depth and richness. As Bishop recorded an observation in her 1934 notebook: "The water so clear & pale that you were seeing *into* it at the same time you were looking at its surface. A *duplicity* all the way though"⁷ (VC). This double function of description is characteristic of Bishop's deceptively simple language and apparently random observation. It is a method of using her material to its utmost capacity while making the "spiritual" "felt" in her descriptions. Observation in "The Map," as in her other poems, enacts a cognitive process in visual experience.⁸

"The Map" also reveals Bishop's skeptical awareness of the limitations of a single, fixed point of view.⁹ The different configurations produced by observation from different vantage points in "The Map" anticipate Bishop's challenge to exclusive notions and values drawn from a single point of view, in her other early poems such as "Casabianca," "The Gentleman of Shalott," "The Man-Moth," and "The Unbeliever." Bishop explores different viewpoints

in relation to the definition of love in "Casabianca." In this poem, she engages in a dialogue with someone else's poem by incorporating its images and utterances to redefine love. Bakhtin has pointed out that when "Concrete socio-ideological language consciousness" becomes "creative" and expressive, its discourse or utterance "cannot fail to be oriented toward the 'already uttered,' the 'already known'" (DI 295, 279). As the title of Bishop's poem indicates, the source of its images is the famous poem of the same title by Felicia Dorothea Hemans, which begins with "The boy stood on the burning deck."¹⁰ "Casabianca" is the surname of a French navy officer, Louis Casabianca (1755-98), captain of the flagship *Orient*, fatally wounded in the Battle of the Nile at Abukir, on August 1, 1798. When the ship caught fire, his ten-year-old son Giacomo refused to leave him. The powder magazine exploded and both were killed.¹¹ This incident is the subject of Hemans's poem, which presents the boy as the heroic epitome of love and loyalty.

Although the boy in Bishop's poem is also presented as the embodiment of love, the concept of love is pluralized in the second stanza by diverse images that also become definitions of love:

Love's the boy stood on the burning deck
 trying to recite "The boy stood on
 the burning deck." Love's the son
 stood stammering elocution
 while the poor ship in flames went down.

Love's the obstinate boy, the ship,
 even the swimming sailors, who
 would like a schoolroom platform, too,
 or an excuse to stay
 on deck. And love's the burning boy. (CP 5)

The sailors who choose to abandon the ship and their captain are indicated to be no less capable of love than the boy. As the speaker says, the sailors wished that they too could articulate their love and demonstrate their loyalty as the boy did. These multiple definitions of love constitute a comment on Hemans's poem, in which the crew is mentioned only in contrast to the heroic boy: "The boy stood on the burning deck / Whence all but he had fled."¹² By replacing Hemans's narrative with images, Bishop's poem changes Hemans's repudiation of the sailors' action and her glorification of the boy's loyalty and heroism into a plural, ambivalent definition of love. What is significant in this change is the shift from one set of values, based on a single point of view, to pluralized values and viewpoints. However, the values in Hemans's poem are not simply repudiated; they are brought into a dialogic interaction with another set of values based on more than one point of view. Bishop expresses these different points of view by using all the images--"the obstinate boy, the ship, / even the swimming sailors"--to define love.

In her exploration for more possibilities in visual images, Bishop's direct encounter with surrealism in France

had a significant role. In 1935, Bishop went to France where she studied the surrealists' works. According to Brett Millier, Bishop translated French poems, especially those of Rimbaud, "as a way of disciplining her own verse" (*Life* 89). Bishop also took a special interest in Max Ernst's frottage drawings, and wrote to a friend:

A few days after you left I ordered . . . the NATURAL HISTORY Plates, by Max Ernst. . . . They arrived this morning, & I have thumbtacked 6 of them up around--they look very well. This little maid is awfully worried--she read the introduction to them by Arp and finally asked me to explain. The only thing I could think of to say, which was simple enough for both me and her, was that Ernst was making fun of Darwin--she appreciated that, apparently! . . .

(qtd. in Millier *Life* 89)

Bishop recognizes Ernst's subversive humour and intertextual parody in *Histoire Naturelle*, a collection of drawings of figurations transformed from the patterns suggested on wood surfaces. Ernst's writings collected in *Beyond Painting* give a detailed account of how he "obtained from the floorboards a series of drawings by first rubbing "with blacklead" on pieces of paper he dropped at random on the floor and then transforming the patterns of wood grains into images with the assistance of his "meditative and hallucinatory powers." He dubbed this process "*frottage* (rubbing)" and put together "the first fruits of the *frottage* process" under the title *Natural History* (24-25). Ernst emphasizes the fact that owing to "a series of

suggestions and transmutations occurring to one spontaneously," "the drawings thus obtained steadily lose . . . the character of the material being studied--wood--and assume the aspect of unbelievably clear images . . ." (25).

Ernst's *Natural History* had several important implications for Bishop in its practice of using unlikely commonplace material for art, especially in its creative transformation of the original material and its allusions through images. In another of her early poems, "The Monument," Bishop makes use of a *frottage* image from Ernst in exploring her questions about the material and function of art. Bishop acknowledged that "The Monument," written after her trip to France, was inspired by the work of Max Ernst. "You are right about my admiring Klee very much," Bishop says in a letter to Anne Stevenson, "but as it happens, 'The Monument' was written more under the influence of a set of *Frottages* by Max Ernst I used to own."¹³ Bonnie Costello identifies the source of Bishop's poem in a *frottage* drawing from *Histoire Naturelle* entitled "False Positions," which "depicts two long, narrow fretted cylinders, ambiguously juxtaposed on a horizontal, striated base" (220).

"The Monument" begins with meticulous description of a peculiar monument in a form of dialogue:

Now can you see the monument? It is of wood

built somewhat like a box. No. Built
like several boxes in descending sizes
one above the other.

A sea of narrow, horizontal boards
lies out behind our lonely monument,
its long grains alternating right and left
like floor-boards--spotted, swarming-still,
and motionless. A sky runs parallel,
and it is palings, coarser than the sea's:
splintery sunlight and long-fibred clouds.

"Where are we? Are we in Asia Minor,
or in Mongolia?"

An ancient promontory,
an ancient principality whose artist-prince
might have wanted to build a monument
to mark a tomb or boundary, or make
a melancholy or romantic scene of it...
"But that queer sea looks made of wood,
half-shining, like a driftwood sea.
And the sky looks wooden, grained with cloud.
It's like a stage-set; it is all so flat!
Those clouds are full of glistening splinters!
What is that?"

It is the monument.
"It's piled-up boxes,
outlined with shoddy fret-work, half-fallen off,
cracked and unpainted. It looks old." (CP 23-24)

While the monument's material features bear explicit
reference to Ernst's *frottage*, the naming of places such as
Asia Minor and Mongolia, and references to the "artist-
prince" of "an ancient principality," as well as "a
melancholy or romantic scene," evoke other poetic texts
about artistic creation and immortality such as Coleridge's
"Kubla Khan" and Keats's "Ode on Melancholy" and "Ode on a
Grecian Urn." Instead of aspiring to the timeless ideal,
Bishop's monument directs the reader's attention to the

banal immediate. Costello points out that Bishop's poem "addresses a long tradition of poems about monument making" and that "Her version of the monument is particularly suited to a modern age, preserving a place for art after dismantling its idealism" (218). Although Bishop's monument is also "an artifact" (CP 24), its modesty and unassuming crudity produce a sharp contrast to the grandeur of Coleridge's "pleasure dome" in "Kubla Khan" and the refined beauty of Keats's Grecian urn.

Bishop's incorporation of a *frottage* drawing by Ernst brings into interaction different ideas about artistic creation and material for art. Even though Bishop's monument is built to "cherish something" (CP 24), it does not aspire to capturing the beautiful and ideal in eternity. Neither does it claim to transcend time and defy mutability. Rather, it is weathered by time: "The strong sunlight, the wind from the sea, / all the conditions of its existence, / may have flaked off the paint, if ever it was painted, / and made it homelier than it was" (CP 24). The wood material of the monument and its potential for developing into different kinds of art reiterate Bishop's idea of using ordinary material for the creation of art:

It is an artifact
of wood . . .

.
The monument's an object, yet those decorations,
carelessly nailed, looking like nothing at all,

give it away as having life, and wishing;
 wanting to be a monument, to cherish something.
 The crudest scroll-work says "commemorate,"

But roughly but adequately it can shelter
 what is within (which after all
 cannot have been intended to be seen).
 It is the beginning of a painting,
 a piece of sculpture, or poem, or monument,
 and all of wood. Watch it closely. (CP 24-25)

The various possibilities of creative transformation and metamorphosis resulting from concentrated observation again indicate the poem's connection to Ernst's drawings produced through the *frottage* process.

Critics also find a connection between the aesthetics expressed in "The Monument" and that of New Criticism. Vernon Shetley contends that, like Wallace Stevens's "Anecdote of the Jar," "The Monument" demonstrates "a decidedly modernist sort of artwork, a seemingly autonomous aesthetic object" (40). In *From Modern to Contemporary* (1984), James Breslin succinctly sums up the principal aesthetics of New Criticism:

What the age demanded was a densely textured lyric, crammed with learned allusions, witty metaphors, startling changes of tone, verbal ambiguities--all packed tightly into the hermetically sealed space of the autonomous symbolist poem. (17)

Even though "The Monument" and Bishop's other early poems bear the marks of this poetic inheritance, especially in their ambiguous and symbolic images, Bishop's emphasis on

the monument's signs of deterioration and its intention to "commemorate" reveal a connection to time and history and challenge the self-enclosed autonomy of abstract artifacts symbolized by the "imaginary iceberg" and marks Bishop's abandonment of the kind of poetry which, "Like jewelry from a grave," "adorns / only itself" (CP 4).

With their divergence from the aesthetics of ahistorical stasis and self-containment, and their assimilation of the possibilities of fluid surrealistic visual images, Bishop's poems are capable of dealing with historical changes and social issues concerning militarism in World War II and racial oppression in America.¹⁴

1.2. "Too Real to be a Dream"

Bishop consciously sought to make her poems relevant to important issues of her time without letting them become merely political propaganda. Her response to the ethical questions and specific events in a particular historical moment in the social world had a determinative impact on both the content and form of her poems. Being concerned that the general impression given by *North & South* would be "slightness of subject matter" in part for its lack of poems about the Second World War, Bishop wrote to her editor at Houghton Mifflin on 22 January 1945:

The fact that none of these poems deal directly with the war, at a time when so much war poetry is being published, will, I am afraid, leave me open to reproach. The chief reason is simply that I work very slowly. But I think it would help some if a note to the effect that most of the poems had been written, or begun at least, before 1941, could be inserted at the beginning, say just after the acknowledgements.

(L 125)

Ten years later, Bishop still felt uncomfortable about the fact that her poems seemed "frivolous." When she won the 1956 Pulitzer prize, Bishop wrote to Robert Lowell, "I was very surprised. . . . I honestly feel from the bottom of my heart that it should have gone to Randall [Jarrell], for some of his war poems, and I don't know why it didn't. I really do seem on the frivolous side compared to him, and there's so little of it" (7 June 1956, L 319).

Even though none of the *North & South* poems deal directly with the war, Bishop does confront the moral crisis associated with it in "Roosters." Speaking of the poem in a 1977 interview, Bishop said that while she was writing it, "The Second World War was going on, and it's about that, more or less."¹⁵ In a letter to Marianne Moore, Bishop revealed that this poem was in part inspired by "those aerial views of dismal little towns in Finland and Norway, when the Germans took over," and by "the violent roosters Picasso did in connection with his *Guernica* picture" (17 October 1940, L 96). As Bakhtin has pointed out, "An artistic device cannot be solely a device of [sic] working the verbal material (words as linguistic datum); it must be first and foremost a device of [sic] working a particular content." He emphasizes that "Form is conditioned by the given content, on the one hand, and, on the other, by the particular nature of the material and the methods of working that material" (AA 192). The devastation of World War II and Picasso's method of protest against the violence of war through visual images helped determine Bishop's choice of content and imagery in "Roosters." Bishop's roosters in the poem are charged with a moral and artistic force through her deployment of visual details which allude to military aggression and destruction and to ethical problems dealt with in the Bible.

The poem begins with dawn when roosters start to crow. As the poem progresses these roosters become increasingly intrusive and tyrannical, combative and cruel.

At four o'clock
in the gun-metal blue dark
we hear the first crow of the first cock

just below
the gun-metal blue window
and immediately there is an echo

off in the distance,
then one from the backyard fence,
then one, with horrible insistence,

.

Cries galore
come from the water-closet door,
from the dropping-plastered henhouse floor,

where in the blue blur
their rustling wives admire,
the roosters brace their cruel feet and glare

with stupid eyes
while from their beaks there rise
the uncontrolled, traditional cries.

Deep from protruding chests
in green-gold medals dressed,
planned to command and terrorize the rest,

the many wives
who lead hens' lives
of being courted and despised. . . . (CP 35)

The connotations of the diction, and the effect of triple rhyme, help Bishop achieve the aim of exposing the cruelty of military aggression and expressing her protest against violence. Phrases such as "the gun-metal blue dark,"

"green-gold medals," and "to command and terrorize the rest" suggest associations with weapons, battles, and violence. All these violent images are connected to the roosters, whose stupidity and lack of sensitivity are further enhanced by the triple rhyme. The uneven length of the lines and the rapid succession of sharp clattering consonants in the triple rhyme, create a mechanical insistence of harsh sound and richety rhythm, which foreground the roosters' combativeness, and mock militarism. As Bishop wrote to Marianne Moore, "what you said about my using rhyme, etc. . . . has helped me decide how to go about these 'serious' poems I always seem to be talking about . . ." (1 September 1940, L 92). Bishop made clear her purposes in her choice of diction and rhyme in response to what Moore took to be inappropriate in this poem. Bishop insisted on using "'water closet' and the other sordidities because," she wrote, "I want to emphasize the essential baseness of militarism." She explained to Moore that she wanted to keep "tin rooster" instead of adopting Moore's correction "gold," and "fastidious beds" because she intended to capture the "atmosphere of poverty" of "the dismal little towns in Finland and Norway" occupied by the Germans. And she would not give up her rhyme scheme which contributes to "a very important 'violence' of tone" even though she felt that "aesthetically" Moore's rejection of it was right.¹⁶

The roosters become overtly military and aggressive as their intrusion into people's lives and their invasion of territories are connected to charts and maps.

A rooster gloats

over our beds
from rusty iron sheds
and fences made from old bedsteads,

over our churches
where the tin rooster perches,
over our little wooden northern houses,

making sallies
from all the muddy alleys,
marking out maps like Rand McNally's:

glass-headed pins,
oil-golds and copper greens,
anthracite blues, alizarins,

each one an active
displacement in perspective;
each screaming, "This is where I live!"

Each screaming
"Get up! Stop dreaming!"
Roosters, what are you projecting?

.
what right have you to give
commands and tell us how to live,

cry "Here!" and "Here!"
and wake us here where are
unwanted love, conceit and war? (CP 36)

Bishop explained to Moore that the scattered cocks' crowing was meant to suggest a connection with "the pins that point out war projects on a map" (17 October 1940, L 96). With this implication of military projects, these roosters and

their "screaming" parody the fascists' military invasion and occupation of other countries' territories. But the roosters' aggressive actions are challenged and resisted by people whose territories they have invaded. Thus, instead of presenting a single point of view, Bishop brings different ideas into collision and interaction.

Bishop's description of a self-destructive scene of roosters fighting exposes and satirizes the brutality of military heroism and glorification.

Now in mid-air
by twos they fight each other.
Down comes a first flame-feather,

and one is flying,
with raging heroism defying
even the sensation of dying.

And one has fallen,
but still above the town
his torn-out, bloodied feathers drift down;

and what he sung
no matter. He is flung
on the gray ash-heap, lies in dung

with his dead wives
with open, bloody eyes,
while those metallic feathers oxidize. (CP 37)

However, the world need not be doomed to destruction with these fighting roosters. The allusion to Peter's sin in the Bible evokes the moral collapse of Nazi collaborators and the moral failures of those who watched the Nazi violence unabated. This biblical allusion also suggests the

possibility of redemption. Here the cock's crowing begins to take on different meaning than that at the beginning of the poem.

St. Peter's sin
was worse than that of Magdalen
whose sin was of the flesh alone;

.

Old holy sculpture
could set it all together
in one small scene, past and future:

Christ stands amazed,
Peter, two fingers raised
to surprised lips, both as if dazed.

But in between
a little cock is seen
carved on a dim column in the travertine,

explained by *gallus canit*;
flet Petrus underneath it.
There is inescapable hope, the pivot;

yes, and there Peter's tears
run down our chanticleer's
sides and gem his spurs.

Tear-encrusted thick
as a medieval relic
he waits. Poor Peter, heart-sick,

still cannot guess
those cock-a-doodles yet might bless,
his dreadful rooster come to mean forgiveness,

.

that even the Prince
of the Apostles long since
had been forgiven, and to convince

all the assembly
that "Deny deny deny"
is not all the roosters cry. (CP 37-8)

Bishop's allusion to Peter's denial and repentance points to the possibility of moral growth and forgiveness. Just as the symbolic meaning of the rooster is fluid, the fascists' military destruction and domination are not final. Both symbolic meanings and the world itself are open to change.

Although Bishop's use of the violent image of roosters was inspired in part by Picasso's painting, her specific descriptions of the roosters and her choice of diction and meter are determined by her response to the violence of war and the "cognitive-ethical tension" of "a lived life," as Bakhtin says of "the artist's relationship to words" (AA 195). Similarly, Bishop's response to the African American experience of racial oppression had a determining effect on her choice and construction of images in the fourth song of her "Songs for a Colored Singer." As in "Roosters," Bishop points to the possibility of change and hope through the transformation of images. Here she employs surrealist hallucinatory images and the surrealist techniques of irrational association and metamorphosis. Like the distorted and metamorphosed forms and figurations that characterize twentieth-century avant-garde paintings, the irrational dream hallucinations in Bishop's poems serve to convey a particular perception with immediate sensory experience, replacing argumentative logic with dream logic.

What's that shining in the leaves,

the shadowy leaves,
like tears when somebody grieves,
shining, shining in the leaves?

Is it dew or is it tears,
dew or tears,
hanging there for years and years
like a heavy dew of tears?

Then that dew begins to fall,
roll down and fall.
Maybe it's not tears at all.
See it, see it roll and fall.

Hear it falling on the ground,
hear, all around.
That is not a tearful sound,
beating, beating on the ground. (CP 50)

The ambivalence of the shining object in the tree is crucial to the central idea of the song, which resides in the immense possibilities of metamorphosis. By connecting the shining object in the tree to tears, the singer alludes to lynching and grief in the life of African Americans. However, the singer does not dwell on tribulation, as the tear-like drop is significantly transformed into something that has tremendous vitality. It falls and rolls on the ground with so much force that it can be heard "all around." The singer eagerly urges the audience to listen to it, and emphasizes "That is not a tearful sound." Its "beating, beating on the ground" is like a heart beat, a sign of life and hope.

Once on the ground, the shining objects go through further transformations at great speed, demanding the

audience's observation and recognition of these changes as real.

See it lying there like seeds,
like black seeds.
See it taking root like weeds,
faster, faster than the weeds,

all the shining seeds take root,
conspiring root,
and what curious flower or fruit
will grow from that conspiring root?

Fruit or flower? It is a face.
Yes, a face.
In that dark and dreary place
each seed grows into a face.

Like an army in a dream
the faces seem,
darker, darker, like a dream.
They're too real to be a dream. (CP 50-57)

The final line affirms hope and possibilities for change suggested by the continual transformation of the ambivalent objects.

Bishop's construction and description of these strange objects in the tree are partly shaped by her response to "Strange Fruit," a song written by Lewis Allen for the African American jazz and blues singer Billie Holiday. Bishop once said that she had Billie Holiday in mind when she wrote "Songs for A Colored Singer."¹⁷ Lloyd Schwartz has rightly pointed out that Bishop's song "has provided an alternate view--not the Black as lynch victim, but as rebel" ("Readjustment" 149). According to Schwartz, "Strange Fruit" was first recorded on March 29, 1939. It presents

explicitly the violence and horror of the lynching inflicted on African Americans:

Southern trees bear a strange fruit,
 Blood on the leaves and blood at the root;
 Black bodies swinging in the southern breeze,
 Strange fruit hanging from the poplar trees.
 (qtd. in Schwartz "Readjustment" 149)

The "strange fruit," which turns out to be a lynched dead body in Lewis Allen's song, is changed into tear-like drops which metamorphose into the seeds of hope in Bishop's poem. With the mechanism of displacement, Bishop transforms the stark bloody reality into imagery which moves from grief to hope. Instead of a "bitter crop," her fourth song ends in an affirmation of strength and change through united rebellious action: "what curious flower or fruit / will grow from that conspiring root?" Bishop addresses African American experience by displacing the horrifying suffering and injustice inflicted on them with images which undergo successive transmutations. By doing so, she lays stress on struggle and hope rather than on terror and grief.

Bishop's use of surrealist techniques for dealing with social issues is usually overlooked by critics. While discussing Bishop's "Songs" as an example of her difference from the surrealist poets, Anne Stevenson argues that Bishop's vision

extends into the regions of dream and fantasy without

ever taking leave of the touchstone of the senses. Often the reader feels that she keeps her poem in strict forms *in order* to bring them into line with ordinary experience: the poems themselves become bridges from one world into another. For this reason, although she has been much interested in Surrealism, she is not a Surrealist poet. (*Bishop* 38)

This is certainly true, and perceptive of the free combination of the real and unreal in Bishop's poems. But the real uniqueness of Bishop's vision lies not only in its extension "into the regions of dream and fantasy without ever taking leave of the touchstone of the senses," but also, and more significantly, in her extension of the dream-like from personal experience to the experience of a repressed racial group.¹⁸

Despite her different treatment of dream experience from the surrealist poets, Bishop's use of dreams and hallucinatory images enabled her to explore and express personal and psychological experience. Her investigation of the realm of the unconscious through surrealist means also provided new possibilities for subject matter and more ways of making poetry.

1.3. "The Armored Cars of Dreams"

Bishop's exploration of dreams in North & South opened more areas for her creative activity and made it possible for her poems to deal with a wider range of experience. Surrealists' use of dreams and the irrational suggested to Bishop not only another possible source of material for poetry, but also a new mode of artistic presentation and expression. She saw in surrealism much more than an account of the irrational and unreal, and her notebooks of the 30's and 40's reveal skeptical and critical responses to other writers' use of surrealism. In one note Bishop asked: "Is surrealism just a new method of dealing bold-facedly with what is embarrassing?" In another, she wrote: "Semi-surrealist poetry terrifies me because of the sense of irresponsibility & . . . danger it gives of the mind being 'broken down'--I want to produce the opposite effect" (qtd. in Goldensohn 124, 123-24). In a letter to Anne Stevenson, Bishop wrote, "I can't believe we are wholly irrational" (Stevenson "Letters" 261). Bishop's dialogic orientation toward surrealism and other writers' surrealistic texts is reflected in her own mode of dream poems.

Bishop used a lot of dream material in her poems, but never allowed her speaker to break down into total irrationality. Dreams provided Bishop with some of her favorite materials for poetry. "I use dream-material,"

Bishop told Anne Stevenson in a letter, "whenever I am lucky enough to have any . . ." ("Letters" 261). Responding to their comments on her poems, Bishop wrote to her friends U. T. and Joseph Summers in 1967, "I use, or used, quite a lot of dream material, and one poem is almost entirely a dream-- just stuck in a few extra lines . . ." (19 October 1967, *L* 478). Like surrealist works, Bishop's dream poems are concerned with exploring the experience of dreaming and with searching through dreams for a possible revelation of what is otherwise inaccessible. Writing to Stevenson in March 1963, Bishop mentioned that "dreams," like "works of art," had a cognitive function in revealing something important, but elusive and seemingly "peripheral" ("Letters" 261). She explores this mode of cognition through dream experience in "Sleeping Standing Up." Even while assimilating surrealists' practice of turning dream experience into creative production, Bishop undermines the surrealists' exaltation of the gratification of dreams.¹⁹

As we lie down to sleep the world turns half away
 through ninety dark degrees;
 the bureau lies on the wall
 and thoughts that were recumbent in the day
 rise as the others fall,
 stand up and make a forest of thick-set trees.
(CP 30)

These descriptions accurately portray both the physical and mental states of sleep and humorously echo Freud's

description of the mental activities in sleep.²⁰ In *Interpretation of Dreams* Freud writes that "with the approach of sleep it is possible to observe how, in proportion as voluntary activities become more difficult, *involuntary ideas* arise, all of which fall into the class of images" (113). The mind in sleep is free to pursue "thoughts that were recumbent in the day." Dreams are a promising vehicle for enabling the dreamer to venture boldly and safely into places otherwise inaccessible.

The armored cars of dreams, contrived to let us do
 so many a dangerous thing,
 are chugging at its edge
 all camouflaged, and ready to go through
 the swiftest streams, or up a ledge
 of crumbling shale, while plates and trappings ring.

Dreams disclose alluring glimpses of what the dreamer wishes to grasp and discover; yet what appears close at hand turns out to be elusive and remains unattainable.

--Through turret-slits we saw the crumbs or pebbles that lay
 below the riveted flanks
 on the green forest floor,
 like those the clever children placed by day
 and followed to their door
 one night, at least; and in the ugly tanks
 we tracked them all the night. Sometimes they disappeared,
 dissolving in the moss,
 sometimes we went too fast
 and ground them underneath. How stupidly we steered
 until the night was past
 and never found out where the cottage was. (CP 30)

The promise of the dream is not fulfilled. "The cottage"

remains out of reach even though sleep provides a condition for latent thoughts in the unconscious to become active. The delusively promising aspect of dreams is ironically suggested by Bishop's descriptions of dreams in the image of "armored cars," chugging at the edge of the dream world, camouflaged and ready to take the dreamers anywhere.

Bishop enhances both the enticing and disappointing aspects of dreams by incorporating fragments from the Grimms' fairy tale "Hansel and Gretel." In Bishop's poem, "the crumbs or pebbles" are used as alluring and promising signs for fulfilling the dreamer's pursuit. Emphasis on the children's success in finding the cottage "one night, at least" renders the failure of dreams to transport the dreamers to "the cottage" particularly frustrating. In the light of "Hansel and Gretel," "cottage" here suggests a sense of home, of belonging, of domestic security, and the love of a family. These things are desirable and unattainable for Bishop, who was deprived of them by her father's death when she was only eight months old, and by her mother's subsequent insanity and eventual permanent removal to an institution when she was five years old. Both Bishop's prose writings and poems carry the marks of this loss and her traumatic experience of being taken away from her maternal grandparents in Great Village, Nova Scotia, to Worcester, Massachusetts to live with her paternal

grandparents, from whom she was once more removed to live with an aunt. Bishop treats such personal wishes, loneliness, and loss with much more directness in her later poems.

As she does with her longings, Bishop presents her experience of memories by appropriating elements from others' works in another of her dream poems, "The Weed." Rather than portraying in specific terms her particular memories, Bishop focuses on the inescapable, disturbing, and even provocative nature of memories in this poem. According to Bishop, "The Weed," like "The Monument," was in part inspired by Max Ernst's *Natural History*.²¹ Bishop also mentioned in an interview that "The Weed" "is modelled somewhat on [George Herbert's] 'Love Unknown'."²² Both Ernst's transformation of memories and hallucinatory images released from the unconscious into works of art and Herbert's poem on the renewal of the spirit can shed light on "The Weed." In "Love Unknown," the speaker's heart goes through three different kinds of tortures for its three flaws in being "foul," "hard," and "dull." First, the speaker's heart is seized by the Lord's servant, who "threw it in a font, wherein did fall / A stream of blood, which issued from the side / Of a great rock . . ." (120-21). Then his heart is thrown into a "boiling cauldron." After these afflictions, the speaker is still not allowed to rest

and is kept sleepless because someone "had stuffed the bed with thoughts," or rather "thorns" to rid him of "a slack and sleepy state of mind." These tribulations were meant to keep the sufferer "*new, tender, quick*" (121-22).

Like "Love Unknown," "The Weed" is allegorical with strikingly new and strange images reminiscent of 17th-century Metaphysical poetry. In a way resembling Herbert's treatment of suffering and spirituality, Bishop deals with the speaker's experience of revitalization by focusing on the condition of the speaker's heart. Just as the speaker's heart in Herbert's poem was foul, hard, and dull, the heart of Bishop's is frozen cold, "stiff and idle," and remains "unchanged" for an indefinite period of time.²³ But this stasis is suddenly broken by a growing weed:

I dreamed that dead, and meditating,
 I lay upon a grave, or bed,
 (at least, some cold and close-built bower).
 In the cold heart, its final thought
 stood frozen, drawn immense and clear,
 stiff and idle as I was there;
 and we remained unchanged together
 for a year, a minute, an hour.
 Suddenly there was a motion,
 as startling, there, to every sense
 as an explosion. Then it dropped
 to insistent, cautious creeping
 in the region of the heart,
 prodding me from desperate sleep.
 I raised my head. A slight young weed
 had pushed up through the heart and its
 green head was nodding on the breast. (CP 20)

The speaker's detailed description follows every step of

change with the irresistible growth of the weed which has a life of its own. The spreading of the weed's roots in the speaker's heart causes it to change.

The rooted heart began to change
 (not beat) and then it split apart
 and from it broke a flood of water.
 Two rivers glanced off from the sides,
 one to the right, one to the left,
 two rushing, half-clear streams,
 (the ribs made of them two cascades)
 which assuredly, smooth as glass,
 went off through the fine black grains of earth.
 (CP 20-21)

The flood of water released from the split heart proves to be a powerful catalyst. Its drops of water bring light to the previously darkness-enshrouded scene by giving the speaker sight and thus joining the element of vision to the speaker's voice.

A few drops fell upon my face
 and in my eyes, so I could see
 (or, in that black place, thought I saw)
 that each drop contained a light,
 a small, illuminated scene;
 the weed-deflected stream was made
 itself of racing images.
 (As if a river should carry all
 the scenes that it had once reflected
 shut in its waters, and not floating
 on momentary surfaces.) (CP 21)

The parenthetical remarks here suggest that the double issuance of this river with its many stored scenes indicates the release of memories preserved not on or in the stream's current but as themselves part of it. (Bishop's use of

parenthetical remarks adds to the sense of spontaneity and the naturalness of tone--two qualities she admires in Gerard Manley Hopkins and Herbert, and strives to achieve in her own poems.) Before the heart is divided, the heart's "final thought stood frozen," "stiff and idle." When the heart is split apart by the growing weed and a flood of water breaks from it, the heart's final frozen thought flows in the rushing stream.

The identification of thoughts with flowing water is implied by the speaker's following speculation in parentheses.

The weed stood in the severed heart.
 "What are you doing there?" I asked.
 It lifted its head all dripping wet
 (with my own thoughts?)
 and answered then: "I grow," it said,
 "but to divide your heart again." (CP 21)

From the moment when the cold heart is divided, a succession of changes takes place, which suggest the vitality, richness, and mystery of psychic life in contrast to the former completely motionless, death-like state in which the unconscious and memories are repressed. The persistent and irresistible growth of the weed promises that the speaker will not remain in her death-like "desperate sleep" and that thought will not stand "frozen," "stiff and idle."

Critics have identified the weed with the power of imagination and Bishop's psychological anxiety. Robert Dale

Parker contends that "The Weed" reveals Bishop's fear of "her self, her own power and imagination, her own body" (7), and that the weed itself seems to be "her poetic power, and also pregnancy" (8). Like Parker, Brett Millier connects the weed to the imaginative power and Bishop's anxiety about her creativity. Millier argues that the poem is "about the terrors of imagination," and "the dream reveals as well Elizabeth's view of her poetic gift as foundling or illegitimate" (*Life* 120). But neither Parker nor Millier has provided enough explanation for Bishop's fear or anxiety in relation to her "poetic power" (or "pregnancy" as Parker claims) though both have recognized the connection between the weed and the poet's imagination and creativity.

Bishop's descriptions of the consequences following the split of the heart by the weed reveal not so much fear as the flux of life and productivity of thought. The growth of the weed also enables the speaker to see images associated with memories and the unconscious, as the parenthetical remark indicates: "(As if a river should carry all / the scenes that it had once reflected / shut in its waters, and not floating / on momentary surfaces.)" The fact that these disconnected images of the past and the repressed emerge with the sudden explosive appearance of the weed which is rooted in the speaker's heart evokes a passage Bishop wrote in her 1935 notebook.

A set of apparently disconnected, unchronological incidents out of the past have been re-appearing. I supposed there must be some string running them altogether, some spring watering them all. Some things will never disappear, but rather clear up, send out roots, as time goes on. They are my family monuments, sinking a little more into the earth year by year, leaning slightly, but becoming only more firm, & inscribed with meanings gradually legible, like letters written in "Magic Ink" (only 5 metaphors).

(VC qtd. in Harrison *Intimacy* 108)

Bishop's comparison of her memories to growing plants which are getting stronger with time suggests a close connection to "The Weed." The persistent and illuminating nature of these memories is also implied in the images of "The Weed" such as the water drops from the weed, each of which "contained a light, / a small, illuminating scene," and in the "racing images" which were once "reflected" and then "shut in" the "weed-deflected stream" (CP 21). Like the weed, certain memories cannot be eliminated or stay repressed in the unconscious. However painful it might be, the growth of the weed for the speaker has a positive, dynamic, and productive effect. The persistent and productive potential of memories for Bishop suggested in "The Weed" is to be clearly demonstrated in her later poems in which she further explores the relation between visual experience and memory, between memory and art through concrete, particular experience.

Even in her early poems, memory has become an increasingly important source for Bishop's poems and its

significance goes beyond being merely subject matter. It plays an important role in her experiments with portraying the perception and experience of time, and the changes that take place in perception with the passing of time. One of the most important seminal efforts Bishop makes in *North & South* is the portrayal of the temporal and spatial experience of time, which will lead to a major artistic breakthrough in her next book. Bishop's first attempts at bringing her ideas of time into poetry emerge in two *North & South* poems, "Florida" and "Paris 7 A.M."

1.4. "Experience-Time"

Bishop's notions of time have an important influence on the development in her methods of composition and her way of presenting images and experience. Her attempts at capturing her speaker's experience of time generate various technical strategies for creating a sense of movement and change in her poems. Bishop's interest in and ideas about time are directly connected to her reading of novels by Dorothy Richardson, Gertrude Stein, James Joyce, Virginia Woolf, and Marcel Proust among others. Bishop argues in her college essay "Time's Andromedas" that it is to "increase the importance of the time-quality . . . that a great deal of our modern 'experimental' writing is done" (105). She studies how these writers' narrative structures and presentations of experience are shaped by their respective ways of dealing with time. For Bishop, time can be experienced in different forms and multiple dimensions, perceived through contrast and change in sight, sound, and rhythm. Time is multidimensional in the sense that perception and experience contain moments of past and present; these moments intersect and mediate one another. One's impressions and ideas are constantly changing because of the interplay between past and present experience. Recognition of these continual shifts and changes with time is for Bishop essential in capturing the immediacy and

actuality of experience and the world.

This concept of time in relation to the flux of experience and inclusiveness of the present, according to Bakhtin, is a liberating concept for artistic imagination and literary creation. An "inclusive and fluid" present, Bakhtin notes, has at its core "personal experience and free creative imagination" which make it possible for literature to develop a genre (the novel) that "structures itself in a zone of direct contact with developing reality" (DI 39). Bishop develops her own strategies to create the sense of time in her poems by assimilating or rejecting other writers' methods of dealing with time.

Bishop discusses her ideas of time and other writers' treatment of time in two of her college essays, "Time's Andromedas" (1933) and "Dimensions For A Novel" (1934). In "Time's Andromedas," Bishop explores her concept of time as inseparable from experience of temporal-spatial relationships through her observation of the contrast between stillness and movement created by the motions of the migrating birds.

It came to me that the flying birds were setting up, far over my head, a sort of time-pattern, or rather patterns, all closely related, all minutely varied, and yet all together forming the migration, which probably in the date of its flight and its actual flying time was as mathematically regular as the planets. There was the individual rate of each bird, its rate in relation to all the other birds, the speed of the various groups, and then that mysterious swath they

made through the sky, leaving it somehow emptied and stilled, slowly assuming its usual coloring and far-away look. ("Andromedas" 103)

The title, "Time's Andromedas," refers to these "time-patterns" created by the moving configuration of migrating birds in the sky which suggest a parallel to the moving galaxy, Andromeda.

Bishop stresses that only in relation to each other's rate of flight, to our perception of it, and to the stillness of the sky, does the motion of the migrating birds give a sense of the passing of time. In and of itself, migration's cycle is timeless and infinite. As Bishop writes:

Yet all this motion with its effect of precision, of *passing the time along*, as the clock passes it along from minute to minute, was to result in the end in a thing so inevitable, so absolute, as to mean nothing connected with the passage of time at all--a static fact of the world, the birds here or there, always; a fact that may hurry the seasons along for us, but as far as bird migration goes, stands still and infinite.
("Andromedas" 103)

An isolated motion or phenomenon cannot give the sense of "*passing the time along*"; the effect of movement is created by contrasts and changes in the temporal-spatial relations of things to each other.

The most important thing Bishop has learned from observing the birds' migration is the fact that the time-pattern set up by the migrating birds in the sky

simultaneously creates a sense of another time which moves at a different pace from theirs. She realizes that

infinitely more important was that impression the birds had given to me of having set up a time-pattern of their own, of having brought down the very sky and fused it with them in an absorption in their own motions that left the other parts of sky and the lower world to move at a quite different clock-pace. (104)

This realization leads Bishop to ask "What went to make up this peculiar passing of *another* time, and why did I become conscious of the essential motionlessness of any such *other* time?" (104). She discovers that while she was looking at the birds within their flying boundaries, her "momentary sense of time" was "theirs." When she looked away from the birds, she was conscious, "for a minute of their time, pulsing against and contradicting my own; then it lost its reality and became a fixed feeling, a little section of the past which had changed and become timeless for me because of its escape from my own time pattern." Then, Bishop came to perceive the migrating birds finally "as not a unit of motion, but rather a static point of a system, an idea of the world's time, the migration idea" (104).

Bishop's observation of the migrating birds leads to her realization that the sense of different time-patterns is created by shifts of perspectives and the difference in temporal-spatial relationships. This realization, Bishop writes, helps her understand the problem of time in certain

novels. In the same essay, she explores how time is treated in modern novels. She discusses "two methods of adding *time* to the novel"--"preserving it in counterpoint" to our own, as Dorothy Richardson does, or "in unison with our own," as Gertrude Stein does. These two writers, Bishop points out, were "widely different," yet both were "'modern,' 'experimenters,'" and "extremely time-conscious" (106). They represent for Bishop "two distinct ideas of time in writing: time that can be felt and realized but that is not our own, going on elsewhere; and time actually our own" (119). Richardson produces a time-pattern which is "not our own" in *Pilgrimage* through the protagonist Miriam's recollections that have "conjured up her past for us" and have given us "her own time-sense, that of the stream of consciousness" (107). Bishop notes that "subtle bridge-passages, linking the essence of a past experience with that of a more recent one" are produced when "Miriam's thoughts are struck off, spark-like, from the present" (111). The "unique" thing in Richardson's work for Bishop is "that moving time-pattern, *contradictory* to but in a sort of counterpoint to our own, prolonged through all the volumes, into the *idea* of the book itself." She discusses how Richardson manages to set up this time-pattern:

Instead of laying bare an era, in our own time, so that it at once has no meanings for us except what the author gives us, she [Richardson] rather insinuates

Miriam simply and slightly into our own *time*, without disturbing it; we are not so much being informed about her as being reminded. We become aware of a rhythm perpetually going on, like our own, in many ways as monotonous as our own, but on a smaller scale, quickly, so that it slows and emphasizes our own. (109)

Here Bishop suggests that a difference in the rhythm, or a change in the tempo of Richardson's narrative, is a crucial strategy in creating a "time-sense" which renders her protagonist's time-pattern at once felt and different from that of the reader. In addition to her manipulation of rhythm or tempo, Bishop notes that Richardson also achieves a "peculiar time-feeling" through shifts of points of view from the author's to the protagonist's and from the present to the past and back to the present.

Unlike this sense of time in Richardson, time in Gertrude Stein's work is self-enclosed and goes on perpetually in the present moment without any change in perspective or rhythm. Bishop notes that what Stein wants to do "is to get present time into her writing, somehow to make us feel that the thing is happening, as we read it, simultaneously" (115). In her novel *The Making of Americans, being a History of a Family Progress*, Bishop writes, Stein is "'groping for a continuous present'" (115) with "curious tricks" such as repetition and "the use of the present participle" (117). But "the repetitions are genuine repetitions" and "there seems to be a group of movements

prolonged to numbness, then repeated. . ." (117). For Bishop, Stein's method of relying on manipulations of syntax and grammar fails to heighten "sensation or impression," thus producing a "static" time "that is frozen and expanded." This "frozen" time in Stein's work," Bishop points out, is incapable of making us feel that we are getting somewhere, and "knowing every bit of the distance we'd come, through and through" (116-17). Therefore, Bishop adds that in *The Making of Americans* "there is, perhaps, no perspective and things seem strangely flattened, yet I get no impression of their actual presence against my eyes, and no time rhythm about them that conceivably corresponds to my own" (119). Bishop sums up the differences in Richardson's and Stein's methods of dealing with time by saying: "Miss Richardson's tempo is her own, she animates it and retards it as she wants; and Miss Stein goes back to the beginning at will, yet each is after all moving in a line with the world, against the time-stream." Bishop proposes a different way of dealing with time for the novel: "I wonder if any one has ever thought of writing a novel which would do neither of these things, but attempt something further" (119). Eventually, she attempts "something further" in her poems--"a sort of *experience-time*" (119) which she mentions in her closing of "Time's Andromedas" and further explores in "Dimensions for a Novel."

Bishop's interest in the realization of "time-patterns" leads to her development of a mode of descriptive poetry which can show the passage of time through motion, experience, and social and historical changes. One important consequence of this ability to visualize time is a "creative mobility," as Bakhtin says of Goethe. In discussing the possibility of "a historical typology for the novel," Bakhtin asserts that "Goethe had a keen eye for all visible markers and signs of time in nature." And Goethe's ability to saturate a seemingly "stable and immutable background" "through and through with time" leads to "a more essential and creative mobility than ever" (SG 30).

Bishop's sense of time as visible patterns and perceptible changes results in various technical strategies in her landscape poems and eventually in her late descriptive narrative poems. Bishop first attempted visualizing "time-patterns" in "Florida." Like "The Map," "Florida" moves with seemingly random observation. Yet unlike the descriptions in "The Map," images presented here do not have any thematic connections or abstract implications beyond their surface meanings. It is divided into two parts, each of considerable length, entirely devoted to descriptions of Florida's "wild" landscape.³⁴ The first part of the poem gives a general picture of Florida's tropical landscape with various plants and creatures. As Bishop says of the

phenomenon of bird migration, the creatures and plants with their endless cycles of life and death set up a time-pattern which is "the world's time" not "our time":

The state with the prettiest name,
 the state that floats in brackish water,
 held together by mangrove roots
 that bear while living oysters in clusters,
 and when dead strew white swamps with skeletons,

 Enormous turtles, helpless and mild,
 die and leave their barnacled shells on the beaches,
 and their large white skulls with round eye-sockets
 twice the size of a man's.

The tropical rain comes down
 to freshen the tide-looped strings of fading shells:
 Job's Tear, the Chinese Alphabet, the scarce Junonia,
 parti-colored pectins and Ladies' Ears,
 arranged as on a gray rag of rotted calico,
 the buried Indian Princess's skirt;
 with these the monotonous, endless, sagging coast-line
 is delicately ornamented. (CP 32)

A break occurs here and the simple present tense shifts to present continuous to signal a shift of perspective in the speaker's observation which now focuses on a flock of birds.

Thirty or more buzzards are drifting down, down, down,
 over something they have spotted in the swamp,
 in circles like stirred-up flakes of sediment
 sinking through water. (CP 32)

The appearance of this swirl of descending vultures creates a different sense of motion in contrast to the preceding motions and activities of the endless cycles in nature. Then the tense in the observation, shifts back to the simple

present, marking the return of the speaker's observation to the landscape. This switching of tenses, Bishop said in an interview, "always gives effects of depth, space, foreground, background" (Brown 298). Here the switching of tenses and the concurrent shifts in perspective also create a different temporal-spatial sense in the speaker's observation. At the same time, these changes lead to a shift from the infinite "world's time" in nature to another time-pattern--"the present, happening time" ("Andromedas" 106)--when the speaker's descriptions turn away from a panorama of Florida's landscape for a moment to the motion of the vultures. With this shift, the poem begins to progress with the passage of time as darkness approaches.

Smoke from woods-fires filters fine blue solvents.
 On stumps and dead trees the charring is like black
 velvet.
 The mosquitoes
 go hunting to the tune of their ferocious obligatos.
 After dark, the fireflies map the heavens in the marsh
 until the moon rises.

 After dark, the pools seem to have slipped away.
 The alligator, who has five distinct calls:
 friendliness, love, mating, war, and a warning--
 whimpers and speaks in the throat
 of the Indian Princess. (CP 32-33)

Within this last part, a swift passage of time is created by a carefully arranged succession of phenomena described with a quicker tempo than the previous one: the "smoke from woods-fires" gives way to the loud and active mosquitoes,

which are replaced by the fireflies after dark; the fireflies' lights dot the heavens "until the moon rises"; then in the "coarse-meshed" moonlight, Florida, with all its exuberant vitality and activity diminished, becomes "all black specks / too far apart, and ugly whites; the poorest / post-card of itself" (CP 33). With nightfall, "the pools seem to have slipped away," and the alligator is heard to whimper and speak "in the throat / of the Indian Princess." This last surrealistic juxtaposition of images creates another pattern of time--the continuity of life in nature as shown in the alligators' calls, and the discontinuity of an Indian tribe as suggested in the silence of the dead Indian Princess. A vanished period of human history is evoked in this juxtaposition. The sense of movement with the passage of time in the last part is enhanced in juxtaposition with the static perpetuation in the first.

While experimenting with her ideas of time in "Florida," Bishop was also searching for a new form. "Florida" appeared for the first time in the Winter 1939 *Partisan Review*. In a letter of 11 September 1940, Bishop revealed to Marianne Moore that she was experimenting with a new method of composing poems but felt uncertain about it.

But I have that continuous uncomfortable feeling of "things" in the head, like icebergs or rocks or awkwardly placed pieces of furniture. It's as if all the nouns were there but the verbs were lacking--if you know what I mean. And I can't help having the theory

that if they are joggled around hard enough and long enough some kind of electricity will occur, just by friction, that will arrange everything. But you remember how Mallarmé said that poetry was made of words, not ideas--and sometimes I'm terribly afraid I am approaching, or trying to approach it all, from the wrong track. (L 94)

In "Florida," Bishop uses collage to assemble and juxtapose abundant images in order to create the actual experience of observing Florida's landscape. Collage enables Bishop to achieve the "electricity" of sensation and impression by accumulating a great number and variety of images. At the same time, these numerous images help create a sense of wide space and provide enough visual objects for Bishop to shift perspectives in her descriptions, thus producing visible and perceptible "time-patterns."

Critics of "Florida" usually focus their attention on its structure and overlook its "time-patterns." David Kalstone observes that the composition method Bishop employed in this poem, "subverts" the "notion of neat and total structure which the critic expects and imposes" (FT 14). Kalstone points out that

there was something about [Bishop's] work for which elegantly standard literary analysis was not prepared. Readers have been puzzled, as when one critic writes about "Florida": "the poet's exuberance provides a scattering of images whose relevance to the total structure is open to question. It is as though Miss Bishop stopped along the road home to examine every buttercup and asphodel she saw." (FT 14)

This "'scattering'" and seemingly irrelevant aspect of Bishop's descriptive style, Kalstone notes, is "a quality which becomes more and more prominent in Bishop's work--her apparent lack of insistence on meanings beyond the surface of the poem, the poem's seeming randomness and disintegration" (FT 14). This "prominent" quality in Bishop's poems such as "Florida," seems to result from her collage method of presenting images. Bishop's use of collage helps her find a poetic form open enough to include heterogeneous phenomena in the immediate world, flexible enough to depict the motions and changes of experience and "time-patterns." She is to explore and develop the possibilities of collage for the rest of her career.

In addition to appropriating visual perspectives and images in portraying "time-patterns" in "Florida," Bishop also attempts to incorporate memories in her treatment of "experience-time" in "Paris, 7 A.M." Bishop explores her concept of "experience-time" in terms of the interplay between memory and perception and discusses its technical possibilities for narrative in "Dimensions For A Novel." For Bishop, narrative which unfolds with a linear sequence is inadequate in depicting the flux and complexity of actual experience. She compares the linear narrative of the novel to "some sort of army style," noting that the fact that "we are moving from one point (usually in time) to another is

always certain" ("Dimensions" 97). This progression of narrative along a predictable linear time line, Bishop notes, fails to capture the perceptual changes and interplays taking place within the sequence.

Someone came to see me Friday afternoon whom I was delighted to see; but since that time many things have come back to mind and it is impossible to look at the visitor with the eyes of Friday. Saturday will always intervene, and Friday and Saturday will come between me and Thursday. A constant process of adjustment is going on about the past--every ingredient dropped into it from the present must affect the whole.
("Dimensions" 97)

Linear narrative cannot make use "of this constant readjustment among the members of any sequence" because, Bishop writes, "Present events run both forwards and backwards, they cannot be contained in one day or one chapter" (97). She reiterates her question put forward in "Time's Andromedas": "Is it possible that there may be a sort of *experience-time*, or the time pattern in which realities reach us, quite different from the hour after hour, day after day kind?" ("Dimensions" 100)

Bishop makes her first attempt at portraying this sort of "*experience-time*" in "Paris, 7 A.M." by contrasting clock-time with *experience-time*. She reveals the inadequacy of clock-time in showing historical experience or memories. Her descriptions of the speaker's temporal-spatial experience point to the interconnections between past and

present. In contrast to the fixity of the exact place and time for the poem's setting indicated by the title, Bishop shows the multidimensional nature of perception at one particular place and moment. The poem is based on the actual surroundings of the apartment in which Bishop stayed with her friend Louise Crane during her first visit to Paris.²⁵ It begins by referring to the collection of clocks in the apartment, and moves on to describe what time actually is.

I make a trip to each clock in the apartment:
 some hands point histrionically one way
 and some point others, from the ignorant faces.
 Time is an Etoile; the hours diverge
 so much that days are journeys round the suburbs,
 circles surrounding stars, overlapping circles.
 The short, half-tone scale of winter weathers
 is a spread pigeon's wing.
 Winter lives under a pigeon's wing, a dead wing with
 damp feathers. (CP 26)

In contrast to the precise time in the title, the multiple hands of the clocks pointing "histrionically" in different directions indicate various past moments fixed on the clocks' "ignorant faces"--"ignorant," because the times they designate reveal nothing and are "cut-off" from the present.²⁶ However, the clocks' geometric faces evoke a particular location in Paris--"Time is an Etoile." The capital letter indicates that the speaker is thinking of the Place de l'Etoile, in the centre of Paris, so named because twelve avenues radiate out from there: it is like a star

(*étoile*) with rays going out in all directions. Time is depicted metaphorically in geometrical images associated with the actual pattern of the Place de l'Etoile.²⁷ On a clock face, hours spread out in a circle from a center like light radiating from a star. "Days are journeys" (a pun on *jour*, "day," the root of *journey*) around this center. Days consist of these "overlapping circles" of hours shown in numbers on the edges of a clock-face; hence "days are journeys round suburbs, / circles surrounding stars" of time, as the clocks have "overlapping circles" of days and weeks surrounding their centers.

The concept of time as multitudinous stars, developed visually and conceptually from the conventional designation of time by the clock, challenges the linear, one-dimensional clock-time. Bishop's definition of time as stars with overlapping circumferences foreshadows her subsequent portrayal of the moment presented as intersected both by the speaker's memories of childhood and the historical events of Paris.²⁸

Look down into the courtyard. All the houses
are built that way, with ornamental urns
set on the mansard roof-tops where the pigeons
take their walks. It is like introspection
to stare inside, or retrospection,
a stare inside a rectangle, a recollection:
this hollow square could easily have been there.
--The childish snow-forts, built in flashier winters,
could have reached these proportions and been houses;
the mighty snow-forts, four, five, stories high,
withstanding spring as sand-forts do the tide,

their walls, their shape, could not dissolve and die,
only be overlapping in a strong chain, turned to stone,
and grayed and yellowed now like these. (CP 26)

Looking down into the courtyard, the speaker is reminded of her childhood, a happier time, in "flashier" winters (suggesting both energy and excitement in contrast to the Paris winter under a dead pigeon's wing) when the speaker used to build snow forts for snowball fights. She imagines that the childhood forts "could have reached these proportions," those of the apartment buildings in view, and recognizes that they could resist the coming of spring only as briefly as sand castles resist the tide. But in the speaker's memory, the walls and shapes of the childhood forts "could not dissolve and die"; instead, they can "only be overlapping in a strong chain, turned to stone," and "grayed and yellowed now like these" of the old apartment buildings.

Present and past intersect through memory. The interlacing duration of time in the speaker's perception dismantles the fixed, linear regularity of clock-time. "Introspection," or "retrospection," occurs with the speaker's stare down into the rectangular courtyard. Here, recollection of a particular period of the past is like "a star inside a rectangle." The memory of childhood snow forts and snow-ball fights and the association of winter weather with "a spread pigeon's wing" lead the speaker's

thoughts to the history of Paris.

Where is the ammunition, the piled-up balls
 with the star-splintered hearts of ice?
 This sky is no carrier-warrior-pigeon
 escaping endless intersecting circles.
 It is a dead one, or the sky from which a dead one
 fell.
 The urns have caught his ashes or his feathers.
 When did the star dissolve, or was it captured
 by the sequence of squares and squares and circles,
 circles?
 Can the clocks say; is it there below,
 about to tumble in snow? (CP 26-27)

The sight of the "grayed and yellowed" walls of the apartment buildings brings the speaker back to the present with a heightened sense of the loss of the energy and excitement of the winters of her childhood. The drab winter sky of Paris now is also compared with the memories of an eventful and turbulent past implied in the "carrier-warrior-pigeon," which allude to the wars that have surged through and around Paris. During the French Revolution and the suppression of the Paris Commune, carrier pigeons were indeed flying through the shell-fire delivering messages to headquarters. Time's endless intersecting circles include these events of Paris's past.

But here, and now, there are no "carrier-warrior pigeons," only the peaceful pigeons who "take their walks" on the mansard roofs as the French bourgeoisie do on the streets below. Once there was exuberant childhood; once there were heroic struggles. But "the ignorant faces" of

the clocks do not show us such things. The inadequacy of clock time to illustrate whether the past dissolves or remains with the present "captured" in memories is again stressed by the speaker's rhetorical questions. Bishop ends the poem with an emphasis on the inability of artificial, sequential clock-time to depict the interpenetration of past and present in the speaker's perception and memories.

In "Paris, 7 A.M.," Bishop has not yet found an effective way to illustrate her notion of "experience-time," which remains elusive and vague in the poem. It seems that Bishop's use of allusions and metaphorical associations adds to the elusive and vague quality of "experience-time" in this poem. This quality, perhaps, has led to Bonnie Costello's conclusion in her discussion of this poem: "Bishop had not yet found, for poetry, an equivalent to the dynamic 'experience-time' she called for in the novel." Costello adds, "Perhaps it had not yet occurred to her that such an aesthetic was appropriate to lyric" (180). But "Paris, 7 A.M." already reveals Bishop's attempt at portraying "experience-time" through multidimensional, geometrical, and symbolic images in association with memories as she describes it in "Dimensions For A Novel": "From a vacant pinpoint of certainty start out these geometrically accurate lines, star-beams, pricking out the past, or present, or casting ahead into the future" (99).

This metaphor describes Bishop's idea that time as perceived in one's experience is not a single linear progression.

Bishop's metaphorical portrayal of "experience-time" through geometrical and symbolic figures in "Paris 7 A.M." is to be replaced by concrete, detailed descriptions in her next book, *A Cold Spring*. In these poems she further explores the possibilities of collage presentation employed in "Florida," while assimilating historical time in her presentation of "time-patterns" or "experience-time." At the same time, the abstract images and dream worlds of *North & South* give way to "real" people and the social world in *A Cold Spring*. Bishop's integration of techniques for portraying "experience-time" with historical changes in lived life and the social world, leads to a major thematic and artistic development in her second book.

Notes to Chapter One

1. After Bishop contributed a poem and story to the *Hound & Horn* undergraduate contest in the spring of 1933, and earned an honourable mention, she was invited to send in more of her writings by the magazine. Yvor Winters, a regional editor of the magazine, offered to criticize some poems for her, and introduced to her Donald Elwin Stanford, who had written poetry under Winter's supervision. At Winter's suggestion, Stanford began an exchange of letters and poems with Bishop while he was in graduate study at Harvard. See *One Art: Letters*, 9-10.
2. Bishop's notebooks are among the Elizabeth Bishop Papers housed at Special Collections of Vassar College Libraries, Poughkeepsie, New York, cited as "VC." Quotations from Elizabeth Bishop's unpublished materials are used by permission of her Estate, Alice Methfessel, Literary Executor, and Nancy S. MacKechnie of Special Collections, Vassar College Libraries.
3. Published by permission of Marianne Craig Moore, Literary Executor for the Estate of Marianne Moore, and Evelyn Feldman of the Marianne Moore Archive, Rosenbach Museum & Library.
4. Quotations from Elizabeth Bishop's unpublished materials are used by permission of her Estate, Alice Methfessel, Literary Executor, and Nancy S. MacKechnie of Special Collections, Vassar College Libraries.
5. "The Imaginary Iceberg first appeared in *Directions: A Quarterly Review of Literature* in April 1935.
6. In her discussion of "The Imaginary Iceberg," Bonnie Costello asserts that there is "a characteristic ambivalence toward the ideal of mastery over life and self" in Bishop's exaltation of the "imaginary above the visible." "What the poem describes," Costello contends, "is the mind's attraction to, even need for, an idea of absolute autonomy, and a process of meditation by which this idea is approached and abandoned" (92). However, Costello argues that "Bishop's attraction to the magisterial loftiness and aloofness of the iceberg ideal . . . is plain throughout *North & South*" (94). Rather than a plain "attraction" to "the iceberg ideal" throughout *North & South*, I discern a struggle to break away from it.

7. See Bishop's 1934 notebook, p. 2. Quotation from Elizabeth Bishop's unpublished material by permission of her Estate, Alice Methfessel, Literary Executor, and of Special Collections of Vassar College Libraries.

8. For more examples of Bishop's mastery of the skill in portraying the speaker's mind in action with the speaker's visual experience, see "The Gentleman of Shalott" and "The Fish."

9. For a discussion of Bishop's skepticism as essential to her politics which rejects "dogmatic ideology" (20), see John Palattella "'That Sense of Constant Re-adjustment': The Great Depression and the Provisional Politics of Elizabeth Bishop's *North & South*," in *Contemporary Literature* 34.1 (Spring 1993): 18-43. For readings of "The Gentleman of Shalott" in relation to Bishop's lesbian psychosexuality, see Brett Millier, *Elizabeth Bishop: Life and the Memory of It*, 99; Victoria Harrison, *Elizabeth Bishop's Poetics of Intimacy*, 46-49.

10. The first and last stanzas of Hemans's ten-stanza "Casabianca" are as follows:

The boy stood on the burning deck
 Whence all but he had fled;
 The flame that lit the battle's wreck,
 Shone round him o'er the dead.

.

With mast and helm, and pennon fair,
 That well had bore their part--
 But the noblest thing which perish'd there
 Was that young faithful heart!

Poems by Felicia Hemans with An Essay on Her Genius by H. T. Tucherman, ed. Rufus W. Griswold (New York: Geo. A. Levy, n.d.) 256. Hemans's poem appeared in an 1820 collection entitled *The Forest Sanctuary*. It was also included in *The Best Loved Poems of the American People*, ed. Hazel Felleman (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1936), 152-53.

11. See *Encyclopedia Americana*, International ed., 1992.

12. See Hemans, 256.

13. Bishop to Anne Stevenson, see Stevenson, "Letters from Elizabeth Bishop," *Times Literary Supplement* 7 March 1980, 261. Henceforth abbreviated as "Letters." These are

fragmentary quotations of Bishop's letters to Stevenson written in the 1960's without specific date for each quote.

14. Bishop also deals with the disturbing destructive consequences of modern technology and commerce through grotesque, surrealist images in poems such as "Love Lies Sleeping" and "From the Country to the City" in *North & South* (1946), "Varick Street" in *A Cold Spring* (1955), and "Night City" in *Geography III* (1976).

15. See George Starbuck, "'The Work!': A Conversation with Elizabeth Bishop," 320. In the same interview Bishop told Starbuck, "Some friends asked me to read ['Roosters'] a year or so ago, and 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). Feminist criticism has noted that "The first two-thirds of 'Roosters' . . . is a strong and brilliant parody of male brutality and male aesthetics" (Ostriker 54).

16. See Bishop's letter to Moore, 17 October 1940, in *One Art: Letters*, 96. After their exchanges about "Roosters," Bishop stopped submitting her drafts to Moore. In a letter to R. Lynn Keller, Bishop explains this change in the two poets' professional relationship.

I showed her my poems up to & including one called "Roosters." She and her mother used to send me criticisms-- some amusing, such as objecting to my use of the word "spit" or "privy"--some excellent. After "Roosters" I decided not to show anything to anyone, or rarely, until it was published. Her criticism of that poem wd. be worth publishing--her rewriting of it, rather--if I could find it! --After that I decided to write entirely on my own, because I realized how very different we were. (qtd. in Goldensohn 155)

For discussions of the exchanges between Bishop and Moore concerning "Roosters," see Kalstone, *Becoming A Poet*, 80-81; Lynn Keller, "Words Worth a Thousand Postcards," and Bonnie Costello, "Friendship and Influence."

17. Bishop met Billie Holiday in New York through her friend Louise Crane. In a letter written on 19 November 1967 to U. T. and Joseph Summers, Bishop mentioned that "the 'Songs' were for Billie H." See Bishop's letter to U. T. and Joseph Summers in the Elizabeth Bishop Papers. Quotation from Elizabeth Bishop's unpublished materials is used by permission of her Estate, Alice Methfessel, Literary

Executor, and Nancy S. MacKechnie of Special Collections, Vassar College Libraries.

18. Defending herself against charges of "racism" by two Brazilian newspaper columnists, Bishop cited this poem as "a prophecy, or a prayer, that justice will eventually triumph for the Negro in the U S A'" (qtd. in Millier *Life* 365). In 1965, Bishop was under attack for "racism" in her article about Rio, "On the Railroad Named Delight," which appeared in *New York Times Magazine*, 7 March 1965. In her article Bishop applauded the scene of a Rio advertisement for a gas stove, in which a black young woman and her white mistress kiss each other on the cheek. Bishop indicated that such a scene could not have appeared in Atlanta, Georgia, or even New York.

19. See for instance, André Breton's dream poem "Vigilance" in which all the opposing elements are merged into one ideal world of the surreal in *Poems of André Breton: A Bilingual Anthology*, trans. and ed. Jean Pierre Cauvin and Mary Ann Caws (Austin: U of Texas P, 1982) 79.

20. Bishop once mentioned to U. T. and Joseph Summers that she had read all of Freud. See Elizabeth Bishop to U.T. and Joseph Summer, 9 December 1953 in *One Art: Letter*, 283.

21. In a letter to U. T. and Joseph Summers, written on 19 October 1967, Bishop expressed her admiration for the early work of de Chirico--an influential predecessor of Surrealism. She also mentioned that "'The Weed' was influenced, if by anything, by a set of prints I had of Max Ernst--lost long ago--called *Histoire Naturelle* (something like that) in which all the plants, etc., had been made by frottage--on wood, so the wood grain showed through" (*L* 478).

22. In a 1966 interview with Ashley Brown, Bishop said, "some of Herbert's poems strike me as almost surrealistic, 'Love Unknown' for instance. (I was much interested in surrealism in the '30s.)" When asked if she owed any of her poems to Herbert, Bishop revealed that "'The Weed' is modelled somewhat on 'Love Unknown'" (Brown 294-95).

23. See George Herbert, "Love Unknown," line 69.

24. Bishop described her first impression of Florida to Marianne Moore in a letter written from a fishing camp in Florida: "From the few states I have seen, I should now immediately select Florida as my favorite. I don't know whether you have been here or not--it is so wild, and what

there is of cultivation seems rather dilapidated and about to become wild again" (5 January 1937, L 53). The abundant images in "Florida" effectively convey the impression Bishop expressed in this letter.

25. According to Bishop's biographer Brett Millier, the apartment belonged to a friend of Louise Crane's family and "housed the owner's collection of clocks" (*Life* 90).

26. In her suggestions to Bishop about this poem, Marianne Moore changed, among other things, the word "apartment" to "room." Bishop insisted on using "apartment" because, she explained in her response, "To me that word suggests so strongly the structure of the house, later referred to, and suggests a 'cut-off' mode of existence so well. . ." (29 September 1936, L 46).

27. In her discussion of "Paris, 7 A.M." Bonnie Costello also notes the pun in Bishop's use of "Etoile": "the French word étoile refers both to celestial stars and to those starlike convergences of streets in Paris (such as Etoile de Gaulle)" (178-79).

28. Bishop's description of time in "Paris, 7 A.M." is usually interpreted by critics as a manifestation of the speaker's psychological disorientation and disassociation from the world. For instance, Thomas Travisano writes that "it is the observer, disturbed already for unspecified reasons, who finds the clocks' hands histrionic, the faces ignorant" (43). David Kalstone asserts that in this poem "as in 'The Man-Moth' and 'Love Lies Sleeping,' the city submerges an instinctual life connected with childhood But in this poem the submergence is effected by some more inexorable force of time and space" (*BAP* 45). In her discussion of this poem, Bonnie Costello also deals with Bishop's psychological state of mind, and her treatment of time. Costello argues that time in this poem "becomes calcified as one of the dimensions of space, where it is aesthetically and conceptually controlled, but not mastered or transcended" (178). Costello's argument that time in this poem is only one-dimensional contradicts Bishop's notion of "experience-time" which is multi-dimensional. In fact, Bishop is dealing with the multi-dimensionality of time in this poem, as the speaker says: "Time is an Etoile."

CHAPTER TWO: *A Cold Spring* (1955)

2.1. "Our Knowledge Is Historical"

Elizabeth Bishop's second collection of poems, *A Cold Spring*, marks a major change in both content and technique, showing her work's departure from *North & South's* imaginary and symbolic figures and dream worlds toward everyday landscapes and people. Partly because of its small number of twenty poems, it was issued in 1955 together with a new edition of her first book in one volume as *Poems: North & South--A Cold Spring* which won the Pulitzer Prize in 1956. Bishop's artistic breakthrough in her second book is largely the result of her efforts to enhance "the time-quality" in her poems by attempting "something further" than what has been done by modern novelists. One of the major technical achievements in this book is Bishop's development of the collage composition employed in "Florida" into an open form which allows abundant details to accumulate and much freedom for different temporal-spatial relationships to emerge and intersect.

Another major achievement in *A Cold Spring* is Bishop's successful incorporation of her concepts of "time-patterns" and "experience-time" with her "baroque style" of creating movement within the poem. With this combination, a more concrete and localized world and more complex forms of time and experience emerge in Bishop's descriptions, adding a

narrative dimension to her descriptive style. David Kalstone has observed that "Even before *North & South* appeared, [Bishop] had turned a poetic corner. She had found a way to make description serve the purpose narrative served for others" (BAP 118). Bishop further developed this aspect of her descriptive skill in her major poems collected in *A Cold Spring*. Although Kalstone overlooks Bishop's exploration of "time-patterns" and "experience-time" in her landscape poems, his comment recognizes an important quality of her descriptive poems. By introducing her notions of time into her descriptions, Bishop expands the limits of her basically descriptive poems to tell stories of other times, other lives, and other worlds together with her speaker's experience and thought. This development marks a further divergence of Bishop's poems from the kind of timeless and self-enclosed aesthetics embodied by the "imaginary iceberg." Her technique of visualizing the passage of time in nature is further extended to include signs of historical change. Instead of using complicated metaphorical images such as those in "Paris, 7 A.M.," her ideas of the interplay between past and present perception are expressed with much more concrete and specific descriptions of actual experience within time. Indeed, Bishop's treatment of "time-patterns" and "experience-time" helps her find "a way to make description serve the purposes narrative served for others"

as Kalstone has remarked.

The significance in Bishop's artistic achievement with the foregrounding of "the time-quality" in her poems can be better understood through Bakhtin's discussion of the functions of the "chronotope" in literature. In "Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel," Bakhtin uses the term "*chronotope* (literally, 'time space')" for "the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature" (DI 84). According to Bakhtin, his term "chronotope" is based on the concept of space-time "introduced as part of Einstein's Theory of Relativity" because of "the inseparability of space and time (time as the fourth dimension of space)." Bakhtin stresses that he deals with "the chronotope" strictly "as a formally constitutive category of literature," and that "in literature the primary category in the chronotope is time" (DI 84-85). The importance of the chronotope in literature, Bakhtin notes, lies in its function as "the primary means for materializing time in space" (DI 250). Bakhtin explains that

In the literary artistic chronotope, spatial and temporal indicators are fused into one carefully thought-out, concrete whole. Time, as it were, thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible; likewise, space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot and history. (DI 84)

The chronotope has a "*representational* importance" not only

in organizing narratives and unfolding the plot, but also in making the abstract concrete. Through the chronotope, Bakhtin remarks, abstract elements such as "philosophical and social generalizations, ideas . . . take on flesh and blood, permitting the imaging power of art to do its work" (DI 250). Bakhtin points out that the artistic chronotope makes it possible for "actual temporal (including historical) reality" to "be reflected and incorporated into the artistic space of the novel" (DI 252). It is the historical specificity and openness to changes that give a literary work its life and the artist more creative possibilities. Bakhtin observes that within the chronotope of Greek romance, the "adventure-time" is "empty" because it leaves "no traces anywhere, no indications of its passing." Hence the "time-sequences" in this "empty time" are "neither historical, quotidian, biographical, nor even biological and maturational" (DI 91). In this kind of eternal present time, both the characters and their world remain unchanged. "Where there is no passage of time," Bakhtin stresses, "there is also no moment of time. . . ." He adds that "If taken outside its relationship to past and future, the present loses its integrity, breaks down into isolated phenomena and objects" which are "a mere abstract conglomeration" (DI 146). In this case, the world and people presented remain "outside time's fullness," untouched

by historical reality and change. Bakhtin argues that "the ancient novel . . . contained the feeble first efforts at new forms for expressing time's fullness" and that "that feeling for time" exercised "an enormous and determining influence on the development of literary forms and images" (DI 146-47).

Bishop's concepts of time are form-giving ideas that generate the movement and change within her poems and contribute to the complexity and mobility of her seemingly simple descriptions. In the title poem "A Cold Spring," Bishop explores the possibilities of revealing a sense of "hurry[ing] the seasons along" through images which reflect the passage of time. At the same time, she attempts to make this pattern of time in nature acquiescent with "our time" by bringing the speaker's observation into motion, which is one with the signs of time passing. In "Time's Andromedas," Bishop notes how individual birds appear to be joined by "an invisible thread," while the interspaces between the flying birds "moved in pulsation too, catching up and continuing the motion of the wings in wakes, carrying it on, as the rest in music does--not a blankness but a space as musical as all the sound" ("Andromedas" 102-103). Between the appearance of each group of birds, there is a pause. Then, Bishop says, she realizes that "the same relationships of birds and spaces I had noticed in the small groups were true

of the whole migration at once" (103). Bishop applies this observation and realization to her descriptions in "A Cold Spring."

"A Cold Spring" is dedicated to Jane Dewey, on whose farm in the Maryland countryside Bishop spent pleasant times.¹ It begins with a sense of the chilliness of early spring, and progresses with various signs of the revival of life and birth.

A cold spring:
 the violet was flawed on the lawn.
 For two weeks or more the trees hesitated;
 the little leaves waited,
 carefully indicating their characteristics.
 Finally a grave green dust
 settled over your big and aimless hills.
 One day, in a chill white blast of sunshine,
 on the side of one a calf was born.

The next day
 was much warmer.
 Greenish-white dogwood infiltrated the wood,
 each petal burned, apparently, by a cigarette-butt;

 In his cap the lilacs whitened,
 then one day they fell like snow. (CP 55)

By now, the season has changed from "a cold spring" into summer with the subtle and accumulative effects created by juxtaposition of detailed images.² Like the migrating birds that set up "a sort of time-pattern, or rather patterns, all closely related, all minutely varied" ("Andromedas" 103), the minutely observed and accurately described phenomena in this poem contribute to Bishop's visualization of time's

passage with the changing season. These effects are also helped by Bishop's division of the poem. The second part consists of thirty-five lines without a break, which build up the sense of the almost imperceptible fleeting transition of the season while heightening the surprise when summer seems to have so suddenly arrived. With this transition, the poem moves quickly from evening into night.

Now, in the evening,
 a new moon comes.
 The hills grow softer. Tufts of long grass show
 where each cow-flop lies.
 The bull-frogs are sounding,
 slack strings plucked by heavy thumbs.
 Beneath the light, against your white front door,
 the smallest moths, like Chinese fans,
 flatten themselves, silver and silver-gilt
 over pale yellow, orange, or gray.
 Now, from the thick grass, the fireflies
 begin to rise:

..-Later on they rise much higher.
 And your shadowy pastures will be able to offer
 these particular glowing tributes
 every evening now throughout the summer. (CP 55-56)

Despite its title, the poem has moved out of a cold spring into full summer, when lilacs have fallen, bull-frogs are loud, fireflies glow, and moths gather under the lights at night. The transition of summer into autumn is even anticipated in the closing lines, which "push visible time into the future" (as Bakhtin says of Goethe's artistic treatment of time in prose) (SG 25).

While enacting the passage of time with the transition

of seasons, Bishop loosens up the form of her poem by integrating the changes in the season with each detailed sight and motion of her descriptions. Thus a seamless flow from line to line is created and maintained throughout the poem. This is one aspect of the "movement" she sees in Hopkins' poems in which "the boundaries of the poem are set free, and the whole thing is loosened up; the motion is kept going without the more or less strong checks customary at the end of lines" ("Hopkins" 7). The quick shift from image to image in the speaker's observation adds to the sense of movement and keeps "the atmosphere fresh and astir," as Bishop says of Hopkins' poems. Combined with her descriptive skill, Bishop's devices for creating the experience of motion and time make "A Cold Spring" and her other poems match the compliment she pays to Hopkins's poems: "A single short stanza can be as full of, aflame with, motion as one of Van Gogh's cedar trees" ("Hopkins" 7).

Through her harmonious fusion of the passage of time with the movement of observation in "A Cold Spring," Bishop achieves what she calls a sustained "acquiescent time-pattern"--"the world's time" in agreement with "our time" ("Andromedas" 105). While discussing time in relation to her observation of the bird migration, Bishop notes that when she was not watching and experiencing the actual flight

of the migrating birds, their time-pattern then "lost its reality and became a fixed feeling, a little section of the past which had changed and become timeless for me because of its escape from my own time pattern" ("Andromedas 104). She compares this sense of a separate, fixed time-pattern to the effect of reading a nineteenth- or early twentieth-century novel which is written "still in the tradition of Dickens, Hardy, or Somerset Maugham" (104). Time in the traditional novel, Bishop writes, usually maintains its own unities which remain outside the reader's time-pattern as a separate "time-system of the book," which eventually slips "into a state of actual timelessness. . . . The result is that the time of the book comes really to mean nothing to us" (104-105). But in modern experimental novels such as *The Waves* by Virginia Woolf and *Ulysses* by James Joyce, the "classical unities of time" are upset; the time-pattern of the past, or of the character, is made "acquiescent with our own time-pattern as we read" (105).

In her other poems, Bishop explores the possibilities of creating time-patterns which are at once contradictory to and acquiescent with the reader's experience of the present "happening time." This exploration leads to Bishop's development in portraying complex time-patterns which include historical changes in the world. Her treatment of historical time, including local history and personal

memories, adds more immediacy to the world she describes. Bakhtin points out that one of the significant results of locating characters and their worlds within the passage of time is the emergence of a type of "realistic" novel in which characters change along with the changes in "a completely new, spatial sphere of historical existence" (SG 24). He notes that the writer's ability to discern "the concrete sensory signs" of time in nature eventually leads to a historical perspective on human life and culture.

The ability to see time, to read time, in the spatial whole of the world and, on the other hand, to perceive the filling of space not as an immobile background, a given that is completed once and for all, but as an emerging whole, an event--this is the ability to read in everything signs that show time in its course, beginning with nature and ending with human customs and ideas (all the way to abstract concepts). (SG 25)

It is to "show time in its course," not just in nature but also in human life, that Bishop applies her ideas discussed in "Time's Andromedas" and "Dimensions For A Novel" in poems such as "Cape Breton," "At the Fishhouses," and "Over 2,000 Illustrations and A Complete Concordance."

In these poems, Bishop begins to depict the human world "as an emerging whole, an event" in a process of change, rather than as "a given that is completed once for all." In "Cape Breton" and "At the Fishhouses," Bishop attempts to make time past and other people's time-patterns felt and connected to the speaker's and reader's time-pattern. She

achieves this by shifting points of view in her speaker's observation and meditation. At the same time, personal memory, local history, and the rhythm of local life are incorporated into her descriptions which consequently have a narrative function. "Cape Breton" is based on one of Bishop's trips back to Nova Scotia in the summer of 1947, when she stayed for six weeks at Briton Cove, Cape Breton. In her description of Cape Breton, Bishop assimilates specific technical strategies she has noted in Dorothy Richardson's "unique" way of introducing other people's time-pattern into the reader's present time. Rather than "laying bare an era, in our own *time*," Bishop observes, Richardson "insinuates" her character and the character's time "simply and slightly into our own *time*, without disturbing it" ("Andromedas" 109).

In "Cape Breton" Bishop succeeds in creating this complex sense of time by unfolding the scenes and activities of a Nova Scotia community through the speaker's roaming observation, which moves inland from the coastline while insinuating the local community's time into the speaker's observation. Her shifts of perspective in her descriptions contribute to creating and sustaining a sense of these different "time-patterns."

Out on the high "bird islands," Ciboux and Hertford,
the razorbill auks and the silly-looking puffins all
stand

with their backs to the mainland
 in solemn, uneven lines along the cliff's brown
 grass-frayed edge,
 while the few sheep pastured there go "Baaa, baaa."

 The silken water is weaving and weaving,
 disappearing under the mist equally in all directions
 (CP 67)

As the description moves away from the seacoast, the region
 is found to be desolate, everything at a standstill.

The road appears to have been abandoned.
 Whatever the landscape had of meaning appears to have
 been abandoned,
 unless the road is holding it back, in the interior,
 where we cannot see,
 where deep lakes are reputed to be,
 and disused trails and mountains of rock
 and miles of burnt forests standing in gray scratches
 like the admirable scriptures made on stones by
 stones--
 and these regions now have little to say for themselves
 except in the thousands of light song-sparrow songs
 floating upward
 freely, dispassionately, through the mist, and meshing
 in brown-wet, fine, torn fish-nets. (CP 67-8)

The deserted look of this place seems to render it devoid of
 meaning; the possibility of any hidden meaning beyond the
 visible horizon is doubtful though not refuted. The signs
 of destruction and domestication in nature mark the passage
 of time and change. The color and condition of the fish-
 nets suggest the decline in the fishing industry and the
 waning of a once prosperous community. The speaker's
 assertion that "these regions now have little to say for
 themselves" implies a time in the past when they witnessed a

more prosperous way of life.

However, the abandoned look of these regions is altered and its stillness gives way to motion and activity when a bus appears on the seemingly abandoned road. With its appearance, the life of the community moves to the foreground; another time-pattern of local people's life is introduced into the speaker's observation with a quicker tempo created by the sense of the bus's movement and people's everyday activities.

A small bus comes along, in up-and-down rushes,
 packed with people, even to its step.
 (On weekdays with groceries, spare automobile parts,
 and pump parts,
 but today only two preachers extra, one carrying his
 frock coat on a hanger.)
 It passes the closed roadside stand, the closed
 schoolhouse,
 where today no flag is flying
 from the rough-adzed pole topped with a white china
 doorknob.
 It stops, and a man carrying a baby gets off,
 climbs over a stile, and goes down through a small
 steep meadow,
 which establishes its poverty in a snowfall of daisies,
 to his invisible house beside the water. (CP 68)

Following the desolate scenes of the landscape, ordinary details such as a small bus "packed with people, even to its step," a preacher "carrying his frock coat on a hanger," and "a man carrying a baby," seem particularly pleasant and even comforting. These sights provide reassurance of the continuity of life and its meaningfulness despite the decline in the community's prosperity.

As the images of the community's life recede again into the background, the description shifts from particulars back to a general depiction of the whole area.

The birds keep on singing, a calf bawls, the bus
 starts.
 The thin mist follows
 the white mutations of its dream;
 an ancient chill is rippling the dark brooks. (CP 68)

These closing lines, with their simple present tense and with a return to the earlier panoramic views, at once enhance and leave behind a different time-pattern with a quicker tempo created by the momentary motion and activities just described. Now the speaker's observation, following the activities of the local community life, communicates a sense of continuity in both the natural and human worlds while life goes on in its quiet quotidian routines. It seems that here Bishop is recreating that sense of perpetual stillness produced by the effect of the migrating birds, which left the sky "somehow emptied and stilled, slowly assuming its usual coloring and faraway look" ("Andromedas" 103). Similarly, after the brief appearance of the bus, with its passengers and signs of their community life observed with close-up details, the landscape of Cape Breton resumes its usual desolate and "faraway look" at the end.

Bishop attempts something further in "At the Fishhouses" by setting up a complex moving time-pattern

which supports the central idea of the poem. One of the strategies she employs is bringing the past into the present without allowing "time-feeling" to be suspended and become inactive "thought-time." "In *Pilgrimage*," Bishop writes, "we are in action. There are recollections, but they come as we move from the very mental pose that brought them into the next" ("Andromedas" 110). The forward going time-pattern is occasionally intersected by time past through the character's recollections, but it is not stopped. Bishop notes that "Although the book [Dorothy Richardson's *Pilgrimage*] is always going forward, more or less in the day-after-day way, Miriam occasionally, finding herself in a strategic situation for thought, goes back, and throwing a sort of lasso around the more recent past, draws it up to the present" ("Andromedas" 112). Even though the form of "At the Fishhouses" does not allow Bishop as much space as prose would, she still manages to create a time-sense similar to Richardson's by bringing the past through recollection into the present, forward-moving process of observation.

"At the Fishhouses" begins with a depiction of an old fisherman mending a net on a cold evening. The sights in his surroundings bear the marks of time past.

The big fish tubs are completely lined
with layers of beautiful herring scales
and the wheelbarrows are similarly plastered

with creamy iridescent coats of mail,
 with small iridescent flies crawling on them.
 Up on the little slope behind the houses,
 set in the sparse bright sprinkle of grass,
 is an ancient wooden capstan,
 cracked, with two long bleached handles
 and some melancholy stains, like dried blood,
 where the ironwork has rusted.
 The old man accepts a Lucky Strike.
 He was a friend of my grandfather.
 We talk of the decline in the population
 and of codfish and herring
 while he waits for a herring boat to come in.
 There are sequins on his vest and on his thumb.
 He has scraped the scales, the principal beauty,
 from unnumbered fish with that black old knife,
 the blade of which is almost worn away. (CP 64-5)

Signs of decay, endurance, and hardship are as noticeable in the appearance of the old man as in his surroundings. The speaker's connection to the setting is implied in the shared moment when the speaker talks and smokes with the old man who used to be "a friend of my grandfather." As in "Cape Breton," a sense of time past and a sense of "present time, passing" are created in these detailed descriptions which also serve to tell, at least in part, the story of this place, the old man, and the fishing community. Life here continues in its daily rounds despite the decline in the population: "We talk of the decline in the population / and the codfish and herring / while he waits for a herring boat to come in." With this digression from the speaker's observation, a different time-pattern is introduced into the forward-moving time-pattern of the poem, causing it to halt for a moment. Another time-pattern, that of the old man and

the fishing community, is presented in counterpoint to that of the speaker.

Following a transitional six-line section, describing the ramp descending into the water, the speaker's observation moves from land to sea. Here again, the present moment is linked to the speaker's past experience through associations and memory. This narrative digression suggests a stretch of time back to the past, which is pulled up to the present time of observation and connected to the time ahead by the speaker's meditation.

Cold dark deep and absolutely clear,
 element bearable to no mortal,
 to fish and to seals ... One seal particularly
 I have seen here evening after evening.
 He was curious about me. He was interested in music;
 like me a believer in total immersion,
 so I used to sing him Baptist hymns.
 I also sang "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God."

.....
 The water seems suspended
 above the rounded gray and blue-gray stones.
 I have seen it over and over, the same sea, the same,
 slightly, indifferently swinging above the stones,
 icily free above the stones,
 above the stones and then the world. (CP 65)

Here the infinite sameness of the sea is juxtaposed to the changes in the lives of the fishing village and in the speaker's life. With the association of memories and the description of the present moment, the speaker comes to a recognition of the transient, historical nature of things and knowledge, which is identified with the feel, taste, and

fluidity of the icy sea water.

If you should dip your hand in,
 your wrist would ache immediately,
 your bones would begin to ache and your hand would burn

as if the water were a transmutation of fire
 that feeds on stones and burns with a dark gray flame.
 If you tasted it, it would first taste bitter,
 then briny, then surely burn your tongue.
 It is like what we imagine knowledge to be:
 dark, salt, clear, moving, utterly free,
 drawn from the cold hard mouth
 of the world, derived from the rocky breasts
 forever, flowing and drawn, and since
 our knowledge is historical, flowing, and flown.
 (CP 65-66)

Revelation results from the flux of experience moving in and out of present and past through images and memories.

Bishop's collage method provides her with the mass of visual material and freedom of open passage between past and present, out of which a complex time-pattern is set up and maintained. With changes in life suggested in the previous meditative-narrative descriptions, the flux of the sea naturally leads to the notion that "our knowledge is historical, flowing, and flown."

Bishop further illustrates the historicity of knowledge and a more encompassing and more closely related relationship between past and present in "Over 2,000 Illustrations and a Complete Concordance" by using new techniques developed from her ideas of "experience-time"-- techniques in part generated by her dissatisfaction with

other writers' treatment of time that she discusses in "Dimensions for a Novel." For Bishop, the narrative of a literary work should reflect the sense of constant readjustment of perception colored by experience with the passage of time. "If I try to think of Friday I cannot recreate Friday pure and simple, exactly as it was," she observes. "It has been changed for me by the intervening Saturday." One's impression of things seen in the past will always change. Bishop emphasizes that "it is impossible to look at the visitor [of Friday] with the eyes of Friday" after Friday ("Dimensions" 97). But she finds this ever-changing process of perception with the passage of time not quite accurately captured in James Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, as she says in "Dimensions For A Novel":

I know of no novel which has ever, say, in giving a life history, managed to blur for the reader the childhood of the hero as it would be when he reaches fifty. Joyce's 'moo-cow' is blurred, but blurred at the age at which he beheld it; when the reader reaches the end of the book he is still in possession of, as of a hard fact, Stephen's earliest days. (98)

In "Over 2,000 Illustrations and a Complete Concordance," Bishop attempts to make a clear childhood perception of the Nativity scene blurred both for her adult speaker and the reader through descriptions of experience over time.³

While describing the speaker's personal experience in

"Over 2,000 Illustrations and a Complete Concordance," Bishop depicts the world in its process of historical change. The poem is divided into three parts, the first describing the engraved illustrations in an old Bible, the second depicting scenes from the speaker's travels around the world, and the third returning to the Bible. It begins with the speaker's disenchantment with tourist travels, and quickly turns to descriptions of engravings in the Bible.

Thus should have been our travels:
 serious, engravable.
 The Seven Wonders of the World are tired
 and a touch familiar, but the other scenes,
 innumerable, though equally sad and still,
 are foreign. Often the squatting Arab,
 or group of Arabs, plotting, probably,
 against our Christian Empire,
 while one apart, with outstretched arm and hand
 points to the Tomb, the pit, the Sepulcher.
 The branches of the date-palms look like files.
 The cobbled courtyard, where the Well is dry,
 is like a diagram, the brickwork conduits
 are vast and obvious, the human figure
 far gone in history or theology,
 gone with its camel or its faithful horse.

 The eye drops, weighted, through the lines
 the burin made, the lines that move apart
 like ripples above sand,
 dispersing storms, God's spreading fingerprint,
 and painfully, finally, that ignite
 in watery prismatic white-and-blue. (CP 57)

Although these pictures are described as artificially stiff and imperfect, they convey pious solemnity infused with a prevailing sense of sacred awe, which renders these scenes "foreign" to us, "though equally sad and still" as "The

Seven Wonders of the World" which have become "a touch familiar." By comparing the look of fingerprint-like lines made by the burin in all the engravings to "God's spreading fingerprint," Bishop deftly implies the unifying connections of these engraved illustrations of Christian beliefs and values.

The second part of the poem shifts from the illustrations in the Bible and travel books to actual scenes encountered on the speaker's travels around the world. In contrast to the austere unity of meanings and centrality of morals in the biblical engravings, these numerous scenes and activities from the travels appear to be banal and meaningless. Everything seems to be fragmentary and unconnected to anything else.

Entering the Narrows at St. Johns⁴
 the touching bleat of goats reached to the ship.

 And at St. Peter's the wind blew and the sun shone
 madly.
 Rapidly, purposefully, the Collegians marched in lines,
 crisscrossing the great square with black, like ants.
 In Mexico the dead man lay
 in a blue arcade; the dead volcanoes
 glistened like Easter lilies.
 The jukebox went on playing "Ay, Jalisco!"

 The Englishwoman poured tea, informing us
 that the Duchess was going to have a baby.
 And in the brothels of Marrakesh
 the little pockmarked prostitutes
 balanced their tea-trays on their heads
 and did their belly-dances; flung themselves
 naked and giggling against our knees,
 asking for cigarettes. It was somewhere near there
 I saw what frightened me most of all:

A holy grave, not looking particularly holy,
 one of a group under a keyhole-arched stone baldaquin
 open to every wind from the pink desert.
 An open, gritty, marble trough, carved solid
 with exhortation, yellowed
 as scattered cattle-teeth;
 half-filled with dust, not even the dust
 of the poor prophet paynim who once lay there.
 In a smart burnoose Khadour looked on amused.
 (CP 57-58)

These carefully juxtaposed scenes from the travels give a disturbing sense of incoherence, incongruity, and mundane familiarity. Bishop's collage method of presentation here enables her to describe her memories of travels in a manner and rhythm close to the way things and people usually appear in memories. Bishop describes the sense of "proportion natural to things that happen to us" and the sense of how things in the past look to us when they occur "in our time-pattern" in her essay "Time's Andromedas":

It is like standing in a snowstorm and looking back through the minute vistas of flakes. Those near at hand seem to be coming down slowly, purposefully, those just a few feet away drift fast and carelessly, and the further through the storm you look the faster the flakes seem to fall, until away back at the end of vision there is nothing but a rapid, flickering white mist. (113)

This impression of things of the past being recalled in the present is enhanced by "a more vivace tempo" than that of "our own" (113). In "Over 2,000 Illustrations" the assemblage of unconnected images also reveals an attempt to associate personal experience with its larger social and

cultural contexts.

As the descriptions of the travel scenes finally focus on "A holy grave, not looking particularly holy," their allusions to the biblical engravings become explicit. Time has not only annihilated the physical existence of the holy, but also corroded religious beliefs and values. Unlike the speaker who is surprised and disturbed at the empty, unholy-looking holy grave, the Arab guide is indifferent and even amused. His indifference is also a contrast to the secretive conspiracy of the "plotting" Arabs described in the first part of the poem.

After experiencing the disconnectedness in the world on her travels, especially the frightening experience of visiting the holy grave, the speaker urges herself to open the Bible again as if to reassure herself of her earlier sense of the holy and the world illustrated in the Bible.

Everything only connected by "and" and "and."
 Open the book. (The gilt rubs off the edges
 of the pages and pollinates the fingertips.)
 Open the heavy book. Why couldn't we have seen
 this old Nativity while we were at it?
 --the dark ajar, the rocks breaking with light,
 an undisturbed, unbreathing flame,
 colorless, sparkless, freely fed on straw,
 and, lulled within, a family with pets,
 --and looked and looked our infant sight away.
 (CP 58-59)

The speaker's disconcerting experience of travels renders the scene of "this old Nativity" in the Bible, unvisited in

her travels, particularly "undisturbed" and detached from the real world. The references to the Bible as "the heavy book," and the Nativity as "a family with pets," indicate the speaker's memory of looking at the Nativity picture in the Bible as a child. In her jacket blurb for Robert Lowell's *Life Studies* (1959), Bishop wrote: "As a child, I used to look at my grandfather's Bible under a powerful reading-glass."⁵ Indications of the speaker's childhood perception of the Nativity are important for Bishop to demonstrate that past perception cannot be sustained unaltered.

The closing line is crucial in showing Bishop's idea, expressed in "Dimensions for A Novel," that "each present moment reaches immediately and directly the past moments, changing them both" (98). Even though the speaker is looking at "this Old Nativity" as she used to in childhood, for the adult speaker it can no longer be the same as it appeared then. The repetition of the word "look" in the last line causes the reader to pause while putting emphasis on the action of looking so that the consequence of this action is enhanced. The prolonged process of looking here seems also to suggest some change taking place in both the beholder and the scene beheld. Bishop's structural arrangement of the closing line connects it to the speaker's question--"Why couldn't we have seen / this old Nativity

while we were at it?" The colloquial phrase--"while we were at it"--refers to our visit in the holy land as tourists with a suggestion of our lack of the kind of religious piety which once motivated pilgrims to the same place, thus relating the looking away of "our infant sight" to the experience of travels and the changes in the world.

The complex meaning of the closing line has been noted by critics.⁶ John Ashbery writes: "In the almost twenty years since I first read this poem I have been unable to exhaust the ambiguities of the last line, and I am also convinced that it somehow contains the clue to Elizabeth Bishop's poetry" ("Second Presentation" 11). It seems that this clue lies in Bishop's notion of "experience-time," which she attempts to illustrate by showing how the Nativity scene is colored by the speaker's childhood memory of it, and how the speaker no longer perceives it in the same way as she used to, even though she still retains this "sight" after her experience of travels. As Bishop argues in "Dimensions for a Novel": "A symbol might remain the same for a lifetime, but surely its implications shift from one thing to another, come and go, always within relation to that particular tone of the present which called it forth" (98). In the poem, the speaker's urge to open the Bible and behold the Nativity again is called forth by the present moment after travels around the world. The plural pronoun

"our" employed at the end indicates that these historically conditioned meanings and their changes, though perceived through an individual's eyes, are more than personal. The moment of beholding the Nativity at the end of the poem encompasses the changes taking place both in the speaker and in the world. "A constant process of adjustment is going on about the past," Bishop contends, and "every ingredient dropped into it from the present must affect the whole" ("Dimensions" 97).

Like "Cape Breton" and "At the Fishhouses," "Over 2,000 Illustrations and a Complete Concordance" shows that the changing world and personal memories have become a rich source of material for Bishop's artistic creativity. As Bakhtin has argued, "the conception of the world as an experience" rather than as "the same, fundamentally immobile and ready-made, given," "presented a different side of the world to man," and "opened up for the novel new and realistically productive points for viewing the world" (SG 23). The poem's title, "Over 2,000 Illustrations and a Complete Concordance," indicates that the numerous scenes from the Bible, the travel books (about the "Seven Wonders"), and the speaker's travels around the world, like the engraved illustrations and concordance of the old Bible, are illustrations of the world.⁷ The differences between the engraved illustrations in the Bible and the speaker's

descriptions of things and people encountered on her travels reveal the changes that have taken place in the world and the speaker alike. These changes demonstrate that "our knowledge is historical, flowing and flown" with experience through time.

Another important turning point for Bishop's poetry is shown in her interest in the relationships between people in a given social condition--one of the major thematic concerns of *A Cold Spring* and of her later poems. Her exploration of the complicated and ambivalent relationships between people in the social world is another important aspect of her attempt to avoid "triviality" in her poems, and to write a "more serious" poetry."⁸

2.2. "More Directly on Real People"

Bishop's poems in *A Cold Spring* are on the whole more personal and at the same time more directly related to the everyday world and people than those in her first book--a direction anticipated in the Southern poems that close *North & South*, such as "Florida," "Jerónimo's House," "The Fish," and "Cootchie" which are directly related to Bishop's life experience in Key West, Florida, where she lived between 1938 and 1947. The everyday life and people in the social world of Key West have become a new source of subject matter for Bishop's poetry. Bakhtin has emphasized the impact of the artist's life and world on his or her art. He points out that the dialogic nature of life and values "determines the work of art as a living event" rather than "as a thing--an object of purely theoretical cognition devoid of the validity or force of an event, devoid of any weight with respect to value" (AA 189). He argues that "it is only in the event of being that any kind of creation whatsoever can have weight, can be serious, significant, and responsible" (AA 190). Bishop attempts to write "more serious" poems by directly confronting ethical questions and racial relationships through people's actual lives rather than through intertextual dialogues or symbolic images as she did in her early poems such as "Casabianca," "Roosters," and "Song IV" of "Songs for a Colored Singer."

This involvement of her poems with the everyday world and people is entirely intentional. Applying for a Guggenheim fellowship in October 1946, the year *North & South* was published and won the Houghton Mifflin Fellowship Award, Bishop made clear that her next project "was to be *Faustina*, a book 'more serious than N & S ... & more unified in style. Also the emphasis in the work I have done so far seems to be more directly on real people who have deeply interested me'" (Millier *Life* 188). "*Faustina*" eventually became an important poem, "*Faustina, or Rock Roses*," in which Bishop explores the social and racial relationships between a white employer and a black employee. Although quite a few poems in *A Cold Spring* are about love, the inter-personal relationships between people of different social positions and cultural backgrounds remain a central concern for the rest of Bishop's career.⁹

When she lived in Key West, Bishop had close contact with some African Americans and learned about their experience of racism. This experience has a profound influence on her and her poems. In a letter of 1965 written from Brazil, Lorrie Goldenshon notes, Bishop rebuked her favourite aunt, Grace Bulmer Bower, for following white southern opinion about Martin Luther King. In the same letter, Bishop told her aunt about the brutality and injustice suffered by African Americans in Key West:

Don't forget I did live in the south--My dear old laundress's (black) son was murdered by the Key West police because one of them wanted his wife.--Everyone knew this and nothing was done about it. The laundress was given her son's body in a coffin, straight from jail--She said "I looked at his arm--Miss Elizabeth,-- it wasn't an arm anymore. . . . (13 March 1965 qtd. in Goldenshon 77)

Bishop's sympathy for African Americans is shown in her southern poems such as "Songs for a Colored Singer" and "Cootchie" in *North & South*. "Cootchie" examines the relationship between a black maid and her white mistress.

Bishop came to know Cootchie while living in Key West. The poem first appeared in the September/October 1941 issue of *Partisan Review*. More than a year before its publication, Bishop enclosed its manuscript in a letter to Marianne Moore, and said "Maybe you will remember Cootchie. I don't know what Miss Lula is going to do without her. She had lived with her 35 years" (24 February 1940, L 88). In her poem, Bishop reveals not only Miss Lula's dependence on Cootchie, but also the irony of the inequality in their life-long relationship.¹⁰

Cootchie, Miss Lula's servant, lies in marl,
 black into white she went
 below the surface of the coral-reef.
 Her life was spent
 in caring for Miss Lula, who is deaf,
 eating her dinner off the kitchen sink
 while Lula ate hers off the kitchen table.
 The skies were egg-white for the funeral
 and the faces sable. (CP 46)

The relationship between Cootchie and Lula is presented from a third person's point of view. Since Cootchie is dead and Lula is deaf, how each felt about the other remains unknown, except for their inequality deftly hinted at in the details about where each of them ate dinner. The title of "Miss" which accompanies only Lula's name, not Cootchie's, further suggests the nature of their master and servant relationship. Bishop also reveals Cootchie's identity and the racial division between her and her employer in other subtle details by indirectly referring to the color of her skin ("black into white she went") and that of the mourners at her funeral ("the faces sable").

The second part of the poem begins with how Miss Lula burns candles shaped like roses in remembrance of the dead. Ironically, the number of these wax roses that "mark Miss Lula's losses" does not seem to include one for Cootchie. These candles indicate that Miss Lula is alone, with no one to make her understand that she has also lost Cootchie for good. But the speaker's concern about Lula's helpless situation and her need for someone to take care of her will seem "trivial" when "the lighthouse" will "discover Cootchie's grave" while searching for another servant to replace Cootchie for Miss Lula (CP 46). With the personified image of the lighthouse, Bishop brings two different perspectives to bear on the two different lives of

Miss Lula and Cootchie. By closing the poem with Cootchie's death and the sea's proffering of waves for Cootchie's grave, Bishop shifts the focus on Miss Lula's life in the second part to indirectly emphasize the fact that Cootchie's "life was spent / in caring for Miss Lula," and "eating her dinner off the kitchen sink / while Lula ate hers off the kitchen table."

Bishop continues to explore the relationship between blacks and whites with immediacy and poignancy in "Faustina, or Rock Roses" in *A Cold Spring*. The clarity of the social and racial inequality in Lula and Cootchie's relationship is replaced by one of a more elusive and complicated nature in "Faustina, or Rock Roses."¹¹ This poem, according to Brett Millier, is based on Bishop's selection "among many facts and anecdotes about the black Cuban woman, a familiar figure in Key West in the 1940s, and focuses on a single visit she made to Faustina at work, caring for an elderly white woman in her home" (*Life* 188-9). The first six stanzas of the poem are devoted to details of the house and the surroundings of the sick bed-ridden woman, who is holding "the pallid palm-leaf fan" which she "cannot wield." The visitor in the house senses something hidden beneath the surface and is "embarrassed" by the false façade. But just what is withheld seems impenetrable.

The visitor is embarrassed

not by pain nor age
 nor even nakedness,
 though perhaps by its reverse.
 By and by the whisper
 says, "Faustina, Faustina..."
 "¡ Vengo, señora!"

On bare scraping feet
 Faustina nears the bed.
 She exhibits the talcum powder,
 the pills, the cans of "cream,"
 the white bowl of farina,
 requesting for herself
 a little *coñac*;

complaining of, explaining,
 the terms of her employment.
 She bends above the other.
 Her sinister kind face
 presents a cruel black
 coincident conundrum.
 Oh, is it

freedom at last, a lifelong
 dream of time and silence,
 dream of protection and rest?
 Or is it the very worst,
 the unimaginable nightmare
 that never before dared last
 more than a second? (CP 73-74)

Bishop's description reveals the subtle relationship between the mistress and her maid, who are mutually dependent for practical reasons. Being a helpless invalid, the white woman relies completely on Faustina, whose complaint about "the terms of her employment" reveal her position as a hired nurse. Faustina's assertiveness and emotional detachment from the sick woman constitute a form of resistance against her employer's domination over her. This emotional detachment seems to be the result of class division and

racial division and discrimination. Following Faustina's complaint, the speaker's observation of the "cruel black / coincident conundrum" which Faustina's "sinister kind face" creates when she bends over the sick woman, seems to imply the ambivalent nature of Faustina's presence for the sick white woman. In her present condition, the invalid is dependent on Faustina, who, with her assertiveness and ease, appears to occupy the dominant position in their relationship even though she is employed by the white woman. The "cruel black / coincident conundrum" seems to suggest the sick woman's situation of being fettered by her physical condition in her relationship with Faustina. Following this "conundrum," the wistful question about death suggests the lack of "freedom," "silence," "protection and rest" in the sick woman's life. But this condition seems equally applicable to Faustina, who is in the dependent position of a servant to a white woman. As an outsider, the speaker perceives the "conundrum" in this relationship, but she cannot solve it.

The plural pronoun in the following stanza indicates that the questions concern more than Faustina and the sick white woman.

The acuteness of the question
 forks instantly and starts
 a snake-tongue flickering;
 blurs further, blunts, softens,
 separates, falls, our problems

becoming helplessly
proliferative.

There is no way of telling.
The eyes say only either.
At last the visitor rises,
awkwardly proffers her bunch
of rust-perforated roses
and wonders oh, whence come
all the petals. (CP 74)

The plural possessive pronoun for "problems" suggests that the unanswered question is directed at the problematic racial relationship in America and at all interpersonal relationships based on mutual need and embedded in conflicts.

Bishop's depiction of this ambivalent relationship avoids simplification of racial and class relationships. As Bakhtin says of any artistic creation, her artistic depiction in this poem is shaped by the values and events of the particular world. Her exploration and presentation of the problems in racial and class relationships give her art life, weight, and significance. In her review of Bishop's *Complete Poems, 1927-1979*, Adrienne Rich praises Bishop's treatment of the subject in this poem: "I cannot think of another poem by a white woman, until some feminist poetry of the last few years, in which the servant-mistress dynamic between Black and white women has received unsentimental attention" (132). The visitor's position as an outsider-observer results in an uncertainty about what actually lies

beneath appearances. Bishop's presentation of her speaker's situatedness in a specific, confined point of view reflects her dialogic artistic position in regard to her subject matter and characters. Consequently, expression of their complexity and different points of view become possible in this and other poems.

A Cold Spring shows Bishop's maturity as a poet who has developed her own distinctive style and her descriptive-narrative techniques in exploring and expressing her axiological and aesthetic concerns. Her poems in this book reveal Bishop's endeavor to improve and renew her art and to make it "more serious" by keeping it in touch with issues in people's everyday life. However, some critics find that the visual descriptions in *A Cold Spring* lack complexity and depth. John Ashbery says that even though this volume contains "the marvellous 'Over 2000 Illustrations'," he "felt slightly disappointed." Among other things, Ashbery finds that several poems in this book "seemed content with picture-making" ("The Complete Poems" 203).¹² Edwin Honig also finds a similar quality in Bishop's descriptions, which "more often, like good camera-eye realism . . . achieve a tense but tidy little vignette." Honig contends that Bishop's "failure is one of setting carefully planned structures in the sands of irrelevance and inconsequence, and so the craft, the true maker's skill she possesses, goes

wanting" (116-17). Although these criticisms do not fully recognize what Bishop is trying to achieve in her descriptions, they point out "the awful faults" Bishop herself was aware of.¹³ After reading Honig's review, Bishop wrote to May Swenson: "I'm relieved that I don't mind [Mr. Honig] a bit! I even agree with his general thesis, I think--but he didn't quote the disastrous things he could have, easily, to prove it" (27 January 1956, L 315).

In her next book, *Questions of Travel* (1965), Bishop overcomes the weakness of merely "picture-making" descriptions, and succeeds in making her visual details more relevant to the social and historical contexts of her poems. This illustrates Bakhtin's contention that the writer's "anticipation" of the reader's "reply" and "objection" actually shape the structure and manner of the writer's work. Bakhtin argues that "Every literary discourse more or less sharply senses its own listener, reader, critic, and reflects in itself their anticipated objections, evaluations, points of view" (*PDP* 196). In her next book, Bishop makes further efforts to produce "more serious" poems. She explores more possibilities of descriptive-meditative poems in performing the function of narrative. Her continual interest in people's relationships and her search for techniques to portray them lead to her

achievement of vivid depictions and subtle revelations of complicated characters. The beautiful landscape and socially, culturally diverse world of Brazil offers Bishop a rich source for her third book of poetry. Writing from Brazil to Paul Brooks, editor-in-chief at Houghton Mifflin, Bishop stated that "since I have moved to the other side of the Equator and have started a lot of quite different things, the work I am doing right now will be a new departure and will not go with these poems [for *A Cold Spring*] very well" (2 January 1953, L 253). Bishop's third book of poetry is "a new departure" in more ways than one.

Notes to Chapter Two

1. Jane Dewey was the philosopher John Dewey's daughter, whom Bishop came to know while living in Key West.

2. During one of her stays at Jane Dewey's farm, Bishop wrote to Joseph and U. T. Summers: "I saw a calf born on the neighboring hillside the other day--and in ten minutes it was on its feet, and in an hour taking little jumps, up and down" (30 April 1951, L 220).

3. In his article "Elizabeth Bishop and the Story of Postmodernism," James Longenbach points out that Bishop's "Dimensions for a Novel" shows the influence of T. S. Eliot's "Tradition and the Individual Talent," which Bishop read "as a theory of hermeneutic indeterminacy" (475). Longenbach argues that "Bishop's career demonstrates not so much a development as an unfolding of the possibilities inherent in positions she articulated" in her two college essays "Dimensions for a Novel," and "Gerard Manley Hopkins: Notes on Timing in His Poetry." "And those possibilities" Longenbach says, "continued to unfold, dramatically so, in poems like 'Over 2,000 Illustrations and a Complete Concordance,' written a decade after the essays" (477). Longenbach notes: "To say, borrowing again the words of Bishop's discussion of Eliot, that 'Over 2,000 Illustrations' reveals the 'perpetually changing integration of what has been written with what is being written' is to recognize that the writing of this poem addresses not only itself but the history of western culture" (481). Thus, Longenbach argues that "Bishop's work grows out of Eliot's." This sweeping statement is incomplete because Bishop's work grows out of many more sources than that of Eliot. The relationship between Bishop's work and those of others is a creative dialogic interaction rather than a single line of literary lineage.

4. In an interview, Bishop points out that a footnote in an anthology mistakenly identifies "the Narrows of St. Johns" as "an island in the Caribbean, when it's St John's, Newfoundland." But Bishop did not explain why she did not use the apostrophe in her poem. See George Starbuck, "'The Work!': A Conversation with Elizabeth Bishop," in Schwartz and Estess, 318.

5. See Bishop, "On *Life Studies* by Robert Lowell," in Schwartz and Estess, 285.

6. The compact implications in the last part of this poem have given rise to various interpretations. David Kalstone focuses on the poet's yearning for the family she was deprived of. "All this is witnessed with a swoon of desire, an infant's undistinguishing desire and envy, an implied dimming of sight, and, if 'infant' keeps its Latin root (Bishop had originally written 'silent'), speechlessness" (BAP 130). Bonnie Costello, on the other hand, says that Bishop "seems, indeed, to identify herself, through illusion, with the infant in the image." Costello believes that "Bishop longs for a condition of awareness equivalent to the scene, an 'infant sight' to match the scene of infancy." However, "'Away,' as in Keats," Costello points out, "signals the end of illusion" (137). Differing from both Kalstone and Costello, Travisano argues that despite the fact suggested by the poem that "a determination to find permanence and seriousness on one's secular pilgrimage is doomed to frustration . . . , one can still devote oneself to the freshness of 'infant sight.' To see with infant sight is not to return to childhood, but, far more difficult, to see, through the eyes of experience, with a child's curiosity and wonder" (121). The speaker's view of the nativity as "a family with pets" seems to support Kalstone's discussion of Bishop's "desire and envy" for the warmth and security of a family. However, Bishop attempts to express something further than her personal longing in this poem. And her concept of "experience-time" and the poem itself as a whole do not seem to support Travisano's claim that the "freshness of 'infant sight'" and "a child's curiosity and wonder" are untinted and unchanged by experience.

7. Bishop originally intended to entitle her second book, "Concordance," "starting off with a poem called 'Over 2,000 Illustrations and a Complete Concordance,'" she told Robert Lowell in a letter of 11 July 1951 (L 222). About a month later, she wrote to Lowell again about her ideas on this matter: "I had my doubts [about *Concordance* for the title] but yesterday morning, just as I was leaving the hotel in Halifax, I picked up the Gideon Bible and thought I'd make one of those test samplings, you know. My finger came right down on the concordance column, so I felt immensely cheered" (19 August 1951, L 223). Although Bishop eventually replaced *Concordance* with *A Cold Spring*, her mention of "the Gideon Bible" further indicates that the title, "Over 2,000 Illustrations and a Complete Concordance," echoes a subtitle once commonly found in such a Bible.

8. Writing to Ferris Greenslet, general manager at Houghton Mifflin, Bishop mentioned that *The New Yorker* offered her a "first reading" contract for both her prose and poetry at 25¢ above their usual payment rate. Although Bishop accepted it, she expressed some concerns to Greenslet: "I doubt that they would actually be interested in any of the more serious poetry I have in mind for the coming year" (28 November 1946, L 142). To portray "real" people in their social relationships is part of Bishop's effort to write "more serious poetry."

9. For a perceptive discussion of the love poems in *A Cold Spring*, including other poems as "Bishop's one sustained attempt at a passionately personal kind of lyric" (96), see Alan Williamson, "A Cold Spring: The Poet of Feeling," in Schwartz and Estess, 96-108.

10. Although "Cootchie" is collected in *North & South*, my discussion of it in this chapter is meant to connect its thematic concern to that of "Faustina, or Rock Roses" collected in *A Cold Spring*.

11. The "roses" which the visitor proffers in this poem are probably rock roses of a pale pink color, which Bishop had in her garden when she lived in Key West. Both Faustina and rock roses were part of Bishop's life experience in Key West. This may partly explain the poem's title, "Faustina, or Rock Roses." Another possible explanation for rock roses being the subtitle of the poem may be found in Bishop's association of rock roses with the female body. In a draft of Bishop's unpublished poem, "Vague Poem (Vaguely Love Poem)," rock roses are connected to the beauty of the female body and eroticism. The manuscripts of this poem are housed at Special Collections, Vassar College Library. For discussions of this poem see Costello, *Elizabeth Bishop: Questions of Mastery*, 73-74, and Goldensohn, *Elizabeth Bishop: The Biography of a Poetry*, 71-73.

12. The other fault Ashbery finds with *A Cold Spring* is that in several poems "the poet's life threatened to intrude on the poetry in a way that didn't suit it." See Ashbery, "The Complete Poems," in Schwartz and Estess, 201. Ashbery's review of Bishop's *The Complete Poems* first appeared in *New York Times Book Review* (1 June 1969) 8, 25.

13. In her letter to a friend, Pearl Kazin, Bishop said that a friend told her that the reviewer of *Partisan Review* [Edwin Honig] "attacks me." "I've never minded criticism a bit, strange to say," Bishop added, "but what if this reviewer (I haven't seen it yet) says the TRUTH?--does point

out all the awful faults I know are there all right?" (26
January 1956, L 314).

CHAPTER THREE: *Questions of Travel* (1965)

3.1. "See the Sun the Other Way Around"

What stands out about Elizabeth Bishop's third book of poetry, *Questions of Travel* (1965), is the rich variety of her subject matter and its close connection to its specific social, cultural, and historical contexts. This connection contributes to Bishop's further development in narrative art and portrayal of characters in her poems--two technical aspects she had already begun to explore in *A Cold Spring*. Like Bishop's description of Robert Lowell's poems in *Life Studies*, these poems in *Questions of Travel* are "as big as life and as alive, and rainbow-edged."¹ When the book appeared in 1965, Bishop had lived in Brazil for about fourteen years. Her direct encounter with another culture changed her preconceived ideas about "'underdeveloped' countries," broadened her subject matter and increased her creative possibilities.

Bishop's life in Brazil had a lasting impact on her career. She left New York on November 10, 1951 on board the *SS Bowplate* for a trip around South America. She had planned to go south along the east coast, through the Straits of Magellan and up the west coast. On November 30, she arrived in Rio de Janeiro to visit some friends she had made in New York, including Lota de Macedo Soares. Bishop missed her freighter for Buenos Aires on January 26 after

falling ill with a serious allergic reaction to the cashew fruit; Soares cared for her during her recuperation. This led to their fifteen-year long relationship and Bishop's attachment to life in Brazil where she was to live with Soares throughout those fifteen years. Lota De Macedo Soares belonged to Brazil's small landowning upper class, was well-educated, spoke French and English as well as Portuguese, and was deeply involved in Brazilian politics. Bishop's relationship with Soares contributed greatly to her knowledge of Brazilian life and culture. She published her translation from the Portuguese of *The Diary of "Helena Morley"* in 1957, and her translations of Brazilian poems and short stories appeared in American literary magazines in 1964 and 1965.² She was also the author of the text for an illustrated book, *Brazil* (1962), one of a Life World Library series. The Brazilian government awarded Bishop the Order of Rio Branco in 1971 for her contributions to Brazilian culture and literature.

The large number of her Brazil poems and their richness indicate that Bishop's encounter with Brazilian culture is an important source and shaping force for her literary creativity. Bakhtin has called on literary scholarship to direct its attention to the interconnections between literature and culture. "Literature is an inseparable part of culture," Bakhtin maintains, "and it cannot be understood

outside the total context of the entire culture of a given epoch." He emphasizes that "the most intense and productive life of culture takes place on the boundaries of its individual areas and not in places where these areas have become enclosed in their own specificity" (SG 2). Living in Brazil, Bishop occupies a unique outsiders' position by virtue of being an American. This position gives her the advantage of what Bakhtin calls "outsideness," which is necessary for "creative understanding." Bakhtin contends:

In the realm of culture, outsideness is a most powerful factor in understanding. It is only in the eyes of another culture that foreign culture reveals itself fully and profoundly. . . . A meaning only reveals its depths once it has encountered and come into contact with another foreign meaning: they engage in a kind of dialogue, which surmounts the closedness and one-sidedness of these particular meanings, these cultures. (SG 7)

Bishop's many years of life in Brazil enabled her to escape cultural "closedness and one-sidedness." Her direct contact with Brazilian people, culture, and Latin American literature provided her with compelling characters and diverse materials for her poems.

Questions of Travel is divided into two parts, the first subtitled "Brazil" and the second "Elsewhere." In both, Bishop portrays different points of view from culturally, socially, or historically confined positions by using what Bakhtin calls "linguistic points of view" to

express her speakers' or characters' values and attitudes. Dramatization of character and the integration of narrative art with descriptive details are a major technical development in this book. In her investigations of the possibilities of descriptive narrative in various forms, Bishop explores the complexity and contradictions of her speaking subject and the relationships between people in a given society. One of Bishop's breakthroughs in *Questions of Travel* is recognized by David Kalstone, who sees the book "not so much as an indication of what has happened in American verse--its achieved grasp of conversational and colloquial idiom--but as something of a provocation for poets trying to find new ways of registering character in poetry" ("All Eye" 310). Similarly laudatory, John Ashbery praises Bishop's accomplishment by saying that *Questions of Travel* "completely erased the doubts that *A Cold Spring* had aroused in one reader" ("The Complete Poems" 204). Bishop's success in "registering character in poetry" is partly due to her close observation of people around her and partly due to what she learned from reading prose fiction and Robert Lowell's *Life Studies* (1959) while she was living in Brazil.

Bishop's life in Brazil had a profound impact not only on her literary career, but also on her view of the world. Her cultural outsidership enabled her to understand better both Brazil and the developed countries. Replying to a

question about whether she had been able to get anything from Brazil besides visual material, Bishop said in a 1966 interview:

Living the way I have happened to live here, knowing Brazilians, has made a great difference. The general life I have known here has of course had an impact on me. I think I've learned a great deal. Most New York intellectuals' ideas about "underdeveloped countries" are partly mistaken, and living among people of a completely different culture has changed a lot of my old stereotyped ideas. (Brown 290)

This awareness of her own and other people's "stereotyped ideas" about "'underdeveloped countries'" is expressed in Bishop's poems through her artistic treatment of different points of view.

The opening poem of *Questions of Travel*, "Arrival at Santos," is written from a tourist's point of view, which expresses value judgements about a third-world country from a privileged, superior position. After a sketch of the landscape and scenes, the speaker in "Arrival at Santos" asks, "Oh, tourist, / is this how this country is going to answer you // and your immodest demands for a different world, / and a better life, and complete comprehension / of both at last, and immediately, / after eighteen days of suspension?" (CP 89). Following three descriptive-meditative stanzas which establish the setting in a foreign land, the poem shifts to the speaker's responses to this foreign country, and to a particular fellow traveller.

Finish your breakfast. The tender is coming,
 a strange and ancient craft, flying a strange and
 brilliant rag.

So that's the flag. I never saw it before.
 I somehow never thought of there *being* a flag,

but of course there was, all along. And coins, I
 presume,
 and paper money; they remain to be seen.
 And gingerly now we climb down the ladder backward,
 myself and a fellow passenger named Miss Breen,

.

Miss Breen is about seventy,
 a retired police lieutenant, six feet tall,
 with beautiful bright blue eyes and a kind expression.
 Her home, when she is at home, is in Glens Fall

s, New York. There. We are settled.
 The customs officials will speak English, we hope,
 and leave us our bourbon and cigarettes.
 Ports are necessities, like postage stamps, or soap,

.
 the unassertive colors of soap, or postage stamps--
 wasting away like the former, slipping the way the
 latter

do when we mail the letters we wrote on the boat,
 either because the glue here is very inferior
 or because of the heat. We leave Santos at once;
 we are driving to the interior. (CP 89-90)

Specific references to Miss Breen reveals who the fellow
 tourists are while adding some dramatic color of character
 and a narrative turn to the extended descriptions. At the
 end of this poem, Bishop put down "January, 1952," the year
 when she missed her freighter in Rio and decided to stay.
 The date, significantly, coincides with the tourist's
 preconceptions and superficial impressions of an
 "underdeveloped" country, and her superior, judgemental

attitude, subtly conveyed in her perception of the flag as "a strange and brilliant rag" and her suspicion that "the glue here is very inferior."

Following this first-impression depiction from the tourist's point of view, the other Brazil poems present the country with gradually increasing depth and intimacy. The title poem "Questions of Travel" further explores the traveller's need to see a foreign land. The speaker asks:

Should we have stayed home and thought of here?

 Is it right to be watching strangers in a play
 in this strangest of theatres?
 What childishness is it that while there's a breath of life
 in our bodies, we are determined to rush
 to see the sun the other way around?

 Oh, must we dream our dreams
 and have them, too? (CP 93)

There are no straight yes or no answers to these questions, only numerous contemplations of the possible regrets over the loss of insights if the traveller had chosen to stay home. As the poem progresses with the traveller's contemplation, questions of travel begin to point to the implications of the penetration of Christianity in a faraway land and the co-existence of primitive and refined cultural phenomena:

But surely it would have been a pity
 not to have seen the trees along this road,

 --A pity not to have heard

the other, less primitive music of the fat brown bird
 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
 between the crudest wooden footwear
 and, careful and finicky,
 the whittled fantasies of wooden cages. (CP 93-4)

These questions about cultural intersection give Bishop's descriptive details of the banal, the exotic, and the strange phenomena encountered in a foreign land a significant and complicated dimension, rendering her visual images more than merely evocative of distant shores.

The speaker's inconclusive pondering on the post-colonial cultural phenomena anticipates Bishop's allusion to Brazil's history in another poem. Writing to Lowell on 22 April 1960, Bishop revealed her worry about the limitations of her descriptive details of Brazilian landscape. "But I worry a great deal about what to do with all this accumulation of exotic or picturesque or charming detail, and I don't want to become a poet who can only write about South America" (22 April 1960, L 383-84). She was still concerned about the seriousness of her subject matter as she was when *North & South* was going into print and *A Cold Spring* was being written. In the same letter to Lowell, she emphasized that one of her major worries was "whether I'm going to turn into solid cuteness in my poetry if I don't

watch out--or if I do watch out" (L 385).

To avoid the triviality of purely "picturesque detail" and "cuteness," Bishop introduces historical and cultural elements into her description of the picturesque landscape in "Brazil, January 1, 1502." This poem was first printed in the *New Yorker* New Year's issue in 1960. According to Ashley Brown, "New Year's Day of 1502 was the date on which the Portuguese caravels arrived at Guanabara Bay, which they mistakenly thought was the mouth of a great river--hence Rio de Janeiro (January)" ("Bishop in Brazil" 230). By using this historical date in the poem's title, Bishop draws the reader's attention to Brazilian history. Two-thirds of this poem is devoted to Brazil's exotic scenery and luscious landscape.

Januaries, Nature greets our eyes
 exactly as she must have greeted theirs:
 every square inch filling in with foliage--
 big leaves, little leaves, and giant leaves,
 blue, blue-green, and olive,

A blue-white sky, a simple web,

 Still in the foreground there is Sin:
 five sooty dragons near some massy rocks.

 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. (CP 91-92)

Significantly, the poem begins by relating the enchanting

effect of Brazilian sights on "our eyes" to that on "theirs" (the colonists'). Extended picturesque descriptions gradually reveal hidden threats amidst all this beauty in nature and serve to link the landscape of Brazil to its colonial history in the last part of the poem. The impending male lizards' battle over the seductive female provides an implied parallel to the Portuguese and Spanish colonists' struggles over territory in South America.

Just so the Christians, hard as nails,
 tiny as nails, and glinting,
 in creaking armor, came and found it all,
 not unfamiliar:
 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--
 wealth, plus a brand-new pleasure.
 Directly after Mass, humming perhaps
L'Homme armé or some such tune,
 they ripped away into the hanging fabric,
 each out to catch an Indian for himself--
 those maddening little women who kept calling,
 calling to each other (or had the birds waked up?)
 and retreating, always retreating, behind it.
 (CP 91-2)

The luxuriant land of Brazil is illustrated in terms of its seductive power over the Christian conquerors, whose violation and exploitation of it in pursuit of their dream of wealth is ironically told along with their "brand-new pleasure" of pursuing the aboriginal women.

Bishop's description of the native women evokes the Brazilian writer Clarice Lispector's short story "The

Smallest Woman in the World," which Bishop translated from the Portuguese. Her portrayal of "those maddening little women" echoes the sense of baffling elusiveness which Lispector's smallest pygmy woman gives the French explorer who discovered her.³ The last line of Bishop's poem appropriates Lispector's description of the vulnerable African pygmies: "The tiny race, retreating, always retreating, has finished hiding away in the heart of Africa, where the lucky explorer discovered it" (501). Like the African pygmies hunted by the savage Bahundes, the "retreating, always retreating" native Brazilian "little women" in Bishop's poem are pursued by the Portuguese invaders.

Bishop's implicit criticism of colonial plunder in this poem is more explicitly articulated in her prose text of *Brazil* (1962). In this book, Bishop provides a brief introduction to the history of how Brazil became Portugal's colony shortly after the navigator Pedro Alvares Cabral first claimed it in 1500. Even though her text of *Brazil* is heavily edited by the editors of *Life*, it still bears Bishop's ironically critical tone in its view of colonialism.⁴ "Two years after Columbus's first voyage in 1492," Bishop writes, "Portugal and Spain, then at the height of their age of discoveries, had grandly divided all the non-Christian world between them" (*Brazil* 26). Despite

the fact that "the Portuguese mercifully lacked the blood-thirsty missionary zeal of the Spaniards," the scribe, on Cabral's flagship, Pedro Vaz de Caminha, still wrote: "'Our Lord gave them [American Indians] fine bodies and good faces as to good men; and He who brought us here, I believe, did not do so without purpose'" (*Brazil* 27). Caminha recorded detailed descriptions of the Indians they encountered. Bishop comments that "The Indians were friendly and docile--too docile for their own good" (*Brazil* 26-27). The descriptions in the last part of "Brazil, January 1, 1502" allude to the history of Brazil's colonization. In the poem, Bishop uses "the Christians" rather than "the Portuguese" to describe the colonizers of Brazil, thus appropriating historical elements while exposing cultural domination under the disguise of religion. In *Brazil*, Bishop notes that Cabral, the Portuguese navigator, "was a Knight of the Order of Christ, and the fleet's sails and banners bore the Order's red cross. The men landed to celebrate Easter Sunday with Mass, and set up a cross" (*Brazil* 26). The Indians "attended the Mass" and exchanged presents with them. Bishop points out one "grimly prophetic" exchange: "the Indians gave the Portuguese headdresses of their exquisite featherwork, and in return the Portuguese gave them the red caps worn by laborers" (*Brazil* 27). In her poem, Bishop exposes the irony in these

Portuguese Christians' faithful observance of religious rituals and their greedy exploitation of the native people by describing how, "Directly after Mass," the Christians "ripped away into the hanging fabric, / each out to catch an Indian for himself" (CP 92).

These allusions to Brazilian history, charged with ironic exposure of the greed, hypocrisy, and arrogance of the colonists, give another layer of significance to Bishop's visual details of Brazilian landscape. But as the ending line of her first poem in this volume says, "we are driving to the interior" (CP 90); the picturesque sketches of Brazil's landscape are to be replaced by a much more intimate and specific depiction of Brazilian life when Bishop begins to write her poems from the point of view of an inside outsider or expatriate. The conflicts in these subsequent Brazil poems, such as "Manuelzinho," are more specifically involved with actual life and people in Brazilian society.

Bishop's direct contact with Brazilians and their daily interactions in Brazil's stratified society enhances her developing ability to dramatize character and to integrate narrative art with descriptive details. Her exploration of relationships between people of different social statuses captures their complexity and contradictions through her speakers' socially conditioned speech manners. As its

subtitle, "[Brazil, A friend of the writer is speaking]" suggests, "Manuelzinho" is written in the voice of Soares, the landowner, who gives a biographical sketch of her gardener Manuelzinho.⁵ In this poem, Bishop revisits the master-servant relationship considered earlier in "Cootchie" and "Faustina, or Rock Roses." But the speaker in "Manuelzinho" is now the "master"; Manuelzinho is portrayed from the master's point of view. In a dramatic monologue, the speaker reveals the interaction between two people from opposite social positions with different viewpoints and values.

Half squatter, half tenant (no rent)--
 a sort of inheritance; white,
 in your thirties now, and supposed
 to supply me with vegetables,
 but you don't; or you won't; or you can't
 get the idea through your brain--
 the world's worst gardener since Cain. (CP 96)

The speaker is obviously exasperated by her tenant's incompetence. Despite her affection for Manuelzinho, the speaker's frustration with him shows the social gap between them in their apparently long and familiar relationship.

Although benevolent and sympathetic, the speaker's social position prevents her from understanding the actuality of life's hardship for the poor. And her tone in describing her tenant and his family is unmistakably condescending.

The strangest things happen, to you.
 Your cow eats a "poison grass"
 and drops dead on the spot.
 Nobody else's does.
 And then your father dies,
 a superior old man
 with a black plush hat, and a moustache
 like a white spread-eagled sea gull.
 The family gathers, but you,
 no, you "don't think he's dead!"

 I give you money for the funeral
 and you go and hire a *bus*
 for the delighted mourners,
 so I have to hand over some more
 and then have to hear you tell me
 you pray for me every night! (CP 97-99)

In her security and comfort, the speaker does not comprehend Manuelzinho's behavior. Her descriptions of him and his manners are full of imaginings typical of her own world, separated from Manuelzinho's by the differences in their economic and social status. For the speaker, Manuelzinho is hopelessly incompetent, and the other people of their class ("the delighted mourners"), including Manuelzinho's father, appear to be strangely entertaining figures from a fairy tale.

However, there is one brief moment in the poem when the speaker and Manuelzinho seem to share some common ground: "In the kitchen we dream together / how the meek shall inherit the earth--," but the next line immediately marks the inevitable gap between them: "or several acres of mine" (CP 98). The following passages enhance the tangible distance between the speaker and Manuelzinho's family.

With blue sugar bags on their heads,
 carrying your lunch,
 your children scuttle by me
 like little moles aboveground,
 or even crouch behind bushes
 as if I were out to shoot them!
 --Impossible to make friends,
 though each will grab at once
 for an orange or a piece of candy.

.

Unkindly,
 I called you Klorophyll Kid.
 My visitors thought it was funny.
 I apologize here and now.

You helpless, foolish man,
 I love you all I can,
 I think. Or do I?
 I take off my hat, unpainted
 and figurative, to you.
 Again I promise to try. (CP 98-99)

The timidity and estrangement in the children's behaviour reflect a class barrier that cannot be eliminated by kindness. From her comfortable social position, the speaker is endlessly puzzled and amused by Manuelzinho and his family, noting his wife's color-blindness, and the lack of any sense of style in her mending of Manuelzinho's "bright-blue pants / with white thread" (CP 99). Being conditioned by her class, the speaker cannot escape her condescending attitude toward Manuelzinho and his people. Admittedly, she is aware of her limitations, as shown at the end of the poem. But her efforts at humility are inescapably mixed with her sense of being the superior provider and protector.

Her uncertainty about her professed love for Manuelzinho, and her promise "again" to try to change, contribute to the sense of social distance between them.

Bishop's complex and sympathetic portrayal of this social relationship through the landowner's ideologically bounded speech effectively demonstrates that by portraying characters and their "linguistic points of view" (Bakhtin's words) from everyday life, Bishop makes it possible to present in her poem "the boundedness, the historicity, the social determination and specificity of one's own language" which Bakhtin claims to be "alien to poetic style" (DI 285). Bakhtin contends that "The concept of many worlds of language, all equal in their ability to conceptualize and to be expressive, is organically denied to poetic style." However, he adds that "This does not mean, of course, that heteroglossia . . . is completely shut out of a poetic work" (DI 286). Nevertheless, "heteroglossia," for Bakhtin, "exists only in the 'low' poetic genres--in the satiric and comic genres and others." When "heteroglossia" is introduced into "purely poetic genres," Bakhtin argues,

It appears, in essence, as a *thing*, it does not lie on the *same* plane with the real language of the work: it is the depicted gesture of one of the characters and does not appear as an aspect of the word doing the depicting. Elements of heteroglossia enter here not in the capacity of another language carrying its own particular points of view, about which one can say things not expressive in one's own language, but rather in the capacity of a depicted thing. (DI 287)

The language of the aristocratic speaker in "Manuelzinho" is one element of "heteroglossia" (socially diverse and ideologically saturated speech). Rather than being depicted as "a thing," it is "doing the depicting" of its social worlds and expressing particular points of view. Within the speaker's discourse, the worlds of poor and rich interact and collide in a sort of social dialogue. The monologue of "Manuelzinho" is internally dialogized and filled with the axiological content of a particular social world; it is "socially localized and limited," as Bakhtin says is true of any living language (DI 287). Being portrayed in their specific social positions, both the speaker and Manuelzinho come across as vivid characters.

In "The Burglar of Babylon," Bishop further illustrates the possibility for poetry to make artistic use of the "internal dialogization" of everyday language through appropriation of socially and ideologically bounded utterances. The simple form and colloquial language, as well as the dramatic events of a ballad, make it possible for "The Burglar of Babylon" to reach a larger audience than Bishop's more difficult poems. In her introduction to the volume entitled *The Ballad of The Burglar of Babylon*, published in 1968 as a children's book, Bishop wrote, "The story of Micuçu is true. It happened in Rio de Janeiro a few years ago. I have changed only one or two minor

details, and, of course, translated the names of the slums." Bishop actually watched the pursuit of Micuçu in Rio:⁶

I was one of those who watched the pursuit through binoculars, although really we could see very little of it: just a few of the soldiers silhouetted against the skyline of the hill of Babylon. The rest of the story is taken, often word for word, from the daily papers, filled out by what I know of the place and the people.⁷

Fragments of newspaper reports on the pursuit are woven into Bishop's narrative, which tells the story from different characters' points of view.

The impersonal characteristics of ballad narrative also enable Bishop to portray a social picture from various perspectives and with much more diversity than she does in "Manuelzinho." In addition, the ballad, being a "low" poetic genre, according to Bakhtin, has "a certain latitude for heteroglossia," which contains the diversity of social voices (*DI* 287). Bishop makes good use of "heteroglossia," including its comic and satiric potential, in her depiction of social problems involved in the industrial progress of Rio, where the hillside slum of Babylon is situated.⁸ The first five stanzas of "The Burglar of Babylon" portray the setting for the pursuit of the burglar while offering a glimpse of the social background that shaped his life and action.

On the fair green hills of Rio

There grows a fearful stain:
The poor who come to Rio
And can't go home again.

.
But they cling and spread like lichen,
And the people come and come.
There's one hill called the Chicken,
And one called Catacomb;

There's the hill of Kerosene,
And the hill of the Skeleton,
The hill of Astonishment,
And the hill of Babylon. (CP 112)

The narrator's categorization of Micuçu as "an enemy of society" is undercut by the ambivalence in the narrative details which describe him as a heroic outlaw who defies authority, but who also is a loving nephew to his old aunt.

Micuçu was a burglar and killer,
An enemy of society.
He had escaped three times
From the worst penitentiary.

.
They said, "He'll go to his auntie,
Who raised him like a son.
She has a little drink shop
On the hill of Babylon."

He did go straight to his auntie,
And he drank a final beer.
He told her, "The soldiers are coming,
And I've got to disappear.

.
"Don't tell anyone you saw me.
I'll run as long as I can.
You were good to me, and I love you,
But I'm a doomed man." (CP 112-3)

Mucuçu was finally surrounded by soldiers on the hill of Babylon. In contrast to the burglar's courage, the soldiers pursuing him are portrayed as cowards, carrying out their duties blindly and without conviction.

A buzzard flapped so near him
 He could see its naked neck.
 He waved his arms and shouted,
 "Not yet, my son, not yet!"

.

But the soldiers were nervous, even
 With tommy guns in hand,
 And one of them, in a panic,
 Shot the officer in command.

He hit him in three places;
 The other shots went wild.
 The soldier had hysterics
 And sobbed like a little child.

The dying man said, "Finish
 The job we came here for."
 He committed his soul to God
 And his sons to the Governor. (CP 114-15)

In juxtaposition to the personal touch of the burglar's relationship with his aunt, the dying commanding officer's order, "Finish / The job we came here for," accentuates the impersonal, duty-bound nature of the soldiers' point of view in regard to Mucuçu. The commanding officer's patriotic gesture at death is as ironic as his death by "friendly fire."

Far away from the dangers of both the burglar and the soldiers, "Rich people in apartments / Watched through

binoculars / As long as the daylight lasted . . . " (CP 115). Finally, the burglar is shot dead. "The police and the populace / Heaved a sigh of relief, / But behind the counter his auntie / Wiped her eyes in grief." The aunt does not understand her nephew's behaviour and is concerned about her respectability:

"We have always been respected.
 His sister has a job.
 Both of us gave him money.
 Why did he have to rob?"

"I raised him to be honest,
 Even here, in Babylon slum."
 The customer had another,
 Looking serious and glum. (CP 117)

The aunt's remarks are clearly directed toward her customers. But her customers do not share her grief, nor do they show much sympathy. Not belonging to the social group of Micuçu's victims, they find Micuçu disappointing as if he was some sort of a sports star: "But one of them said to another, / When he got outside the door, / 'He wasn't much of a burglar, / He got caught six times--or more'" (CP 117).

The final stanzas of this poem indicate that the death of Micuçu is not the end of the social problem. Micuçu is only one of many outlaws, enemies of a society that is, partly at least, responsible for making them what they are. Micuçu, and the others like him, are part of the "fearful stain" in the slums of Rio. Even though Micuçu is no more

glorified than he is condemned, the narrative suggests that he is a victim of his hellish social milieu. In closing the narrative, the narrator returns to a gradually wider and more distant view of the city, one that reiterates the magnitude of its problems.

This morning the little soldiers
 Are on Babylon hill again;
 Their gun barrels and helmets
 Shine in a gentle rain.

Micuçú is buried already.
 They're after another two,
 But they say they aren't as dangerous
 As the poor Micuçú.

On the fair green hills of Rio
 There grows a fearful stain:
 The poor who come to Rio
 And can't go home again.

There's the hill of Kerosene,
 And the hill of the Skeleton,
 The hill of Astonishment,
 And the hill of Babylon. (CP 117-18)

The last two stanzas repeat the opening ones, thus laying emphasis on the connection between poverty and crime. The enormity of Rio's social problems is hammered home in listing each of the other hills besides "the hill of Babylon." As the caption for a photo of Rio's slums in Brazil says, "THE BLIGHT of poverty, increasing in spite of industrial growth, is taxing the capabilities of free institutions" (138). "The Burglar of Babylon" exposes some of industrial growth's particular social consequences

through the story of Micuçu.

By appropriating news reports on Micuçu's pursuit "often word for word, from the daily papers," and combining these with what she knew "of the place and the people," Bishop constructs a narrative with different social voices through citations of "heteroglossia." Fragmentary utterances of individuals belonging to different social groups are combined with the narrator's descriptions of each group to offer several different points of view on the same person, surrounding the same event. As Bakhtin argues in "Discourse in the Novel":

The living utterance, having taken meaning and shape at a particular historical moment in a socially specific environment, cannot fail to brush up against thousands of living dialogic threads, woven by socio-ideological consciousness around the given object of an utterance; it cannot fail to become an active participant in social dialogue. (DI 276)

The different characters in "The Burglar of Babylon" function as interlocutors in a social dialogue. What unfolds in the narrative of this poem is not "illuminated by a single authorial consciousness; rather a *plurality of consciousnesses, with equal rights and each with its own world*, combine but are not merged in the unity of the event," as Bakhtin says of Dostoevsky's polyphonic novels (PDP 6). The distinctive voices of Micuçu, the general public, the soldiers, the aunt and her customers, as well as

the rich people's response to Micuçu's pursuit, reflect their separate values and worlds.

While most of her Brazil poems remain embedded in the particulars of Brazilian landscape and society, Bishop turns to Brazilian folklore for material in dealing with her ideas about art and the artist. In rethinking her ideas about art, Bishop appropriates images and material from another text in "The Riverman" as she has done in her early poems such as "Casabianca" and the fourth song of "Songs for a Colored Singer." However, rather than responding to other texts' points of view with another perspective offered through statements, as she does in these early intertextual dialogues, Bishop combines and transforms specific information and materials from another text to create a compelling character, the riverman. Like "Manuelzinho," "The Riverman" employs the form of monologue. In a 1966 interview, Bishop says that the form of dramatic monologue "should act as a sort of release. You can say all kinds of things you couldn't in a lyric. If you have scenery and costumes, you can get away with a lot" (Brown 298). Through the voice of the riverman, Bishop simultaneously articulates her own ideas about being an artist and the riverman's about his becoming a shaman.

As Bishop's introductory note to the poem acknowledges, "The Riverman" draws heavily from many details of Charles

Wagley's accounts of aboriginal medicine men and women along the Amazon in his book *Amazon Town: A Study of Man in the Tropics* (1953). Wagley was an American social anthropologist who lived and studied aboriginal people and culture among the Tapirapé Indians and the Tenetehara Indians for eighteen months between 1939 and 1941. When a co-operative public-health program was established by the Brazilian and American governments in 1942, he worked closely with this organization in the Amazon Valley. Wagley believed that a familiarity with Brazilian native culture and folk beliefs would enable a smoother introduction and acceptance of Western medicine and "many old customs and beliefs may be replaced with greater ease" where people still have a fundamentally "magical view of the world" (255-56). Bishop's poem draws heavily on the numerous details of these "old customs and beliefs" and the "magical view of the world" which Wagley's book provides.

In her introductory note, Bishop explains that the speaker in "The Riverman" is "a man in a remote Amazonian village [who] decides to become a *sacaca*, a witch doctor who works with water spirits" (CP 105). Consciously or not, Bishop in this poem describes the riverman in a way that suggests the life of a poet as she sees it. Through the riverman's experience, she effectively expresses her sense of the mystery and hard work involved in the acquisition of

artistic skills. "I really don't know how poetry gets to be written," Bishop once wrote in a letter to someone who was learning the art of poetry. Then she added, "There is a mystery & surprise, and after that a great deal of hard work."⁹ The riverman's involuntary response to the dolphin's call and the mysterious rituals performed in his encounter with the water spirits seem to convey Bishop's sense of "a mystery & surprise" involved in mastering the art of poetry.

I got up in the night
 for the Dolphin spoke to me.
 He grunted beneath my window,
 hid by the river mist,
 but I glimpsed him -- a man like myself,
 I threw off my blanket, sweating;
 I even tore off my shirt.
 I got out of my hammock
 and went through the window naked.
 My wife slept and snored. (CP 105)

These descriptions condense Wagley's accounts of a pagé named Fortunato Pombo (who disappeared one day wandering along the riverbank as a boy, and whose shirt was found hanging on a pole close to the pier) and of a young woman who showed symptoms of being a pagé-to-be (228). One night, "she rose from her hammock and ran pell-mell toward the river. She would have plunged in if her father and brothers had not held her" (230). According to Wagley, those who have the potential to be pagé (witch doctors) are called upon by water spirits, with whom they work in curing

diseases.

The Dolphin as the mediator between this world and the other unknown world in the water is reminiscent of the seal in "At the Fishhouses," who, Bishop wrote, "like me [was] a believer in total immersion" (CP 65). The riverman's response to the dolphin's call leads to his total immersion in the river, where he is received by its creatures and the river spirit, Luandinha, associated with the moon.

They gave me a shell of *cachaça*
and decorated cigars.
The smoke rose like mist
through the water, and our breaths
didn't make any bubbles.
We drank *cachaça* and smoked
the green cheroots. The room
filled with gray-green smoke
and my head couldn't have been dizzier.
Then a tall, beautiful serpent
in elegant white satin,
with her big eyes green and gold
like the lights on the river steamers--
yes, Luandinha, none other--
entered and greeted me
in a language I didn't know;
but when she blew cigar smoke
into my ears and nostrils
I understood, like a dog,
although I can't speak it yet. (CP 106)

This passage is a combination of fragments from Wagley's book with Bishop's own experiences in Brazil. Wagley's research reveals that tobacco and alcohol play an important part in the witch doctor's practice. The Indian shamans in the Amazon forest had to swallow "large quantities of tobacco smoke" so as to be able to enter into trances in

communicating with the spirits (226). "The shamans cured . . . ills" inflicted by a forest spirit or a ghost "by massage, by blowing tobacco smoke over the patient's body . . ." (226). When the pagé-to-be Pombo encountered the spirits in the depths of the water for the first time, he was offered "the large, beautifully painted tauari (cigar)" (228). According to Wagley, a great Indian pagé, Joaquim, who earned the title of *sacaca*, used to hear Luandinha, a large female snail spirit, call him and "he would disappear to spend a few hours with her in the depths of the Amazon" (228). Wagley also reports: "Two fishermen had actually seen [a giant snake's] great luminous eyes closing in upon them as they sat in their canoes 'Its eyes shine like the spotlights on a river steamer'" (236). These materials from Wagley's text are revised and combined with others in Bishop's poem. In a 1966 interview, Bishop said in reply to a question about her level of mastery of Portuguese, "After all these years, I'm like a dog: I understand everything that's said to me, but I don't speak it very well" (Brown 291). Like Wagley's information about witch doctors, Bishop's own experience of communicating in Portuguese in Brazil is transformed into the riverman's experience of contact with the water spirits.

As the riverman's contact with the other world increases, and his knowledge of the magic art grows, he

becomes an outsider to both worlds--the one he visits and the one he lives in. His physical being and habits change, but no one except himself knows the secret behind this.

Three times now I've been there.
 I don't eat fish any more.
 There is fine mud on my scalp
 and I know from smelling my comb
 that the river smells in my hair.
 My hands and feet are cold.
 I look yellow, my wife says,
 and she brews me stinking teas
 I throw out, behind her back.
 Every moonlit night
 I'm to go back again.
 I know some things already,
 but it will take years of study,
 it is so difficult. (CP 106-7)

The riverman's difficulties in his endeavor are increased by the secretiveness and mystery he must maintain in order to make his study with the water spirits possible. Wagley's book offers some information which can partly illuminate the secret the riverman has to keep. According to Wagley, "The pagé is persecuted by the authorities, called 'pagan' by the padre, and publicly criticized by the upper class" (229). Also, the riverman's existence is deeply rooted in the everyday social world, which sometimes intrudes on his secret plans.

I need a virgin mirror
 no one's ever looked at,
 that's never looked back at anyone,
 to flash up the spirits' eyes
 and help me recognize them.
 The storekeeper offered me

a box of little mirrors,
 but each time I picked one up
 a neighbor looked over my shoulder
 and then that one was spoiled--
 spoiled, that is, for anything
 but the girls to look at their mouths in,
 to examine their teeth and smiles. (CP 107)

The riverman, moving between the two worlds, lives at the intersection of everyday social life and the supernatural; the attainment of his magic power requires ambition, courage, and persistence. The details about the riverman's "virgin mirror" are related to the particular experience of a pagé called Satiro in Wagley's book.

Satiro is still learning his profession. Though he wanted a rattle very badly, he told us that first he must have the power to travel under water. In the depths he expects to receive his *maracá* (rattle) from the mouth of a giant water snake. A more powerful pagé told Satiro that he also needs a "virgin mirror"--one into which no one has ever looked--so that he could see his spirit companions without danger to himself while travelling under water. He has tried unsuccessfully several times to buy such a mirror, but someone always looks over his shoulder as the box containing them is opened in the store. Satiro is certain that he will one day be a strong pagé. (232)

Satiro's confidence is also reiterated in the riverman's statement later in the poem. The riverman's articulation of his ambition and conviction, while remaining true to his character and action, seems to echo Bishop's as a poet.

Why shouldn't I be ambitious?
 I sincerely desire to be
 a serious *sacaca*
 like Fortunato Pombo,

or Lúcio, or even
 the great Joaquim Sacaca.
 Look, it stands to reason
 that everything we need
 can be obtained from the river.
 It drains the jungles; it draws
 from trees and plants and rocks
 from half around the world,
 it draws from the very heart
 of the earth the remedy
 for each of the diseases--
 one just has to know how to find it.
 But everything must be there
 in that magic mud, beneath
 the multitudes of fish,
 deadly or innocent,
 the giant *pirarucús*,
 the turtles and crocodiles,

 and all is sweetness there
 in the deep, enchanted silt. (CP 107-8)

The river as the source for the sacaca's magic and
 "everything we need" parallels the sea water in "At the
 Fishhouses," which feels and tastes like "what we imagine
 knowledge to be." All the natural, commonplace things in
 the world may reveal new knowledge; "one just has to know
 how to find it."

The idea of using the commonplace as material for art,
 and the notion of familiar natural elements as conditions
 for the existence of art, suggested in "The Monument,"
 resurface here. Like the old, "cracked and unpainted" boxes
 in "The Monument," everything that "we need" "in that magic
 mud" includes history and past experience, suggested by
 "tree trunks and sunk canoes" in the river.¹⁰ These
 ordinary things in the river become clues as important as

those provided by turtles and crocodiles and the giant "pirarucú" fish for the riverman's magic art. Natural and commonplace things are the sources for Bishop's poetic art; they provide her with the basic material and subject matter for her poems.

Like other details in this poem, the names of the great *sacacas* who inspire the riverman are borrowed from Wagley's *Amazon Town*, in which a passage says:

None of the shamans living in the Itá community, however, is a great *pagé*. The great ones, everyone in Itá agrees, lived about a generation ago. They were called *sacacas*. Such famous men as Joaquim Sacaca . . . Fortunato Pombo . . . and Lúcio . . . were *pagé sacacas*." (227)

The term *sacaca*, Wagley explains, "is a name given to an Indian tribe which once inhabited the Island of Marajó, from which famous shamans may have come" (227). According to Wagley, not every *pagé* can be a *sacaca* who is "a great *pagé*" and possesses extraordinary magic power. The riverman's evocation of these powerful *sacacas* articulates his ambition and his loyalty in the clash between Western civilization and folk wisdom embodied in the *pagés*, and the numerous conflicts Wagley refers to such as "a conflict between the use of herbal remedies and modern medicine" and "a clash between the orthodox Church and traditional religion over the powers of the local brotherhoods and over the local festivals" (286). By adopting the point of view of the

ambitious riverman and speaking through his voice, Bishop seems to be simultaneously uttering her own confidence in her art and her sense of the artist's responsibility, as the riverman pledges to his people: "When the moon shines . . . I will go to work / to get you health and money" (CP 109).

Bishop's employment of material from *Amazon Town* is an enactment of the "In Prison" speaker's ambition to form his "own examples of surrealist art!" by deconstructing a book and "posing fragments of it against the surroundings and conversations of my prison" (CPr 188). "The Riverman" is such an artistic work, which appropriates fragments from another text and adapts them to a poetic form to deal with a different subject matter from a different point of view. Thomas Travisano gives some insightful observations on Bishop's transformation of the material from the textual source of this poem. Travisano points out that Wagley's tone, though humane, remains "remote, secure in North American assumptions of cultural superiority. He emphasizes the practical value of understanding the native viewpoint if North Americans are to succeed in benefiting the locals by, for example, getting Western medicine accepted" (159). As far as Wagley's book is concerned, Travisano observes, "there is no question of learning the old beliefs to appreciate their mystery or beauty, nor is there any doubt that they ought to be replaced" (159). Although Bishop's

poem is not a direct response to Wagley's book, and never ridicules or refutes it, her adoption of the riverman's point of view counters the implicit assumption of the superiority of rationality and scientific techniques in *Amazon Town*. But more importantly, as far as Bishop's poem is concerned, the mysterious and irrational incidents in the magical world offered Bishop a wonderfully rich source of material for artistic creation and expression. It seems that in the voice of an ambitious and confident riverman who is determined to be "a serious *sacaca*," Bishop is able to articulate her own ambition and pride in her talent and art. As the riverman says at the end of the poem with defiance and confidence in the pursuit of his magic art: "The Dolphin singled me out; / Luandinha seconded it" (CP 109).

By the time "The Riverman" was published, Bishop had lived in Brazil for about ten years and travelled widely within the country." Her close connection to the local people and culture may partly explain her ability to adopt their point of view, and to attain an awareness of her own and other people's "unconsciously condescending attitude toward the third world"--an attitude which is humorously revealed and parodied in a later poem, "12 O'Clock News." Responding to her friend U. T. Summers's comment on "The Riverman," Bishop expressed her admiration for the virtues of poor Brazilians: "I was very pleased, U. T., with what

you said about The Riverman--particularly the words 'gentle reasonableness'--because that is exactly the quality that is so endearing about poor Brazilians"¹² (13 May 1960 VC). Bishop's letters to her aunt also reveal that her experience of living in the Southern United States and in Brazil contributed to her sympathy for African Americans and her appreciation of the native cultural traditions in Brazil, as well as to her awareness of the brutality inflicted under the guise of Western civilization. Writing from Brazil to her aunt Grace Bulmer Bowers on 13 March 1965, Bishop "scolds" her, says Lorrie Goldensohn, "for following southern opinion about Martin Luther King's leadership, and points with satisfaction to having recorded for a Brazilian newspaper her own approval of King's being awarded the Nobel Peace Prize" (77). She says to her aunt, "You have no idea how the rest of the world feels about how the U S treats its colored people--and particularly here, where there is no problem at all."¹³ It is one reason I like living here, after ten years or so in the 'south'" (qtd. in Goldensohn 77). In another letter written on May 18th that year, Bishop again talks with strong emotions about the racial relations and the idea of civilization:

After living in the south off and on for more than ten years --you have no idea what a relief it is to live here and see people of all colors happy and natural together. (All miserably poor together, too--but even so, it is more civilized than what we have in the U S

A, I'm afraid.) At the grand opening of Lota's "park," a few weeks ago, there was a new outdoor dance-floor-- and it was so nice to see all the different colors dancing together. . . . Our mulatto maid went, all dressed to kill, and all Lota's architects-- young white men--danced away with her and she had the time of her life. Now that is what I call being civilized! It is something I feel very deeply about. (qtd. in Goldensohn 77)

Bishop's position on racial issues and her deep convictions about civilization shape the points of view and the meanings in "The Riverman" and other poems such "Song IV" in "Songs for a Colored Singer," enriching her art with social and cultural reality.

By this point in Bishop's career, social and intertextual dialogues have become increasingly prominent in her poems and are more closely related to personal experience and specific situations in the everyday social world. In addition to functioning as the central generative force for the development of ideas and technical strategies in Bishop's poems, dialogic interactions in her "Brazil" poems in *Questions of Travel* also reveal the dialogic nature of social existence. These poems and the poems of "Elsewhere" in the second half of *Questions of Travel* further illustrate that dialogism is an essential element which adds to the depth and complexity of Bishop's art.

3.2. "Significant, Illustrative, American"

Bishop's poems in the second half of *Questions of Travel* look outward from Brazil. Both the content and form of these poems again show how Bishop's life, reading, and awareness of her reader have shaped her art, and how Bishop appropriates other writers' words to express and enrich the meanings of her own poems. While most of these poems are autobiographical, others respond to larger historical and political issues through personal experience. Six of the eight poems grouped under the subtitle "Elsewhere" are connected to Bishop's childhood memories. The security and domestic pleasure Bishop enjoyed in her life with Soares brought back early recollections of her relatives and experiences as a child, including the trauma she suffered from her mother's insanity shortly after her father's death, and from the loss of both parents in early childhood. Bishop was five years old when her mother was committed permanently to an asylum, and she never saw her again. Her memories of childhood became a major source of subject matter for her writing, especially during her years in Brazil.

When she began living with Soares in Brazil, Bishop felt a sense of being home for the first time in her life. "I only hope you don't have to get to be forty-two before you feel so at home," Bishop wrote to her friend Pearl Kazin

(25 April 1953, L 262). To her friends Kit and Ilse Barker, Bishop said, "I have been so happy that it takes a great deal of getting used to" (7 February 1952, L 235). In another letter to the Barkers, Bishop wrote: "It is funny to come to Brazil to experience total recall about Nova Scotia--geography must be more mysterious than we realize, even" (12 October 1952, L 249). About a year later, Bishop still strongly felt the impact of living in Brazil on her sense of the past. Again to the Barkers, Bishop wrote: "It's funny how in this undeveloped-yet-decadent country one feels so much closer to the past than one ever could in the U.S.A." (29 August 1953, L 271).

With her life settled down in Brazil, Bishop began to explore enthusiastically the possibilities of using autobiographical material directly in her poems and her prose. Two of her autobiographical short stories, "Gwendolyn" and "In the Village," appeared in the *New Yorker* in 1953. The subject matter of "Gwendolyn"--a child's death and funeral observed from a child's point of view--is also dealt with in an "Elsewhere" poem, "First Death in Nova Scotia." "In the Village" was the opening piece for "Elsewhere" when *Questions of Travel* was first published in 1965. Bishop referred to it as "poetic prose," and said that it is "completely autobiographical."¹⁴ This story is set in Great Village, Nova Scotia where Bishop spent three

years in her early childhood with her maternal grandparents, and deals with her memory of her mother's screams while suffering from insanity after the death of her husband.¹⁵ During the early 1950's, Bishop also began working on other autobiographical prose pieces, "Memories of Uncle Neddy," "Primer Class" and "The Country Mouse."¹⁶ She reported her newfound productiveness in prose to the Barkers with delight: "To my great surprise--I hadn't finished a story in ten years, I think--I suddenly started writing some and have done three--two more part done--and the Sable Island, which I am just now getting down to" (12 October 1952, L 249).

Bishop's interest in writing prose during this period has a significant influence on the development of the narrative art in her descriptive poems. Bishop wrote to Kit and Ilse Barker:

I am really getting interested in what I now think is the Art of story writing. I just wrote off some prose-poetry from time to time before. I'm afraid "In the Village" is pretty much that, too--but now I am taking it more seriously and thinking about people, balancing this with that, time, etc.--and I'm hoping whatever I write will be a little less precious and "sensitive," etc., in the future. (29 August 1953, L 272)

Bishop's efforts to make her writing "a little less precious and 'sensitive'" make her poems increasingly direct and personal. Her "Elsewhere" poems such as "Manners," "Sandpiper," "First Death in Nova Scotia," "Filling

Station," "From Trollope's Journal," and "Visit to St. Elizabeths" show Bishop's descriptive skill in character portrayal and narrative. The impact of Bishop's interest in "people" and her exploration of the art of story telling in her prose was already shown in "Manners," first published in the *New Yorker* on 26 November 1955. The character of the speaker's grandfather is depicted with vivid narrative details. The speaker's childhood experience with her grandfather is recreated in a child-like tone and simple language.¹⁷

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.
How would he know where to go?

.

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. (CP 121-22)

Each stanza of "Manners," being part of a ride with

Grandfather, provides an example of Grandfather's good manners as the speaker's descriptive narrative of a wagon ride with him unfolds. Bishop's use of simple diction and colloquial language helps her achieve a naturalness in her narrative descriptions of Grandpa's teaching and the child's learning of "good manners." As she once explained in a letter to Marianne Moore about one of her technical strategies in another poem, "to use as colorless words as possible" will help make her employment of a particular poetic form become "less of a trick and more of a natural theme and variations" (5 January 1937, L 54).

Bishop's employment of "colorless words," "the Art of story writing" and more directly autobiographical material results from her continuing effort to escape the confinement of New Critical aesthetics--impersonality, ambiguity, and elaborate craft--in order to present everyday experience more directly in poetry. She perceived a similar effort in Robert Lowell's poems. Responding to one of Lowell's "family life" poems, later published as *Life Studies* (1959), Bishop wrote: "Well, I like it very much; all together those poems will have a wonderful effect, I think--family, paternity, marriage, painfully acute and real. (Penn Warren's on the subject seem so voulu [deliberate], don't you think?)" (28 August 1958, L 361-62). Bishop sees in Lowell's manuscripts of "family life" poems not only

the "acute and real" experience she is attempting in her own poems, but also the art of characterization. These elements, for Bishop, offer something new and sorely needed in American poetry. Writing to Lowell again about his draft copy of *Life Studies*, Bishop paid more compliments to his new poems: "your poetry is as different from the rest of our contemporaries as say ice from slush. . . . I was craving something new--and I suspect that the poetry audience is, too, and will like these new poems very much." She informed Lowell in the same letter that when she gave a talk to teachers from "the Instituto Brasil," she intended to call their attention to the characterization in his poems: "And your interest in character will be stressed. After all, I can't think of any English poet who writes about *people* the way you do any more" (30 October 1958, L 364-65).

Lowell's example of using autobiographical material in his poems may have further encouraged Bishop to employ personal experience more directly in her own work. Writing to Lowell from Brazil, Bishop mentioned that she had been working on a poem called "Letter to Two Friends," which "is rather light, though."¹⁸ She was critical of herself to Lowell: "Oh heavens, when does one begin to write the *real* poems? I certainly feel as if I never had." She praised Lowell by contrast for his recent autobiographical poems.

"But of course I don't feel that way about yours--they all seem real as real--and getting more so" (11 December 1957, L 348). In the second part of the same letter to Lowell, written two days later, Bishop further expressed her admiration for his "real" poems to be published in *Life Studies*. She also expressed her envy for Lowell's family background which made autobiographical poems more than personal, and revealed her own hesitation over the use of autobiographical material for her poems:

I find I have here surely a whole new book of poems, don't I? I think all the family group--some of them I hadn't seen in Boston--are really superb, Cal. [...]

[...] And here I must confess (and I imagine most of our contemporaries would confess the same thing) that I am green with envy of your kind of assurance. I feel that I could write in as much detail about my Uncle Artie, say--but what would be the significance? Nothing at all. [...] Whereas all you have to do is put down the names! And the fact that it seems significant, illustrative, American, etc., gives you, I think, the confidence you display about tackling any idea or theme, *seriously*, in both writing and conversation. In some ways you are the luckiest poet I know!--in some ways not so lucky, either, of course. But it is hell to realize one has wasted half one's talent through timidity that probably could have been overcome if anyone in one's family had had a few grains of sense or education. Well, maybe it's not too late! (14 December 1957, L 350-51)

These comments suggest that for Bishop, "real poems" should be not only personal, but also connected to issues beyond those of a single individual; their details should be "significant, illustrative, American," and their subject

matter must be dealt with "seriously."

While making poems out of her childhood recollections, Bishop also attempts poems in which personal experience and perspective are "significant" and "illustrative" of something abstract and general, something related to "American" history and politics as in Lowell's poems. One major device Bishop employs to achieve these effects is incorporation of a relevant, significant, and well-known literary voice in her poems. In another "Elsewhere" poem, "The Sandpiper," Bishop expresses her sense of herself and the world, and examines her preoccupation with observation by alluding to Blake. Her interest in characterization and narrative are evident in the descriptive details which bring to life the personality of the poem's character, a sandpiper. The sandpiper's preoccupation with visual details parallels Bishop's own salient Darwin-like observation.

The roaring alongside he takes for granted,
and that every so often the world is bound to shake.
He runs, he runs to the south, finical, awkward,
in a state of controlled panic, a student of Blake.

The beach hisses like fat. On his left, a sheet
of interrupting water comes and goes
and glazes over his dark and brittle feet.
He runs, he runs straight through it, watching his
toes.

--Watching, rather, the spaces of sand and between
them,
where (no detail too small) the Atlantic drains
rapidly backwards and downwards. As he runs,

he stares at the dragging grains.

The world is a mist. And then the world is
 minute and vast and clear. The tide
 is higher or lower. He couldn't tell you which.
 His beak is focussed; he is preoccupied,

looking for something, something, something.
 Poor bird, he is obsessed!
 The millions of grains are black, white, tan, and gray,
 mixed with quartz grains, rose and amethyst. (CP 131)

This ambivalent, open-ended perception of the world through the eyes of the sandpiper, "a student of Blake," alludes to Blake's utterances in "Auguries of Innocence": "To see the world in a grain of sand, / And a heaven in a wild flower-- / Hold infinity in the palm of your hand, / And eternity in an hour" (27). Unlike this unity and grand scale of vision, the sandpiper's view of the world is ambivalent: "The world is a mist. And then the world is / minute and vast and clear." An ambivalence also characterizes Bishop's depiction of the sandpiper as "a student of Blake" who is frightened by the chaotic and overwhelming universe, but who is following Blake's motto "(no detail too small)" faithfully by focusing his attention determinedly on immediate visual details, "looking for something, something, something." Despite this obsession with details, the bird fails to achieve a Blakean microcosmic vision.

Bishop's description of the sandpiper's ambivalent view of the world, his obsession with minute details, and his concentration on observation also contains some self-

expression and self-mockery. In her 1976 acceptance speech upon being awarded the Books Abroad/Neustadt International Prize for Literature, Bishop identified herself with the sandpiper in her poem: "All my life I have lived and behaved very much like that sandpiper--just running along the edges of different countries and continents, 'looking for something'. . . pecking for subsistence along coastlines of the world" ("Laureate's Words of Acceptance" 12). The sandpiper's, or rather Bishop's own, preoccupation with seeking discovery in visual details evokes Charles Darwin's manner of observation, which Bishop greatly admired. In a letter to Anne Stevenson, Bishop wrote:

But reading Darwin, one admires the beautiful solid case being built up out of his endless heroic observations, almost unconscious or automatic . . . his eyes fixed on facts and minute details, sinking or sliding giddily off into the unknown. What one seems to want in art, in experiencing it, is the same thing that is necessary for its creation, a self-forgetful, perfectly useless concentration. (In this sense it is always "escape" don't you think?)

(March 1963 "Letters" 261).

Like Darwin's "beautiful solid case," Bishop's poems themselves are built up out of minute observations. In "The Sandpiper," a "self-forgetful, perfectly useless" Darwinian concentration is enacted. Like Darwin's "almost unconscious or automatic" observations which lead him into "the unknown," the sandpiper's preoccupied search leads to the discovery of the infinite beautiful diversity of the world

epitomized in "The millions of grains," which "are black, white, tan, and gray, / mixed with quartz grains, rose and amethyst." Such diversity and mystery in a world at once minute and vast, clear and opaque, offer an endless source of material for Bishop's poems of exploratory observation.

The meaning of Bishop's parenthetical remark in the same letter to Stevenson -- "(In this sense, it is always 'escape')"--is implicitly suggested in the Sandpiper's concentration on examining the grains of sand in order to help control his "panic." Joseph Summers's perceptive comments on the function of meticulous attention to details in Bishop's prose piece "In the Village" are helpful for understanding Bishop's meaning of "'escape'" in observation. In his lecture "Elizabeth Bishop" given at Oxford during the late 60's, Professor Summers pointed out that the story "shows how the sounds and sights and textures of a Nova Scotia village enable a child to come to terms with the sound of the scream which signified her mother's madness and, ultimately, human isolation, loss, mortality."¹⁹ He continued:

the child's capacity for meticulous attention serves not merely as a method of escaping from intolerable pain, but also as an opening from the prison of the self and its wounds to a rejoicing in both human creativity and the things and events of an ordinary day. (1 VC)

In her letter to U. T. and Joseph Summers, Bishop endorsed

Joseph Summers's comments and singled out this part of his essay for praise:

I think the beginning part about "meticulous attention, a method of escaping from intolerable pain" is awfully good--and something I've just begun to realize myself--although I did take it in about Marianne Moore long ago. (It is her way of controlling what almost amounts to paranoia, I believe--although I handle these words ineptly.) (19 October 1967, L 477)

These comments and one line from Bishop's essay, "Efforts of Affection: A Memoir of Marianne Moore," can further illuminate the sandpiper's (and the poet's) "controlled panic" and need for observation in association with the production of the poem. Responding to a feminist writer's remark about Moore as a "'poet who controlled panic by presenting it as whimsy,'" Bishop wrote: "Surely there is an element of mortal panic and fear underlying all works of art?" (CPr 143-44). The sandpiper's (or rather Bishop's) "mortal panic and fear" are presented with humor and perhaps even a certain amount of whimsy. The bird's almost desperate concentration on visual details suggests a need to escape his fear of "the roaring alongside" and the unstoppable shaking of the earth, even though he takes the roaring "for granted." By referring to the sandpiper as "a student of Blake," Bishop also indicates the bird's need to rejoice in every particular he sees and to perceive something that will bring liberation from "the prison of the

self and its wounds."

Bishop's appropriation of others' words enables her to express complicated ideas and various viewpoints through simple language and descriptions. As Bakhtin says, "Others' utterances can be repeated with varying degrees of reinterpretation" (SG 91). He notes that

very frequently the expression of our utterance is determined not only--and sometimes not so much--by the referentially semantic content of this utterance, but also by others' utterances on the same topic to which we are responding or with which we are polemicizing.
(SG 91)

This "reinterpretation" of others' words is also a technical strategy for Bishop to express certain ideas, feelings, and attitudes. In "From Trollope's Journal," a poem on an American historical theme, she expresses her thoughts through another's words by selecting and recombining material from one of Anthony Trollope's letters and a chapter of his book *North America* (1863). Writing to Robert Lowell, who had sent Bishop his comments on her draft of this poem, Bishop explained her use of Trollope's words:

I have re-arranged the Trollope poem, taking your advice, and I think it is improved. The whole thing should really be in quotation marks, I suppose; the reason it doesn't sound like me is because it sounds like Trollope. It probably should be quite a bit longer. Have you ever read his *North America*? I just copied out some of the Washington chapter. Well, I don't know whether it is a virtue or not, never to sound the same way more than once or twice! It sounds too much like facility, and yet I don't feel a bit

facile, God knows. (27 July 1960, L 387)

In another letter, Bishop told Lowell "'From Trollope's Journal' was actually an anti-Eisenhower poem, I think-- although it's really almost all Trollope, phrase after phrase" (18 November 1965, L 439).

Trollope's chapter on Washington D.C. records his detailed and comprehensive observations of the city, including its architecture, the federal government, and the Army of the Potomac during his visit there between the middle of December 1861 and the middle of January 1862 at the beginning of the American Civil War. Bishop reconstructed Trollope's narrative in his own voice by combining selected information from Trollope into a double sonnet. But Trollope's words are modified, rearranged, and transformed into Bishop's own work of art. In *North America*, Trollope wrote:

Statuary at Washington runs too much on two subjects, which are repeated perhaps almost *ad nauseam*: one is that of a stiff, steady-looking, healthy, but ugly individual, with a square jaw and big jowl, which represents the great general And the other represents a melancholy, weak figure without any hair, but often covered with feathers, and is intended to typify the red Indian. [...] (12)

The President's house is nice to look at, but it is built on marsh ground, not much above the level of the Potomac, and is very unhealthy. I was told that all who live there become subject to fever and ague, and that few who now live there have escaped it altogether. [...] But the poor President cannot desert the White House. He must make the most of the

residence which the nation has prepared for him.
(18-19)

Trollope's comments on the statues in Washington and his information about the effect of the location of the White House on its residents are condensed and rearranged in the beginning lines of Bishop's poem. Hence her poem immediately sets the depressing tone and melancholy atmosphere in the capital.

As far as statues go, so far there's not much choice: they're either Washingtons or Indians, a whitewashed, stubby lot, His country's Father or His foster sons. The White House in a sad, unhealthy spot just higher than Potomac's swampy brim, --they say the present President has got ague or fever in each backwoods limb. (CP 132)

The rest of the poem turns into narration of the speaker's encounters in Washington, which are basically Trollope's own experience and observations of Washington in the midst of preparation for war. Trollope wrote:

A sad and saddening spot was that marsh, as I wandered down on it all alone one Sunday afternoon. The ground was frozen and I could walk dry-shod, but there was not a blade of grass. Around me on all sides were cattle in great numbers--steers and big oxen--howling in their hunger for a meal. They were beef for the army, and never again, I suppose, would it be allowed to them to fill their big maws and chew the patient cud. [...]

Have I as yet said that Washington was dirty in that winter of 1861-62? Or, I should rather ask, have I made it understood that in walking about Washington one waded as deep in mud as one does in floundering through an ordinary plowed field in November? [...]

Then came a severe frost and a little snow; and if one did not fall while walking, it was very well. After that we had the thaw; and Washington assumed its normal winter condition. I must say that, during the whole of this time, the atmosphere was to me exhilarating; but I was hardly out of the doctor's hands while I was there, and he did not support my theory as to the goodness of the air. "It is poisoned by the soldiers," he said, "and everybody is ill." (20-21)

These two paragraphs contain almost all the narrative and descriptive details of Bishop's poem:

On Sunday afternoon I wandered--rather,
I floundered--out alone. The air was raw
and dark; the marsh half-ice, half-mud. This weather
is normal now: a frost, and then a thaw,
and then a frost. A hunting man, I found
the Pennsylvania Avenue heavy ground ...
There all around me in the ugly mud
--hoof-pocked, uncultivated--herds of cattle,
numberless, wond'ring steers and oxen, stood:
beef for the Army, after the next battle.
Their legs were caked the color of dried blood;
their horns were wreathed with fog. Poor, starving,
dumb
or lowing creatures, never to chew the cud
or fill their maws again! Th'effluvium
made that damned anthrax on my forehead throb.
I called a surgeon in, a young man, but,
with a sore throat himself, he did his job.
We talked about the War, and as he cut
away, he croaked out, "Sir, I do declare
everyone's sick! The soldiers poison the air."
(CP 132)

Bishop also incorporated into her poem information from a letter Trollope wrote in Washington D. C. on 17 December 1861, which revealed that he was suffering from an anthrax on his forehead, and his doctor "has chopped it across twice."²⁰ Bishop integrated this information with that

from Trollope's book in her poem to help create a sense of the prevalence of disease in Washington. The widespread ill health in the poem (from the president to the doctor and to the speaker of the poem) suggests the pervasive victimizing impact of the war on everyone. The epigrammatic closing couplet--". . . 'Sir, I declare / everyone's sick! The soldiers poison the air'"--which serves as a commentary on and summary of the preceding narrative, indirectly expresses Bishop's "anti-Eisenhower" attitude. As in Trollope's book, there is no actual fighting taking place in this poem. But the killing and violence of war are suggested in Bishop's revised descriptions of the "herds of cattle" whose "legs were caked the color of dried blood" and who were to be "beef for the Army, after the next battle." In a later chapter on "The Army of the North," Trollope mentioned that the ground where the Potomac army camped was "in its nature soft and deep, composed of red clay . . ." (139). Bishop made imaginative transformation of "red clay" into "the color of dried blood" that "caked" the cattle's legs to suggest the enormous amount of bloodshed none too distant. So much emphasis on the link between sickness, soldiers, and killing alludes to Eisenhower's military background and suggests that Bishop's attack on the Eisenhower administration is aimed at what she saw as an unhealthy American political situation.

Bishop's connection of militarism, politics, and death in "From Trollope's Journal" is reminiscent of Robert Lowell's bitter attack on militarism in the American presidency in one of his *Life Study* poems, "Inauguration Day: January 1953." In this poem, Lowell also refers to American history in his protest against Eisenhower: "God of our armies, who interred / Cold Harbor's blue immortals, Grant! / Horseman, your sword is in the groove!" (57). In this short poem, Lowell employs a series of images as metaphors for the lack of progress in American politics and the destructiveness of militarism:

Ice, ice. Our wheels no longer move.
 Look, the fixed stars, all just alike
 as lack-land atoms, split apart,
 and the Republic summons Ike,
 the mausoleum in her heart. (57)

These devices of metaphorical language and symbolic imagery in this Lowell poem are avoided in Bishop's "From Trollope's Journal." In one of her articles on Marianne Moore, "As We Like It," Bishop revealed her belief in avoiding metaphorical expression. She cited Edgar Allan Poe from his "Philosophy of Composition" and noted that Poe "stressed the importance of avoiding 'the excess of the suggested meaning,'" and advised that "metaphor is a device that must be very carefully employed." "Miss Moore does employ it carefully," Bishop pointed out, "and it is one of the

qualities that gives her poetry its steady aura of both reserve and having possibly more meanings, in reserve" (132). It is this effect of "having possibly more meanings, in reserve" that Bishop achieves in her appropriation of the descriptive details from Trollope's narrative. Moreover, her appropriation of Trollope's narrative flow helps make her double sonnet's technical devices appear "less of a trick and more of a natural theme and variations" while her poem progresses naturally with the details of Trollope's "story." Furthermore, Bishop's intertextual appropriation and revision of Trollope enables her to achieve the "significant, illustrative, American" qualities she admired in Lowell.

Bishop deals with another American theme by employing a nursery rhyme in "Visits to St. Elizabeths." The parenthetical date under this title "[1950]" indicates the time of Ezra Pound's incarceration in St. Elizabeth's Hospital, a mental institution in Washington, D.C. Bishop paid several visits to Pound when she served as Consultant in Poetry at the Library of Congress between 1949 and 1950. Although this poem expresses Bishop's personal feelings about Pound, it participates in a social dialogue on the issues surrounding him. According to Robert Dale Parker, "To comment on Pound in the late forties and the fifties became a national ritual of political passion. . . . The

political judgments . . . were radically dismissive at their gentlest. Newspapers wrote openly that Pound should be shot" (114). In her poem, Bishop rejected a one-sided view of Pound.²¹ Writing to Robert Lowell, she complained that some of Robert Frost's remarks about Pound were "just what the public wants to hear, I'm afraid" (30 October 1958, *L* 365).

"Visits to St. Elizabeths," which appeared in the 1957 Spring issue of *Partisan Review*, voices Bishop's ambivalent feelings about Pound. Writing to Isabella Gardner, an editor of *Poetry* magazine in the 1950s, Bishop said, "I am so pleased that you liked the Pound poem. I really couldn't tell much myself whether it conveyed my rather mixed emotions or not" (May Day, 1957, *L* 338). The different sides of Pound she saw and her "mixed emotions" are expressed through the descriptive and accumulative form of a nursery rhyme, "This is the house that Jack built," which provides Bishop with a medium that escapes confinement to one single aspect or one particular point of view. With a slight alteration in the beginning line of the nursery rhyme, Bishop establishes the asylum setting and the incarceration of her character.

This is the house of Bedlam.

This is the man
that lies in the house of Bedlam. (*CP* 133)

As the poem progresses with accumulating information about its subject, the man "that lies in the house of Bedlam" is described as "the tragic man," "the talkative man," "the honored man," "the old, brave man," "the cranky man," also, "the cruel man," "the busy man," "the tedious man," and "the wretched man." These mixed characteristics portray Pound as a person with certain peculiarities rather than as a demonized or deified symbol. Despite her expressed sympathy and admiration for Pound, Bishop's depiction of him does not flinch from his guilt or his ugly side. Bishop's introduction of the Jewish patient in the middle of the poem and her juxtaposition of the Jew's grief, loss, and final escape over the sea to America with descriptions of Pound, articulate Bishop's protest against Pound's anti-Semitism. However, while gradually revealing the Jewish patient's sufferings, Bishop gives a multifaceted picture of "the poet, the man":

This is a Jew in a newspaper hat
 that dances weeping down the ward
 over the creaking sea of board
 beyond the sailor
 winding his watch
 that tells the time
 of the cruel man
 that lies in the house of Bedlam.

This is a world of books gone flat.
 This is a Jew in a newspaper hat
 that dances weeping down the ward
 over the creaking sea of board
 of the batty sailor
 that winds his watch

that tells the time
of the busy man
that lies in the house of Bedlam.

This is the boy that pats the floor
to see if the world is there, is flat,
for the widowed Jew in the newspaper hat
that dances weeping down the ward
waltzing the length of a weaving board
by the silent sailor
that hears his watch
that ticks the time
of the tedious man
that lies in the house of Bedlam. (CP 134)

The last stanza, adding "the soldier home from the war" to the Jewish inmate "walking the plank of a coffin board," underscores Pound's guilt. But at the same time Pound, "the wretched man," is ironically incarcerated with the mad soldier from the war and the insane Jewish patient: all are victims, in different ways, of racism, bigotry, and hatred. With its poignant immediacy of historical and social contexts, "Visits to St. Elizabeths" is much more "real" and "serious" than Bishop's early poems such as "The Gentleman of Shalott" and "The Unbeliever." Personal delusion and opinions in this poem lead to direct social and historical consequences, rather than humorously suggesting mainly metaphysical implications like those of the two early poems.

This growing sense of the connection between the personal values and actions and the social world was to become a guiding principle in Bishop's new poems collected in her fourth book, *The Complete Poems* (1969), and it is one

of the reasons Bishop rejected the "self-indulgent" aspect of some of the so-called "confessional" poems that emerged in the wake of the publication of Robert Lowell's *Life Studies* (1959). Bishop's resistance to seeing the self or the world from within an enclosure, or from one single point of view, becomes a determining factor in how she depicts the self and the world in these new poems.

Notes to Chapter Three

1. See Bishop's blurb for Robert Lowell's *Life Studies*, collected in Schwartz and Estess, 285.

2. Bishop's translations of João Cabral de Malo Neto's poem "From *The Death and Life of A Severino*" appeared in *Poetry* in 1963, and her translations of Carlos Drummond de Andrade's "Seven-Sided Poem" and "Don't Kill Yourself" appeared in *Shenandoah*, 1965. Her translations of Clarice Lispector's short stories, "The Smallest Woman in the World," "A Hen," and "Marmosets," were published in *Kenyon Review* in 1964.

3. Lispector's "Smallest Woman in the World" exposes the French's Eurocentrism and racial prejudice in their encounter with a different race through a French explorer's discovery of a woman of the smallest pygmies in equatorial Africa. Bishop appropriates Lispector's parodic technique in revealing Eurocentrism and racial prejudice in a later poem, "12 O'Clock News."

4. Bishop complained a lot about the difficult time she had with *Life* magazine, which asked her to write the text of an illustrated book on Brazil. "I'm having a hideous time writing the thing," Bishop wrote to a friend, Pearl Kazin. As she told Kazin, Bishop fought hard with the magazine in order to hold on to her own principles:

It is really more like manufacturing synthetic whipped cream out of the by-products of a plastic factory than anything remotely connected with writing--even journalistic writing. I put on one display of temperament & the editor here came running around all fluttering and consoling. [...] They also telexed from N.Y. to ask if I'd ever been a Communist! (Probably some infant editor saw a poem in *Partisan Review* and the name terrified them.) On the whole, they behave exactly the way the U.S. Embassy does here. (13 August 1961, L 399-400)

To her Aunt Grace, Bishop expressed some relief that after all she had "saved some of the book": "They are incredible people and what they know about Brazil would fit on the head of a pin--and yet the gall, the arrogance, the general condescension! However--I've saved some of the book, and it does tell the truth, more or less--and some of the pictures are pretty--but not nearly enough" (12 December 1961, L 403).

5. In a letter of 27 January 1956 to May Swenson, Bishop wrote, "The New Yorker took a long, long poem ["Manuelzinho"]--to my great surprise. . . . It's supposed to be Lota talking, and I do hope you will like it" (L 315).

6. Bishop had an apartment in Rio de Janeiro, left to her by Soares after Soares's death in 1967. Rio provides the setting for a few of her poems, including "The Burglar of Babylon."

7. See Bishop, "On 'The Burglar of Babylon'," in Schwartz and Estess, 305.

8. In the caption for a photo of slums on a hill of Rio, Bishop wrote:

Vertical slums, the favelas of Rio are home to some 80,000 people, who live without running water or sewers literally a stone's throw from Rio's luxury apartment houses. Flimsy shanties built of odd scraps, they inhabited mainly by rural people who come to Rio to find work. Although the favelas are no worse than many other city slums, they are more conspicuous--inescapable reminders of the rural squalor behind Brazil's industrial progress. (Brazil 138)

9. This comment on how "poetry gets to be written" is from Bishop's letter in reply to a Miss Pierson. Among other things, Bishop talks about the poet's voice in the poem: "why shouldn't the poet appear in the poem? There are several tricks--"I" or "we" or "he" or "she" or even "one"--or somebody's name. Someone is talking, after all--but of course the idea is to prevent that particular tone of voice from growing monotonous." Bishop also emphasizes that poetry "can't be done, apparently, by willpower and study alone. . ." (28 May 1975, L 596). The diverse identities of speakers in Bishop's poems are in part a way to avoid a "monotonous" tone of voice.

10. In an early poem, "Miracle for Breakfast," included in *North & South*, Bishop implicitly expresses the idea that the "miracle" of her art comes from history, nature, and persistence: "My crumb / my mansion, made for me by a miracle, / through ages, by insects, birds, and the river / working the stone" (CP 19). In a fragmentary passage of a prose poem draft entitled "THE WALKING-STICK INSECT," which seems to have been written at the same time as the published three animal monologues under the general title "Rainy Season: Sub-Tropics," Bishop also expresses the idea of the poet being immersed in natural elements and history: "In

communion with the forest, with underbrush, dead leaves of last year and years before . . . a sense of meditation--the past--objectivity--"dead wood"! little do they know -" This manuscript is in Bishop's unpublished prose manuscripts among the Elizabeth Bishop Papers. Quotations from Elizabeth Bishop's unpublished materials are used by permission of her Estate, Alice Methfessel, Literary Executor, and Special Collections of Vassar College Libraries.

11. Bishop expressed her feelings about the Brazilian Indians in a letter to Robert Lowell in which she described a visit which she and others, including Dos Passos and Aldous Huxley, made to Brasilia to see native Indians.

I don't know how you feel about Indians--I had expected to be depressed by them . . . but actually we had a wonderful cheerful time. It's only depressing to think about their future. [...] They were very curious about Huxley. One who spoke a little Portuguese said he was "homely...homely." And then one, a widower, asked me to stay and marry him. This was a slightly dubious compliment; nevertheless the other ladies were all quite jealous. But I am finishing up a long piece about it . . . so I won't describe any more. Sometimes I hope to go back there and spend a few days" (28 August 1958, L 362).

The piece Bishop mentioned that she was working on was not "Riverman" which appeared in the *New Yorker* in April 1960. According to Bishop's letter to Anny Baumann (her doctor), this piece about Brasilia was rejected by the *New Yorker* (4 December 1958, L 369).

12. Quotations from Elizabeth Bishop's unpublished materials are used by permission of her Estate, Alice Methfessel, Literary Executor, and of Special Collections of Vassar College Libraries.

13. It is this somewhat simplistic view in Bishop's comment on the unproblematic and apparently harmonious racial relationship in Brazilian society that partly drew some Brazilian newspapers' attack on Bishop's "racism" referred to in my discussion of the fourth song of "Songs for A Colored Singer" in Chapter One, Note 18. Bishop's comments on racial relationship in "On the Railroad Named Delight" were more specific and limited to one particular aspect of racial relationship in Brazil in comparison with the overt racism in the United States.

14. See Elizabeth Bishop's letter of "February 25th or 6th [1954]" to her English friends, Kit Barker, a painter, and his wife, Ilse Barker, a novelist, in *One Art: Letters*, 291. After she met them at Yaddo in December 1950, Bishop developed a lifelong friendship with them.

15. Bishop's mother, Gertrude Bulmer, brought Bishop back to her hometown Great Village, Nova Scotia after Bishop's father, William Thomas Bishop, died. When she was six years old, Bishop was taken back to Worcester, Massachusetts to live with her paternal grandparents. In "The Country Mouse," Bishop wrote: "I had been brought back unconsulted and against my wishes to the house my father had been born in, to be saved from a life of poverty and provincialism, bare feet, suet puddings, unsanitary school slates, perhaps even from the inverted r's of my mother's family" (CPR 17).

16. Bishop did not get these autobiographical prose pieces published until much later. "Memory of Uncle Neddy" first appeared in the October 1977 issue of *Southern Review*. It was later collected together with "Primer Class" and "The Country Mouse" in Bishop's *Collected Prose* (1984).

17. Two other "Elsewhere" poems, "Sestina" and "First Death in Nova Scotia" are also written from a child's point of view and based on Bishop's childhood memories. Critics have noted that "First Death in Nova Scotia" owes some debt to one of Robert Lowell's *Life Studies* poems, "My Last Afternoon with Uncle Devereux Winslow," which also deals with a child's first encounter with death. For a perceptive discussion of the similarities and differences between these two poems, see Kalstone, *Becoming A Poet*, 218-21.

18. The two friends are Marianne Moore and Robert Lowell, but Bishop never finished the draft of this poem.

19. The manuscript of this lecture on Bishop is among the Elizabeth Bishop Papers. Quotations from Joseph Summers's unpublished material are used by permission of Joseph Summers, and Nancy S. MacKechnie of Special Collections, Vassar College Libraries.

20. See *The Letters of Anthony Trollope*, ed. Bradford Allen Booth (London: Oxford UP, 1951), 97. In a letter to Joseph Summers, Bishop wrote that she "read all of Dickens, Trollope, Freud. . ." (9 December 1953, L 283).

21. For more information about Pound at St. Elizabeths, see E. Fuller Torrey, *The Roots of Treason: Ezra Pound and the Secret of St. Elizabeths* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1984);

and Charles Olson, *Charles Olson & Ezra Pound: An Encounter at St. Elizabeths*, ed. Catherine Seelye (New York: Grossman, 1975).

CHAPTER FOUR: "New and Uncollected Work"
in *The Complete Poems* (1969)

4.1. "The Oblique, The Indirect Approach"

Elizabeth Bishop's fourth book of poetry, *The Complete Poems* (1969), contains the three previously published collections, *North & South* (1946), *A Cold Spring* (1955), and *Questions of Travel* (1965), along with her translations of two Brazilian poets, and a section of "New and Uncollected Work."¹ It won the National Book Award for poetry in 1970. Both the forms and the contents of these new poems, to a large extent, are determined by Bishop's response to the emerging school of "confessional" poetry in America. Even though Bishop had already begun to use autobiographical material and to place herself directly in some of her earlier poems, her treatment of personal experience and the self was not as complex or as acutely direct as it is in these new poems. Even so, these poems never become "naked" confession or concern themselves with the self only. They are at once an assimilation of and a resistance to the "confessional" practice in contemporary American poetry.

In the 1960's, Bishop found her own aesthetic principles and poetic practice at odds with certain trends in American poetry that had developed since Robert Lowell's *Life Studies*, published in 1959. Disclosing aspects of the poet's private, sometimes painful, personal life, *Life*

Studies addresses the audience directly without the intervention of a persona. It is generally considered a seminal book that marked a new departure in the history of American poetry, turning against the impersonal and symbolic aesthetics of New Critical poetry. As Mark Doty says, "[*Life Studies*] signalled to the coming generation of young poets the end of the domination of the New Critical perspective that the self and the poem are divorced, of the poem as artifact unto itself detached from the poet" (152). In *The Confessional Poets* (1973), Robert Phillips also refers to *Life Studies* as "that seminal book" (1) which "was the first postwar book, written as self-therapy and breaking through to the personal," that "reached a wide audience." Phillips contends that "all modern American confessional poetry seems influenced by Lowell's direct, easily understood volume." He adds that "As a genre, 'confessional poetry' has become a potent force in the literary history of the post-Eisenhower years" (1). Several Pulitzer Prizes for poetry of this decade went to the works of "confessional" poets. W. D. Snodgrass' *Heart's Needle* won the 1960 Pulitzer; the 1965 Pulitzer went to John Berryman for *77 Dream Songs*; Ann Sexton's *Live or Die* was awarded the prize in 1967.

Bishop found this new trend of poetry, which focuses on self-exploration and self-disclosure, provocative. At

times, though, she found herself depressed by what was going on. She complained to Robert Lowell in March, 1961:

I get so depressed with every number of POETRY, The New Yorker, etc. (this one I am swearing off of, except for prose, forever, I hope--) so much adequate poetry all sounding just alike and so boring--or am I growing frizzled small and stale or however you put it? There seems to be too much of everything--too much painting, too much poetry, too many novels--and much too much money, I suppose.... And no one really feeling anything much. (Houghton Library, Harvard University, qtd. in Millier *Life* 322)

Bishop's response to the "confessional" was thoughtful and cautious at the beginning. She felt ambivalent about Berryman's 77 *Dream Songs* (1964). "I am pretty much at sea about that book," Bishop wrote to Lowell on October 1, 1964. Apart from her uncertainty, Bishop carefully expressed her disapproval of Berryman's "too personal" confessions: "Some pages I find wonderful, some baffle me completely. I am sure he is saying *something* important--perhaps sometimes too personal?" (qtd. in Millier *Life* 361). To Anne Stevenson, Bishop also expressed her admiration for and bafflement at Berryman's poems. But she was more frank, and "showed more confidence in her evaluation," as Brett Millier says, to Stevenson than she had in her letter to Lowell:

[Berryman] echoes: "The Wreck of the Deutschland," Stevens, Cummings, Lowell, a bit, Pound, etc etc.--but it is quite an extraordinary performance, although I think I really understand probably barely half of it. If I were a critic and had a good brain I think I'd like to write a study of "The School of Anguish"---

Lowell (by far the best), Roethke, and Berryman and their descendants like Anne Sexton and Siedel, more and more anguish and less and less poetry. Surely never in all the ages has poetry been so personal and confessional---and I don't think it is what I like, really--although I certainly admire Lowell.

(27 October 1964, Washington University Library, qtd. in Millier *Life* 361)

For Bishop, excessive anguish and confession are treated at the cost of artistry--"more and more anguish and less and less poetry"--in some poems which are "so personal and confessional." A decade later, she continued to express her objection to "naked" self-exposure and extremely "depressing" treatment of awful situations to a friend, Lloyd Schwartz, in response to his poem, "Who's on First?":

I myself think it is a very economical and acutely put description of a contemporary situation--moving, awful, depressing in the extreme, etc.--but I'm still not sure whether one could call this prose dialogue a poem. Of course I am hopelessly old-fashioned and perhaps I don't like things expressed so openly and nakedly, I don't know.

... I can't bear to have my friends run themselves down. Even if I read it in a magazine and didn't know you, I think I'd wonder at the exposure. (There is a piece, a sort of prose-poem fantasy by James Schuyler . . . that I really rather liked. It may be about an even worse situation--I gather from the ending--but the details, the hilarity, somehow make it more acceptable --at least, to me.) (21 October 1974, L 589)

In a 1978 interview, Bishop once again expressed her preference for an indirect approach to self-disclosure. "T. S. Eliot, though, was right, I think, when he said that the more you try to express yourself, the less you really

express. So much poetry I see seems self-indulgent" (Johnson 21).

As she came to hear and read more "confessional" poems and the works of the Beat poets during the 60's, Bishop became more articulate in her comments. In 1968, according to Millier, Bishop did poetry readings "twice in San Francisco, once at the Museum of Modern Art and once at Glide Memorial, the so-called hippy church, in a benefit for striking teachers at San Francisco State University" (*Life* 412-13). Bishop said, in her letter to James Merrill, that she did the reading out of "curiosity and friendship," rather than "anything idealistic" (27 February 1969, VC). And she wanted to see the famous San Francisco writers and poets whom she had never met. Even though she "smoked a little marijuana at the reading and decided she liked [Richard] Brautigan" (Millier *Life* 413), Bishop felt herself to be an outsider.² To Merrill, she wrote,

in general, I'm afraid, I'm just a member of the eastern establishment to everyone here, and definitely passéé. I don't mind. I thought that Thom [Gunn]'s poems and mine were the best!--the rest were propaganda that takes me back to my college days and the WPA theatre and so on--propaganda, or reportage of all-too-familiar events.³ (27 February 1969, VC)

For Bishop, poetry is reduced to propaganda and reportage when artistic values are sacrificed for the sake of politics or sensationalism. However, she is equally against

sacrificing the poet's social responsibility for the sake of art.

These principles are stated passionately in another letter to Lowell. Responding to Lowell's use and alterations of his second wife Elizabeth Hardwick's letters to him in his poems to be published in *The Dolphin* (1973), Bishop wrote: "It's hell to write this, so please first do believe I think *Dolphin* is magnificent poetry. It is also honest poetry--almost." To make her point, Bishop quoted a passage from Thomas Hardy in the same letter to Lowell:

Here is a quotation from dear little Hardy that I copied out years ago--long before *Dolphin*, or even the *Notebooks*, were thought of. It's from a letter written in 1911. . . . (Not exactly the same situation as *Dolphin*, but fairly close.)

"What should certainly be protested against, in cases where there is no authorization, is the mixing of fact and fiction in unknown proportions. Infinite mischief would lie in that. If any statements in the dress of fiction are covertly hinted to be fact, all must be fact, and nothing else but fact, for obvious reasons. The power of getting lies believed about people through that channel after they are dead, by stirring in a few truths, is a horror to contemplates."

I'm sure my point is only too plain. Lizzie is not dead, etc.--but there is a "mixture of fact & fiction--", and you have *changed* her letters. That is "infinite mischief," I think. . . . One can use one's life as material--one does, anyway--but these letters--aren't you violating a trust? IF you were given permission--IF you hadn't changed them . . . etc. But art *just isn't worth that much*. (21 March 1972, L 561-62)

In this same letter, Bishop expressed her ideas about confessional poetry with much more frankness and confidence

than before.

In general, I deplore the "confessional"--however, when you wrote *Life Studies* perhaps it was a necessary movement, and it helped make poetry more real, fresh and immediate. But now--ye gods--anything goes, and I am so sick of poems about the students' mothers & fathers and sex lives and so on. All that can be done--but at the same time one surely should have a feeling that one can trust the writer--not to distort, tell lies, etc.

. . . I just hate the level we seem to live and think and feel on at present. . . . I can't bear to have anything you write tell--perhaps--what we're really like in 1972--perhaps it's as simple as that. But are we? (L 562-63)

Bishop's acknowledgement of the contribution of Lowell's *Life Studies* to poetry in general reflects her own belief in revolt that makes poetry "more real, fresh and immediate"--qualities she felt sorely lacking in those confessional poems which all "[sound] just alike and so boring." Two years later, she again explained to Lowell in another letter that she had no objection to the kind of "confession" in his *Life Studies*, except for other poets' excessive use of sexuality as subject matter. "Well, you've been blamed for starting some of that, we know--but there's all the difference in the world [between] "Life Studies" and those who now out-sex Ann Sexton" (22 January 1974, Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, qtd. in Millier *Life* 490).

But it is more than the lack of artistic originality or diversity that made Bishop "deplore the 'confessional'" in

general. Bishop protested against the "confessional" also for the overall picture of people and their lives depicted in those poems, as she wrote to Lowell:

I am sick of all this fascination with extremes . . . Dope addicts-saints--either one or the other--*anything* rather than be what we are--*anything* to imply we're all victims, I guess--or that as long as you see through everything, you've done all you can. (22 January 1962, Houghton Library, qtd. in Millier "Modesty and Morality" 48)

Bishop openly expressed her objection to the implications in this "fascination with extremes" in her comment on "confessional" poems in *Time* (June 2, 1967):

Now the idea is that we live in a horrible and terrifying world, and the worst moments of horrible and terrifying lives are an allegory of the world. . . . The tendency is to overdo the morbidity. You just wish they'd keep some of these things to themselves.⁴

These comments suggest that for Bishop, resisting or indulging in the excessive release of personal anguish in poetry is more than a matter of aesthetics; it is also an ethical question of how the poet views the world and seeks to communicate his or her world view.

Soon after her comments on the confessional poets in *Time*, Bishop's prose poem "Rainy Season; Sub-Tropics" appeared in *Kenyon Review* in November, 1967 as a response to the "confessional" poetry. In this prose poem, Bishop articulates the principles of her poetics while parodying

the "confessional" self-examination and self-assertion through three animal speakers in three monologues subtitled "Giant Toad," "Strayed Crab," and "Giant Snail." Bishop exposes the limitations of each animal speaker's view of the self and the world by showing them from outside themselves through each other's eyes. She also avoids expressing a single authorial consciousness and viewpoint by incorporating others' voices in each of her animals' monologues. This treatment of the self with "otherness" as an integral part of the self's consciousness, according to Bakhtin, is a necessary condition for the "aesthetic event" in a literary work. "If there is only one unitary and unique participant," Bakhtin says, "there can be no aesthetic event." He contends: "An absolute consciousness, a consciousness that has nothing transgredient to, nothing situated outside itself and capable of delimiting it from outside--such a consciousness cannot be 'aestheticized' . . ." (AA 22). Bakhtin explains that my view of another person does not "coincide" with his view of himself because

I shall always see and know something that he, from his plane outside and over against me, cannot see himself: parts of his body that are inaccessible to his own gaze . . . which in any of our natural relations are accessible to me but not to him. (AA 23)

Bakhtin calls this kind of sight "excess of my seeing in relation to another human being" and considers it a

necessary condition for "aesthetic actions" (AA 24). For Bakhtin, this kind of aesthetic activity involves an interaction of different points of view on the same subject. This dialogic aesthetic experience can provide the reader with a cognitive process of recognition or revelation rather than offering a "polemical tract, manifesto, speech of accusation or of praise and gratitude . . ." (AA 22).

Bishop's animal speakers' "confessions" enact such dialogic aesthetic experience while revealing the "excess" of each's seeing of the other and parodying the "confessional" mode of poetry. This treatment of the self through parody and the eyes of others helps Bishop avoid sensationalism or giving the reader "a slight thrill of detection." Bishop discussed how this effect can be achieved by using "'physical' words" properly in a letter to May Swenson:

It's a problem of placement, choice of word, abruptness or accuracy of the image--and does it help or detract? If it sticks out of the poem so that all the reader is going to remember is "That Miss Swenson is always talking about phalluses"--or is it phalli?--you have spoiled your effect, obviously, and given the Freudian-minded contemporary reader just a slight thrill of detection rather than an esthetic experience.

(3 July 1958, L 361)

The physical characteristics of Bishop's three animal speakers, the Giant Toad, the Strayed Crab, and the Giant Snail, accurately match their descriptions of themselves,

including their boasts and complaints.⁵ Her use of animal speakers also incorporates a time-honoured satiric device often employed in such works as the fables of La Fontaine, in which human follies are exposed through the foibles of non-human characters.⁶

The prose poem's descriptive, meditative, and narrative characteristics, and its lack of metrical strictures, provide Bishop with a fitting form to depict both the spiritual and physical aspects of her animal speakers, and to reveal both their private and social selves. The prose poem form was often adopted by French surrealist poets partly because of its escape from the metrical constraint. According to Michael Benedikt, editor of *The Prose Poem: An International Anthology* (1976), Charles Baudelaire was "the originator" (43) who first consciously practised the form to explore its poetic possibilities.⁷ In a letter to his friend Arsène Houssaye published as the preface to *Short Prose Poems*, later issued as *Paris Spleen* (1869), Baudelaire asks:

Which one of us, in his moments of ambition, has not dreamt of the miracle of a poetic prose, musical, without rhythm and without rhyme, supple enough and rugged enough to adapt itself to the lyrical impulses of the soul, the undulations of reverie, the jibes of consciences? (ix-x)

As Rosemary Lloyd says in her introduction to Baudelaire's *The Prose Poems and La Fanfarlo* (1991), the prose poem

offers the possibilities of "rapid changes of mood and of combinations of pathos and comedy, lyricism and irony" (xiii). By combining interior monologue with the prose poem, Bishop achieves greater flexibility and opens new possibilities for revealing the multiple, complex facets of her personae in "Rainy Season; Sub-Tropics." Each of these prose-poem monologues reveals the co-existence of many contradictions and conflicts within the speaking subject. The multiple voices combined with the interactions between these animal speakers demonstrate the social, communal nature of thought, values, and self-consciousness. Her speakers' interactions with others are indispensable to revealing the self axiologically and aesthetically. "Rainy Season; Sub-Tropics," though one of Bishop's less commented-on works, contains important articulations about herself as a poet, and about her poetic principles and practice.

Self-mockery is used in all three monologues as a multi-functional method to enable the speaker simultaneously to articulate private thoughts and parody others' voices and view-points with a great amount of humor and freedom, while still maintaining the distance between the speaker and the poet. This distance creates the kind of "self-objectification," which, according to Bakhtin, is necessary for self-expression and for a dialogic relation with the self. "To express oneself means to make oneself an object

for another and for oneself ('the actualizing of consciousness')," Bakhtin observes. "Self-objectification (in the lyric, in the confession, and so forth) as self-alienation," he says, "to a certain degree," is "a surmounting of the self. By objectifying myself (i.e. by placing myself outside) I gain the opportunity to have an authentically dialogic relation with myself" (SG 110, 122). Bishop's use of self-mocking animal speakers in her prose creates this function of "self-objectification" by placing her self outside her personae.

The Giant Toad's monologue begins with anguish, humility and self-indulgence:

I am too big, too big by far. Pity me.
 My eyes bulge and hurt. They are my one great
 beauty, even so. They see too much, above, below, and
 yet there is not much to see. The rain has stopped.
 The mist is gathering on my skin in drops. . . .
 Perhaps the droplets on my mottled hide are pretty,
 like dewdrops, silver on a moldering leaf? They chill
 me through and through. I feel my colors changing now,
 my pigments gradually shudder and shift over.
 Now I shall get beneath that overhanging ledge.
 [...] Don't breathe until the snail gets by. But we go
 travelling the same weathers.
 Swallow the air and mouthfuls of cold mist. Give
 voice, just once. O how it echoed from the rock! What
 a profound, angelic bell I rang! (CP 139)

Even though the toad suffers from a painful self-consciousness about its size, it cannot resist a narcissistic tendency.⁴ Its apparent self-awareness is undercut by a strain of egocentricism and a self-

congratulatory tone.

The toad becomes totally helpless and vulnerable in the hands of "some naughty children," who put lit cigarettes in its mouth and the mouths of its "two brothers," and made it "sick for days." After this traumatic experience, the toad is no longer coy in asserting its confidence in itself. Its utterances become hostile and menacing:

I have big shoulders, like a boxer. They are not muscle, however, and their colour is dark. They are my sacs of poison, the almost unused poison that I bear, my burden and my great responsibility. Big wings of poison, folded on my back. Beware, I am an angel in disguise; my wings are evil, but not deadly. If I will it, the poison could break through, blue-black, and dangerous to all. Blue-black fumes would rise upon the air. Beware, you frivolous crab. (CP 139)

The toad's emphasis on its evil wings and sacs of poison in part signifies a disassociation from what Bishop regarded as self-congratulatory niceness she discerned in certain women writers. In a letter to Robert Lowell, Bishop expressed her ideas about some aspects in women's writings:

That Anne Sexton I think still has a bit too much romanticism and what I think of as the "our beautiful old silver" school of female writing, which is really boasting about how "nice" we were. [...] I wrote a story at Vassar that was too much admired by Miss Rose Peebles, my teacher, who was very proud of being an old-school Southern lady-- and suddenly this fact about women's writing dawned on me, and has haunted me ever since. (27 July 1960 L 386)

These qualities Bishop disliked are parodied in the Giant

Toad's monologue. Earlier in a letter to her friend Ilse Barker, Bishop explained her dislike of the self-congratulatory tone in some women writers' work: "It is that they are really boasting all the time. . . . It's the 'How nice to be nice!' atmosphere that gets me, and I think women writers must get quite away from it before they ever amount to a hill of beans." Further clarifying her idea in the same letter, Bishop made reference to Gustave Flaubert: "Although he's not my favorite writer by any means at least he's not hinting to you all the time about what fine feelings he has and what a dear rich old social background he had!" She concluded by saying that "I suppose it is at bottom a flaw in reality that irritates me so--not so much of being protected,--you can't blame them for that--but of wanting to show that they are even if they aren't"⁹ (28 February [1955], PU).

Bishop's irritation at what she considered unrealistically complacent female writing has to do partly with her own experience of gender discrimination in the literary world. In a conversation (1977), Bishop said that she refused to have her work included in women's anthologies, or in all-women issues of magazines while she was at college, because she "felt it was a lot of nonsense, separating the sexes." And "this feeling", she added, "came from feminist principles, perhaps stronger than I was aware

of" (Starbuck 322). In the same conversation, Bishop complained about the prejudice women writers were up against.

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 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 writing 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. (Starbuck 323-4)

These mixed feelings of resentment against prejudice, of being used to being "put down," of a "tough ironic attitude," and the confidence in her own as well as other women writers' creative competence seem to be transformed and expressed in the Giant Toad's monologue.¹⁰

In this regard, "Giant Toad" is like what Bishop says of Marianne Moore's poem "Marriage": "It is a poem which transforms a justified sense of injury into a work of art" (CPr 144). Indeed, the toad articulates a humorous anger Bishop shares with Moore, as her comments on "Marriage" indicate:

Perhaps it was pride or vanity that kept [Moore] from complaints, and that put her sense of injustice through the prisms dissected by "those various scalpels" into poetry. She was not too proud for occasional

complaints; she was humorously angry, but nevertheless angry, when her publisher twice postponed her book in order to bring out two young male poets, both now almost unheard of. ("Efforts of Affection" CPR 144-5)

Through the voice of a victimized toad, Bishop also expresses with self-mocking humor her anger at gender discrimination while the toad's threat about its "evil" wings and hidden poison "dangerous to all" counters the self-congratulatory claim of "How nice to be nice" in some women writers' works Bishop referred to. Bishop's use of a physically grotesque image in expressing complicated feelings is characteristic of women's writings. The monstrous image women writers identify themselves with is a strategy of subversion, revision, and self-articulation in both nineteenth- and twentieth-century literature.¹¹ In *The Madwoman in the Attic*, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar point out how Mary Shelley identifies herself with the monster she creates (58-59), and how Christina Rossetti "represents her own anxiety of authorship in the split between one heroine who longs to 'suck and suck' on goblin fruit and another who locks her lips fiercely together in a gesture of silent and passionate renunciation" (58). As Alicia Suskin Ostriker observes, "Much of *The Madwoman in the Attic* traces the image, in nineteenth-century women's writing, of the monster the author fears she is or secretly craves to be as against the angel she wishes to be or to appear" (74). Ostriker

points out that "Among contemporary women poets, fascination with deformity seems also to capture a sense--guilty or gloating, defensive or aggressive--of unacceptable personal power" (74). Ann Sexton defiantly calls herself "a possessed witch" in "Her Kind" (15). And Sylvia Plath declares her rebirth in "Lady Lazarus" with the threat: "Out of the ash / I rise with my red hair / And I eat men like air" (9). The presentation of grotesque bodily images is often used in women writers' works to subvert conventional values and to express their sense of themselves in a shocking, unconventional way. This employment of images and its subversive effect indicate that one's perception of one's body and the self is in part formed by others' values and opinions. In this respect, the body is not something self-sufficient. The anguish and potential danger Bishop's toad feels about its body reveals that its own ideas about itself also reflect others' values and opinions.

Bishop's toad shares those women writers' anger, confidence, and deliberate countering of the traditional orphic image of the poet. However, the toad's confidence in its threat of hidden, dangerous power is undercut by helplessness and self-pity ("I am too big, too big by far. Pity me.") On the one hand, these sentiments of helplessness and self-pity express feelings which Bishop

the other, they parody some confessional poets whom Bishop called "the self pitiers" of the "anguish-school that Cal [Robert Lowell] seems innocently to have inspired."¹³ Although Bishop's toad deliberately rejects an angelic image, it does not solely intend to convey menace with its alleged "evil" wings "dangerous to all." The fact that its sacs of poison are its burden and also its "great responsibility" echoes Moore's warning to Bishop herself. Responding to another of Bishop's prose poems in a letter written on February 9, 1937, Moore said to her, "Your competence in THE HANGING of THE MOUSE is almost criminal Your faculty of projecting the imagination and maintaining an initial suggestion in absolute adjustment is a heavy responsibility for you"¹⁴ (RM). In another letter written about a year later, Moore's warning to Bishop became more direct and specific: "I do feel that tentativeness and interiorizing are your danger as well as your strength"¹⁵ (1 May 1938, RM). Both Moore's humorous comment on Bishop's artistic capability and her warning of the responsibility of her art are also appropriated into the Giant Toad's utterances and transformed into its big, boxer-like shoulders which carry its dangerous sacs of poison.

The duality of responsibility and potential danger the toad is capable of also reflects Bishop's sense of the poet's social responsibility and the danger of relinquishing

it. Discussing her ideas about narrow psychoanalytical approaches to literature and art in a letter to Marianne Moore, Bishop said, "everything I have read about it has made me think that psychologists misinterpret and very much underestimate all the workings of ART!" Then she cited a passage from *Illusion and Reality* by Christopher Caudwell to make her point:

"Psychoanalysts do not see the poet playing a social function, but regard him as a neurotic working off his complexes at the expense of the public. Therefore in analyzing a work of art, psychoanalysts seek just those symbols that are peculiarly private, i.e. neurotic" (7 September 1937, L 63)

This awareness of the poet's "social function" helps make Bishop's animal monologues dialogic in the sense that they involve other people's points of view, and are oriented toward what has already been uttered, as well as toward their audience.

Although the toad's monologue, as Helen Vendler says of all three monologues, "contain[s] reflections on Bishop's self and her art" ("Elizabeth Bishop" 284), it alludes to other poets' utterances and artistic practice and articulates Bishop's commentary on them as well. The plurality of voice and multiplicity of consciousness in the toad's monologue demonstrate the "nonself-sufficiency, the impossibility of the existence of a single consciousness" which Bakhtin notes both in life and in art. "I am

conscious of myself and become myself only while revealing myself for another, through another, and with the help of another" (*PDP* 287). While discussing Dostoevsky's work, Bakhtin emphasizes that one of Dostoevsky's artistic achievements lies in his depiction of "confession and the confessional consciousnesses" which reveal their "internally social structure" and "the interdependence of consciousnesses." In short, Dostoevsky shows that confessions are "nothing other than an event of interaction among consciousnesses" (*PDP* 287). Likewise, the Giant Toad's monologue is more than a self-examination and self-reflection; it is a dialogue with others, and with Bishop herself. Bishop enhances the dialogic nature of values and consciousness by revealing how the toad's two neighbors, the Strayed Crab and Giant Snail, respond to its utterances. The toad's voice, self-admired as "a profound, angelic bell," provokes a negative response from the Strayed Crab, who regards it as nothing more than "a loud and hollow noise." While being as self-appreciative as the toad, the crab articulates different convictions and preoccupations, which more obviously invite associations with Bishop's own poetic style and practice. Bishop's sense of outsiderhood, her sense of being "passée" among the confessional and Beat poets, and her sense of alienation in San Francisco in the 1960s--"I almost felt that I understood people, or they me,

better in Brazil than now when I'm here on the same continent with them"¹⁶--seem to be expressed through the Strayed Crab:

This is not my home. How did I get so far from water? It must be over that way somewhere.

I am the color of wine, of tinta. The inside of my powerful right claw is saffron-yellow. See, I see it now; I wave it like a flag. I am dapper and elegant; I move with great precision, cleverly managing all my smaller yellow claws. I believe in the oblique, the indirect approach, and I keep my feelings to myself.

(CP 140)

The Strayed Crab's self-expression is reminiscent of Bishop's own formal elegance, precise description, and reticence. Like the self-disclosure in confessional poems, the crab's interior monologue expresses personal anguish and beliefs. Moreover, what is also revealed here, among other things, is again "the complexity of the simple phenomenon of looking at oneself in the mirror: with one's own and with others' eyes simultaneously, a meeting and interaction between the others' and one's own eyes," as Bakhtin says of the confessions in Dostoevsky's novels (PDP 289).

The Strayed Crab, with its cheerfully arrogant manner, presents a self and a view of the world which are very different from the depressing aspect in the toad's view of itself. The crab's attitude toward its two neighbors and its view of the world reveal an intersection of different values.

Cheer up, O grievous snail. I tap your shell,
 encouragingly, not that you will ever know about it.
 And I want nothing to do with you, either, sulking
 toad. Imagine, at least four times my size and yet so
 vulnerable... I could open your belly with my claw.
 You glare and bulge, a watchdog near my pool; you make
 a loud and hollow noise. I do not care for such
 stupidity. I admire compression, lightness, and
 agility, all rare in this loose world. (CP 140)

It seems that speaking through the voice of an insolent and arrogant crab, Bishop is able to articulate her negative response to the excessive treatment of anguish in some confessional poems. The crab's self-assurance also seems to echo Bishop's self-confidence in her own art, as she expressed it after having direct contact with the San Francisco poets. Like her earlier use of the riverman's voice, Bishop's use of the Strayed Crab's voice seems to serve a double function of depicting a character while expressing her own belief in "the oblique, the indirect approach," and "compression, lightness, and agility, all rare in this loose world."

Like its two neighbors, the Giant Snail also seems to articulate Bishop's response to others' ideas and utterances while describing with precision the actual physical condition of a snail:

Although I move ghostlike and my floating edges barely graze the ground, I am heavy, heavy, heavy. My white muscles are already tired. I give the impression of mysterious ease, but it is only with the greatest effort of my will that I can rise above the smallest

stones and sticks. And I must not let myself be distracted by those rough spears of grass. Don't touch them. Draw back. Withdrawal is always best.
(CP 141)

The appearance of ease in the snail's movement, and the actual difficulty involved, are analogous to the natural casualness of Bishop's poems and the immense efforts such naturalness requires. In a letter to Marianne Moore written in 1954 from Brazil, Bishop expressed her frustration at the fact that some literary reviews seem to take writers' works for granted without being aware of the magnitude of difficulties they entail.

A friend brought our mail today, including the September "Poetry"--I object so much to Hugh Kenner most of the time but I do think he has written the best review by far that I've seen--I wonder if you like it, too? He also seems to be aware of the enormous difficulties more than other reviewers who somehow imply it was easy in an infuriating way.¹⁷
(15 October 1954, RM)

The "absolute naturalness of tone" was one of the qualities Bishop admired in George Herbert's poems, and one she laboured to achieve in her own work.¹⁸ But "writing poetry is an unnatural act. It takes great skill to make it seem natural" (VC), Bishop wrote in one of her notebooks.¹⁹ These ideas and her sense of the difficult struggle involved in her career are implied in the snail's self-expression: "I give the impression of mysterious ease, but it is only with the greatest effort of my will that I can rise above

the smallest stones and sticks."

Like the self in "confessional" poems, Bishop's animal speakers are full of self-awareness and self-contradictions. Although the Giant Snail knows many of its weak points, like the Giant Toad, it is highly aware of its own beauty, and takes pride in it. But at the same time it suffers from anguish over its weight, a self-consciousness that is penetrated by the awareness of another's opinion. "Vexation and a certain resentment, with which our dissatisfaction about our own exterior may combine," says Bakhtin, "give body to this other--the possible author of our own exterior" (AA 33). The snail's anxiety about her own physical appearance, again, presupposes the evaluation of others.

The sides of my mouth are now my hands. They press the earth and suck it hard. Ah, but I know my shell is beautiful, and high, and glazed, and shining. I know it well, although I have not seen it. Its curled white lip is of the finest enamel. Inside, it is as smooth as silk, and I, I fill it to perfection.

My wide wake shines, now it is growing dark. I leave a lovely opalescent ribbon: I know this.

But Oh! I am too big. I feel it. Pity me.

(CP 141-2)

The abrupt shifting of tone and topic in the snail's monologue reflects its inner conflict between self-assurance and self-pity. The fact that both the Giant Snail and the Giant Toad are painfully self-conscious about their physique also seems to be an ironic transformation of Bishop's awareness of the prejudice women writers suffer from and her

own sense of alienation as a result of her lesbianism and alcoholism. Helen Vendler associates this sense of alienation with the artist's position in society. She regards the toad and the snail as analogies for an artist like the strange creature the man-moth in an early Bishop poem.

Like the toad and snail, the man-moth suffers from being physically unlike other creatures: he comes out of his subterranean home only at night and is alone in the populous city. It is tempting to see in this physicality that is alienated from its neighbors a metaphor for sexual difference, and Adrienne Rich has suggested that Bishop's "experience of outsiderhood" is "closely--though not exclusively--linked with the essential outsiderhood of a lesbian identity." But the painful eyes of the giant toad are a burden equal to his abnormal size; the spiritual singularity of artists sets them socially apart, in the long run, whether they are sexual "outsiders" or not.²⁰

("Elizabeth Bishop" 286)

This is true. But even this sense of alienation resulting either from "being physically unlike other creatures" or from "spiritual singularity" is inseparable from these creatures' awareness of and interactions with others. "For our own relationship to our exterior," as Bakhtin says, "does not, after all, have an immediately aesthetic character; it pertains only to its possible effect on others. . . . That is, we evaluate our exterior not for ourselves, but *for others through others*" (AA 33).

A dialogic "self-objectification" and interaction with

others seem to be the important aspect of Bishop's "confessing" animals who escape giving a "morbid" or "self-indulgent" view of themselves and the world because of what Bakhtin calls "the 'excess' of seeing, knowing, and valuation" of the self by others (AA 204). According to Bakhtin's dialogic aesthetics, this "'excess' of seeing, knowing, and valuation" of Bishop's animal speakers of one another becomes "an essential enrichment" of their own self-portrayals. Since

my life is co-experienced by [the other person] in a new form, in a new axiological category--as the life of another, a different human being. That is, it is co-experienced as a life which, axiologically, is toned or colored differently from his own life and is received differently, justified differently, than his own life.

(Bakhtin AA 88)

Bishop's portrayal of the animal speakers from different angles outside themselves helps to present them as comparatively whole personalities. It also effectively reveals these animal speakers' follies. Thus, their personal anguish and perception will not be taken as completely truthful pictures of themselves or others. With humor and self-mockery, their limitations together with their pride and confidence help avoid making "the worst" personal moments "an allegory of the world," as Bishop says of the morbid tendency in "confessional" poems in her comment on them, which was quoted in a 1967 *Time* article on

contemporary American poets.

Both the form and content of Bishop's prose monologues in "Rainy Season; Sub-Tropics" seem to be shaped by the "confessional" poems.²¹ As Bakhtin argues in his essay "The Problem of Speech Genres": "Utterances are not indifferent to one another, and are not self-sufficient; they are aware of and mutually reflect one another. These mutual reflections determine their character" (SG 91). "Rainy Season; Sub-Tropics" shows that even though Bishop is critical of the "too personal" exposure and the excess of anguish in some "confessional" poems, she is part of the revolt in contemporary American poetry against the New Critical impersonal poetic stance. With her "oblique" and "indirect approach," Bishop participates in the contemporary American poetry's demolishing of the priesthood of the Orphic poet by revealing the irrationality, vulnerability and anguish, as well as other weaknesses, of the poetic persona.

While responding to the new trends in American poetry, and rethinking her art, Bishop further develops her seemingly simple skill of description through dialogic interactions, the possibilities of the prose poem, and the physical features of her animal speakers. In her other new poems collected in the 1969 *Complete Poems*, Bishop employs certain surrealist elements in her "indirect approach" to

autobiographical events and in her depiction of the social world.

4.2. "A Peripheral Vision"

The "confessional" trend in American poetry challenged Elizabeth Bishop to expand the range of her descriptive skill in exploring the self without being "self-indulgent." It also motivated Bishop to seek new ways of employing surrealism so as to deal with uncanny experience and autobiographical material directly without becoming confessional. At the same time, Bishop turned to her contact with Brazil and its people for subject matter in exercising her resistance to the "morbidity" of presenting "a horrible and terrifying world," the implication that "we're all victims," and the attitude that "as long as you see through everything, you've done all you can." In her countering of these "extremes," Bishop employed surrealist elements and Brazilian material to reveal the enigmas of life, to portray other people's misery and problems rather than her own, to reveal something "enormously important" through what is usually unnoticed, and to depict the everyday world with curiosity and delight.

In the early period of her career, Bishop resisted the "irresponsibility" in the excessive irrationality of "semi-surrealist poetry." During the 1960's, Bishop found the "surrealism of everyday life" to be "always-more-successful" in revealing what is enigmatic and important. She expressed this idea in a letter to Anne Stevenson:

Dreams, works of art (some), glimpses of the always-more-successful surrealism of everyday life, unexpected moments of empathy (is it?) catch a peripheral vision of whatever it is one can never really see full-face but that seems enormously important. ("Letters" 261)

She employs the surrealist principles of everyday chance encounter and visual metamorphosis in combination with her descriptive-narrative skill to show the enigma, surprise, and "glimpses" of revelation in everyday life.

Surrealists sought revelation in everyday chance encounters, as well as in dreams. They embraced the law of chance because it countered the logic of cause and effect. The value they attached to found objects, similarly, lies in the sense of strangeness and the mystery they convey, and in their resistance to any rationalizations about their practical functions. Displacement and incomprehensibility are two distinct aspects of French surrealist found objects. In her book *Surrealist Art*, Sarane Alexandrian observes:

Surrealism has often urged the intrinsic worth of the found object, and the only purpose of those frequent forays down to the Flea Market which Breton extolled at the time of *Nadja* (1928) was the discovery of such objects. The found object is one which when seen among a large number of other objects possesses an attraction--the art of the *jamais vu*, the 'never before seen'. It is usually an old-fashioned manufactured object, whose practical function is not evident and about whose origins nothing is known. (140-1)

Breton is especially interested in the way found objects can visually appear to be one thing and another at the same

time--an aspect which subverts categorized definitions.²²

The chance discovery, the mystery, displacement, and metamorphosis of surrealist found objects, are enacted in Bishop's poem "Trouvée." The French word in the title itself alludes to the particular meanings and values associated with surrealist found objects. As Bakhtin says, when constructing an utterance, we usually select words from other utterances "that are kindred to ours in genre, that is, in theme, composition, or style. Consequently, we choose words according to their generic specifications." Some words acquire "typical expression" and particular meanings in a genre, which, like "speech genres in general can submit fairly easily to re-accentuation." As a result something new can be achieved from this "re-accentuation" of specific generic words or style (SG 87). Bishop employs the creative possibilities of generic "re-accentuation" in "Trouvée" to express her sense of unknowable mystery and inexplicable catastrophe in life through the speaker's unexpected encounter with a dead hen in a street in New York City.

"Trouvée" is set in a Greenwich Village street, and begins in a tone of inquisitive astonishment with the speaker's coming upon a run-over chicken.

Oh, why should a hen
have been run over
on West 4th Street

in the middle of summer?

She was a white hen
 --red-and-white now, of course.
 How did she get there?
 Where was she going?

Her wing feathers spread
 flat, flat in the tar,
 all dirtied, and thin
 as tissue paper.

A pigeon, yes,
 or an English sparrow,
 might meet such a fate,
 but not that poor fowl.

Just now I went back
 to look again.
 I hadn't dreamed it:
 there is a hen

turned into a quaint
 old country saying
 scribbled in chalk
 (except for the beak). (CP 150)

The speaker's unanswerable questions, "why should a *hen* / have been run over / on West 4th Street/ in the middle of summer?" and "How did she get there? / Where was she going?" dominate this unexpected discovery. The mystery of this run-over "*hen*" is so compelling and intriguing that the speaker "went back / to look again." Then to her amazement ("I hadn't dreamt it"), the dead hen, with its reality confirmed, "turned into a quaint / old country saying / scribbled in chalk." Both the speaker's amazement at this strange "*trouvée*" and the inexplicability of it are implied in the reference to the "old country saying"--"Why did the

chicken cross the road? To get to the other side."

According to Bishop's friends, Wheaton Galentine and Harold Leeds, "Trouvée" is based on a real incident which took place during the summer of 1967 while Bishop was staying alone in an apartment at 61 Perry Street, just around the corner from West 4th Street. Wheaton and Leeds was living in a house across the street, where Bishop spent much of her time during the summer. One afternoon, Bishop came over late around four or five o'clock and told them that she had just seen "the strangest thing"--there was a chicken run over by a car on 4th Street in front of Nicola's, a grocery store. Then they all went over to look at it and made surmises about where it came from. That night, Bishop wrote "Trouvée," and brought it over to show her friends the next morning and dedicated it to them (Fountain 228).

The uncanny surrealistic "trouvée" in Bishop's poem has a sad parallel to her traumatic experience of unexpectedly finding Lota Soares unconscious, collapsed on the floor of her apartment. Soares, who had been suffering from depression, among other things, joined Bishop in New York on September 19th. On the morning of the 20th, Bishop woke up to find Soares comatosed, clutching an empty Nembutal bottle (though later tests showed only Valium present in her system). Lota de Maced Soares lapsed into a coma and died

in the hospital five days later without regaining consciousness. Galentine and Leeds were on the scene within "about 5 minutes" (L 467) after they received a telephone call from Bishop's doctor,²³ and were very helpful to Bishop during this crisis.²⁴ Bishop stayed overnight in their house the day Soares died.

In the light of Soares's death later that year, the unanswerable question suggested in "Trouvée" seems particularly pertinent to Bishop's question about Soares's apparent suicide. In her letters to friends, Bishop painfully expressed her uncertainty about what had really happened the morning she found Soares on the floor, particularly her doubts about whether Soares had consciously attempted suicide, and if so, why. "Oh WHY WHY WHY didn't she wait a few days?" Bishop asked in her letter to U. T. and Joseph Summers. "Why did I sleep so soundly?--why why why . . ." (28 September 1967, L 470). In her letter to Ilse and Kit Barker, Bishop wrote: "the fact that she came and wanted to be with me, anyway, are the only comforts I can find so far. But oh WHY WHY WHY didn't she wait a few days?" (28 September 1967, L 470). To Ashley Brown, she also expressed utter vexation about Soares's act: "I'll never know now exactly what happened, I suppose--it may have been a sudden impulse, or even a mistake--maybe she expected a miracle would take place and she would start feeling well

the minute she got here" (3 October 1967, L 473-74).

When "Trouvée" appeared in the *New Yorker* on 10 August 1968, the speaker's meticulous observation of and attention to a strange sight in the everyday world for possible revelation seemed to counter again what Bishop regarded as solipsism in "confessional" poetry. By evoking the suggestive mysteries of surrealist found objects in this poem, Bishop focuses on the enigma of the "trouvée" and especially its unknowable "origin", and avoids dealing with the speaker's (or her own) feelings. As her persona in the prose poem monologue "Strayed Crab" says, "I believe in the oblique, the indirect approach, and I keep my feelings to myself."

In another poem, "House Guest," which first appeared in *The New Yorker* in December 1968, Bishop expresses the idea that sometimes people create their own misery by dwelling upon an injury, and making themselves their own victims. Both the content and form of this poem are again shaped by Bishop's response to "the self pitiers" of the "anguish-school" of poetry. In stanza after stanza, the poem gives clear examples to show how the "house guest" is determined to remain bitter and to cling to despair for no obvious reason. The doggerel regularity of meter enhances the absurdity in her insistence on being unhappy.

The sad seamstress

who stays with us this month
 is small and thin and bitter.
 No one can cheer her up.
 Give her a dress, a drink,
 roast chicken, or fried fish--
 it's all the same to her.

She sits and watches TV.
 No, she watches zigzags.
 "Can you adjust the TV?"
 "No," she says. No hope.
 She watches on and on,
 without hope, without air.

.

Please! Take our money! Smile!
 What on earth have we done?
 What has everyone done
 and when did it all begin?
 Then one day she confides
 that she wanted to be a nun
 and her family opposed her.

.

Can it be that we nourish
 one of the Fates in our bosoms?
 Clotho, sewing our lives
 with a bony little foot
 on a borrowed sewing machine,
 and our fates will be like hers,
 and our hems crooked forever? (CP 148-49)

Obviously the guest's unfulfilled wish to be a nun is not a sufficient reason for this "sad seamstress" to always keep her face "closed as a nut," "or a thousand-year-old seed" and deny herself all the joys and pleasures available in her life. Lines such as "but she's not a poor orphan. / She has a father, a mother," suggest a comparison between Bishop herself and those "self pitiers." Through this seamstress's morbid insistence on being unhappy, "House Guest" catches "a

peripheral vision of whatever it is one can never really see full-face but that seems enormously important." As the speaker asks, "Can it be that we nourish / one of the Fates in our bosoms?"

Revelation and recognition of the self in Bishop's poems are obtained not so much by confession as through interactions with others, as shown in "Rainy Season; Sub-Tropics," and again in "Going to the Bakery," in which self-recognition comes through some unexpected "glimpses" of "a peripheral vision of whatever it is one can never really see full-face." "Going to the Bakery" describes a chance encounter in a typical daily routine from her life in Rio de Janeiro. The picturesque sketches in her earlier Brazil poems are replaced here by the gloomy reality of city life in Brazil, through Bishop's account of an evening trip to the bakery.

The bakery lights are dim. Beneath
our rationed electricity,

.

Now flour is adulterated
with cornmeal, the loaves of bread
lie like yellow-fever victims
laid out in a crowded ward.

The baker; sickly too, suggests
the "milk rolls," since they still are warm
and made with milk, he says. They feel
like a baby on the arm.

.

In front of my apartment house
 a black man sits in a black shade,
 lifting his shirt to show a bandage
 on his black, invisible side.

Fumes of cachaça knock me over,
 like gas fumes from an auto-crash.
 He speaks in perfect gibberish.
 The bandage glares up, white and fresh.

I give him seven cents in my
 terrific money, say "Good night"
 from force of habit. Oh, mean habit!
 Not one word more apt or bright? (CP 151-52)

The deteriorating economic situation in Brazil, which Bishop sorely felt while living there, is reflected in the condition of the pastry in the bakery. These background descriptions lead to the final moment of revelation in the poet's encounter with a drunken black beggar. This contact makes the poet recognize the inadequacy of her slight benevolent gesture. The repetitive rhyme of the last stanza emphatically expresses the speaker's recognition of the falsity and inadequacy of her polite habitual parting.

The speaker's self-reproachful realization of her own social alienation contrasts with, even as it evokes the speaker in "Manuelzinho." Without the comfortable distance maintained as one of the "Rich people in apartments" watching "through binoculars" the hunting of "The Burglar of Babylon," Bishop now comes in direct contact with the poor outside her apartment. In her discussion of how Bishop's meticulous observations have "become quasi-religious rituals

that distance despair," Marjorie Perloff singles out "Going to the Bakery" as one of the examples, in which detailed description of a daily task provides Bishop with an opportunity "To escape a world of human misery . . ." (180). However, rather than allowing an escape from "human misery," the daily task of going to the bakery brings Bishop face to face with "human misery" in the world. This poem involves more than what Perloff sees as a depiction of "the special pleasure and peculiar discipline of this seemingly simple ritual" (180). Rather than bringing an escape from the despairing self, self-recognition in "Going to the Bakery" results, painfully, from an unexpected moment of empathy, a moment in which the speaker sees herself through the eyes of the other, when two people from separate but mutually defining worlds interact.

Despite these glimpses of human misery and social problems, Bishop's poems celebrate the world around her. In one of her letters to Anne Stevenson written during the '60's, Bishop said:

My outlook is pessimistic. I think we are still barbarians, barbarians who commit a hundred indecencies and cruelties every day of our lives, as just possibly future ages may be able to see. But I think we should be gay in spite of it, sometimes even giddy--to make life endurable and to keep ourselves "new, tender, quick". ("Letters" 262)

This self-critical outlook and the choice to be "gay" and

"sometimes even giddy" in order "to make life enduring and to keep ourselves 'new, tender, quick'" play an important role in determining the tone and content of Bishop's poems.²⁵ Her poem "Under the Window: Ouro Prêto," which first appeared in the *New Yorker* in 1966, is a tribute to the life of a small town in Brazil, which Bishop often visited, and where she eventually bought an old house dating from about 1730. The lively everyday activity of a community is captured through Bishop's collage presentation of living images and utterances. Direct insertion of fragmentary utterances and images in her descriptive poems has by now become a typical means for Bishop to reveal the interaction of diverse values and ideas, as well as the co-existence of past and present. This poem is dedicated to Lilli Correia de Araújo, a friend of Bishop who lived in Ouro Prêto, and from whose bedroom window Bishop observed the activities and eavesdropped on the conversations of the local residents, which become the material for this poem. Writing from Ouro Prêto to May Swenson, Bishop reported with pleasure that

there is also a small water-fall right under my bedroom window--the house sits up high on a ledge overlooking the town--and it is good water, so every passerby, every car and truck almost, stops for a drink of water, and I lean out and eavesdrop on their conversations--mostly talk of sicknesses, funerals, babies, and the cost of living. (21 May 1965, Washington University Library, qtd. in Millier *Life* 369)

These inconsequential details observed and overheard from the window are juxtaposed, seemingly at random, in "Under the Window: Ouro Prêto":

The conversations are simple: about food, or, "When my mother combs my hair it hurts." "Women." "Women!" Women in red dresses

.

The water used to run out of the mouths of three green soapstone faces. (One face laughed and one face cried; the middle one just looked.

Patched up with plaster, they're in the museum.) It runs now from a single iron pipe, a strong and ropy stream. (CP 153)

This resting place serves as a social gathering-spot where people of all sorts meet by chance and engage in conversations. Those disconnected images and utterances directly depict the diverse activity and multiple voices in the community's life while giving vivid glimpses of personalities. Bishop's method of collage assemblage enables her to present the co-existence of a variety of activities, including elements of the past and present, and the simultaneous interactions among them. Changes over time are hinted in things like "single iron pipe" which has replaced the much more pleasant "three green soapstone faces." Nevertheless, some things remain unaltered for centuries--the need for water and conversation, and the gender differences between people.

Six donkeys come behind their "godmother"
 --the one who wears a fringe of orange wool
 with wooly balls above her eyes, and bells.

.

A big new truck, Mercedes-Benz, arrives
 to overawe them all. The body's painted
 with throbbing rosebuds and the bumper says

HERE AM I FOR WHOM YOU HAVE BEEN WAITING.
 The driver and assistant driver wash
 their faces, necks, and chests. They wash their
 feet,

their shoes, and put them back together again.
 Meanwhile, another, older truck grinds up
 in a blue cloud of burning oil. It has

a syphilitic nose. Nevertheless,
 its gallant driver tells the passerby
 NOT MUCH MONEY BUT IT IS AMUSING.

"She is been in labor now two days." "Transistors
 cost much too much." "For lunch we took advantage
 of the poor duck the dog decapitated."

The seven ages of man are talkative
 and soiled and thirsty.

Oil has seeped into
 the margins of the ditch of standing water

and flashes or looks upward brokenly,
 like bits of mirror--no, more blue than that:
 like tatters of the *Morpho* butterfly. (CP 154)

The egocentric, macho attitude of the boisterous, cheerful
 truck drivers is captured in the tone and style of the
 trucks' bumper stickers and fragmentary quotations of the
 drivers' utterances. Gender difference in this poem is
 revealed as much through visual details as through
 fragmentary living speeches of different styles, which

Bakhtin calls "heteroglossia," or "socio-linguistic speech diversity" (*DI* 326).

The lack of thematic connections makes it possible for "Under the Window: Ouro Prêto" and Bishop's other poems to encompass the heterogeneity of the living world. Seemingly random assemblage of details is a typical manifestation of Bishop's strategy for achieving a sense of spontaneity and immediacy in experience. The abundance of her descriptive details is essential for Bishop to include the diversity and heterogeneity of the world in her poems. Albert Cook refers to Bishop's collage assemblage of images as "free-floating images," "whose signification cannot be referred easily to the argument of the poem" (91). In his chapter on "Surrealism and Surrealisms" in *Figural Choice in Poetry and Art* (1985), Cook asserts that Bishop's presentation of images was indirectly influenced by surrealism "after she had lived many years in a South America where a surrealist aesthetic dominated the world of poetry" (91-92). Cook singles out "Under the Window: Ouro Prêto" as an example which contains "the analogue to Surrealism" (92). For him, "the eye and the psyche move into perilous conjunction" in the last stanza of this poem. He concludes:

The age-old association of psyche and butterfly can neither be avoided nor applied. Much of the poem up to this final point had sounded like random notation. This conclusion aims its words towards the never-realized possibility of a depth commentary on such

randomness. (92)

It seems that rather than failing to realize the "possibility of a depth commentary on such randomness" with her "floating images," the accurate description of the oil on the water in the closing lines itself illustrates exactly the "randomness" in Bishop's images, which are "brokenly," not logically connected, "like bits of mirror" that reflect the random appearance of people gathering at the water spout under the speaker's window.

In fact, the closing lines of "Under the Window: Ouro Prêto" suggest an association with Bishop's way of making poetry. She records and assembles various phenomena of life around her through observation and collage; bits of commonplace material are transformed into art in her poem, just as caterpillars are transformed into butterflies. Writing to Randall Jarrell from Brazil about his poems, Bishop talked about her wish to capture in hers certain aspects of the world:

With all its awfulness and stupidities--some of the Lost World hasn't quite been lost here yet, I feel, on the days I still like living in this backward place. This is true particularly when one gets away from Rio, or the coast. The people in the small poor places are so absolutely natural and so elegantly polite. I'm not really off the subject of your poems--it is that I think the things you feel a sense of loss for aren't entirely lost to the world, yet. I gather up every bit of evidence with joy, and wish I could put it into my poems, too. (20 March 1965, L 434-35)

"Under the Window: Ouro Preto" is one of the "bit[s] of evidence" Bishop gathered up "with joy" to show that "some of the Lost World hasn't quite been lost here yet." Nevertheless, the existence of this not quite lost world is precarious. In a letter to Robert Lowell, Bishop told him how "local cultures" were on the verge of disappearing.

The dying out of local cultures seems to me one of the most tragic things in this century--and it's true everywhere, I suppose--in Brazil, at any rate. Small towns far inland on the rivers were real centers; they had teachers of music and dancing and languages--they made beautiful furniture and built beautiful churches. And now they're all dead as doornails, and broken-down trucks arrive bringing powdered milk and Japanese jewelry and *Time* magazine. (4 April 1962, L 408)

Broken-down trucks, and even a new "Mercedes-Benz," have joined the traffic passing alongside donkeys and horses in "Under the Window: Ouro Preto." As hinted in the "tatters of the *Morpho* butterfly" in the closing line, the numerous images of the old and the new portray a small town in a stage of change.

Meticulous observations for Bishop function as more than just an escape from despair or human misery as Marjorie Perloff notes; they also lead to revelations of the self and other people, to new discoveries about the world, and eventually to the creation of poetry. In an interview of 1978, Bishop said:

I am very object-struck. Critics have often written

that I write more about things than people. This isn't conscious on my part. I simply try to see things afresh. A certain curiosity about the world around you is one of the most important things in life. It's behind almost all poetry. (Johnson 20)

Bishop's intention "to see things afresh" makes it necessary for her to take different points of view and to enter into a dialogic relationship with what is observed.

The creatively productive function and potential for revelation of "a certain curiosity about the world around you" is illustrated even more clearly in her later poems, in which Bishop combines the various technical strategies she has been exploring and experimenting with. In her last book and final poems, Bishop ventures further in directly employing autobiographical material and engaging social and cultural issues in her poems. With her synthesis of thematic and technical concerns pursued and developed over decades, Bishop achieves her artistic apex in her last poems.

Notes to Chapter Four

1. Bishop's translations of four poems by Carlos Drummond de Andrade, and one by João Cabral de Melo Neto collected in her fourth book of poetry, had all appeared in several American journals.

2. Bishop made some friends on the West coast in 1966 when she left Brazil to teach from January to June at the University of Washington in Seattle. She returned to the West coast and lived in San Francisco for a year (1968-1969) after Lota Macedo Soares's death in 1967.

3. Quotations from Elizabeth Bishop's unpublished materials are used by permission of her Estate, Alice Methfessel, Literary Executor, and Nancy S. MacKechnie of Special Collections, Vassar College Libraries.

4. For Bishop's comments on "confessional" poetry, see "Poets: The Second Chance," *Time* (2 June 1967): 68.

5. The unusually huge size of living things Bishop saw in Brazil, partly at least, provided her with the images of these giant creatures in her prose poem. Writing to James Merrill from Soares's country house at Samambaia, Bishop described:

Things are very much out of scale, too, like a
Rousseau--or out of our scale, that is. The
"Samanbaia" mentioned at the top of the page is a giant
fern, big as a tree, and there are toads as big as your
hat and snails as big as bread & butter plates. . . .
(1 March 1955, L 303)

6. Bishop was familiar with La Fontaine's animal fables. Marianne Moore's translation of La Fontaine prompted her to read more of his work. After receiving a copy of Moore's published translation, Bishop wrote to Moore, "I am reading a lot of the La Fontaine with the French now, you have got me so fascinated--many of them I had never read before" (30 October 1954, L 300).

7. After Baudelaire, Lautréamont and Rimbaud used the prose poem form as a way of breaking away from conventional poetic composition and as a means of exploring and revealing the unconscious. The oneiric, hallucinatory, and disturbing contents of Lautréamont's prose poems *Chants de Maldoror* anticipated surrealist poetry. William Rees, editor of *French Poetry 1820-1950* (1990), contends that Rimbaud's

collection of prose poems, *Les Illuminations*, destroyed "the old rhetoric that enslaved even his predecessor Baudelaire" (283). So doing, he was able to "pursue self-knowledge to an extreme degree to discover and communicate his deepest impulses, however irrational, discontinuous and disturbing both the process and its expression may be" (Rees 283). In his 1935 lecture on "Situation of the Surrealist Object," published in *Manifestoes of Surrealism* (1969, 1972), Breton praised the prose poems of Lautréamont and Rimbaud for their "deliberate abandonment of these worn-out combinations" such as "meter, rhythm, rhymes," which he considered "completely exterior," and "arbitrary" (262). Surrealist poets widely employed the prose poem form in their efforts to explore and present the irrationality of the unconscious. For a fairly comprehensive discussion of French prose poems, see Mary Ann Caws and Hermine Riffaterre eds., *The Prose Poem in France: Theory and Practice* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1983).

8. The animal characters in the fable are usually identified either as a "he" or "she." Even though Bishop's animal speakers seem to be indicated as males through the toad's remark of "my two brothers," I use a neutral pronoun "it" for all of them partly because all three seem to contain many aspects of Bishop herself, and partly because they also parody the "confessional" poets of both male and female genders.

9. Bishop's letter of 28 February 1955 to Ilse Barker is an autograph signed letter, kept in the Elizabeth Bishop Collection, Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Libraries, Princeton, New Jersey, cited as PU. Quotations from Elizabeth Bishop's unpublished materials are used by permission of her Estate, Alice Methfessel, and the Princeton University Libraries.

10. Bishop always rejected being judged in terms of her gender. In a letter to her friend Donald E. Stanford, Bishop asked, "what do you mean when you say my perceptions are 'almost impossible for a woman's'? [...] Is there some glandular reason which prevents a woman from having good perceptions, or what?..." (20 November 1933, L 12). Decades later, Robert Lowell's remark also provoked her to respond: "Perhaps I shouldn't say this--but it antedates all Female Lib-ism by 40 years--I'd rather be called "the 16th poet" with no reference to my sex, than one of 4 women--even if the other 3 are pretty good . . ." (qtd. in Kalstone BAP 226). Responding to the prospect of a women's issue of *Little Magazine* in 1971, Bishop states:

I have never believed in segregating the sexes in any way, including the arts... It is true there are very few women poets, painters, etc., --but I feel that to print them or exhibit them apart from works by men poets, painters, etc., is just to illustrate in this century, Dr. Johnson's well-known remark--rather to seem to agree with it.

See *Little Magazine* 5 (Fall-Winter 1971): 79. Bishop always refused to be included in any women's anthologies because she rejected "segregating" creative works according to the artists' genders.

One of the negative effects of being labelled a "woman poet" is the implication of intellectual poverty. For instance, John Crowe Ransom's article on Edna St. Vincent Millay and her "woman critic," emphasizes that "man distinguishes himself from woman by intellect," whereas a woman, being "less pliant, safer as biological organism . . . remains fixed in her famous attitudes, and is indifferent to intellectuality." See Ransom, *The World's Body*, 77-78. As Mary Ellman notes, "Books by women are treated as though they themselves were women." See Ellman, *Thinking About Women*, 29.

11. See Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1979); Alicia Suskin Ostriker, *Stealing the Language: The Emergence of Women's Poetry in America* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1986).

12. For Bishop's self-chastisement of her use of "falsity and the great power of sentimentality," and her "playing up my sad romantic plight" out of a "hideous craving for sympathy" as a child, see her prose piece, "The Country Mouse" in *The Collected Prose*, 31-32. For her rare plea for a friend's sympathy and help in her agonizing moments, see Bishop's letter to Loren MacIver written on 3 July and 5 July 1949, in *One Art: Letters*, 186-189.

13. Bishop to Randall Jarrell, 25 February 1965, L 432.

14. Published by permissions of Marianne Craig Moore, Literary Executor of the Estate of Marianne Moore, and the Marianne Moore Archive, Rosenbach Museum & Library.

15. Published by permission of Marianne Craig Moore, Literary Executor of the Estate of Marianne Moore, and Evelyn Feldman of the Marianne Moore Archive, Rosenbach Museum & Library.

16. See Bishop's letter to Louise Crane, 10 March 1969, in *One Art: Letters*, 504.

17. Quotations from Elizabeth Bishop's unpublished materials are used by permission of her Estate, Alice Methfessel, Literary Executor, and Evelyn Feldman of the Marianne Moore Archive, Rosenbach Museum & Library.

18. Speaking of George Herbert in an interview, Bishop said, "I like the absolute naturalness of tone." See Brown, "An Interview with Elizabeth Bishop," 294.

19. Quotations from Elizabeth Bishop's unpublished materials are used by permission of her Estate, Alice Methfessel, Literary Executor, and Nancy S. MacKachenie of Special Collections, Vassar College Libraries.

20. For Adrienne Rich's comments on Bishop's themes of "outsiderhood and marginality," see "The Eye of the Outsider: Elizabeth Bishop's *Complete Poems, 1927-1979* (1983)," in Adrienne Rich, *Blood, Bread, and Poetry: Selected Prose, 1979-1985* (New York: Norton, 1986) 124-135.

21. The shaping effect of the "confessional" poems on "Rainy Season; Sub-Tropics" has been overlooked in criticism on this prose poem. In his discussion of Bishop's surrealist inheritance, Richard Mullen groups "Rainy Season; Sub-Tropics" with "The Monument" and "The Weed" as valuable examples of how Bishop "adopts the surrealists' principles into her writing," because "their surrealist sources can be identified" (65). Mullen finds in Bishop's animal speakers "some resemblance to the writing of Francis Ponge," whose writing, he writes, "captures the 'thingness of things'" and manages to "magnify and upset rational perspectives through the delineation of particular natural detail" (71). Mullen quotes a passage from Ponge's prose poem "Snails," as an example of Bishop's similarities with Ponge's prose poem. In her letter to Mullen (5 March 1976), Bishop acknowledged "her familiarity with [Ponge's] early prose poems" (Mullen 72). But the snails in Ponge's description are fundamentally different from Bishop's Giant Snail and the other two animal speakers because they are mute objects of the poet's consciousness and illustrate values from the single point of view of the poet. Rather than merely revealing the "'thingness of things'" or expressing a single authorial point of view, Bishop's creatures in "Rainy Season; Sub-Tropics" are presented as speaking subjects who express different points of view. For Francis Ponge's complete text of "Snails," see *The Prose Poem: An International Anthology*, ed. Michael Benedikt (New York:

Dell, 1976) 171-73.

22. See for instance, André Breton's collage fiction *Nadja*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Grove Press, 1960) 52-59.

23. For more information about this incident and Bishop's response to it see Bishop, *One Art: Letters*, 467-75.

24. Writing to thank Leeds and Galentine again, Bishop said, "I can never thank you enough for your kindness and generosity & everything else. I feel quite sure I wouldn't have survived at all without you. (And I shall dedicate something better than the poor HEN ["Trouvée"] at least, sometime, to you, as one other small footnote of gratitude)" (5 December 1967, *L* 483-84).

25. The quotation in Bishop's letter is from George Herbert's poem "Love Unknown."

CHAPTER FIVE: *Geography III* (1976)
& "New Poems" (1979)

5.1. "Dress Up and Dance at Carnival!"

Elizabeth Bishop's poems in her fifth book, *Geography III* (1976), and her last "new poems" published in 1978 and 1979, collected in *The Complete Poems, 1927-1979* (1983), were written at the apex of her poetic career.¹ They embody the culmination of her life-long search for the proper material and techniques to write a poetry "in action," a poetry "more serious," "more real, fresh and immediate," a poetry of "surprise," and a poetry which can "explain the endless hows and whys of incident and character more precisely than before."² These poems contain her most poignant commentary on social and cultural issues and show her most openly direct treatment of autobiographical material. They articulate her values, ideas, and feelings more clearly and forcefully than any of her previous work. The once dominant but incomplete notion of Bishop as "the epitome of the cool, detached, low-key observer"³ can be put to rest by the emotional intensity, narrative density, and social involvement in these poems. The surprisingly versatile capacity of each of these predominantly descriptive poems illustrates Bishop's masterful combination of various technical strategies she has been exploring and developing for decades.

Despite being her briefest volume, containing nine poems and a translation of Octavio Paz's "Objects & Apparitions," *Geography III* won the 1976 National Book Critics Circle Award and is praised as the crowning achievement of Bishop's work. David Kalstone calls *Geography III* her "last and, in many senses, greatest book." He notes that poems in *Geography III* "revisit her earlier poems as Bishop herself once visited tropical and polar zones, and . . . they refigure her work in wonderful ways."⁴ Other critics also see a retrospective character in the major concerns of these final poems. Lorrie Goldensohn says of *Geography III* that "Childhood is one of the more crucial examples of a continuous, interlocking subject" (242). Brett Millier singles out "Poem" in *Geography III* as "the clearest example of such reconsideration in Bishop's work," "in the way [it] revisits the earlier "Large Bad Picture" collected in *North & South* (474-75). Margo Jefferson observes that

"Geography III" defines that kind of survival which neither blurs nor romanticizes its cost. It maps the regions we live in and the journeys we make--country to country, childhood to adulthood, imagination to fact, art to life--with the greatest care for topographical truth. As always, it is the accumulation of familiar, seemingly minor details and events that illuminates the intense experiences--pain, joy, loss. (73)

Differing from these views on the thematic continuity of *Geography III*, Thom Gunn discerns a sudden leap in Bishop's

treatment of experience and artistry which redefine her poems in general:

. . . here, all at once, everything was changed. Its longest three poems were directly concerned with uncontainable, unboxable experience. It was only ten poems long, and yet its achievement was such that it retrospectively altered the emphasis and shape of an entire career. (791)

Bishop's direct treatment of "uncontainable, unboxable experience" in *Geography III* is far from an unexpected change.⁵ Since *North & South*, Bishop has been searching for more possibilities of dealing with "unboxable" experience in her poems and has been developing those major thematic concerns and technical devices which culminate in the *Geography III* poems. The fact that poems in her last book "revisit" her earlier ones in terms of themes and subject matter suggests that Bishop's persistent search for new ways of writing poetry has yielded her greater artistic capacity and dexterity for dealing with matters which deeply concerned her all her life. As Kalstone has perceptively pointed out, Bishop's "Nova Scotia trips of the late 1940s made deep impressions upon her, seeded her future work, and yet there were only certain ways she was able to write about them at the time" (BAP 119). By the time Bishop wrote *Geography III*, she was able to write about both her early and late experience with much more flexibility and immediacy.

The book's title, *Geography III*, with its implication of the importance of places, recalls Bishop's two earlier books, *North & South* and *Questions of Travel*, and suggests an extension from both the interior and exterior geography delineated in the previous poems. Also, the title seems to be associated with the two lessons in geography which preface the poems in this volume. Bishop's note indicates that she has cited the two lessons (Lessons VI and X) from "'First Lessons in Geography', Monteith's *Geographical Series*, A. S. Barnes & Co., 1884" (CP 157). The poems in *Geography III* map out places Bishop lived, from childhood to adulthood, from North America to South America. They constitute the third "lesson" in geography--*Geography III*. While differing from the other two lessons which explain geography in purely technical terms and on conceptual levels, Bishop's "*Geography III*" answers questions the other two lessons have posed with everyday particulars and personal experience in different parts of the world:

LESSON VI

What is Geography? . . .

LESSON X

What is a Map?

*.
In what direction from the centre of the
picture is the Island?*

*.
In what direction is the Volcano? The*

*Cape? The Bay? The Lake? The Strait?
 The Mountains? . . .
 What is in the East? In the West? In the
 South? In the North? In the Northwest? (CP 157)*

The "maps" drawn by Bishop's poems consist of more than the surface of "land and water"; their typography is colored by the poet's emotional and psychological experience and shaped by social and cultural diversity. As Bishop once wrote in a letter from Brazil: "geography must be more mysterious than we realize, even" (12 October 1952, L 249).

Among all the places where Bishop lived and travelled, Brazil's social, cultural, and geographical typography features prominently in the *Geography III* poems and in Bishop's last "new poems" as well. "Santarém," which describes Bishop's memories of a small town she visited on her trip along the Amazon, shows her integration of various technical strategies. Writing to Robert Lowell two months after her trip to the Amazon in 1960, Bishop mentioned, "I want to go back to the Amazon. I dream dreams every night-- I don't know quite why I found it so affecting." In the same letter she also told Lowell that she was working on "an authentic, post-Amazon" poem (22 April 1960, L 383, 382). But Bishop did not complete this "post-Amazon poem" until eighteen years later; "Santarém" appeared in the 1978 February issue of *The New Yorker*. According to Brett Millier, Bishop began writing this poem shortly after her

Amazon, but ran into difficulty in completing it. "In the months after the trip," Millier writes, "Elizabeth referred often in her letters to an 'endless' 'post-Amazon Amazon poem'." This endlessness here, Millier notes, took on Bishop's "special significance of 'refusing to come to an end'." That is, "Santarém" "refused for a long time to cohere" (*Life* 308). In her study of Bishop's manuscripts of this poem, Barbara Page discovers that Bishop struggled with the conception of choice. The possibility to choose seemed to be the central idea in what appeared to be the earliest drafts which contained several variations of the line, "Choice--a Choice! That evening, one might choose!" Over time, a new idea emerged in the drafts: "'opposites-- apposites her[e] one didn't have to choose'" (60-61). Eventually in the final version of the poem, the special attraction of Santarém to the speaker lies in the coming together of two great rivers, which signifies the refusal to choose between abstract definitions and categories. This refusal and its implications become the central concern of "Santarém," which gives coherence to the meditation, description, and narrative in the poem.

At the same time, Bishop manages to reinforce this poem's central concern by combining her method of revealing the mind in action through descriptions of visual details and her method of juxtaposing different points of view

through people's utterances. The shifts from meditation to description and back to meditation build a free, natural passage between the speaker's inner and outer worlds.

Of course I may be remembering it all wrong
after, after--how many years?

That golden evening I really wanted to go no farther;
more than anything else I wanted to stay awhile
in that conflux of two great rivers, Tapajós, Amazon,
grandly, silently flowing, flowing east.

.
I liked the place; I liked the idea of the place.
Two rivers. Hadn't two rivers sprung
from the Garden of Eden? No, that was four
and they'd diverged. Here only two
and coming together. Even if one were tempted
to literary interpretations
such as: life/death, right/wrong, male/female
--such notions would have resolved, dissolved, straight
off
in that watery, dazzling dialectic. (CP 185)

As in "The Map," the interplay between the speaker's thought and observation generates the movement of the poem. Through the speaker's gaze at her immediate surroundings, different races, classes, beliefs, and ways of life are shown to mix and co-exist like the confluence of Tapajós and Amazon.

Two rivers full of crazy shipping--people
all apparently changing their minds, embarking,
disembarking, rowing clumsy dories.
(After the Civil War some Southern families
came here; here they could still own slaves.
They left occasional blue eyes, English names,
.)
A dozen or so young nuns, white-habited,
waved gaily from an old stern-wheeler
getting up steam, already hung with hammocks
--off to their mission, days and days away
up God knows what lost tributary.

Side-wheelers, countless wobbling dugouts...
 A cow stood up in one, quite calm,
 chewing her cud while being ferried,
 tipping, wobbling, somewhere, to be married. (CP 186)

Historical elements and cultural diversity are conveyed through the compactly juxtaposed collage presentation of people and their activities. Bishop's collage method here, as in "Over 2,000 Illustrations," demonstrates that social diversity can be introduced into a poetic text not only through "heteroglossia," but also through visual images which reflect this diversity.

But in "Santarém," Bishop is able to do much more than showing the mind in action as she did in "The Map" or revealing historical changes and cultural diversity as in "Over 2,000 Illustrations" through observation. Like her shifts of perspective in "Florida" and "Cape Breton," Bishop's descriptions in "Santarém" move from a panorama to pause on a particular river schooner. But here, the pause quickly leads to narratives.

A river schooner with raked masts
 and violet-colored sails tacked in so close
 her bowsprit seemed to touch the church

(Cathedral, rather!). A week or so before
 there'd been a thunderstorm and the Cathedral'd
 been struck by lightning. One tower had
 a widening zigzag crack all the way down.
 It was a miracle. The priest's house right next door
 had been struck, too, and his brass bed
 (the only one in town) galvanized black.
 Graças a deus--he'd been in Belém.

In the blue pharmacy the pharmacist
had hung an empty wasps' nest from a shelf:
small, exquisite, clean matte white,
and hard as stucco. I admired it
so much he gave it to me.

Then--my ship's whistle blew. I couldn't stay.
Back on board, a fellow-passenger, Mr. Swan,
Dutch, the retiring head of Philips Electric,
really a very nice old man,
who wanted to see the Amazon before he died,
asked, "What's that ugly thing?" (CP 186-87)

The closing narrative looks back to the beginning of the poem and implicitly suggests that differences among people cannot be resolved easily, nor can they be neatly divided in polarized categories. Following the moment of shared appreciation of the "exquisite" wasps' nest, Mr. Swan's question poses a jarringly different sensibility and perspective, suggesting an opposite (the "ugly") to the beautiful. This apparently irreconcilable dichotomy seems to suggest that there is no escape from conflicts and contradictions in people's daily encounters. However, the specific information about Mr. Swan, and the description of him as "really a very nice old man," enhance the implication that contradictory opinions rooted in everyday particulars among people are not such clear-cut, fixed opposites as the notions of "life/death, right/wrong, male/female." Like the two great rivers, people with different backgrounds, values, and beliefs come together and co-exist.

These co-existing diversities among people connect

Bishop's art to the actual life and world, and provide rich material for her artistic creativity. According to Bakhtinian dialogism, diversity of values and ideas is essential to artistic creation. Bakhtin argues:

Each large and creative verbal whole is a very complex and multi-faceted system of relations. [...] Any live, competent, and dispassionate observation from any position, from any viewpoint, always retains its value and its meaning. The one-sided and limited nature of viewpoint (the position of the observer) can always be corrected, augmented, transformed (transferred) with the help of like observations from others' viewpoints. Bare viewpoints (without living and new observations) are fruitless. (SG 124)

In "Santarém," as in her other poems, Bishop employs the method of attributing viewpoints to specific emotional and axiological positions, and of bringing different values and opinions into dialogue through "living and new observations."

In addition to being able to portray complex and particular living diversity, Bishop's late poems show a more direct cultural and social critique through her use of surrealist imagery and parodic discourse. In a prose poem, "12 O'Clock News," Bishop uses the surrealist method of visual distortion and metamorphosis to transform the objects on her desk into a foreign country which is full of mysterious, unknown objects and helpless, superstitious people. This foreign country and its people provide the material for the speakers' "news reports," which reveal the

speakers' prejudices and values. Each object on a desk functions simultaneously as the speaker/observer and the thing being observed. As in another prose poem "Rainy Season; Sub-Tropics," the speakers' utterances parody and articulate other people's attitudes together with Bishop's own. These "dialogized" utterances in this late poem have taken on a much more acute tone of contemporary socio-cultural value judgment and critique. In her allusion to the speakers' observation and comments as "news reports" and the self-revealing parodic utterances of the speakers, Bishop seems to have appropriated the Brazilian writer Clarice Lispector's ironic strategy of exposing self-assumed superiority and racial prejudice through an explorer's seemingly scientific interest and objective observation and other characters' utterances about an unfamiliar human being.

In Lispector's short story "The Smallest Woman in the World" (which Bishop translated), the French explorer Marcel Pretre discovered a "seventeen and three-quarter inches high" African pygmy woman. "Feeling an immediate necessity for order and for giving names to what exists, he called her Little Flower" and "informed the press" that Little Flower was "'Black as a monkey'" (501). When a life-size photograph of Little Flower appeared in the Sunday papers in France, "a woman seeing the picture . . . didn't want to

look a second time because 'It gives me the creeps'" (502). A bride-to-be found Little Flower "sad" and felt sympathetic. But her mother reminded her that "it's the sadness of an animal. It isn't human sadness'." A boy wanted to use Little Flower to play tricks with. "She would be our toy!" he exclaimed (503). The boy's mother responded by obstinately adorning her son "with fine clothes" and keeping him "very clean" so as to draw him away from "something that ought to be 'black as a monkey'" (504). Another family fantasized about having the pregnant Little Flower as their servant. "Imagine her serving our table, with her big little belly!" one of them uttered (504). In the meantime, the methodical explorer carefully examined Little Flower, taking notes of his observations faithfully. But his "curiosity, or exhaltation [sic], or victory, or the scientific spirit" gave way to a "sick" feeling when he "studied the little belly of the smallest mature human being" (505).

These various reactions to Little Flower reveal something in common: to judge and study a different race from a set of self-centered values and a self-assumed superior position. These values and attitudes which are exposed and satirized in Lispector's story are characteristic of Edward Said's definition of "Eurocentrism" which is the result of colonialism and European imperialist

expansion. In *Culture and Imperialism*, Said notes that among other things, Eurocentric researchers "studied," "classified," and "verified" non-Europeans and banished their identities, "except as a lower order of being, from the culture and indeed the very idea of white Christian Europe" (222). This kind of Eurocentric observation and judgement is parodied in Bishop's "12 O'Clock News," which, like Lispector's story, reveals the speakers' stereotypical ideas through their observations of a non-European country and people.

"12 O'Clock News" begins with the speaker reporting in a matter-of-fact manner, giving what seem to be objectively observed facts in news-report jargon. From a distant aerial vantage point, the "gooseneck lamp" in the report becomes the moon as seen from the earth; likewise, the "typewriter" is transformed into part of this strange vista through the reporter's observation. Then the reports reveal that this small foreign country is at war. The objects on a desk, identified in the left margin of each paragraph of descriptions, indicate that all the reports are based on the literal appearances of these objects.

pile of mss. A slight landslide occurred in the northwest about an hour ago. The exposed soil appears to be of poor quality: almost white, calcareous, and shaly. There are believed to have been no casualties.

typed sheet Almost due north, our aerial reconnaissance

reports the discovery of a large rectangular "field," hitherto unknown to us, obviously man-made. It is dark-speckled. An airstrip? A cemetery?

envelopes

In this small, backward country, one of the most backward left in the world today, communications are crude and "industrialization" and its products almost nonexistent. Strange to say, however, signboards are on a truly gigantic scale.

ink-bottle

We have also received reports of a mysterious, oddly shaped, black structure, at an undisclosed distance to the east. Its presence was revealed only because its highly polished surface catches such feeble moonlight as prevails. The natural resources of the country being far from completely known to us, there is the possibility that this may be, or may contain, some powerful and terrifying "secret weapon." On the other hand, given what we *do* know, or have learned from our anthropologists and sociologists about this people, it may well be nothing more than a *numen*, or a great altar recently erected to one of their gods, to which, in their present historical state of superstition and helplessness, they attribute magical powers, and may even regard as a "savior," one last hope of rescue from their grave difficulties. (CP 174-175)

These seemingly accurate descriptions and sophisticated speculations on the peculiar landscape and inscrutable objects of this alien country are counterpoised and humorously ridiculed by their identification as actual objects on a desk. Here, as in a number of Bishop's early poems, the reliability of one's perception of what is actually seen is indirectly undermined. Moreover, "images, and words themselves," says Lloyd Schwartz, "are revealed in

all their power to alter perceptions" ("One Art" 144).

As the reporter's observations and commentary move on to give information about the people of this foreign land, satirical mockery, seemingly directed at the journalistic jargon, expose these reporters' privileged position and superior attitudes toward an "under-developed" country and its people.

ashtray From our superior vantage point, we can clearly see into a sort of dugout, possibly a shell crater, a "nest" of soldiers. They lie heaped together, wearing the camouflage "battle dress" intended for "winter warfare." [...] The fact that these poor soldiers are wearing them here, on the plain, gives further proof, if proof were necessary, either of the childishness and hopeless impracticality of this inscrutable people, our opponents, or of the sad corruption of their leaders. (CP 175)

The parodic mimicry of extra-literary jargon and manners of speech intentionally punctures the inflated seriousness and superiority-complex in the reporter's utterances.

Nevertheless, the reporter's observations of an alien country and its people and leaders are not without sympathy and a certain amount of truth.

Bishop's many years of life in Brazil gave her the opportunity to recognize how people from "developed" countries revealed their stereotypical ideas about Brazilians in their contact with them. She wrote to James Merrill from Brazil that she had almost given up going to

the concerts in which artists from other countries "play down so to the Rio audience, as a rule." And the Rio audience "resent it very much" (1 March 1955, L 303). While parodying and exposing certain people's Eurocentric attitude toward "undeveloped" countries, "12 O'Clock News" also expresses Bishop's ambivalent feelings about Brazil. Writing to Mrs. E. B. (Katherine) White, a fiction editor of *The New Yorker*, Bishop said that "after wading through ['a huge batch of American magazines'] I suddenly felt extremely happy to be living in an 'underdeveloped' country" (15 January 1963, L 414). But she also dismissed the possibility of Brazil's capability and moral strength to fight against its backwardness and corruption, and occasionally disparaged Brazil as uncivilized. Writing to Robert Lowell, Bishop complained: "But I've had ten years of a backward, corrupt country, and like Lota, I yearn for civilization . . ." (26 August 1963, L 418). To Anny Baumann, Bishop wrote: "I wish Lota and I weren't so involved in the politics of this hopeless country" (17 November 1964, L 427). References to "the childishness and hopeless impracticality of this inscrutable people" and "the sad corruption of their leaders" in the closing line of "12 O'Clock News" articulate what Bishop had learned and felt about the discouraging aspects of Brazil during a particular period of her life when Lota de Macedo Soares was deeply

involved in Brazil's politics.

Critics, however, tend to think that "12 O'Clock News" is essentially about writing. Adrienne Rich refers to it as an example of the kind of Bishop poem in which "the poem-about-an-artifact . . . becomes the poem-as-artifact," the kind of poem that "owes too much to Moore" [125-6]. Lorrie Goldensohn says that "'12 O'Clock News' is notable . . . for the open interest it signals in writing as subject" (259). She adds that "the comedy of mistaken identity seems thin and unremittingly premised on the writer's insignificance and unproductivity: the 'joke' is too close to morose complaint" (260). Lloyd Schwartz maintains a similar view of the poem and remarks that "The irony is mordantly directed at the author's own sense of insurmountable odds, being resigned to rely on recalcitrant machines and inanimate objects, but also to the inescapable difficulty and possible pointlessness of the creative process itself" ("One Art" 145).

Comments such as these which focus on a possible theme of the poem seem to be in part the results of an effort to reconstruct the particular authorial psychological state in which this poem was written. While these comments may provide some insights into the poem, they overlook the characteristic double-voiced self-mockery and the cultural issues in "12 O'Clock News" by locating the origin and

meaning of the poem solely in the poet and in a possible theme. "The expression of an utterance can never be fully understood or explained if its thematic content is all that is taken into account," Bakhtin emphasizes. He continues:

The expression of an utterance always . . . expresses the speaker's attitude toward others' utterances and not just his attitude toward the object of his utterance. [...] The utterance is filled with *dialogic overtones*, and they must be taken into account in order to understand fully the style of the utterance.

(SG 92)

The discourse of "12 O'Clock News" is not a self-enclosed, socially-detached artifact. Rather, it is "double-voiced" with its utterances orienting toward and incorporating the voices of others through parody. The voice in this poem is not just that of the poet herself, but also a ventriloquy of others' voices which express culturally shaped values and attitudes. This incorporation of contemporary opinions and attitudes has a determining impact on the meanings of the poem.

As Bishop once said in an interview, describing how living in Brazil had enabled her to recognize her own and other people's stereotypes about third-world countries, her position as an outsider both to Brazil and to her own country granted her an "excess" of seeing, which has become a creatively productive asset for her poetry.⁶ Bishop's cultural "outsideness" enables her to avoid presenting a

closed and onesided picture of the "under-developed" country observed, or the "reporters" who describe this country in "12 O'Clock News." Although "12 O'Clock News" parodies stereotypical ideas and notions about a different culture, it also exposes the corruption of leaders in the "underdeveloped" country. This ambivalence avoids assuming any absolute truth or a single viewpoint and enriches Bishop's poem with the particulars and complexity in this culturally specific world.

Socially and culturally determined values and attitudes are more directly expressed and challenged in "Pink Dog" through a grotesque visual image. Although the voice in this poem is single, the speaker engages in a dialogue with the dog which is oriented toward a set of social values. The speaker's advice to the dog, pink with a skin disease, simultaneously reveals and criticizes a set of social problems and values. As Bakhtin says, "However monological the utterance may be . . . it cannot but be, in some measure, a response to what has already been said about the given topic, on the given issue." Even though this responsiveness is not expressed formally, "It will be manifested in the overtones of the style, in the finest nuance of the composition" (SG 92). The responsiveness of "Pink Dog" to certain attitudes towards the physically different and socially discriminated against is suggested in

the speaker's bitter irony and reference to what might happen to the dog. The pink dog's physical oddity evokes the giant animal speakers in "Rainy Season; Sub-Tropics," but rather than a self-conscious agony, the dog will suffer from cruel ill-treatment. The setting of the poem, identified as Rio in a note below the title, provides a fitting social environment for Bishop's treatment of social discrimination and marginality.

The sun is blazing and the sky is blue.
Umbrellas clothe the beach in every hue.
Naked, you trot across the avenue.

Oh, never have I seen a dog so bare!
Naked and pink, without a single hair...
Startled, the passersby draw back and stare.

Of course they're mortally afraid of rabies.
You are not mad; you have a case of scabies
but look intelligent. Where are your babies?

.

Didn't you know? It's been in all the papers,
to solve this problem, how they deal with beggars?
They take and throw them in the tidal rivers.

Yes, idiots, paralytics, parasites
go bobbing in the ebbing sewage, nights
out in the suburbs, where there are no lights.

.

In your condition you would not be able
even to float, much less to dog-paddle.
Now look, the practical, the sensible

solution is to wear a *fantasia*.
Tonight you simply can't afford to be a
n eyesore. But no one will ever see a

dog in *máscara* this time of year.

Ash Wednesday'll come but Carnival is here.
 What sambas can you dance? What will you wear?

They say that Carnival's degenerating
 --radios, Americans, or something,
 have ruined it completely. They're just talking.

Carnival is always wonderful!
 A depilated dog would not look well.
 Dress up! Dress up and dance at Carnival!
 (CP 190-91)

The dog's scabies startles the passers-by just as the unusually huge sizes of the Giant Toad and Giant Snail horrify their neighbors. But the Pink Dog's case is worse, for her physical symptom is mistaken for rabies. This socially alienated eye-sore of a dog is associated with the marginal, the helpless, and disdained of the society-- "beggars," "idiots, paralytics, [and] parasites." Discussing a Sylvia Plath poem, Alicia Suskin Ostriker notes that "the identification of woman and body, body and vulnerability, vulnerability and irony . . . is a common phenomenon in women's poetry of the last twenty years" (103). Bishop's identification of the Pink Dog with other social groups goes beyond the experience of women in a given society. Adrienne Rich points out that Bishop's "essential outsiderhood of a lesbian identity" enables her "to perceive other kinds of outsiders and to identify, or try to identify, with them" (127). The fact that the Pink Dog is shunned, misunderstood and treated like a criminal purely because of her physical condition suggests a parallel to the

situation created by bigotry, homophobia, and gender and racial discrimination. Bishop's specific reference to the treatment of the poor, the homeless, the sick, and those outside the mainstream, and how they have to fend for themselves, constitutes a commentary on and critique of social prejudice and injustice.

Like the double-voiced discourse of "12 O'Clock News," the speaker's wry advice to the Pink Dog to disguise herself in a carnival costume and participate in the samba dance for self-protection expresses more than a typical Bishop attitude of refusing to be a victim. It is at once an assimilation of and protest against a particular set of established social values and attitudes. Writing to Ashley Brown, Bishop mentioned her "rather ghastly Carnival poem ["Pink Dog"] that will be in *The New Yorker* at Carnival time" (8 January 1979, L 629). Later, in another letter, she explained, "Well, I meant my Carnival poem was 'ghastly' as to subject matter--not such a bad poem!--at least I hope not" (1 March 1979, L 632). The Carnival festival itself is a way of articulating what is usually forbidden and subverting what is doctrinaire. Bakhtin points out that "the *official* life, monolithically serious and gloomy, subjugated to a strict hierarchical order, full of terror, dogmatism, reverence, and piety" is contrasted and challenged by "the *life of the carnival square*, free and

unrestricted, full of ambivalent laughter, blasphemy, the profanation of everything sacred, full of debasing and obscenities, familiar contact with everyone and everything" (PDP 129-30). To "dress up and dance at Carnival" is to enjoy the freedom and equality the carnival square offers. Bakhtin emphasizes that in the carnival all differences and social hierarchy are abolished:

The laws, prohibitions, and restrictions that determine the structure and order of ordinary, that is noncarnival, life are suspended during carnival: what is suspended first of all is hierarchical structure and all forms of terror, reverence, piety, and etiquette connected with it--that is, everything resulting from socio-hierarchical inequality or any other form of inequality among people (including age). All distance between people is suspended, and a special carnival category goes into effect: *free and familiar contact among people*. (PDP 122-23)

The speaker's advice for the naked dog to wear a "fantasia" ironically suggests that in order to enjoy equality and freedom, individuals who are different from others have to put on a mask and disguise their true identities. This value-determined image of "Pink Dog" set against its particular society and culture, like those in "12 O'Clock News," appropriates others' opinions and value judgments, and introduces into the poem contemporary socio-ideological elements which make the dog's alienation and suffering more than personal.

The grotesque appearance of the pink dog also enables

Bishop to articulate her sense of alienation, vulnerability, anger, and protest from the point of view of the marginal, the repressed, and the misunderstood in society. Bishop once said to Robert Lowell that "in itself [suffering] has no value, anyway."⁷ In "Pink Dog," she associates the dog's suffering with that of the poor and the socially alienated, and with a set of socially determined values, thus linking a personal condition to particular social and political issues. Bishop's description of the dog's physical appearance and people's responses to it illustrates the importance of values in artistic creation, which Bakhtin emphasizes: "the reality confronted by the author's free creative imagination [is] the inward reality of a life's own directedness of values and meaning" (AA 199). The image of the naked pink dog, like those in "12 O'Clock News," carries the axiological weight of particular social groups, and is penetrated by conflicting and mutually defining values. "Thus, in the world of forms alone," Bakhtin notes, "form has no validity or force." He continues: "The value-context in which a work of literature is actualized and in which it is rendered meaningful is not just a literary context. A work of art must feel its way toward and find an axiological reality . . ." (AA 201). Bishop's poems such as "Santarém," "12 O'Clock News," and "Pink Dog" achieve their artistic force and social relevance through their

confrontation with particular cultural and social values in the everyday world.

Bishop's other late poems further reveal the creatively productive result of an actual "axiological reality," and of her speakers' dialogic position which is separate from, yet which interacts with, others. Only contact with others is capable of "constituting the axiological center of artistic vision," says Bakhtin. This is because "I do not yet exist in my own axiological world as a contented and self-equivalent positive given. My own axiological relationship to myself is completely unproductive aesthetically: for myself, I am aesthetically unreal" (AA 188). Bishop's investigations and expressions of the self in these late poems indicate that "the intensification of one's own *outsideness* with respect to others, one's own *distinctness* from others" (Bakhtin AA 88) is a fundamental productive condition for the making of her poetry. Moreover, interactions with others' utterances and points of view are necessary in articulating and expressing one's own values and emotions. Bishop has employed this dialogic method of self-expression in poems like "Sandpiper" and "Rainy Season; Sub-Tropics," but in her late autobiographical poems she further explores the possibilities of this method in various ways.

5.2. "Un-rediscovered, Un-renamable"

One of Geography III's most widely acclaimed poems, "Crusoe in England," also seems to be Bishop's most comprehensive autobiographical poem. Like a number of Bishop's poems, it deals with two things simultaneously. In examining Crusoe's life through his own voice, the poem also deals with the most important changes in Bishop's life and expresses a wide range of emotions, including Bishop's most persistent feelings of loneliness, homelessness, and the pain of loss; it also touches upon matters of creative innovation and meticulous observation which concerned Bishop most as a poet. Helen Vendler's comments on the poem well summarize its scope. "['Crusoe in England'] is the history of a life--or everything that matters about a life--with glimpses of terror, of inadequacy, of steadiness, of invention, of intimacy, of bitterness, of exhaustion of emotion, and of pain." Vendler regards this poem "a perfect reproduction of the self in words," and notes that it "contains, in its secure and unfaltering progress, truthful representations of many aspects of Bishop" ("Recent Poetry" 419).

Bishop's employment of a literary figure, Crusoe, with whom she could identify herself in many ways, helped her achievement of this "perfect reproduction of the self in words." In her discussion of "Crusoe in England," Renée

Curry asserts that Bishop's choice of "Crusoe instead of a female character . . . affords her a literary as well as a sexual mask" and that Bishop's deployment of "a male castaway in the land of volcanoes rather than a female representative in the land of her birth" also has a "protective" function (74). It seems that for Bishop, Crusoe serves more than the purpose of masking or protecting herself. According to David Kalstone, Bishop "was especially drawn to [South America] by E. Lucas Bridges's *Uttermost Part of the Earth*," which "she found comparable to *Robinson Crusoe* in its 'suspense of strangeness and ingenuity and courage and loneliness'" (BAP 229). For Bishop, Crusoe's particularly attractive qualities--ingenuity, courage, and resourcefulness--could also be applied to the making of poetry. As her notes made in 1934 reveal: "On an island you live all the time in this Robinson Crusoe atmosphere; making this do for that, and contriving and inventing. . . . A poem should be made about making things in a pinch" (VC). Bishop could also identify herself with Crusoe's loneliness, homelessness, and adventures in a far away strange land. While living in Lota de Macedo Soares's country house in the mountains, which was more than one hour's drive from Rio, Bishop once had an experience that reminded her of Robinson Crusoe. She described this event to her friend Pearl Kazin:

We've had a terrific four-day storm here and there wasn't a scrap of airmail at the P.O.--perhaps the planes have been held up. Lota was away in Rio and I was all alone with the servants and the toucan . . . & the cat . . . and the roaring waterfall. I feel as if I'd undergone a sort of Robinson Crusoe experience.
(30 November 1956, L 332).

In her poem, Bishop transforms Robinson Crusoe's autobiography by incorporating her own experience and values, as well as those of others. Thus her Crusoe's multi-faceted personality and various emotions are revealed through a dialogue with different points of view. While discussing her use of autobiography in short stories in a letter of 1954 to Robert Lowell, Bishop wrote: "somehow--that desire to get things straight and tell the truth--it's almost impossible not to tell the truth in poetry, I think, but in prose it keeps eluding one in the funniest way" (qtd. in Goldensohn 228). For Bishop, telling "the truth" in poetry is different from naked confession. She once tried to make her point about this to Lowell in 1972 by quoting from Kierkegaard's journals:

the law of delicacy according to which an author has a right to use what he himself has experienced, is that he is never to utter verity but is to keep verity for himself & only let it be refracted in various ways.
(qtd. in Goldensohn 229)

Bishop's use of Crusoe as her persona is a strategy of telling the truth about herself and her experience by refracting verity "in various ways."

In "Crusoe in England," many aspects of Bishop's truthful self emerge with Crusoe's emphasis on the uniqueness of his experience, emotions, and values in relation to others. This representation of the self through interactions with others is necessary according to Bakhtinian dialogism. Allusions to others' utterances and opinions is necessary in self-expression because one can express one's own feelings and values more clearly and strongly by referring to those of others. Bakhtin emphasizes that

Without this essentially necessary reference to the other . . . form fails to find any inner foundation and validation from within the author/contemplator's self-activity and inevitably degenerates into something that simply affords pleasure, into something "pretty," something I find immediately agreeable, the way I find myself feeling immediately cold or warm. (AA 97)

In other words, without connections to and interactions with others, the character's feelings and actions will be aesthetically impoverished. Bishop has made good use of this aesthetically necessary "reference to the other" in poems such as "The Rainy Season; Sub-Tropics" and "Pink Dog"; in "Crusoe in England" she further explores the possibilities of dialogue with others and the productive potential of the distinctness of her persona's life.

According to Bishop, "Crusoe in England" results from her impulse to eliminate the Christian morals embodied in

Defoe's *Crusoe*. In a 1977 interview Bishop said: "I reread the book and discovered how really awful *Robinson Crusoe* was, which I hadn't realized. . . . And I had forgotten it was so moral. All that Christianity. So I wanted to re-see it with all that left out" (Starbuck 319). Bishop replaces Robinson Crusoe's experience with her own,⁸ including her trip across the island of Aruba where "there are small volcanoes all over the place" (Starbuck 319). By the time "Crusoe in England" appeared in the November 1971 issue of the *New Yorker*, Bishop had lost her home in Brazil after Marcedo de Soares's death and had returned to her birthplace, Massachusetts, to teach at Harvard.

"Crusoe in England" begins with Crusoe in old age at home in England, scanning the newspapers which report the eruption of a new volcano and the discovery of an island. This news reminds Crusoe of another island he calls his own.

A new volcano has erupted,
 the papers say, and last week I was reading
 where some ship saw an island being born:

 They named it. But my poor old island's still
 un-re-discovered, un-renamable.
 None of the books has ever got it right.

Well, I had fifty-two
 miserable, small volcanoes I could climb
 with a few slithery strides --
 volcanoes dead as ash heaps. (CP 162)

By emphasizing the singularity of his island, and its general mis-representation ("None of the books has ever got

it right"), Crusoe begins to tell his own story about his life on this still "un-rediscovered, un-renamable" island. Unlike Defoe's Crusoe, who is constantly engaged in making and carrying out plans for survival, Bishop's Crusoe is more like herself, inquisitive about natural phenomena on the island and absorbed in sensory, especially visual, experience.' As the narration progresses with Crusoe's recollections, a central emotion, loneliness, emerges and remains with Crusoe's description of the environment of his island.

And I had waterspouts. Oh,
 half a dozen at a time, far out,
 they'd come and go, advancing and retreating,
 their heads in cloud, their feet in moving patches
 of scuffed-up white.
 Glass chimneys, flexible, attenuated,
 sacerdotal beings of glass...I watched
 the water spiral up in them like smoke.
 Beautiful, yes, but not much company. (CP 163)

Descriptions of the natural environment and phenomena convey Crusoe's loneliness, since all this around him is "Beautiful, yes, but not much company."

Bishop's technical strategies here in building and sustaining Crusoe's emotional intensity and depth can be illuminated by her own analysis of "the sustained emotional height of most of Hopkins's poetry, and the depth of the emotional source from which it arises" ("Hopkins" 6). In her essay on "timing" in Hopkins's poetry, Bishop examines

his treatment of emotions:

A poem is begun with a certain volume of emotion, intellectualized or not according to the poet, and as it is written out of this emotion, subtracted from it, the volume is reduced--as water drawn off from the bottom of a measure reduces the level of the water at the top. Now, I think, comes a strange and yet natural filling up of the original volume--with the emotion aroused by the lines or stanzas just completed. The whole process is a continual flowing fullness kept moving by its own weight, the combination of original emotion with the created, crystallized emotion
 ("Hopkins" 6)

From the moment Crusoe's loneliness is uttered, the "volume" of this emotion increases, and it is then kept at full through newly revealed sources which amplify it, even though it is simultaneously being reduced by Crusoe's releasing articulation of it. Crusoe's efforts to keep himself busy, to cheer himself up, and to find solace in nature as Wordsworth does, become one of those sources which reveal the depth of his loneliness. Bishop's painful life-long struggle with alcoholism is transformed into Crusoe's invention and production of "home-brew" with the berries he discovers on the island.

There was one kind of berry, a dark red.
 I tried it, one by one, and hours apart.
 Sub-acid, and not bad, no ill effects;
 and so I made home-brew, I'd drink
 the awful, fizzy, stinging stuff
 that went straight to my head
 and play my home-made flute
 (I think it had the weirdest scale on earth)
 and, dizzy, whoop and dance among the goats.
 Home-made, home-made! But aren't we all?

I felt a deep affection for
 the smallest of my island industries.
 No, not exactly, since the smallest was
 a miserable philosophy.

Because I didn't know enough.
 Why didn't I know enough of something?
 Greek drama or astronomy? The books
 I'd read were full of blanks;
 the poems--well, I tried
 reciting to my iris-beds,
 "They flash upon that inward eye,
 which is the bliss ... " The bliss of what?
 One of the first things that I did
 when I got back was look it up. (CP 164)

The emphasis on "home-made" reflects Crusoe's self-reliance in his island industries; it also echoes Bishop's contemplation on poetry-making recorded in her notebook. For Bishop, Robinson Crusoe's way of living on an island ("making this do for that, and contriving and inventing"), suggests a parallel with making poetry out of limited material by "using things in unthought-of ways." "Crusoe in England" is itself a poem made with Crusoe's kind of inventiveness. Bishop's rewriting of Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* by "interpreting" it "not at all according to its intent" (CPr 188), and by assimilating and revising information from it, including the anachronism of letting Crusoe recite Wordsworth, is an example of this "island feeling" invention.¹⁰

Bishop's Crusoe pokes fun at her own reluctance to make philosophy out of experience, or to make poetry an illustration of a philosophy by claiming that the smallest

industry of a solitary life is nothing but "a miserable philosophy." Crusoe's remark also, for Bishop, self-mockingly echoes other people's comments on the lack of "philosophy" in her nature poems. She reveals, in an interview, that "about my first book one fairly admiring friend wound up by saying, 'But you have no philosophy whatever.'" She adds, "And people who are really city people are sometimes bothered by all the 'nature' in my poems" (Starbuck 317). In another interview, Bishop reveals that she is not interested in the question of whether a poet needs an overall belief system to sustain his or her work. "I'm not interested in big-scale work as such," she says. "Something needn't be large to be good" (Brown 295).

Crusoe further expresses his inconsolable loneliness by appropriating Wordsworth's utterances and undermining Wordsworth's claim of "the bliss of solitude" acquired from nature. For Wordsworth's speaker in "I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud," the beautiful sight of daffodils becomes a lasting source of delight and comfort:

For oft, when on my couch I lie
 In vacant or in pensive mood,
 They flash upon that inward eye
 Which is the bliss of solitude;
 And then my heart with pleasure fills,
 And dances with the daffodils. (191)

For Bishop's Crusoe, the beauty of his "iris-beds" and everything else fail to console his loneliness. Writing to

Robert Lowell from Wiscasset, Maine on 30 June 1948, Bishop complained about the "almost drugging" dullness in "such completely boring solitude" she had been in, and expressed her unbearable loneliness: "people who haven't experienced absolute loneliness for long stretches of time can never sympathize with it at all" (L 159). After Soares's death, Bishop found that her favourite town of Ouro Preto and the 18th-century house there she loved so much and bought and restored were not enough to be a home for her as she had expected." She wrote to James Merrill after she had listed the house for sale: "I'm afraid at any minute I'll weaken and decide not to sell it--but know I mustn't--I CAN'T live there, really--architecture is not enough. (And I'm awfully sick of looking at the Loeb Theatre. Where to go?)" (8 January 1973, L 576). In "Crusoe in England," Bishop articulates the inadequacy of beautiful things and surroundings in comforting Crusoe's loneliness and homelessness through subversive allusion to Wordsworth's remarks concerning the "bliss of solitude." Even though Crusoe tried reciting Wordsworth's lines to his iris-beds, his experience of distress in solitude made it impossible for him to share Wordsworth's philosophy of nature; he simply could not recall "The bliss of what?"

Bishop's refusal to make poetry according to a philosophy makes it possible for her to deal with disparate

and conflicting aspects of the self and life in her poems. Crusoe, then, can identify himself with Wordsworth while proving Wordsworth's theory about nature inadequate for his experience. This, in fact, both articulates and mocks Bishop's own identification with Wordsworth's love of nature. She once mentioned to Robert Lowell: "On reading over what I've got on hand I find I'm really a minor female Wordsworth--at least, I don't know anyone else who seems to be such a Nature Lover" (11 July 1951, L 222). Bishop shares Wordsworth's love of nature, but not his doctrinal notion about nature's nurturing influence on the poet. Her parodic reference to Wordsworth's "I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud" ultimately serves to express Crusoe's (and her own) acute sense of inconsolable loneliness.

Bishop's allusions to other poets' descriptions of the correspondences between nature and man are a major method of keeping Crusoe's emotional volume full by releasing Crusoe's original emotion of inconsolable loneliness while introducing a newly created emotion--boredom. Crusoe's dialogues with other people's opinions and attitudes help move the narrative forward and provide new subject matter for Crusoe to talk about different aspects of his still "unrediscovered, un-renamable" island. Baudelaire's claim to an intimate relationship between man and nature in his poem "Correspondences" is implicitly evoked and questioned by

Crusoe's boring solitary life in nature. In Baudelaire's
"Correspondences"

All scents and sounds and colors meet as one.

Perfumes there are as sweet as the oboe's sound,
Green as the prairies, fresh as a child's caress,
--And there are others, rich, corrupt, profound

And of an infinite pervasiveness,
Like myrrh, or musk, or amber, that excite
The ecstasies of sense, the soul's delight.¹⁷

The "infinite pervasiveness" of nature on Crusoe's island is
of quite a different kind.

The island smelled of goat and guano.
The goats were white, so were the gulls,
.
Baa, baa, baa and shriek, shriek, shriek,
baa...shriek...baa...I still can't shake
them from my ears; they're hurting now.
The questioning shrieks, the equivocal replies
over a ground of hissing rain
and hissing, ambulating turtles
got on my nerves.

.
One billy-goat would stand on the volcano
.
and bleat and bleat, and sniff the air.
I'd grab his beard and look at him.
His pupils, horizontal, narrowed up
and expressed nothing, or a little malice.
I got so tired of the very colors!
One day I dyed a baby goat bright red
with my red berries, just to see
something a little different.
And then his mother wouldn't recognize him.
(CP 164-65)

The pervasive smell of goat and guano on the island, the
persistent noise and the maddeningly dull color of

everything, offer a depiction of nature which contrasts with that of Baudelaire's "Correspondences." In Baudelaire's nature, "all things watch [man] with familiar eyes" (12); on Crusoe's island, the goats only add to the annoying clamor and show no possibility of any kind of "correspondence" with him.

Ultimately, Bishop's subversive allusions to Wordsworth's and Baudelaire's notions about the relationship between man and nature serve to emphasize and sustain Crusoe's yearning for love and company. In her discussion of Hopkins's poems, Bishop notes that "Because of this constant fullness [of emotional volume] each part serves as a check, a guide, and in a way a model, for each following part and the whole is weighed together" ("Hopkins" 6). The sustained emotion of Crusoe's unbearable loneliness holds the poem together and enhances Crusoe's joy at Friday's arrival.

Just when I thought I couldn't stand it
 another minute longer, Friday came.
 (Accounts of that have everything all wrong.)
 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.
 (CP 165-66)

Bishop's Crusoe revises Robinson Crusoe's position as the

superior, civilized Christian saviour who rescued the savage native Friday from cannibals. "Friday" was the first word Robinson Crusoe taught him as his name, "for the memory" of the day when he was saved by Crusoe. The second word Defoe's Crusoe taught Friday was "master" to be addressed to him as his name, signifying their master-slave relationship (Defoe 204). (Ironically, Robinson Crusoe taught his parrot to call him by his name.) Bishop rejects this relationship between a superior, condescending master and a grateful, loyal slave: "Accounts of that have everything all wrong." The happiness Crusoe enjoyed with Friday is expressed in his desire to "propagate my kind," which humorously echoes Darwin's argument that reproduction indicates happiness: "If all the individuals of any species were habitually to suffer to an extreme degree they would neglect to propagate their kind" (88). The implied homosexual relationship between Crusoe and Friday reflects Bishop's own lesbian point of view.¹³ Bishop's reduction of Robinson Crusoe's long-awaited contact with people from his world to a single line--"And then one day they came and took us off" (CP 166)--effectively communicates the abruptness with which her Crusoe's happiness with Friday is ended.

Following his abrupt ending of a short happy life with Friday, Crusoe's monologue returns to his life in England. With this return, new feelings of exhaustion and loss are

created while the original feelings of boredom and
loneliness re-emerge:

Now I live here, another island,
that doesn't seem like one, but who decides?
My blood was full of them; my brain
bred islands. But that archipelago
has petered out. I'm old.
I'm bored, too, drinking my real tea,
surrounded by uninteresting lumber.
.

The local museum's asked me to
leave everything to them:
the flute, the knife, the shrivelled shoes,
.
How can anyone want such things?
--And Friday, my dear Friday, died of measles
seventeen years ago come March. (CP 166)

Now in old age, Crusoe's adventurous and imaginative energy has petered out; his knife which used to be indispensable and "reeked of meaning" and "lived" has become a meaningless object: "The living soul has dribbled away. / My eyes rest on it and pass on" (CP 166). Crusoe's other belongings, which are treasured by the local museum, have also lost their meaning to him. This gradually built up sense of loss leads to the climax of loss and loneliness in the last two lines, which convey Crusoe's lasting pain of missing Friday. Crusoe's counting of the years of Friday's death also articulates Bishop's loving memory and painful mourning of Lota Soares. "I miss her [Lota] more every day of my life," Bishop told Lowell in a letter of 27 February 1970 (L 516). Writing to Ilse and Kit Barker to inform them of Soares's

death, Bishop said, "I'm only sorry you didn't know Lota when she was well. I had at least 13 happy years with her, the happiest of my life" (28 September 1967, *L* 470).

Bishop's incorporation of her own personal experience in "Crusoe in England" has attracted much critical attention. Brett Millier argues that this poem "is as close as Elizabeth came to a verse autobiography," noting that "the changes she incorporated into her version emphasize precisely where her experience intersects with [Crusoe's]" (*Life* 447). Bonnie Costello stresses Bishop's combination of the cultural with the personal:

Bishop's sense of life as a series of eruptions and survivals, her sense of homelessness, loneliness, longing for children, sexual joy and despair, all find expression in this poem. The distance Bishop retains through her persona and its allusiveness has to do primarily with the wish to set personal feelings and memories in the larger labyrinth of cultural myths. She draws on her wide reading, not only from Defoe but from Melville's 'The Encantadas,' Darwin's *The Voyage of the Beagle* and his autobiography, Genesis, and Wordsworth. This is a poem less about the poet's ability to transform personal experience to mythic and epic dimension than about the nature of memory as both personal and cultural. (208)

Although Bishop's allusive persona does serve to locate the personal in a larger cultural context, rather than merely creating "distance," her use of persona and allusions also enables her to articulate personal feelings effectively. Her persona's "allusiveness" is an inevitable technique for turning personal experience into art by keeping the verity

to herself while letting it "be refracted in various ways."

In her other late poems, Bishop also makes unique personal experience creatively productive material for poetry by locating it in the actual events and particular places of lived life. By combining the possibilities of various technical strategies developed over the years, Bishop is able to portray complex experience and express complicated ideas with much more immediacy and clarity than ever before.

5.3. "Art 'Copying from Life' and Life Itself"

Talking about what she sought to accomplish in her poetry, Bishop said in a 1978 interview: "The greatest challenge, for me, is to try and express difficult thoughts in plain language. I prize clarity and simplicity. I like to present complicated or mysterious ideas in the simplest way possible" (Johnson 20). In the same interview, Bishop added: "I feel people don't get enough out of the *original* experience that prompted a poem. The essential experience, the living of life if you like, appears to be missing or incomplete" (Johnson 21). Bishop's belief in making poetry out of original experience in life has a profound impact on the development of her art, which by the time she wrote *Geography III* has broken away from the symbolic and metaphysical ambiguity shown in early poems such as "The Monument" and "The Weed." In her last poems, Bishop is able to portray a variety of experience and to "present complicated or mysterious ideas in the simplest way possible" as she had hoped to do. She also achieves the element of "surprise" she considers the "one quality" every poem should have. Explaining this quality in her last interview in 1978, Bishop said: "The subject and language which conveys it should surprise you. You should be surprised at seeing something new and strangely alive" (Johnson 21).

Bishop's last Nova Scotia poem, "The Moose," shows how she achieves the effect of "surprise" by turning an original experience in life into art. "The Moose" is one of those poems whose drafts began long before their publication dates. Bishop's encounter with a moose took place in 1946 on her way back to Boston after visiting Aunt Grace in Great Village, Nova Scotia. Bishop described this event to Marianne Moore in a letter:

Early the next morning, just as it was getting light, the driver had to stop suddenly for a big cow moose who was wandering down the road. She walked away very slowly into the woods, looking at us over her shoulder. The driver said that one foggy night he had to stop while a huge bull moose came right up and smelled the engine. "Very curious beasts," he said.
(29 August 1946, L 141)

Ten years after this incident, Bishop wrote to Aunt Grace: "I've written a long poem ["The Moose"] about Nova Scotia. It's dedicated to you" (2 December 1956, L 334). But Bishop did not finish the poem until sixteen years later when she read it on 13 June 1972 at the joint Harvard-Radcliffe Phi Beta Kappa ceremony. She wrote to Aunt Grace about the poem: "This is a very long one, about Nova Scotia--the one I said was to be dedicated to you when it is published in a book. It is called 'The Moose.' (You are *not* the moose.) It was very successful, I think . . . and will be in *The New Yorker*" (15 June 1972, L 568).

"The Moose" begins with a panoramic view of the fishing

villages along the coast. As in her early poems such as "Florida," "Cape Breton," and "At the Fishhouses," more than one "time-pattern" is created within the descriptive narrative of the poem--one that progresses with the passage of time at the moment of observation, another that goes back to the past through associations of the speaker's memory, and still another suggested by the moose and the natural world it inhabits. The lines of this poem are much shorter than in her earlier landscape poems. In combination with the regular meter, their length seems to convey the sense of swift movement of the bus and of the passing views and activities observed from inside the bus.

through late afternoon
 a bus journeys west,
 the windshield flashing pink,

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. (CP 169-70)

As is characteristic of Bishop's poems, the narrative progresses with description, and observation serves as narration. Detailed descriptions here also signal the

passing of time. Observation of the sunset reflection, the light, and the fog punctuate the transition from late afternoon to evening, just as the farm house, churches, and people mark the places the bus passes. Bishop's collage of disconnected images here helps produce a vivace tempo in accordance with the sense of movement of the passing views observed from the moving bus.

One stop at Bass River.
Then the Economies--
Lower, Middle, Upper;
Five Islands, Five Houses,
where a woman shakes a tablecloth
out after supper.

A pale flickering. Gone.
The Tantramar marshes
and the smell of salt hay.
An iron bridge trembles
and a loose plank rattles
but doesn't give way.

On the left, a red light
swims through the dark:
a ship's port lantern.
Two rubber boots show,
illuminated, solemn.
A dog gives one bark.

A woman climbs in
with two market bags,
brisk, freckled, elderly.
"A grand night. Yes, sir,
all the way to Boston."
She regards us amicably.

Moonlight as we enter
the New Brunswick woods,
hairy, scratchy, splintery;
moonlight and mist
caught in them like lamb's wool
on bushes in a pasture. (CP 170-71)

By now evening has given way to night, the arrival of which is indicated by the red light from "a ship's port lantern," by the woman passenger's comment, "A grand night," and finally by moonlight and mist. Bishop attempted portraying the passage of time within a day in her early poem, "Roosters," but only to a limited extent. "Roosters" begins with dawn "At four o'clock" when it is still dark, and when "we hear the first crow of the first cock" (CP 35). But it moves through thirty-eight stanzas without referring to the passage of time until the end of the poem: "In the morning / a low light is floating / in the backyard, and gilding // from underneath / the broccoli, leaf by leaf; / how could the night have come to grief?" (CP 39). In fact, the passage of time is only hinted at rather than illustrated within the poem. The passing of the day is not integrated into the poem throughout as it is in "The Moose."

The sense of linear progress of time with the movement of the bus in "The Moose" comes to a halt after dark, and another sense of time is introduced into the poem. The speaker's comparison of the look of tree tops in the moonlight in the woods to "lamb's wool / on bushes in a pasture" gives a sense of the drowsiness of the night, anticipating the dreamy state that follows. When night falls, the speaker's description turns inside to the passengers and their conversations. The voices on the bus

lull the speaker and take her back to memories of childhood
with her grandparents.

The passengers lie back.
Snores. Some long sighs.
A dreamy divagation
begins in the night,
a gentle, auditory,
slow hallucination....

In the creakings and noises,
an old conversation
--not concerning us,
but recognizable, somewhere,
back in the bus:
Grandparents' voices

.
"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,
.

Now, it's all right now
even to fall asleep
just as on all those nights.
--Suddenly the bus driver
stops with a jolt,
turns off his lights. (CP 172)

The passengers' voices and words become intertwined, in a
dreamy state bordering between sleep and wakefulness, with
the speaker's recollections of her grandparents' voices and
lives. The familiar voices, fragmentary conversations, and
domestic images are connected to the speaker's childhood

memories, which introduce a past "time-pattern" into the poem "in counterpoint" with the "present, happening time" in which the passengers' conversations are taking place.

This time-line that runs back to the past with the narrator's memories is abruptly interrupted by the bus's sudden stop caused by their encounter with a moose. Following this, Bishop's juxtaposition of directly cited utterances of the passengers' and driver's responses to the moose reveals richly diverse personalities.

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.

.

Some of the passengers
exclaim in whispers,
childishly, 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, why 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. (CP 172-73)

The mystery in this momentary meeting between creatures of two separate and interconnected worlds is enhanced by the co-existing yet distinct smells of moose and gasoline. Two different "time-patterns" also intersect each other here-- one which belongs to the moose who has come out of "the impenetrable wood," "Taking her time," with her "grand" otherworldliness, and the other which belongs to the passengers with their domesticity and technology.

Like Bishop's other late poems, "The Moose" draws enrichment from the concrete diversity in the surrounding world, which is manifested mostly in her direct citation of people's utterances. Bakhtin contends that a literary work can avail itself of this enrichment by appropriating other people's words into its discourse. Bishop's direct citation of people's utterances employs the spontaneous, expressive capabilities of various speech manners. Both the moose and the experience of surprise "at seeing something new and strangely alive" are depicted through the observations of the passengers, the driver, and the speaker. The technical strategies of "The Moose" show the merit of Bishop's integration of her descriptive skills in depicting both the outer and inner worlds with her mastery of the art of

storytelling.

Bishop's struggle to achieve this integration in "The Moose" seems to account for the long period of time she took in completing this poem. According to Brett Millier, "'The Moose' remains one of [Bishop's] most revised poems." Its drafts indicate that Bishop "worked on it from time to time for more than twenty-five years" (*Life* 466). Millier thinks that the changes Bishop made between the original prose description and the poem are due to the "prosodic demands" of the poem's "rich rhyme scheme." But the poem retains "all the basic elements" which "are present in the first prose account, though the nighttime hallucination of the passengers is barely suggested" (*Life* 467). Lorrie Goldensohn also finds that Bishop's drafts of the poem show that "There are no notes about the trip from inside the bus, no sketches for what the passengers are doing until the moose steps in." Goldensohn notes that "The details of sighting the moose were there from the beginning as a closure to the poem's experience" and that the first stanza remained very much the same "until the poem was finished" (253). Bishop herself said in an interview that she started the poem at least "twenty years ago" and "wanted to finish it because I liked it, but I could never seem to get the middle part, to get from one place to the other" (*Spires* 3368). In her final version of the poem, Bishop solves this

problem of getting from one place to the other partly by superimposing fragmentary scenes of different places over the ongoing rhythm of the bus and the linear passage of time, and partly by shifting her descriptive narrative from outside to inside the bus. This shift enables Bishop to turn her descriptions to the fellow passengers and their lives, thus introducing her memory of early childhood into the poem through association. Bishop's portrayal of the passengers and the narrator's memory enrich the description of Nova Scotia landscape and fishing villages with a touch of intimacy. At the same time, it provides the transitional middle part which bridges the opening stanzas and the closing ones. Being positioned right before the appearance of the moose, the mundane topics of the passengers' conversations, the familiar voices, and domestic images described in a comfortable, sleepy state render the passengers' encounter with the moose specially surprising and refreshing.

In her other *Geography III* poems such as "In the Waiting Room" and "Poem" Bishop also employs the technique of shifting the descriptive narrative back and forth between the images observed and her speaker's inner experience. With this unpredictable development of the poem which progresses with the speaker's apparently random observation, Bishop renders the speaker's unexpected discoveries and

sudden revelations surprisingly immediate and poignant. "In the Waiting Room" deals with Bishop's childhood experience of discovering her connection to other people, particularly the grown-ups. As in "Over 2,000 Illustrations and a Complete Concordance," Bishop combines collage with other techniques developed from her notions of "time-patterns" and "experience-time" to portray the process of constant re-adjustment in perception within a moment of observation. But the re-adjustment of perception within a moment of observation is vaguely hinted at in "Over 2,000 Illustrations," whereas in "In the Waiting Room," the process of how and why the changes take place within the speaker's perception is depicted with much more clarity and effect. In the latter, Bishop also shows the full possibilities of portraying experience and perception according to her notions of "experience-time" and "time-patterns." In "Dimensions for a Novel," Bishop writes:

The crises of our lives do not come, I think, accurately dated; they crop up unexpected and out of turn, and somehow or other arrange themselves according to a calendar we cannot control. [...] If I suffer a terrible loss and do not realize it till several years later among different surroundings, then the important fact is not the original loss so much as the circumstance of the new surroundings which succeeded in letting the loss through to my consciousness.

(100-101)

"In the Waiting Room" portrays such a moment that crops up unexpectedly "according to a calendar we cannot control,"

and it depicts how the circumstance of some particular surroundings let the speaker/narrator's sense of self through to her consciousness.

Bishop also assimilates Proust's method of picking "one moment of observation and show[ing] the whole past in the terminology of that particular moment"--a method employed in poems such as "Cape Breton," "At the Fishhouses," and "Over 2,000 Illustrations and a Complete Concordance." "This method," Bishop contends, "achieves, perhaps, the 'conformity between the old and new' . . . but since the conformity itself must be ever-changing, the truth of it, the thing I should like to get at, is the ever-changing expression for it" ("Dimensions" 98). "In the Waiting Room" demonstrates Bishop's mastery of the technical devices of "the ever-changing expression" for the readjustment in her narrator's perception. It also reveals Bishop's effective employment of another method she discusses along with others in her essay:

In conversation we notice how, often, the other person will repeat some word or phrase of ours, perhaps with quite a different meaning, and we in turn will pick up some adjective or adverb of theirs. . . . This trick of echoes and re-echoes, references and cross-references produces again a kind of "conformity between the old and new," and it illustrates fairly well both the situation possible to reveal in the novel and a method of approaching it. (98)

Bishop incorporates this approach of "echoes and re-echoes,

references and cross-references" in her employment of Proust's method of focusing on a moment of observation to portray the changes in her speaker's perception.

Like many of her poems, "In the Waiting Room" is based on an "original experience" in Bishop's life.¹⁴

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.
 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;

 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. (CP 159-60)

Talking about this poem in a letter to Frank Bidart, Bishop wrote that "it is almost a true story--I've combined a later thought or two, I think." She also informed Bidart that her descriptions of the images were not from the same issue of the *National Geographic*, which was about Alaska, called "The Valley of Ten Thousand Smokes." "I tried using that a bit," Bishop wrote, "but my mind kept going back to another issue of the *National Geographic* that had made what seemed like a more relevant impression on me, so used it instead" (27 July 1971, L 545-46). The "more relevant impression" seems to be connected to the child's surprise and uncomfortable feelings at seeing "A dead man slung on the pole," the physical distortion the babies and the women endure and particularly, the "black, naked women" whose "breasts were horrifying." These strange and horrifying sights induced a cry of pain from the child Elizabeth, which she at first took to be her aunt's voice, and then recognized with surprise as her own. Her recognition of her own cry led to her identification with her aunt and other grown-ups. This cognitive process

gives more meaning to the experience of suffering and provides the material for illustrating Bishop's ideas concerning the sense of time and the relationship between experience and perception. The child was so overwhelmed by this unexpected recognition of her link to the suffering adults that she experienced a moment of disorientation. As if the fixed order of calendar time were a way to help her stay in the world of familiar and predictable things, the child tried to cling to the date on the magazine in order to reassure herself of her own identity.

However, the child's efforts to disassociate herself from her aunt and other adults only led to her full realization that she was one of them.

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.
.
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? . . . (CP 160-61)

Even though the child could not quite understand it, she had definitely recognized her identity as being separate from and yet connected to the strange and even horrifying unknown other. References again to the cry of pain and "the *National Geographic*," as well as "those awful hanging breasts" reflect another stage of the child's recognition, suggesting emerging gender-awareness as well. As Hans-Georg Gadamer says, recognition is more than "knowing something again that we know already--i.e., what is familiar is recognized again." Gadamer emphasizes that "In recognition what we know emerges, as if illuminated, from all the contingent and variable circumstances that condition it; it is grasped in its essence. It is known as something" (114). Bishop's descriptions that return to images already observed are her method of "echoes and re-echoes and references and cross-references." This method expresses the adjustment in the child's perception of the familiar and the strange.

Moreover, Bishop's repetitive references to the date on the magazine cover and to the waiting room present the fixity of calendar time and the stasis of the familiar world in juxtaposition to the flux in the child's ever-changing perception within a moment of experience. They help set up what Bishop in "Time's Andromedas" calls another "time-pattern" (104), which is "contradictory to but in a sort of counterpoint" (109) to the movement of changes within the

child.

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. (CP 161)

The date on the magazine is referred to three times, each in counterpoint, marking a shift in the child's sensations and thoughts. The seemingly static conditions of the world, with the sustained darkness of night, the continuity of "The War," the stability of a familiar place like "Worcester, Massachusetts," and the unchanged date of calendar time all counterpoise the child's strange psychological journey of "sliding beneath" one "big black wave" after another into a timeless state of consciousness and returning to this familiar world of calendar time. The closing statement-- "and it was still the fifth / of February, 1918" underlines the psychological disorientation and cognitive growth the child has experienced.

This treatment of time and observation in relation to perception and revelation is explored in another of Bishop's late works, "Poem," which also focuses on a moment of observation but with much more important interplay between

past and present. The importance of memory as a source for artistic creativity and as material for art is clearly illustrated rather than suggested with ambiguity as in the early poem "The Weed." In "Poem," Bishop is able to deal simultaneously with the action of the mind and the constant readjustment in perception by including past experience through memory. As in her early poem "Paris, 7 A.M." and later in "Over 2,000 Illustrations and a Complete Concordance," Bishop focuses on one particular set of images, and interweaves the present moment of observation with memory so as to show the mutual influence between the past and present within the observer's perception. Unlike the other two poems, however, "Poem" portrays this interplay through one particular experience of observation with much more localized and interconnected images and with more flexible and natural shifts between observation and memories.

"Poem" begins with a brief account of an apparently worthless "little painting" which is "About the size of an old-style dollar bill," but "has never earned any money in its life." It has been kept by family members for a long time but never seems to have appealed to its owners.

Useless and free, it has spent seventy years
as a minor family relic
handed along collaterally to owners
who looked at it sometimes, or didn't bother to.
(CP 176)

After this brief introduction about the painting's uselessness and unappealing quality, the speaker begins to closely examine every detail in the picture.

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.
 Elm trees, low hill, a thin church steeple
 --that gray-blue wisp--or is it? In the foreground
 a water meadow with some tiny cows,
 two brushstrokes each, but confidently cows;
 two minuscule white geese in the blue water,
 back-to-back, feeding, and a slanting stick.
 Up closer, a wild iris, white and yellow,
 fresh-squiggled from the tube.
 The air is fresh and cold; cold early spring
 clear as gray glass; a half inch of blue sky
 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? (CP 176)

The cumulative impact of observation leads to the speaker's sudden realization that these objects in the painting are familiar things from her past. As she relates the images in the painting to her memories of the place and the people while looking at them again, the speaker no longer judges them with a detached critical aesthetic eye. Rather, she re-examines them with the delight of recognition.

Heavens, I recognize the place, I know it!
 It's behind--I can almost remember the farmer's name.

 Would that be Miss Gillespie's house?
 Those particular geese and cows
 are naturally before my time. (CP 176-77)

This recognition evokes the speaker's memories of other family members' casual comments on the painting and how the painting was handed down to her, and eventually to recollections of "Uncle George," the artist.

A sketch done in an hour, "in one breath,"
 once taken from a trunk and handed over.
*Would you like this? I'll probably never
 have room to hang these things again.
 Your Uncle George, no, mine, my Uncle George,
 he'd be your great-uncle, left them all with Mother
 When he went back to England.
 You know, he was quite famous, an R.A....* (CP 177)

Following these remembered exchanges, the speaker's feeling about the painting undergoes further alteration. As Bishop notes in "Dimensions for a Novel," "within the shiftings produced by the present over the past is this other shifting, rhythmical perhaps, of the moments themselves" (100). While the speaker's perception shifts from observation to recognition, to recollection, back to re-examination, then to contemplation, and finally to observation again, the moment of looking at this old painting itself as a whole undergoes "this other shifting" of re-evaluating the painting, which goes beyond the painting itself. The speaker's recognition of familiar sights captured by the painter, her great-uncle, refreshes her memory of these commonplace and seemingly inconsequential things cherished both by Uncle George and herself. A tangible bond between the speaker and her past

is to be found in the painting. The "useless" and once unheeded picture now has taken on significant value and contains important implications about the relation between life and art.

I never knew him. We both knew this place,
 apparently, this literal small backwater,
 looked at it long enough to memorize it,
 our years apart. How strange. And it's still loved,
 or its memory is (it must have changed a lot).
 Our visions coincided--"visions" is
 too serious a word--our looks, two looks:
 art "copying from life" and life itself,
 life and the memory of it so compressed
 they're turned into each other. Which is which?
 Life and the memory of it cramped,
 dim, on a piece of Bristol board,
 dim, but how live, how touching in detail
 --the little that we get for free,
 the little of our earthly trust. Not much.
 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. (CP 177)

This "little painting," whose very worth is questioned by the speaker at the beginning of the poem, has become priceless. It stands for life itself and testifies to the interconnectedness of art and life and memory. Its size, compared to "an old-style dollar bill" at the beginning, now is "About the size of our abidance / along with" those of other living things and natural scenes. As the title of this poem indicates, poetry is made out of these details of life in memory, much as Uncle George's painting is made from them. The cluster of images at the end of the poem, though

described earlier, is re-seen differently as "touching" details of life and the world, which are the source for art. By means of noting this, recognizing that, and recalling something else, then contemplating, and finally seeing the painting in a new light, the speaker is simultaneously demonstrating how a poem is made naturally, spontaneously out of observation, recollection, and contemplation. As its title indicates, this poem is not so much about a painting as about the making of a poem.

For Bishop, the making of a poem involves, among other things, creating variant feelings of time in relation to actual experience so as to give it dimensions and keep its action in motion.¹⁵ The moment when these details in the painting are re-examined in "Poem," like the final moment of "In the Waiting Room" when the child's perception returns to the familiar yet changed world, is similar to the moment when the adult speaker in "Over 2,000 Illustrations and a Complete Concordance" beholds again the Nativity with an altered perception of it. Each of these moments, like "a star inside a rectangle," consists of a multiplicity of moments retained through memory as "Paris, 7 A.M." metaphorically describes a moment of visual experience mingled with "introspection" and "recollection." But the multiple dimensions and fluidity of perception in the moments of observation in "Poem" and "In the Waiting Room"

are revealed with much more directness and accessibility than in the early poems. Bishop achieves this directness and accessibility by focusing on the stages of the speaker's process of observation and by emphasizing the speaker's consequent revelations through repeated descriptions of the speaker's perception of the same group of images. Ultimately, this achievement owes much to the possibilities resulting from Bishop's combination of her skill of description with her art of narrative.

Bishop realizes in these late poems her belief "that the fact of experience-time can be made of use possibly in its own order, in order to explain the endless hows and whys of incident and character more precisely than before" ("Dimensions" 101). She also successfully employs the "important" "measurements" for dealing with "experience-time" she proposes for the construction of the novel:

First, a very few primary ideas of facts would suffice, and they could be told immediately. The interest would not lie in watching a "march" through a segment of time, but rather the complete absorption of each item, and the constant re-organization, the constantly maintained order of the whole mass. The process perhaps resembles more than anything the way in which a drop of mercury, a drop to begin with, joins smaller ones to it and grows larger, yet keeps its original form and quality. ("Dimensions" 103).

By applying these measures to her poems, Bishop is able to include numerous details, and combine lyricism, narrative, and meditation in her formally conventional and basically

descriptive poems. The flexibility, the naturalness and immediacy, the rich diversity and details in Bishop's late poems result, to a large extent, from her combination of various techniques she has explored and developed since the beginning of her career. The most prominent and well-integrated techniques in those poems are her methods of creating a sense of motion by depicting the movements of thought, the changes of "time-patterns," and the constant re-adjustments of "experience-time." She achieves the unpredictable, startling effect in those poems by combining her descriptive accuracy with the art of story-telling.

Unlike her early poems of surrealist visual distortion, "something new and strangely alive" is not presented through metamorphosis of images in "The Moose," "In the Waiting Room," and "Poem." Rather, commonplace things are seen as "new and strangely alive" from different points of view through interaction with others in real life situations, and through Bishop's masterful descriptive and narrative devices. In a 1930's notebook entry, Bishop recorded her comments on a phrase by Baudelaire: "surprising, accurate, dating the poem, yet making it real, yet making it mysterious"¹⁶ (VC). She has achieved these qualities and much more in her final poems.

Notes to Chapter Five

1. Elizabeth Bishop died on 6 October 1979 at Lewis Wharf. She was visiting professor of poetry at M.I.T. for the fall semester, but illness prevented her from giving any classes.

2. In "Dimensions for a Novel," Bishop says: "it seems to me that the fact of experience-time can be made of use possibly in its own order, in order to explain the endless hows and whys of incident and character more precisely than before" (101). She achieves this goal in her late poems by making use of "experience-time" in combination with other techniques.

3. See "Poets: The Second Chance," *Time*, 2 June 1967: 74.

4. See James Merrill, "Afterword" to Kalstone, *Becoming A Poet*, 251-52.

5. Other critics also note the illuminating aspect of *Geography III* in Bishop's early poems. Marilyn Lombardi says that "When Bishop published *Geography III* she revealed for the first time how autobiographical her poems had always been, despite their practiced indirection and reserve" (3). Elizabeth Spires contends that *Geography III* "illuminated aspects of [Bishop's] past work that had been missed or misread." These late poems, she adds, "provide an entrance into the early work. Specially, the openly personal element in the late poems points the reader toward a 'submerged personal' in the earlier poems" (70).

6. In a conversation with George Starbuck, published in 1977, Bishop mentioned that "['12 O'Clock News'] had nothing to do with Viet Nam or any particular war when I first wrote it, it was just fantasy" (Starbuck 320). Although it has no connection to any particular war, the "fantasy" makes it possible for the objects on a desk to become material for the "news reporters" to reveal their stereotyped ideas about an "underdeveloped" country.

7. Bishop to Robert Lowell, 8 September 1948, *One Art: Letters*, 170.

8. In an interview, Bishop said that some descriptions in the poem are based on her recollections of the places she visited. Apart from the volcanoes from the island of Aruba, both the "waterspouts" and "blue snails" in the poem are from Florida, where she actually saw them. See Starbuck, 319, 317.

9. In a 1978 interview, when asked if Crusoe's record of every type of flora and fauna "is intended to suggest the poet's duty or his burden," Bishop replies: "There is a certain self-mockery, I guess" (Johnson 20).

10. According to Bishop, the anachronism of having Crusoe reading Wordsworth is deliberate. This arrangement makes possible Bishop's assimilation of and challenge to Wordsworth's notion of the blissful company of nature in her description of Crusoe's experience of nature in solitude. She reveals in a 1977 interview: "The *New Yorker* sent the proof back and beside that line was the word 'anachronism,' and also at another place in the poem, I think. But I told them it was on purpose. But the snail shells, the blue snail shells, are true." See Starbuck, 317.

11. All her life, except those happy years she spent with Lota Soares, Bishop never completely escaped loneliness. Several years after Soares's death, she wrote to Ashley Brown, "I get homesick for O.P. [Ouro Preto] but know that soon after I get there I'll be bogged down in house-keeping and maintenance, and also dying of isolation and boredom and finding it hard to work--this is what seems to happen there. I can work all day alone--but around five I'd like a little company" (23 January 1972, L 555). Bishop incorporates her own painful experience of loneliness into Crusoe's longing and almost desperate need for company in his solitary life.

12. This poem translated by Richard Wilbur is collected in *Charles Baudelaire: The Flowers of Evil*, ed. Marthiel and Jackson Mathews (New York: New Directions, 1989) 12.

13. For a reading of "Crusoe in England" in relation to Bishop's lesbian identity, see Renée Curry, "Augury and Autobiography: Bishop's 'Crusoe in England'." Arizona Quarterly 47.3 (Autumn 1991): 71-91.

14. For another account of this childhood experience see Bishop's short story "The Country Mouse," in *Elizabeth Bishop: The Collected Prose*, 32-33.

15. In his examination of time in poetry, Richard Jackson mentions that "the truth of Elizabeth Bishop's view of time" is that "poetic Time is, in effect, the self-questioning of presence; it is, in the end, a matter of perspective" (20). As an example, Jackson cites parts of "Poem," which reveals the importance of memory in a moment of recognition and the inseparableness of memory from life. It is impossible to

separate memory from life, Jackson contends, because to do so is to "stand in a static, timeless realm-not to live in the world" (21). However, Jackson does not include Bishop's perspective among the six "perspectives" of time in the works of six poets in his book *The Dismantling of Time in Contemporary Poetry* (1988). This is probably because his choice is oriented not only to "different strategies for dealing with time, but . . . time itself as a central and directly treated theme" (21). Rather than treating time directly as a theme, Bishop deals with the experience of time. The six poets Jackson discusses are Robert Penn Warren, John Hollander, James Wright, John Ashbery, Denise Levertov, and Charles Simic.

16. Quotations from Elizabeth Bishop's unpublished materials are used by permission of her Estate, Alice Methfessel, Literary Executor, and Nancy S. MacKechnie of Special Collections, Vassar College Libraries.

CONCLUSION

The development of Elizabeth Bishop's poetry is a progressive realization of the artistic goals and principles she expressed in her notebooks, essays, letters, and interviews, and indirectly articulated through the speaker of "In Prison." These goals and principles and their consequent techniques grew out of Bishop's interactions with other writers' works, and their ideas, values, and technical devices. Her interest in the "baroque style," surrealism, the treatment of time in modern novels, and the art of story-telling in prose, and her admiration for the works of Klee, Picasso, Herbert, Hopkins, Moore, and Lowell, and many other artists, poets, and writers, and her dissatisfaction with other poets' ways of making poetry and other writers' treatment of time helped her in formulating, producing, and developing her "own poetic convention."

Bishop has redefined descriptive poetry by making observation serve multiple purposes through her persistent exploration of the possibilities which various literary traditions, including surrealism, can offer. By inventing through assimilation, revision, and transformation of available material and techniques, and by maintaining a dialogic position in her poems, Bishop greatly expands the capacity of her descriptive mode of poetry to portray as many aspects of life as possible, while rendering her poems

increasingly responsive to major social and artistic concerns of her time. Surrealist techniques such as metamorphosis, visual distortion, collage juxtaposition, and intertextual parody and revision enable Bishop to make use of limited material in various ways to portray "the living of life" through personal and social experience within particular historical and cultural contexts. They also help open up space within the boundaries of poetic form for Bishop to engage in dialogues with other poets and writers, and to depict the experience of time, the interplay among different voices, attitudes, and viewpoints as well as between past and present.

In general, new artistic methods are developed with changes in artists' epistemological and axiological positions. Bishop emphasizes this point in "Dimensions for a Novel": "Before a genuine change in form takes place, maybe quite a while before, the actual substance, the protoplasmic make-up of the writing must be changed" (96). She points out that the narrative in Thomas Hardy's *The Return of the Native* unfolds within the limitations of a linear chronological order and a definite scheme of chorus and action, "not because Hardy thought that was an interesting new way of writing a book (although he undoubtedly did), but something in the story itself suggested that form, made it the only possible one for the

book" (95). Bishop's innovative methods of dealing with time and experience, as well as multiple viewpoints in her poems of observation, are the result of changed and changing ideas and values.

Bishop was able to break away from the confinement of an argumentative and declarative poetic discourse and linear pattern of time, and escape the limitations of using images as metaphors for abstractions, because of her awareness of the socially, culturally, and historically conditioned nature of knowledge and attitudes, because of her belief in the role of art as participating in the actuality of experience, and because of her disapproval of "modern religiosity" which "always seems to lead to a tone of moral superiority."¹ A passage Bishop copied from John Dewey's *Human Nature and Conduct* at the top of page one of an unpublished prose piece, "The Bees," further illuminates the importance of her exploratory observation and the dialogic relation she maintains with what is observed in her poems.

Any observed form or object is a challenge. The case is not otherwise with ideals of justice or peace or human brotherhood, or equality, or order. They too are not things self-enclosed to be known by introspection, as objects were once supposed to be known by rational insight. Like thunderbolts and tubercular disease and the rainbow they can be known only by extensive and minute observation of consequences incurred in action.²

The historical perspective in this passage parallels

Bishop's belief in the fact that "our knowledge is historical, flowing, and flown." The dialogic position with regard to "any observed form or object" also evokes the ambivalence in Bishop's observation of the world through the eyes of the sandpiper: "The world is a mist. And then the world is / minute and vast and clear." These cognitive and axiological principles contribute to providing a foundation for Bishop's poetics of dialogism.

An examination of both the thematic and technical development from her early works to her final poems reveals that dialogism enables Bishop's poetry to be inclusive of the conflicts, diversity, and heterogeneity of life. Dialogism in Bishop's poems leads to her presentation of people and the world as multifaceted and multidimensional, and experience as fluid. Moreover, dialogism is generative of the creative production and constant renewal of artistic expression in her poems.

Bishop's life-long efforts to construct her "own examples of surrealist art" illustrate that this dialogic relation with others was essential to attaining her own distinctive poetic voice and style. The speaker of Bishop's "In Prison" articulates this necessity allegorically by referring to the norms of prison life. Once he is "in," the speaker asserts, he must manage to establish and maintain a manner of carrying and apprelling himself, which will

always be different from those of other inmates.

I shall manage to look just a little different in my uniform from the rest of the prisoners. I shall leave the top button of the shirt undone, or roll the long sleeves half way between wrist and elbow--something just a little casual, a little Byronic. On the other hand, if that is already the general tone in the prison, I shall affect a severe, mechanical neatness. My carriage and facial expression will be influenced by the same motive. There is, however, no insincerity in any of this; it is my conception of my role in prison life. It is entirely a different thing from being a "rebel" outside the prison; it is to be unconventional, rebellious perhaps, but in shades and shadows.

(CPr 189)

This unique manner must be established and maintained by a revolt against and a continual readjustment to any conventional norms and any vogue of fashion in others' styles. A distinct individual style is created and sustained by a dialogic position in response to others. As Bakhtin points out:

In literary speech the significance of the hidden polemic is enormous. In every style, strictly speaking, there is an element of internal polemic In addition, literary discourse senses alongside itself another literary discourse, another style. An element of so-called reaction to the preceding literary style, present in every new style, is an example of that same internal polemic. (PDP 196)

This logic underlies the fundamentally dialogic stance the speaker of "In Prison" takes and explains how Bishop assimilated techniques from various literary schools without becoming a follower of any. Such a dialogic stance in

relation to others' styles was necessary for her to establish and maintain her own artistic individuality.

Equally significantly, as the speaker emphasizes, this revolt must be staged from within the "prison" and among its inmates. Individual artistic innovation is defined by its difference from what have been the norms and conventions of artistic practice. Such an on-going dialogue between old and new will ensure the continuity of literary traditions while stimulating the renewal of literary conventions. Bishop's own poetic style and voice are developed by appropriating, revising, and transforming various aspects of established poetic conventions and others' techniques, styles and even points of view. This dialogic interaction between the old and the new, the given and the invented in literary creation is a fundamental condition of Bakhtinian dialogism. "But something created is always created out of something given," Bakhtin emphasizes. "What is given is completely transformed in what is created" (SG 120). Because of its ideological and axiological nature, the potential for renewal in literature is inevitable and infinite. Bakhtin notes: "Words and forms as abbreviations or representatives of the utterance, world view, point of view, and so forth, actual or possible. The possibilities and perspectives embedded in the word; they are essentially infinite" (SG 120). Since "Dialogic boundaries intersect

the entire field of living human thought" (SG 120), Bakhtin questions the possibility of monologism and self-enclosure in literary work in one of his late essays, "The Problem of the Text":

To what degree are pure, objectless, single-voiced words possible in literature? Is it possible for a word in which the author does not hear another's voice, which includes *only* the author and *all* of the author, to become material for the construction of a literary work? [...] Is not any writer (even the pure lyricist) always a "dramaturge" in the sense that he directs all words to others' voices, including to the image of the author (and to other authorial masks)? Perhaps any literal, single-voiced word is naive and unsuitable for authentic creativity. Any truly creative voice can only be the *second* voice in the discourse. (SG 110)

These remarks, like the basis of Bakhtinian dialogism, undermine and revise Bakhtin's early statements about the monologic nature of poetry in general. Bakhtin's own dialogue with himself here affirms interaction with others' words as a necessary condition for literary creation, and suggests that dialogism is inevitable in creative production.

Bakhtinian dialogism provides theories for the fact that the new is produced in response to the old. In literature, response to what has been uttered and created generates new utterances and creative works. Bishop's understanding of this logic of artistic innovation is expressed as early as her 1934 college essay "Dimensions for a Novel." In its opening paragraph, Bishop contends that

The discovery, or invention, whichever it may be, of a new method of doing something old is often made by defining the opposite of an old method, or the opposite of the sum of several old methods and calling it new. And the objective of this research or discovery is rather the new method, the new tool, than the new thing. In the come and go of art movements, movements in music, revolutions in literature, and "experiments" in everything, we often see this illustrated. (95)

This "invention" is illustrated in Bishop's own poems, in which she persistently seeks new ways of "using things in unthought of ways," and insists on "doing it deliberately different from accepting that it is all that way."

Throughout her career, Bishop followed these principles she set for herself in her notebook entries written when she had just graduated from college, and was preparing herself to be a poet.

This imperative for revolt against conformity leads to Bishop's distinctive poetic style and artistic innovation. Her original style often emerges not only from her revolt against conventions, but also from her revisionist assimilation of what has been written. After reading "From Trollope's Journal" and other Bishop poems, Robert Lowell complimented Bishop for the uniqueness and variety of her work:

I think you never do a poem without your own intuition. You are the only poet now who calls her own tune--rather different from even Pound or Miss Moore who built original styles then continue them--but yours, especially the last dozen or so, are all unpredictably different.

(12 July 1960, VC qtd. in Harrison *Intimacy* 2)

The originality of style is a quality Bishop admired in Marianne Moore's poems and one she labored to achieve in her own. Speaking of Moore's unique devices, Bishop notes: "they made me realize more than I ever had the rarity of true originality, and also the sort of alienation it might involve" ("Efforts of Affection" 140). After reading *What Are Years*, Bishop expressed her admiration to Moore: "what I like best of all, is the wonderful alone quality of it all like the piano alone in the middle of the concerto"³ (23 October 1941, RM). In her own poems, Bishop has achieved this distinctive "alone quality"--a seemingly simple, descriptive poetry which makes us see the world afresh, challenges our received notions, and reveals complicated ideas and feelings through observation. Bishop develops the capacity of her description which is capable of enacting complex experience, portraying characters, and depicting actions. She relies on the richness of visual images to suggest an undercurrent of meanings and emotions which run beneath the surface of observation. The speaker of "In Prison" anticipates Bishop's achievement in his confident assertion: "in a place where all dress alike I have the gift of being able to develop a 'style' of my own, something that is even admired and imitated by others" (CPr 190). Bishop has developed a unique mode of descriptive poetry

which, without abandoning literary conventions, constitutes a commentary on and a "protest" against literary conformism. As the speaker of "In Prison" predicts, "By means of these . . . slight differences, and appeal" of his "carefully subdued, reserved manner" of a "rebel" "in shades and shadows" within the prison, he will attract and influence others, and eventually establish himself "as an authority, recognized but unofficial, on the conduct of prison life" (CPr 190).

The innovative nature of Bishop's poems and their importance in the "evolution" of American poetry have been recognized and admired by critics and fellow poets. Howard Moss was perhaps the first to articulate the significantly "rebellious" nature of Bishop's achievement. In his review of Bishop's *Questions of Travel* (1965), Moss asserts, "What she brings to poetry is a new imagination; because of that, she is revolutionary, not 'experimental.' And she is revolutionary in being the first poet successfully to use all the resources of prose" ("All Praise" 259). Criticism in general has only recently begun to recognize this "revolutionary" aspect of Bishop's poetry. Essays in the 1991 anthology *A Profile of Twentieth-Century American Poetry* reflect this shift in evaluating Bishop's position in American poetry. Discussing the poetry of the 1940s, Richard Jackson points out that when her first book of

poetry appeared in 1946, Bishop "was then considered a descriptive, simply referential traditionalist." But he argues that "in quiet poems usually as intellectually challenging as Stevens's and as much concerned with the speaker as Jarrell's, [Bishop] was a leader in an unannounced move to displace the old poetry and theory" (114).

Bishop's poems maintained an important position among the directly autobiographical poems of the 1950s, which are "characterized by the opening of the private, the presentation of the self as character," Mark Doty contends, "for her poems bear, as much as those of any poet of her generation, the stamp of individual character, of an idiosyncratic perception which becomes both mode and subject of the poems" (150). In the '60's, Leslie Ullman points out, Bishop's "use of strong, convincing imagery made her an inspiration to formalists and Surrealists alike" (214-15). When Bishop was awarded the 1976 Neustadt International Prize for Literature, her position in American poetry was well summarized by John Ashbery. Ashbery asserted that Bishop's "unique position among American poets" is manifested in "the extraordinary intense loyalty her work inspires in writers of every sort--from poets like myself . . . and from a whole generation of young experimental poets to experimenters of a different sort"

("Second Presentation" 8).

This "unique position among American poets" has been anticipated by the speaker of "In Prison": "in a place where all dress alike I have the gift of being able to develop a 'style' of my own, something that is even admired and imitated by others." Bishop understood that there could be no short-cut to establishing her own style. As the speaker of "In Prison" says, "The longer my sentence, although I constantly find myself thinking of it as a life sentence, the more slowly shall I go about establishing myself, and the more certain are my chances of success" (*CPr* 190). Bishop worked painstakingly at her poems, always searching for something new for her art throughout her writing life. Her integration of all kinds of technical devices from various traditions, and her combination of them with her own exploratory innovation, make her poetry appeal to other poets whose works are very different from hers. John Ashbery, for instance, a self-alleged "harebrained, homegrown surrealist,"⁴ calls himself "an addict of her work." He remarks that Bishop is "somehow an establishment poet," but notes: "the establishment ought to give thanks; she is proof that it can't be all bad"⁵ ("*The Complete Poems*" 201).

Bishop's accomplishment, achieved by being deliberately "unconventional" and "rebellious perhaps," but within the

"prison" house of poetic traditions, has won admiration from poets of "every sort." For James Merrill, "The unpretentiousness of [Bishop's] form is very appealing. But," he said, "I don't know if it's simply a matter of form." He added: "Rather, I like the way her whole oeuvre is on the scale of a human life; there is no oracular amplification, she doesn't need that" ("An Interview" 200). In one of his last poems, "Overdue Pilgrimage to Nova Scotia," Merrill pays homage to Bishop and her work:

Your village touched us by not knowing how.

In living as in poetry, your art
 Refused to tip the scale of being human
 By adding unearned weight. "New, tender, quick"--
 Nice watchwords; yet how often they invited
 The anguish coming only now to light
 In letters like photographs from Space, revealing
 Your planet tremulously bright through veils
 As swept, in fact, by inconceivable
 Heat and turbulence--but there, I've done it,
 Added the weight. What tribute could you bear
 Without dismay? Well, facing where you lived
 Somebody's been inspired (can he have read
 "Filling Station"?) to put pumps, a sign:
 ESSO--what else! We filled up at the shrine. (87-88)

W. S. Merwin points out in his review of Merrill's final collection of poems *A Scattering of Salts* (1995), that Bishop is one of Merrill's "immediate forebears" (3). Robert Lowell often pays tribute to Bishop for challenging him to attempt something new. While discussing his own poem, "Skunk Hour," Lowell acknowledges that it is written

in imitation of Bishop. "When I began writing 'Skunk Hour,'" Lowell says, "I felt that most of what I knew about writing was a hindrance." He explains that the poem is dedicated to Bishop, "because re-reading her suggested a way of breaking thorough the shell of my old manner. Her rhythms, idiom, images, and stanza structure seemed to belong to a later century" ("On 'Skunk Hour'" 199). And, again, in a 1964 talk with Stanley Kunitz, Lowell includes Bishop with Allen Tate and William Carlos Williams as "the poets who most directly influenced me." He adds that "Bishop is a sort of bridge between Tate's formalism and Williams's informal art" (Kunitz 86). Adrienne Rich also expresses admiration for the challenge Bishop's poems put to her both thematically and technically. Reviewing Bishop's *The Complete Poems, 1927-1979* (1983), Rich writes that she has been fascinated by "the diversity of challenges" that this volume contained, and by "the questions--poetic and political--that it stirs up, the opportunities that it affords" (126).

Elizabeth Bishop's accomplishment as a poet results from her life-long search for new ways to write poetry, which led her to push the limits of poetic discourse and enlarge the boundaries of poetic genres. Her keen awareness of the dialogic nature of invention underlies her poetic practice and her accomplishment. Marvelling at the distinct

prosodic structure of Marianne Moore's poems, Bishop suggests that the particular historical moment was a possible contributing factor to Moore's achievement of originality: "she had started writing at a time when poetry was undergoing drastic changes, she had been free to make the most of it and experiment as she saw fit" ("Efforts of Affection" 140). The changes taking place in art and poetry while Bishop was writing her poems also motivated and enabled her to be responsive to the aesthetic and axiological changes of her time. Her poems reflect her development with the "evolution" of artistic and literary traditions; they also embody as well as engage in the social and cultural transitions and conflicts that shaped both her world and her art. Elizabeth Bishop's achievements as a poet make the comparatively small volume of her poems a significant contribution to the life of poetry.

Notes to Conclusion

1. In her interview with Ashley Brown, Bishop says that she has "the greatest admiration for Auden as a poet," but "Auden's later poetry is sometimes spoiled for me by his didacticism." She adds, "I don't like modern religiosity in general; it always seems to lead to a tone of moral superiority" (Brown 295).

2. This passage which Bishop copied down on her manuscript is from John Dewey's *Human Nature and Conduct: An Introduction to Social Psychology* (New York: The Modern Library, 1957) 56-57.

3. Quotations from Elizabeth Bishop's unpublished materials are used by permission of her Estate, Alice Methfessel, Literary Executor, and Evelyn Feldman of the Marianne Moore Archive, the Rosenbach Museum & Library.

4. See John Ashbery, "Second Presentation of Elizabeth Bishop," 8.

5. John Ashbery's review of Bishop's *The Complete Poems* (1969) appeared in *New York Times Book Review*, 1 June 1969: 8, 25, and was later collected in Schwartz and Estess. Citations within the text are taken from this anthology.

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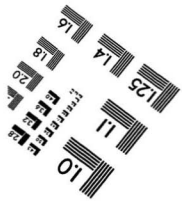
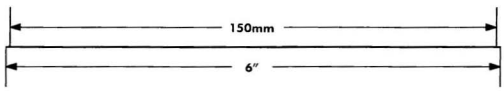
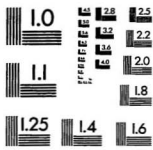
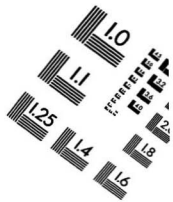
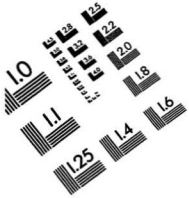
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