CHAPTER IV
SEARCH FOR HOME

“The art of losing isn’t hard to master;
So many things seem filled with the intent
to be lost that their loss is no disaster.”[CP 178]

Elizabeth Bishop was no stranger to loss: having lost her parents, love of her life Lota de Macedo Soares, and above all her various lovely homes. Loss had become an integral part of Bishop’s life and her art. To make for these deficits, Bishop had extended periods of travel, and not had a stable long-term address throughout her life implying a deeper problem with settling down, a continuous displacement, and trying to make a place for self she could call home. The exotic flora and fauna of Brazil was no longer a bright mosaic for Bishop, it was in fact transformed into a glamorous inferno due to Lota’s death. The only peace for Bishop was to rise above this hell, to travel out of Brazil. Throughout Bishop’s many travels, New York remained a natural hub for her to return to. The city became her temporary “home” at various times throughout her life. Nevertheless, Bishop had a complicated relationship with the city that both inspired and tormented her in equal measure. Bishop’s relationship with the city was paradoxical: her time in New York both made her and marred her. The city nurtured her as a poet but destroyed her mentally and emotionally. The final physical displacement of Bishop was back to America to make a living and search the final solace in her life. The final section, “Search for Home” covers the period of Bishop’s life extending from the year 1970 to 1979. After losing Brazil and her Brazilian love Lota, Bishop thought that poetry will not happen to her, but good she was wrong. Her last collection of poetry, “Geography III”, a magnificent book of ten poems, was published in 1976, with predominant themes of loneliness, pain, and loss reflected throughout the volume, possibly because Bishop, probably never recovered from the loss of Lota from her life. In the last phase of Bishop’s life, she emphasised the importance of self-discovery through the risk associated
with travel and it is reflected in many of the poems of “Geography III”. Bishop’s art, in this phase, is marked with a use of active description, subject matter based on personal experiences, her search for home and theme of displacement. In her later era, Bishop was able to describe her feelings more candidly and use her own experiences to create meaning in her poems hence her poems in this phase become more personal.

Geography, for Bishop is a hope to discover out of flux of images where she is and how to get home. Bishop’s poems accept our uncertain relation to time, place and person, suggesting that we have no “self” and no “home.” This uncertainty about everything allows her to interrogate everything and every experience. Paradoxically for Bishop, questions are assertions. Like compass these questions point to something absolute and show us where we stand in the design of the world. There are number of questions related to Bishop’s life which pose a challenge to her and are unresolved, like – death, abnormality, maternal warmth and love, her so – called abduction by her paternal grandparents, her lost home and her sexual difference. These peculiar private questions create an inquisitive writer who uses questioning technique in her writings. Bishop hides herself behind these questions, which have the quality of riddles, and wavers in them to discover her answers through her travels and observations. These questions distract her, though temporarily, from the unwanted realities of her life. With the help of these questions, Bishop displaces herself to a world of puzzles and riddles. The technique of “passive description” encompassing “the questioning style” is exemplified in many of Bishop’s poems. The impersonal and interrogative modes of writing tend to promote a feeling of disunity and disorientation, but for Bishop these are the conditions conducive for discovery and she intends throughout her life to discover her home in Nova Scotia. In the epigram to “Geography III” Bishop becomes interrogative;

[ from “First Lessons in Geography,”

Monteith’s Geographical Series,

A.S. Barnes & Co., 1884]
LESSON VI

“What is Geography?
A description of the Earth’s surface.
What is Earth? . . .
What is the shape of the earth? . . .
Of which the Earth’s surface composed?
Land and water.”

LESSON X

“What is Map?
A picture of the whole or the part of the Earth’s surface.
What are the directions on the Map? . . .
In what direction from the center of the
picture is the Island? . . .
In what direction is the Volcano? The
Cape? The Bay? The Lake? The Strait?
The Mountains? The Isthmuns?
What is in the East? In the West? In the . . .”[CP 157]

These questions, at the beginning of the volume of poetry, indicate the heightened extent of Bishop’s search and her movement or displacement in her life. These questions are more firm and more real than the answers. Embarking upon the questions and answers, but the answers are soon dropped and only the questions continue, Bishop shows us that her search in not answered. The opening poem of Bishop’s first volume “North & South” is “The Map” in all the work that followed it, Bishop was concerned with mapping of the world. Bishop understands Geography from all the travelling, charting and measuring to consider the motives and impulses behind these activities. She still asks-where is Nova Scotia and where is Brazil? But in her last work she asks
different versions of these questions. What am I doing and where am I? In Bishop’s poetry, the interrogation is asserting the need and direction of displacement and the way back home.¹

“Home,” for Bishop, is a place from her childhood, probably her memory of those images from her Nova Sotian childhood where life, for her, got stuck. The most famous poem, “In the Waiting Room,” the opening poem of “Geography III” concerns young Bishop's sudden awareness of both the division and the connection between herself and the world. Bishop, in this poem, is reminiscent of her childhood days. Through this poem, Bishop is displaced into the lanes of those places from past, where life had a different interpretation and meaning not necessarily the carefree one but the one full of losses and afflictions:

“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.”[CP 159]

Bishop’s displacement to the past is not in the comforts of home but in the closure of dentist’s waiting room. There is no place more impersonal than this, but because she is not at home, discovery is possible. A waiting room is not a home or a destination but only a transitional space to intensify one’s search for home. Bishop describes enclosed spaces like waiting rooms, ports, islands, etc which are not microcosms or escape from history. These places contain the tides - of unity and discontinuity, of presence and absence - with the same incompleteness as any wider experience of flux will have. These places do not accommodate or displace the world so they are definitely not a home to Bishop; they become places to encounter the world in a forced way. The poem proceeds with the receding of the time. The wintry Worcester recedes into twilight, and the apparent hierarchy of time and space goes with it. Bishop’s Aunt, Consuelo seems to be inside the dentist’s office for a long time, while Bishop reads and studies the photographs of far off places in a 1918 issue of the ‘National Geographic.’ The absence of mother figure in Bishop’s poetry is
conspicuous. Bishop’s inability to invoke her mother figure directly in poetry hints at the fear associated with her childhood memories of her mother’s illness. The hinges of distance and duration come loose and the constructed adult self which was worked upon since childhood flaps precariously and lay open in this poem. The very layout of the magazine forces violently widening definition of humanity. Bishop uses paradigmatic epiphany in this poem. There is an up-bursting epiphanic motion in the poem emerging from the photograph photos of an eruption:

“the inside of volcano,
black, and full of ashes;
then it was spilling over
in the rivulets of fire.”[CP 159]

Bishop's paradigm epiphany, in this poem, shows the threat of chaos (fiery surges) and the contrasting but equal threat of constriction, as in the rounded shape of the volcano, combining to initiate a child into epiphanic terror and wonder. After the eruptive surges come horrible constricted, rounded shapes like – “pith helmets,” string-wound heads wire-wound necks “like the necks of bulbs, ”and“ terrifying breasts The doubled use of doubling, "round and round" repeated, conveys the obsessive, hypnotic horror of the circles:

“Osa and Martin Johnson
dressed in riding breeches,
. . . A dead man slung on a pole
. . . Babies with pointed heads
wound round and round with string;
black, naked women with necks
like the necks of light bulbs.

Their breasts were horrifying.”[CP 159]

On January 25, 1934 Bishop and Marianne Moore watched the screening of Martin Johnson’s jungle film, “Baboons.” Beginning in the mid-1920s,
Johnson was every American’s introduction to Africa, Guinea, and Borneo; and Bishop later borrowed him along with his wife Osa, for the February 1918 issue of ‘National Geographic’ in “The Waiting Room.” These descriptions of well decorated Englishmen standing side-by-side with the vulnerable humanity, “a dead man slung on a pole” creates a perspective incongruity of humanity. The child doesn’t articulate her fascination but is “too shy to stop” reading through the magazine implies that she has somehow brought home to herself here, that these extremities though harsh are the realities of life to which Bishop has access. There is a sudden displacement from an urbanised class to the afflicted ones. The child, who has longed for maternal warmth and love, cannot escape this threatening dependence of the “horrifying” “breasts” whereby the child and mother-object are either unhappily merged or unhappily disunited. In the epiphanic terms, Bishop's "In the Waiting Room," the babies' heads are "wound round and round" with string; the mothers' necks are "wound round and round" with wire; mother and child are miserably separate and bounded, yet miserably one and blended. Breasts are desired, yet "horrible." Why rounded breasts are horrifying is left unexplained, for they recall a trauma prior to Bishop’s acquisition of language with her mother take away from her due to mental breakdown. The humiliating picture on the magazine indicates that not only the obvious and very real patriarchal torment but also Mother-related childhood terrors infuse the nightmare. Bishop is jolted out from the magazine, loses her balance and in a sudden moment of undifferentiation between Aunt Consuelo and herself, a cry from inside the dentist’s office seem to come literally from inside the child’s mouth.

“Suddenly, from inside,

came an oh! Of pain

– Aunt Consuelo’s voice –

. . . 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.” [CP 160]
The intensity and strangeness of the experience derives not only from slips into undifferentiation but from the sense of difference perceived. There is a displacement of identity indicated in the poem at this juncture. Bishop combines two terrors here: the sensation that the girl is inseparable from her disliked "foolish" aunt (their voices and even their eyes the same) and the sensation of an unstoppable "falling." As the child goes through the National Geography, the epiphanic motions resume; a rising voice within her precipitates a complementary motion of falling. The feeling of oneness, as dissolution of separate identities, is a fall, an experience of being whelmed by chaos:

“... You are an I,
you are an Elizabeth,
you are one of them.

Why should you be one, too?” [CP 160]
The image of volcano forces everyone together by its implied threat to human life. This process of reading the magazine introduces the pre-adolescent girl to the terribleness of femininity and her multivalent existence as “an I, [...] an Elizabeth, [...] one of them.” Here, reading leads to both the girl’s discovery of the anxiety of gender and, paradoxically, her own inherent individuality. Though aunt’s and Bishop’s personalities are merged for time being, but later in the poem, the difference between the child and her “foolish, timid” aunt is perceived. A shocking experience of identification creates a simultaneous loss of original identity and this loss is never overcome. This is not a pure moment of symbiosis for there is always an emphasis on how unlikely this likeliness is. The epiphanic moment comes in the poem when the speaker is aware that nothing stranger can ever happen to her:

"I knew that nothing stranger
had ever happened, that nothing
stranger could ever happen."[CP 160]

These lines indicate that her disorientation is complete: the menace of identity-dissolution is incomprehensible. The poem also exhibits the adamant and robust soul of the child to challenge the unseen and withstand life on her own terms. The force and power for such an epiphanic movement came from Bishop’s painful childhood experience which she withstood in a commendable way. Such experiences provided Bishop with a bank of images and stories she continually returned to throughout her life. The child’s will to survive the odds lifted the poem to another level displaying the epiphanic moment “In the Waiting Room,” with Bishop’s awareness that souls are unexchangeable:

“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 hanging breasts–
held us all together
or made us all just one?”[CP 161]

The mystery of identity, of the terror of its loss and the equal terror of its recapture, remains. These lines show that losing one's identity is not the only, or ultimate, horror: being an "I," an ego, a separate entity, is also a fear one scarcely dares to face, for it means being "one of them" with individuality. The speaker tries to arrest the dissolution of identity into chaos by forcibly recalling her consciousness of being a separate self. Yet, limited discrete selves are revealed to be highly questionable, perhaps contemptible, like her aunt (called "foolish" twice). This poem exemplifies a psychological mastery of the threat of the self’s disintegration or deadening dispersal. The best way to clarify the psychological implications of Bishop's epiphanic paradigm reflected in the image of “awful hanging breasts” is provided in
Psychoanalytic Studies of the Personality by W. R. D. Fairbairn, a pre-oedipal theorist of mother-child dynamics in the tradition of "object relations" founded by Melanie Klein. Fairbairn's Psychoanalytic Studies of the Personality reoriented psychoanalysis by centering human development on the infant's innate need for relationships with its mother. This kind of theorizing stresses early ambivalence toward the maternal "object" (a word used to mean either the breast or the mother herself, since in early developmental stages the child has no sense of the mother as a whole person). The breast, like Mother herself, is sometimes available and sometimes not; the child develops both idealized and resentful portrayals of the maternal "object." In cases of traumatic frustration, the child may experience guilt not only for desiring the breast but also for the aggressive greed arising when breast, love, or attention is withheld. Hence, in the poem, Bishop asserts the image of mother object as "those awful hanging breasts." Suddenly, in the poem, there is the unexplainable stopping of "a cry of pain";

"How had I come to be here,  
like them, and overhear  
a cry of pain that could have  
got loud and worse but hadn’t?"[CP 161]

In Bishop’s poems "cry of pain," "screams," "shouts," and "shrieks" have special place because they have haunted her through her past. Bishop in her short story narrates her fear in the following words:

"A scream, the echo of a scream, hangs over that Nova Scotia village. No one hears it: it hangs there forever, a slight stain in those pure blue skies. The scream hangs like that, unheard in memory – in the past, in the present, and those years between. It was not even loud to begin with, perhaps. Its pitch would be the pitch of my village. Flick the lightening rod on top of the church steeple with your fingernail and you will hear it"³

Before the sense of maternal loss and the associated "cry of pain" begins to haunt the poetry and might overpowered the girl completely "that could have / got loud and worse but hadn’t?" Yet it is this very thought-the thought of utter
inexplicability—that finally does overwhelm her, in an epiphatic lateral-and-
downward fiery-and-watery plunge:

“\[\text{The waiting room was bright}\]
\[\text{and too hot. It was sliding}\]
\[\text{beneath a big black wave,}\]
\[\text{another, and another.}\]”[CP 161]

Although the girl of course does not die (she and her aunt are soon outside in
the cold, slushy night), the death-memacing epiphany of a rising of fiery
rivulets and a rising voice, followed by a double falling or blacking out, first
into blue-black space and then under repeated big waves of blackness, is
paradigmatic for all of Bishop's epiphanies. The inscrutable volcano, the inside
of child’s mouth, the dentist’s chamber are all figures for the abyss, the child
has discovered, and she peeps into it; she is full of questions, another and
another- why, what, how? Until she is thrown back into the exclamatory “How
unlikely!” and it is clear that they will never be answered. The questions
mediate between absolute differences and undifferentiation, between stillness
and total flux. By moving through these questions the speaker ultimately has
“brought home to herself.” Indeed many of Bishop’s characters lose
themselves to find themselves. In one sense, the child experiences a traumatic
leap into the impersonal, the unfamiliar. But in most profound sense she
discovers the personal. In Bishop’s poems, moments of confrontation however
powerful are always transient. The pressure of the questions, push the room to
a volcanic limit as if beneath a lava flow. But when the flow subsided the
world is left ashen and silent. “In the Waiting Room” is an enclosure symbolic
of home. Bishop’s world though very peaceful from outside had literally ashen
due to the volcanoes of her questions. In the adult vision, the dormant volcano
that the child inherits has none of the security of her childhood world “of
grown up people,” “arctics and overcoats”, “lamps and magazines.”

“Then I was back in it.

The War was on. Outside,
in Worchester, Massachusetts,
were night and slush and cold,
and it was still the fifth
of February, 1918.”[CP 161]

There is no stability in “night and slush and cold” and certainly none in war. Once again, the child is displaced into the thoughts of the cover story of National Geography. In many ways the molten, self annihilating questions are preferable to these dismally impersonal facts. For the adult narrator, memory is a way of re-entering the childhood, of escaping the bleak inheritance of certainty without security. When Bishop continuously questions her surroundings she is actually questioning her perspectives. The poem shows double displacement, one when the adult Bishop displacing herself to her childhood memories, and second when young Bishop displaces herself to the world of National Geography to the world of childhood fears and insecurities.

“Crusoe in England” is the longest and the most ambitious poem of Bishop’s last volume of poetry. In this poem, Bishop brings together themes, motives and images from all her earlier work. The island is an odd combination of elements from Cape Britain, South America, Worcester and all the places where Bishop has lost and found herself. The guise of the traveller, the voice of the child, and the testimonies of grotesque, tropical creatures all convey experience profoundly felt and obliquely expressed by Bishop in this poem. Different as these voices are, each carries a quality of existential displacement. Bishop’s “Crusoe in England” offers a complex mirror of life; it is her interpretation arising from the experience derived from different cultures, languages, and notions of identity. The idea of home, as opposed to that of travel, is a site of conflict that centres on the tension between autobiography and geography. Bishop recreates Daniel Defoe’s Robinson Crusoe as a visionary instead of a colonizing figure says Joanne Fiet Diehl. Bishop places her figure in England revisiting his past life on the island:

“A new volcano has erupted,
the papers say, and last week I was reading
where some ship saw an island being born: . . .

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They named it. But my poor old island’s still
un-rediscovered, un-renamable.

None of the books has ever got it right. ”[CP 162]

Crusoe is very much like Bishop, in a way that, both are nostalgic about their past, Bishop for her childhood days and Crusoe for the island life. Crusoe’s displacement on the island due to a shipwreck was the most vital period of his life. While on the island, Crusoe was intensely in search of home. For Bishop, whose characters and writings thrive on exploring the perplexity and excitement of geographical displacement, writing about home, either real or imaginary, involves negotiating the Crusoe dilemma. Crusoe comes back to England but is still tied to the umbilical cord of his island. “Crusoe in England” returns to the chasm between text and experiences—and to dislocation. He returns, in Defoe’s words, as “a Stranger to the world, as if I had never been known there.” Bishop, however, constructs a returned Crusoe in a domestic setting with newspapers, chair, fan, and tea, creating a nostalgic Crusoe whose life is eaten up by the sense of loss and anonymity, for he is at home in England still he is missing his home at the island; Crusoe’s life is very much similar to Bishop’s life and her nostalgia about Nova Scotia. Bishop’s Crusoe has the inability of utterance and literacy to capture the essence of his life, which like his island, remains “un-rediscovered, un-renamable.” Naming the island suggests to colonize, to appropriate; but Crusoe is himself unknown both on his island and in England. Even “at home” in Britain, he is exiled or castaway, a creator and a master, a writer and a colonist. His existence evokes legendary figures such as Odysseus, Adam, Orpheus, and Gulliver, whose vagrant lives constantly search for a home elsewhere. Bishop’s “Crusoe in England” evoke an autobiographical self that negotiates the Crusoe complex. James McCorkle argues that “for Bishop, addressing the figure of Crusoe entails engaging in a multilayered critique of the idea of self and other, a critique of one’s personal identity, and a critique of one’s position within a culture.” For Bishop, as a woman and a lesbian, placed outside Crusoe’s domain, “Crusoe in England” registers her lifetime loss and longing for a home—like the traveller in her poem “Questions of Travel,” who will “Think
of the long trip home”. Crusoe’s apparently peaceful life in England is a dormant volcano more troublesome than what he witnessed at the island:

“Well, I had fifty-two
miserable, small volcanoes I could climb
with a few slithery strides—
volcanoes dead as ash heaps.
I used to sit on the edge of the highest one
and count the others standing up,
naked and leaden, with their heads blown off.”[CP 162]

Crusoe owed the volcanoes of the island for he says, “I had fifty-two.” Crusoe’s emotional turmoil, when he first landed on the island, finds its projection in a violent, aggressive landscape where volcanoes’ heads are “blown off” and the “parched throats” of craters are “hot to touch,” an island hissing with aridity and the replication of barren life. He then gradually realises that the volcanoes are not majestic or threatening but “miserable, small” things, “dead as ash heaps.” Bishop projects the volcanic explosions takes place at the beginning of the poem reflecting the importance of explosions in Bishop's poetry and their significance in her personal life. Similar connections can be drawn to the recurrence of shipwrecks and screams in Bishop's works. Bishop's tendency to draw upon her Nova Scotian heritage and her childhood experiences in the province was an effort to explore and understand this past in order to overcome her feelings of displacement, asserting a familial and artistic identity. Bishop felt trapped while working in Congress Library in America, similar was Crusoe’s case on the island. He finds himself under an enormous burden incongruous with his surroundings even though it does provide solace to him. He can’t seem to adjust his perspectives to fit the proportion of the place:

“I couldn’t bear to think what size
the goats and turtles were,
or the gulls, or the overlapping rollers
—a glittering hexagon of rollers

closing and closing in, but never quite,

sparkling and glittering, though the sky

was mostly overcast.

My island seemed to be

a sort of cloud-dump. All the hemisphere’s

left-over clouds arrived and hung

above the craters—their parched throats

were hot to touch.”[CP 162]

What troubles Crusoe most is the aridity of the place, marked by the parched throats of the volcanoes. The island is also full of impressive features like glittering rollers, variegated beaches, the water spouts, etc. On Crusoe’s island, the mist is not mysterious but a confusion of a “cloud-dump.” All these features are “Beautiful, yes, but not much company” pure abstract forms without sympathy. On this unknown island familiar thing for Crusoe was he himself, so self-pity created all the sense of “home” there. Bishop withdraws herself to the interiors of her mind, the realm of literary metaphysical speculation and psychological brinkmanship, instead of the surface shields of the grieving survivor from prying eyes. Bishop hated self-pity, and exhibitionism of any sort she found distasteful. Her poems which draw upon her own personal distresses does so, always, indirectly and ironically, telling the truth but telling it slants. Yet the final aside -

“I often gave way to self-pity.

“Do I deserve this? I suppose I must.

I wouldn’t be here otherwise. Was there

a moment when I actually chose this?

I don’t remember, but there could have been.”

... “Pity should begin at home.” So the more
pity I felt, the more I felt at home.”[CP 163]
Crusoe, on the unknown island lives with the feeling of loss of his “home.” He develops a strange, almost sadistic relationship between self-pity and home that questions the very notion of “home.” By equating the idea of home with self-pity, Bishop highlights Crusoe’s uprootedness. Home becomes an unattainable territory. For Crusoe, home lacks geography. It is an imagined place hinging on the unimaginable. It exists between the chasm of familiarity and unfamiliarity. It is not elsewhere but nowhere. It is a dilemma where self-pity takes its root. It provides the only clue to Crusoe’s life before the shipwreck. Why would pity of all emotional responses evoke memories of "home"? Bishop invents what appears to be one more casual cliché "to feel at home" in order to fend off while disclosing a wound. The first theme of Crusoe is that human order imposed on the landscape never takes as a real presence and neither does the landscape answers our questions about its objective order. Second related theme is we must ask ourselves the questions, like Crusoe’s self interrogation. When the mind fails to find external objectification it necessarily turns inwards for its comfort. For Crusoe, self explanation achieved with self awareness and humanity, is justified. With every passing day, Crusoe begins explaining himself to himself. He tries to surpass his complaints and attempts to construct a home out of alien materials in an alien land. He tries to create his own world to reflect himself in it. He rejoices over “home–brew” and his weird flute but as a hero of self consciousness. Crusoe fathoms his limits and this limits his ability to rejoice. As Bishop displaces herself into creativity and searches her home in it, similarly, Crusoe finds his creativity giving him happiness. The awareness that the self, too, created:

“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 . . .

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In writing about the homemade, she makes her way closer to home, though it might be for her perpetually an imagined one. By the same token, Crusoe creates his journals before he entirely makes himself at home on the island, surrounded by his homemade objects, objects necessary to every survival. In the heart of autobiography, too, lies the idea of the homemade – the idea that we are “made” by a home in childhood. One’s “home” is often not the home of one’s birth, but a place created in exile, as seen Crusoe and Bishop’s own restless navigations. Bishop’s return to the question of her childhood, after her emigration from Brazil, reflects a looping or circular movement: no place – England or another island, Brazil or Nova Scotia – possess the resilience or permanence of original or final home. Yet Bishop’s stay in Brazil gives her the perspective of an unrescued Crusoe trying to remember a lost self and home. In the poem, Bishop describes a site of loss, but here invention, while it can temporarily stave off loneliness cannot serve as a home. What constitutes the different losses suffered in the poem, Bishop tries to create a meaningful world where human craft conspires with nature to create a safe haven for art but this world cannot be completed without sustained human relationships. When love is not offered externally, he discovers self love. "Company" and "home," however, prompt are a retreat into the language of displacement and wilderness.

“I felt a deep affection for
the smallest of my island industries.”[CP 164]

Bishop does not negate Crusoe’s inventions by confronting an impersonal world in an inquisitive attitude, but tries to show that creativity can’t be a substitute to human affection. Crusoe is also frustrated with creativity and happiness derived out of it because he does not verify his value or self-image, on the contrary overlooks a clear awareness of the relative nature of identities and creations. Crusoe in a way, experiences the bliss of solitude but not as Wordsworth might, in communion with nature. Experiencing a harsh isolation, Crusoe engages in self doubling, a dialogue with the self the interior version of charity. Bishop recognises that narcissism is an essential aspect of self-
definition. Crusoe’s hardships are related as much to the claustrophobia of entrapment within an obsessive imagination as it is to the physical conditions of the island. According to David Lehman, Bishop’s frequent desire to create confinement in her art is actually an expression of her “need to make peace with the certitude of loss.” Crusoe feels that he is imprisoned on the island but wants a provincial captivity, “as the prisoner’s cell where contact is possible”. Crusoe in this poem puts questions to an outer world but then turns them inward due to frustration. Like Bishop, Crusoe tries to construct meanings “out of nothingness at all, or air”. Crusoe trying to give meaning is in a way trying to search home on the island. Despite of discomforts and struggles, Crusoe, like Bishop, finds comfort in creativity, enquiry and self introspection. Crusoe projects the structures of his own language on to the animals imagining a communication to be taking place:

“I was a goat, too, or a gull.

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 . . .

got on my nerves.”[CP 164]

Crusoe tries to personalise an impersonal world. Crusoe tries to make the uninhabited island his home. Since he fails to do that, he infuses them with nostalgic feeling converting the landscapes to symbols of his own image. Crusoe tries to christen the volcano “Mount d’Espoir or Mount Despair” imposing positive and negative values on the landscape. The island keeps intruding on Crusoe’s dream of home. For Crusoe, nostalgia is a temporal displacement to the spatial one. Historic continuity is just disrupted as visual perceptive. In Bishop’s poems, act of self creation go on though they are always incomplete nevertheless, they are steps towards self consciousness towards the questioning process. How can these creatures be so at home on this burned out island? It is the obvious question in Crusoe’s mind. Even hostile otherness would be preferable to this inactive indifference. To counter
the experience of otherness on the island and driven by boredom, Crusoe dyes a baby goat to force him into exile:

“I got so tired of the very colors!
One day I dyed the baby goat bright red
with my red berries, just to see
something a little different.

And then his mother wouldn’t recognize him.”[CP 165]

Displacing his feelings of strangeness upon the natural world by isolating the kid from its mother is Crusoe's ultimate retaliation, but it is a pathetic, cruel, and childish one. Bishop’s mother taken to insanity wouldn’t recognise her; home to Bishop was, then and there, lost forever, which she was in search of throughout her life. Crippled by the boredom and uncanniness of an island, Crusoe must find another perspective to relieve the two-dimensionality of this scene; he chooses dreams. Bishop also used her dream poems to surface her repressed feelings. Displacement to the world of dreams was a necessity for Crusoe as well as for Bishop. Within this sleep-tossed state, appetites surface, demanding to be satisfied, “I dreamt of food and love”. Stranded on the island, Crusoe stands unable to relinquish or nourish his interior needs, like the child's, "immense, sibilant, glistening loneliness." His need for contact with his own kind confounds his emotional grasp of the state of exile. Friday, his own kind, become a kind of mediator in the wilderness and the only external access to Crusoe:

“Just when I thought I couldn't stand it
another minute longer, Friday came.

(Accounts of that have everything all wrong.)”[CP 165]

After the nightmarish threat of intellectual pedantry throughout eternity, Crusoe surrenders his civilization. Ordinary language, the language of accounts, cannot grasp the utter disruption of Crusoe's established emotional state triggered by the direct physical confrontation with a healthy otherness; in retrospect, unable to conjure a more emotive language, Crusoe can only confess his overwhelming excitement:
“Friday was nice. Friday was nice, and we were friends.”[CP 166]

Yet the effect of this apparent failure of rhetorical prowess is to reiterate the original emotional value of these simple words. Bishop fosters the immediate equality of friendship between them. Friday becomes home for Crusoe. But theirs is not a productive love the difference isn’t adequate to create a new identity out of selves. After toying with the un-nourishing words like nice and friends, Bishop underscores all ambiguities with one of her famous conditionals; just as Crusoe and Friday had become a male-bonded couple. There is a relationship between home, gender, and race in Defoe’s novel but Bishop separates them by pointing to their basic incompatibility in terms of the requirements of the domestic world:

“If only he had been a woman!

I wanted to propagate my kind

and so did he, I think, poor boy.”[CP 166]

Interpersonal love remains a pastoral idea in Bishop. Bishop’s poems raising the question of love end with separation and loss, destruction and an attachment. Friday dies at the end, precisely because Crusoe has drawn him into his own world; he dies of measles— a European childhood disease:

“—And Friday, my dear Friday, died of measles

seventeen years ago come March.”[CP 166]

Crusoe took Friday “home” to England, where he died, while Soares followed Bishop to New York and committed suicide. With the loss of Friday, Crusoe lost his home forever. Certainly a tenuous connection can be made here, as Lorrie Goldensohn does, between Friday’s death and Bishop’s Brazilian lover Lota’s death, Lota went to America due to her love for Bishop and died there. Bishop intermingle the complexity of the idea of "home" and “love”. Bishop’s "home" in Brazil with Soares was perhaps the closest Bishop ever got to a sense of real belonging. To Bishop, as the critic Bethany Hicok points out, “Soares was her ‘home’ in Brazil. Not the country itself or the house she had bought, however much she tried to make it so.” Bishop’s search for home is in
a way search for love and vice-a-versa. Much like Crusoe in Defoe’s account, Crusoe in Bishop finds a sense of purpose, of "home," when Friday arrives. The original title of the poem was "Crusoe at Home" which suggests that Bishop had initially thought of the poem in terms of an investigation of Crusoe’s relationship to the idea of "home." For Bishop, a permanent house is not in nostalgia, not in self-created surroundings, not in self-pity, not in strangeness and not even in love and yet these failed attempts of comfort are preferred homes than the total withdrawal. Crusoe’s rescue from the island is an end to the search of home ultimately it becomes a rescue from the struggle to survive, to find oneself or make place for oneself. Hence, the so called England home is no more a home for Crusoe. England, the object of Crusoe’s nostalgia while at the island no more remains the dream house for him. Crusoe can barely inhabit the static or barren America. Nostalgia persists as part of the human character, transferred now to the former centres of pain. He has moved from the question of place and purpose to the question of past, as he tries to locate himself in terms of his former hardships. In England the objects of his past, i.e. home, love and creativity, have lost all the moisture of vitality; they are empty symbols of comfort. The displacement of Crusoe, from the island to America becomes painful and his search for home continues. “Crusoe in England” is not explicitly autobiographical, but it can be read as a reticently autobiographical poem that explores Bishop’s return to Boston after the exile in Brazil.

Bishop’s poems are travel poems either citing the experience of travel or waiting for the travel to begin. Bishop's “Night City,” with a sub title “[From the plane]” is one such poem enumerating the episode of the air travel. In “The Night City,” Bishop shows a forbidding climate, focusing on the urban horizon viewed by from an airplane, presumably flying overhead. Not only do we see the city through the airplane window, we see it coloured through the eyes of a passionate observer. Bishop, a passionate traveller focuses in this poem on the degeneration of an urban city, which she has witnessed over her years of displacement from one place to other. In 1970 people began to realize the importance of recycling because there was no more room for garbage dumps and burn sites. It was now or never. Elizabeth Bishop’s collection in
“Geography III” seems to catch the reality of the world surrounding the years 1970. She notices and reflects upon the environment and how tormented it is, at the cost of development and urbanisation:

“No foot could endure it,
shoes are too thin.

Broken glass, broken bottles,
heaps of them burn.”[CP 167]

Bishop opens the poem with utter distress and uneasiness, for she views the city as a burning furnace, all that resides in it is seen burning or melting. The images of the heap of broken glass burning appear to be a double threat to anyone who would walk there. This can be an epiphanic moment where Bishop is trying to caution the reader about how we are destroying our earth from polluting it with “Broken glass, broken bottles.” The burning debris of the first stanza intensifies into “fires and flaring acids” in the second stanza:

“Over those fires
no one could walk:

those flaring acids
and variegated bloods.”[CP 167]

The image of, “the flaring acids” and “variegated bloods” equates the diverse racial elements or blood of the city to acid, symbolizing the racial or cultural tensions in the poem. These violent images are a threat to the mankind which would lead to dissolution and mental chaos. The most powerful images to be found in the poem are the physiological metaphors for the city. These metaphors make the city come alive, as if a single flaming body that is breaking down and building up naturally. She goes on to reveal how the cities are being affected, “A gathered lake of aquamarine begins to smoke.” The images of fire, city burning are from Bishop’s own experience of “the great Salem fire at her summer home in Marblehead, Massachusetts, in the summers of 1914 and there is also another experience reference to by Bishop in her story “In the Village,” a fire which took place in Nova Scotia.”[10] The
landscape, or inscape, remains that of a grieving, guilt-ridden, anguished and riven psyche:

“The city burns tears. . . .

The city burns guilt.

– For guilt-disposal

the central heat

must be this intense.”[CP 167]

The “tears” of the city are burned, it has turned mechanical. Bishop literally and figuratively illustrates her uncanny ability to animate objects in a few well chosen words. She personifies the city and presents it tormented and emotionless. It had become so barren that there are no tears left to shed over her destruction and demolishment. Due to such ill treatment to the city, it is losing its beauty and charm– its lakes aren’t flowing but they are merely “gathered” as if conspiring to desert the place all together. The lake is supposed to be the lifeline of the city laden with exotic “aquamarine” but it "begins to smoke," or darken with hopelessness as if trying to rebel against the city. "The city burns guilt," thus rejecting morality which causes guilt and without guilt there isn’t any hope for change. Guilt is the precondition for revival and change but the city unfortunately lacks it. Bishop indicates that the "central heat" the combined efforts can cause the change but when this “central heat” is directed towards the “guilt-disposal” mankind along with the city and its environment are destined to suffer a horrifying plight. Her use of details, colours and personifications work together, simultaneously, to bring a profound experience to the reader. Bishop keeps her line lengths fairly even throughout the poem, with an average of five beats per line. Bishop places herself away from what she is observing, but the subtle patterns within her verses along with intriguing descriptive detail pull her, along with the reader, down towards the city to feel its heat. Many of Bishop's poems are glazed with a sense of foreboding. This poem, however, is thoroughly suffused with a dark aura from the very first line. The poems progress suggests the distress and uneasiness, which the second stanza strengthens into a visceral menace of "variegated bloods." Later in the poem, there is heightened pathos:
“Diaphanous lymph, 
bright turgid blood, 
spatter outward 
in clots of gold 
to where run, molten, 
in the dark environs 
green and luminous 
silicate rivers.”[CP 167]

The burst of colour and texture from the fifth stanza flows into the six stanza, like a "molten" in rivers of silicate "green and luminous," symbolising the industrialisation and technological growth. The city has become a living monster churning out materialistic growth and increasing itself with indifference to the environment which has turned dark. The word “molten” eludes the image of volcano but Bishop creates a more frightful threat than volcano that of “silicate river” which is hazardous to the nature whereas, volcanoes are part of nature. The epiphany of the poem partly tames the horror of uncontrolled mental forces through a double framing strategy of both miniaturizing volcanic threats and allegorizing them. The airplane's distancing perspective can shrink the eruptive fires, though they remain unequalled. The epiphanic power remains vital because the psychoanalytic depth remains uncannily intense. We seem to view the city's psyche, not that of the speaker, but we know better. Yet in addition to her miniaturizing, distancing tactics, Bishop conceptually frames the drama through allegory as she creates the image of "tycoon," in the seventh stanza of the poem, who is weeping by himself, for he is responsible for creating “A pool of bitumen,” and “a blackened moon.” He is crying along because in the wake of progress and materialistic development he has lost his loved ones:

“Another cried 
a skyscraper up.

Look Incandescent,
its wires drip.”[CP 168]

The plunges and surges are less utterly annihilating than usual; they are disposing of guilt, though there is always more to “burn.” Whether in a skyscraper or an ordinary man everyone seem to contemplate their decision of progress at the cost of beauty which is now a “blackened moon” “dark environs.” The world is being killed, “A pool of bitumen”, which is a mixture of organic liquids turned black. “A skyscraper up” demonstrates the hollowness of the progress of urban society. Bishop in this poem does not create a home but a “skyscraper” where there is no love or peace but only burning off guilt, alone. There are “incandescent” in and around the people living in those high building but these glowing and shining lights cannot illuminate the hearts of the borders, there prevails darkness. In the mess and chaos of the wires the “sky is dead.” The city is growing; it is in a never-ending battle with the earth. The earth slowly loses its liveliness and same is the fate of the sky, “The sky is dead.” Despite the dead sky:

“(Still, there are creatures,
careful ones, overhead.

They set down their feet, they walk
green, red; green, red.)”[CP 168]

The “careful,” birdlike “creatures” are unburnt. The plane and the distancing allegory "lift" the epiphanist, the fantasy-birds, above fear of dissolution in "tears" of "guilt." Bishop, in this poem, puts forth the plight of living in a densely populated areas put under the pressure of development. Bishop seems to describing traffic lights, “green, red; green, red,” but in an almost childlike way, Bishop describes a living city turning into a rule bond entity. The final stanza is typical of Bishop’s poetry, a ray of hope. With so much of change happening in the living places, still the “creatures are “careful ones” adjusting to the new terms and condition of the so called progressive cities. In a very humorous vein, at the end Bishop equates all beings into the word “creatures” walking cautiously, following the decorum and rules of living in urban society, “green, red; green, red.”
Many of Bishop’s poems dramatise some sort of conflict between the past and the present: the passing of time, the pain of loss, the nature of what endures, the need to remember, the need to forget. “The End of March” is one such poem in which there is a reverse nostalgia, a mellower resignation to the limitations of future, “the opposite of history,” as she writes of Joseph Cornell in her translation of Octavio Paz’s “Objects & Apparitions.” The tension in the poem is between what actually is there and what can only be imagined. “The End of March” is a penultimate poem of “Geography III.” She began composing the poem in the spring of 1974, on a visit to the coastal resort of Duxbury, Massachusetts. Bishop dedicates the poem to “For John Malcolm Brinnin and Bill Read: Duxbury.” John Brinnin (whom she had met at Yaddo in 1949) and his partner Bill Read owned a house in Duxbury... and made it available to Bishop and Alice Methfessel. “The End of March” is one such rare poem where Bishop actually appears as a character in the poem. The poem is Bishop’s finest evocation of the abandoned rural house and its deep appeal. The poem begins with the descriptions of a “long beach”;

“It was cold and windy, scarcely the day

to take a walk on that long beach

Everything was withdrawn as far as possible,

indrawn: the tide far out, the ocean shrunken,

seabirds in ones or twos.

The rackety, icy, offshore wind

numbed our faces on one side;”[CP 179]

“The End of the March” opens with an exceptionally cold weather which is a usual opening of many of Bishop’s poems. Bishop continually worried about repeating herself. According to Bishop’s friends U.T. and Joseph Summers “She sometimes feared her poetic inspiration had only two faucets, marked H and C.”[OA 477] These presumably stood for hot and cold. Bishop’s love for Canada, its sea, its beaches and its fauna is directly expressed in the poem. At Duxbury, it is cold, windy, the tide far out, and there are few seabirds. Everything is shrunken, as if the coldness of the weather is trying to
sensuously assimilate and be all possessive; and everything ready to withdraw itself under the chill of the weather. Bishop narrates a walk towards an abandoned house on the beach. This poem is about a lost and slender connection with the landscape from the past, which were previously unnamed objects of Bishop’s poems but now they are named ones. Bishop involves all the senses in the poem and heightens the sensual appeal of the images. The description in the poem tells us what is there, seen, felt, heard, and tasted:

“The sky was darker than the water
— it was the color of mutton-fat jade.

Along the wet sand, in rubber boots, we followed

a track of big dog-prints (so big
they were more like lion-prints).”[CP 179]

At a changeable day in the end of winter, Bishop and her friend Methfessel are seen following “a track of big dog prints.” But these tracks are mysterious, “(so big they were most like lion prints).” With all her senses involved in the search, Bishop desires to reach a rickety house she has spotted on her walk. Bishop probably had Lota in her mind when she invokes the image of “sodden ghost” “rising on every wave,” with Lota – whose birthday was March 15 – but her death may have haunted the poem. Bishop seemed to feel guilt for Lota’s death, as she wrote cryptically to Lowell in 1973, “We all have irreparable and awful actions on our consciences . . . I just try to live without blaming myself for them every day, at least – every day, I should say- the nights take care of guilt sufficiently.”[WA 753] With the death of Lota, “Samambaia” was also lost to Bishop, as she wrote to her friend in 1968:

“Can you imagine arriving at the only home . . . I have ever really had in this world and finding it not only mine – I had agreed to all that [in the will of Soares] – but almost at ripped bare? . . . I’d give, but “everything” certainly – to have Lota back and well.”[OA 490]

Bishop in the poem is ready to give everything to the sodden ghost, “giving up the ghost. . . .” If not “Samambaia,” Bishop seems secretly fantasized about living in a mysterious “shingled green” house on the beach. “Many things
about this place” she reminds us, “are dubious.” The fantasy is very complete and detail, this thematically represented idea is an unattainable ideal. Bishop’s desire to reach the home is not conveyed through the metrical impulse of the poem. The passage, in which Bishop describes the house and her wish to reach it, contains the most neutral, prose like writings of the poem:

“ I wanted to get as far as my proto-dream-house,
my crypto-dream-house, that crooked box
set up on pilings, shingled green,
a sort of artichoke of a house, but greener
(boiled with bicarbonate of soda?),
protected from spring tides by a palisade
of –are they railroad ties?”[CP 179]

Bishop’s fondness seems to be compelling for the “dubious” and “impossible” dream house. Millier quoted Bishop saying that “John Brinnin was so appalled when I said I wanted that ugly green shack for my summer home! (He doesn’t share my taste for the awful, I’m afraid).”[WA 767] The “summer house” in question was an abandoned beach shack. In its details it recalled a number of houses and dwellings where Bishop had lived, from the Great Village house to the shack in Provincetown, which helped provide the setting and theme to many of her poems. The house in the “The End of the March” resembles the many fragile houses she evoked in her poetry. The house which Bishop desires, one of her “three loved houses” or her childhood Nova Scotian home is never reached so this poem presents an illusionary escape from it to the remote dream-house, her “proto-dream-house” and her “crypto-dream-house.” The house represents a retreat and a release from a world which is impossible to lift. Living in such a place one can occupy oneself merely by existing, by enjoying the experience of life in its purest, most self-indulgent form. And Bishop is in need of only “two bare rooms” where she would:

“look through binoculars, read boring books,
old, long, long books, and write down useless notes,
talk to myself, and, foggy days,
watch the droplets slipping, heavy with light.”[CP 180]
Bishop explores the possibility of this denial, as it proposes the lovely, seductive aloneness and it then dismisses. The crooked box, the dream-house of the poem is prison-like in many ways than one, a rough but adequate shelter with constrains enough to provide the stimulus, if not necessity for creative activity. The description of the house in the poem is that of a prison, still it is a paradise for Bishop and desirable. For whole life Bishop was searching for a home in the seclusions of the nature, to the end of the geography, not accessible to others. It seems that the whole world is “in drawn” so the possibility of contact is minimal and the imagination must make much of very little. This speculation is pleasurable for Bishop. Since the world is denied access to its secret, she is left with much speculative freedom. The closest the speaker gets to a stable image of herself is the house, and that is of course, “boarded up”. Often homeless figures in Bishop’s poetry are presented by a detached narrator, who sees their familiar structures foundering but can imagine a larger womb-like mystery. Bishop’s experience, adding a touch of reality, helps create meaning in her poem “The End of March.” The “rubber boots” contrast the “wet sand,” just Bishop's following of the “big dog-prints” creates movement in the poem. Once again, Bishop’s personal experiences are connected with cultural experiences to create meaning. The renunciation of this dream house might constitute a denial of what the poet recognizes as dangerous solitude, possibly wrapped in alcoholic haze:

“... perfect! But—impossible.
And that day the wind was much too cold
even to get that far,
and of course the house was boarded up.”[CP 180]

The poem participates in Bishop’s search and evokes the house, but paradoxically it turns out to be “too cold / even to get that far,” and to her dismay, the house is boarded up. Everything in the diction and the movement of the verse works to diminish the excitement of the ideal she is imagining. Here in the “naturalness,” Bishop’s house as a “crooked box” is like a vengeance upon her. Although, in the poem Bishop leads the reader to believe that she longed for the “crooked box” house, the beauty of the language and the movement of the verse show us that she finds a considerable pleasure in a world as vast and unknowledgeable as the house is self contained and
intelligible. There is a real verbal and metric excitement in the poem at its conclusion:

“They could have been teasing the lion sun,
except that now he was behind them
– a sun who’d walked the beach that last low tide,
making those big, majestic paw-prints,

who perhaps had batted a kite out of the sky to play with.”[CP 180]

The forces she describes in the last passage seem beneficial one. The great rocks come alive as playful beings, capable of “teasing” a receptive lion sun, who like a small cub might take enjoyment in batting around a kite. But the energy behind all this playfulness is potentially tremendous and terrifying. The sun may act as a cub but it is a force capable of destroying anything and everything. The quality of sun, as is presented is the quality of end of March itself, a time when elemental forces first begin to seem friendly and contained, but are larking dangerously in the atmosphere nonetheless. The climatic movement in the poem suggests that though Bishop longs for a rickety house on a hill, actually she values the large dangerous universe where “all the untidy activities continue,/ awful but cheerful.”[CP 61]

Bishop used the technique of surrealism extensively in her poems written in the “American Phase.” Bishop meticulously records her dream in her poem “12 O’Clock News,” expressing her anxiety about writing – sleeping on the giant typewriter and dreaming about the objects in her room, Bishop takes the technique of surrealism a little further. In this poem, Bishop describes various familiar objects on her desk as if they were parts of a new world, an unfamiliar world. She utilizes a technique of constructing an exotic world and creates an illusion of the news reports. By choosing the newsroom to manipulate, Bishop draws our attention to the relationship between the familiar and the unknown world made familiar by the news reports. Bishop in “12 O’Clock News” portrays a U.S. military venture during the Cold War as a neo-colonial enterprise. Camille Roman pointed out that the poem was originally titled “Desk at Night,” and began in year 1950 in response to the Korean War and was then developed “into the Vietnam era published poem.”[12] Thus, this poem

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took fourteen years to take its final form. Bishop constructs a parody of newscast – one broadcasting from a particular dark midnight of the writer’s soul. Reporting its imaginary war story in the style of network news or documentary, “12 O’Clock News” brings to light an eerie confluence of military, corporate, anthropological, travel, and neo-colonial discourses. While on travel, Bishop seems to be in search of “Home” but in the poem, she is in her room and transforms it into a war field. Bishop delivers the entire poem with such scepticism that the words cannot be taken at face value. In this prose-poem, each object on the left and its description on the right work in interplay to create a metaphor. The objects from her desk are metaphors for the descriptions that go with them, but the descriptions are also metaphors for the objects that are associated with them. These metaphors not only represent the wider world of the mass media but also for the writer herself. In addition to providing a commentary on mass media, Bishop, as a writer, bestows symbolic value on the seven objects, namely: “gooseneck lamp,” “typewriter,” “pile of mss.,” “typed sheet,” “envelops,” “ink-bottle,” “typewriter eraser,” and “ashtray.” The objects combine to create a landscape as well as a sense of writer’s progression. The poem is a guided tour of the paraphernalia of writing, as if it was an archaeological discovery. Bishop builds from the light (i.e. her gooseneck lamp) and works outward to show all the objects that are illuminated and what they are capable of being. In the first stanza of the poem, Bishop accentuates the difficulty involved in perceiving the “truth.”

“. . . tonight is the night of the full moon, half the world over. But here the moon seems to hang motionless in the sky. It gives very little light; it could be dead. Visibility is poor. Nevertheless, we shall try to give you some idea of the lay of the land and the present situation.”[CP 174]

This television journalist’s prose narration turns desktop objects into scenes from a television war zone. Bishop compares the dim light given out from her “gooseneck lamp,” to the light emitted by the moon. She has something in common with the reporter, and that is, the poor visibility of the place. Still the
reporter seems to be reporting facts which are less illuminated. In fact, the
reporter suggests that the moon “could be dead”, reinforcing the contrast
between being in the light and knowing, and being in the dark and not
knowing. The poem can be read as a commentary, full of dramatic irony, of a
reporter of the mass media who doesn’t fathom the full implications of what he
reports and how he portrays foreign landscapes. By de-familiarizing a
newsroom, she questions our trust in what we perceive. Is it truly a journey to
another world or just another perspective on something we are already familiar
with? The intent of this transformation is to create a substitute for reality,
alogous to the substituted reality which the media presents to us each day as
its product, the “news.” Media is capable of creating a world beyond what we
see every day, presenting us with what appears to be the truth about culture,
race, conflict and people, we will never encounter firsthand experience or
truth. Bishop’s manipulation of a newsroom parallels the way the media
distorts our perception of the world, and by doing so questions our ability to
find our way out, of this manmade illusion of truth, towards “reality.” In the
second stanza of the poem, Bishop relates her “typewriter” to “the
escarpment.” Using a simile to compare the typewriter with “fish scales,” she
enumerates its beauty and importance as earlier established in her poem “The
Fish” where she goes on to express “his brown skin hung in strips like ancient
wallpaper, and its... shapes like full- blown roses.” Her typewriter is an
instrument of her welfare:

“... What endless labor those
small, peculiarly shaped terraces represent! And
yet, on them the welfare of this tiny principality
depends.”[CP 174]

Bishop gives the viewers “some idea of the lay of the land and the present
situation,” by comparing it with the “typewriter keys.” The keys are described
as the agricultural “terraces” as revealed by “aerial reconnaissance reports.”
The desktop nation is a “backward” Third-World country – a description
uncannily echoing Bishop’s own reference to Brazil as backward. Bishop’s
typewriter means a lot in her life; on its welfare depends her “tiny
principality,” her writings. Similarly Brazil meant a lot to her and her welfare happened mainly in Brazil by finding love and home there but still she calls it backward because it got manipulated by the colonial powers. Though her life had been a journey of losses but the only true gain she had was her pen products which were a creative outlet for her. Bishop was a perfectionist, to produce a poem she had to draft and re-draft till perfection. This poem’s long gestation period demonstrates the cultural shift during those years towards “the mode of communication, in which electronic devises mediate human awareness. Whereas the 1950 draft focuses entirely on the objects on the poet’s desk, viewed as a war zone.” The reconceived poem positioned the trope within the conventions of a television newscast. She compared her manuscripts to “a slight landslide:”

“. . . . The exposed soil appears to be of poor quality: almost white, calcareous, and shaly. There are believed to have been no casualties.”[CP 174]

Bishop compares her “pile of manuscripts” and the “typed sheet” to geography, describing them as different manifestations of strange topography. Each “typed sheet” is either an airstrip or a cemetery. From the mechanics of the lamp and typewriter grows the pile of manuscripts that, in turn, brings about the typed sheets and envelopes. The “typed sheet” is perceived as;

“. . . . a large rectangular "field," hitherto unknown to us, obviously man-made.”[CP 174]

Ironically every descriptive detail is more true than expected. The final speculation about the page is more disturbing, “It is dark- / speckled. An airstrip? A cemetery?” But these words do not seem to be true. The pun on the “hitherto unknown” and “man-made” which seems to be comic turns to be serious and allegoric. Images in the poem are revealing, so as to alter our perceptions. In the fifth stanza of the poem, Bishop equates the envelopes to “crude” forms of communication; either she sends letters to friends or that she sends her poems out into the world. Karen Lee argues in an essay “Clouded Perceptions in Elizabeth Bishop’s ‘12 O’Clock News’” that Bishop wants to question our trust of perceived truths. In questioning these perceptions, Bishop
highlights the different ways we see the world based on how familiar we are with a place or object. Because the reporter in the poem cannot see well, her perceptions are thrown off. However, she still makes judgments: “In this small, backward country, one of the most backward left in the world today.” Bishop in this poem engages with history but in a sophisticated way.

“. . . . 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.”” [CP 175]

Bishop is probably referring to Brazil for it was still new and unexplored for the colonisers. But the humiliation and exploitation of the women and the fauna of the place lead to a feeling of unrest among the natives. The natives themselves are hidden weapons full of rebel and revolution in their heart. The ink bottle image takes on indescribable religious power:

“. . . it may well be nothing more than a numen, or a great altar recently erected to one of their gods, ... . . . . they attribute magical powers, and may even regard as a "savior," one last hope of rescue from their grave difficulties.”[CP 175]

The idea of past knowledge presented in the form of god act as a savior, to the poet, as the “last hope of rescue” from her “grave difficulties” is literal and figurative. Bishop was frustrated due to her slow production of poems, but also the act of writing is mysterious and only meaningful if illuminated by some motivation from the past. From the serious religious representation, Bishop playfully presents one of the inhabitants “a unicyclist-courier” which she associates with “the typewriter eraser” with “the thick, bristling black hair typical of the indigenes.” Bishop presents us with items and a description of those items that allows for more than one reading: she shows both their
proximity and distance. But she is as cool and calculating in describing these objects as a reporter would be showing war. In doing so, Bishop makes not only the news media culpable but also the act of writing and thus the poet herself. In this poem, Bishop looks at our ability to feel alienated from the world around us, even when that world is occupied by familiar objects. It is all the more humorous that in the ashtray she sees;

“. . . 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." They are in hideously contorted positions, all
dead.” [CP 175]

The “ashtray” stanza shows several “soldiers” in a heap, “all dead.” They are ineffective and there is little in the way of sorrow at their deaths. We’ve been set up not to empathize with the people in this foreign place but just to witness and report passively. In a conversation with George Starbuck, Bishop seems to be reluctant to accept the poem’s reference to war and says, “It had nothing to do with Vietnam or any particular war when I first wrote it, it was just fantasy.”[13] The soldiers’ uniforms were designed for “guerrilla warfare” and the fact that they are wearing them gives further proof of:

“. . . the childishness

and hopeless impracticality of this inscrutable

people, our opponents, or of the sad corruption of

their leaders.” [CP 175]

Bishop describes a lost war where soldiers are dead. But somebody probably from the opponent’s party calls them childish, hopeless, inscrutable, impractical, and “their leaders” in a sad state of “corruption.” Employing ethnocentric terminology, Bishop ascribes “childishness” and “corruption” to these “inscrutable people” and thereby exposes the political biases concealed within the electronic media’s seemingly objective, authoritative voice.[12] The poem uses Third-World landscapes and people as figures for the poet’s
writing, a gesture contiguous with the news media’s own self-involvement. Bishop satirises the televisual imperialism in the poem. The irony is directed towards Bishop’s own sense of insurmountable odds, her own dependence on the inanimate objects and possible the pointlessness of the creative process. Bishop, in her accustomed surrounding of her “home” questions the very process of creative writing. In the witty and sinister surrealism of this poem we get closer than ever to Bishop’s view of herself as a writer.

Robert Lowell had rightly said of Elizabeth Bishop that she “spent a lifetime trying to impersonate an ordinary woman.” Perhaps he meant it as an observation of her personality, but it is also an apt observation of her poetry, of her poetic technique. And it is what I love about Bishop’s poems: the casual, conversational tone, the frequent questions and hesitations, the way we’re gradually drawn into the sense that we are seeing—not just seeing, really, but entering—a mind at work, and then the turn, or turns: into reflection, and then into revelation, revelation that surprises and moves. Bishop’s poems are descriptions of details, small and trivial things which interest her. “Poem” is one such pen-picture in which Bishop talks about the possibilities of preserving what dies. In this poem, Bishop looks back in time to the place from past, her childhood experience. “Poem” is a detailed description and meditation on a work of art, finally dealing with the implication of its existence. The poet gazes idly at a small painting done by her great-uncle and begins yet another meditation on the domestication of the world.

“About the size of an old-style dollar bill,

American or Canadian, . . .

– this little painting (a sketch for a large one?)

has never earned any money in its life.

Useless and free, it has spent seventy years

as a minor family relic”[CP 176]

The value of “this little painting,” ironically has nothing to do with dollars but its worth is that it is a family possession. The first time it is rendered visually, exactly, interestedly, appreciatively, and so on. Bishop asserts in the poem,
that we do not gain anything in such activities, the painting is “useless and free” except perhaps it is used for self-location. “Free” here means “without restraint,” it has no monetary value, although since she’s already told us that it “never earned any money,” perhaps there is a sense in which “free” implies artistic freedom. The painting has been handed on “collaterally,” from one generation to another, but the language also suggests that it is some kind of collateral. Still, it doesn’t seem to have had any value to the generations of owners “who looked at it sometimes, or didn’t bother to.” We realise that it is a pure visual, pleasure touched with relatively impersonal recognition:

“It must be Nova Scotia; only there

does one see gabled wooden houses

painted that awful shades of brown.”[CP 176]

She gazes idly until she realizes that the painting is a place she lived in. The qualifying and recognising remarks are the new insights and new revelations of the place made by Bishop in course of the poem. We are in the poem endowed with the responsibility of examining the poet’s discoveries. Suddenly she recognises the place and with double transfiguration occurs: the mind enlarges the picture beyond the limits of the frame, placing the painted scene in a larger, remembered landscape, and the items in the picture are given local habitations and a name. The church steeple is perhaps indicated by a “gray-blue wisp,” the “tiny cows” in the painting are “two brushstrokes each, but confidently cows,” and when Bishop instructs the readers to look up closer, we see the wild iris is paint, “white and yellow, / fresh-squiggled from the tube.” We’re also told that the “steel-gray storm clouds” were “the artist’s specialty.” Bishop posing not to know anything about “this little painting,” suddenly recognises its setting as Nova Scotia, revealing that she knows the artist’s specialty:

“Heavens, I recognize the place, I know it!

Its behind – I can almost remember the farmer’s name.

His barn backed on that meadow. . . .

Would it be Miss Gillespie’s house?”[CP176]
Bishop establishes a connection between self and the picture, the painting remains a painting, described by someone recognising its meanings – a dab of titanium white here, some fine brush work there. Bishop seemed to have lived in the place painted in the scene but at another point of time then the painter-those geese and cows belong to another era. In a beautiful tour de force “the place” is described three times. As a vessel of memory, the painting connect to a multiple past, not only to the scene but to those who witnessed it and even to those from whose hands the painting has past. She never knew the artist all they have in common is that place or “the memory of it.” In the fifth stanza, we learn something even more specific: the “sketch” was “done in an hour, ‘in one breath.’ ” Bishop reveals that the “sketch” was “once taken from a trunk and handed over,” to her. “Would you like this? I’ll probably never / have room to hang these things again.” This speaker is perhaps an older relative speaking to the poet, someone who is downsizing and passing things on to the next generation:

“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]

Here, the revelation is of the family connection, the continuity of the painting being handed down and yet the losses, the deaths that have had to occur in order for the painting to be handed down. As Bishop brings us closer and closer to the painting, we realise its emotional value for her. “Poem” anchors memory in Bishop’s childhood home in Nova Scotia. This takes a more dramatic turn in the final stanza, the longest stanza in the poem, which brings with the poet making a connection between herself and “Uncle George,” who was “quite famous, an R.A.,” or a member of the Royal Academy of Art in England, a status which lends him legitimacy as an artist. Both of them knew “this literal small backwater” and “looked at it long enough to memorize it,” despite all their years apart, and she remarks that “it’s still loved, / or its memory is (it must have changed a lot.)” Here the poem takes another, more dramatic turn: from the particulars of the painting and its place in the family
tree, even from its emotional value to her, to a meditation on art. Still Bishop feels a strong connection between them because:

“Our visions coincided—“visions” is too serious a word—our looks, two looks.”[CP 177]

Both Bishop and her “great-uncle,” “Uncle George,” “an R.A.,” took the scene from life, committed it to memory and commemorated it through art. At the end of the poem, Bishop has united himself with the artist. They have both loved this unimportant corner of the earth but it has existed in their lives, in their memories and in their art. This leads her to think about the role of memory in art, the way that art itself is memory, that it is memory that gives art its sense of life:

“art “coping from life” and life itself,

life and memory of it is so compressed
they’ve turned into each other. Which is which?[CP 177]

Memory, “on a piece of Bristol board” and in the mind of the poet and also in the form of her poems is what allows the original place to be “still loved,” since the present place “must have changed a lot.” It is loved because it still exists and represents her home there. Representation of life fails to realise the world it depicts, thought or imagination which is curtailed by surface interruptions are questioned. The poem never transcends the flux of things, the distance of time and space but in our thoughts of past and of the presence there exists a certain sudden feeling of well-being: “how live, how touching.” Bishop selects a piece of land out of the whole world and domesticates, remembers, memorialises and even immortalises it. Immortalise because the third time the painting is seen it is not seen through eyes but by heart, touched by participation. Bishop leads us into the scene itself:

“. . . . 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-be-dismantled elms, the geese.”[CP 177]

Art has the capacity to keep even little things especially that we love, things that die, alive. The effect of being in the landscape arises from the use of present participles, “the munching cows,” “the shivering iris,” the standing water.” The participation is also confirmed from the repetition of nouns from the earlier passages, for example, “the cow,” and “the iris”. The word “dismantled” in the last line refutes the whole illusion of the memorial scene. The world of the child is now just scenery arranged for some kind of drama with short tenure on the stage, the play once over the set will be dismantled and the illusion gone. Bishop in the poem, having taken the reader through the process of domestication by which a strange terrain becomes first recognisable, then familiar, and then beloved, releases the reader from the intimacy by dismantling all that has been included. Domestication is inevitable followed by dismantling which is, in its acute form, “disaster” of the poem “One Art.”

Bishop’s physical displacement throughout her life engaged her with the world and with self through inquiry, even when distance and difference may result. “Five Flight Up” is an ironic and painful composition. The comparison in the poem is one of contrast rather similitude. The poem opens with the questioning inquiry of the animals in the pre-dawn time:

“Perhaps in the sleep, too, the bird inquires
  once or twice, quavering.

Questions- if that is what they are-
  answered directly, simply,
  by day itself.”[CP 181]

These questions are resolved for the animals “by day itself.” The speaker of the poem may feel certain envy for the dog or bird. For us the morning seems to be “enormous morning, ponderous, meticulous” bringing back the memories of the bygone day, thinking over the challenges of the forthcoming day. But for nature and its inhabitants every day is a new beginning – beautiful for
“gray light streaking each bare branch,” slow for the bird “seems to yawn”, and cheerful as the “little black dog runs in the yard.” It is the early morning hour culminating into the break of the day. Bishop shows a human intrusion in such an auspicious beginning of the day:

“He and the bird knows that everything is answered, all taken care of, no need to ask again.”[CP 181]

The dog “has no sense of shame” for he has no memories therefore, no worries to ponder upon. On the contrary, the ponderousness of the morning becomes our ancient indulgence, the depression of having a past and the knowledge of what’s recurring. Each new day is a new beginning for him. He is well aware that all his queries are answered:

“– yesterday bought to today so differently!

(A yesterday I find almost impossible to lift.)”[CP 181]

In the human world, distance between the past and present are not easily overcome; questions regarding the past persist beyond all presence. And yet there is no preference for the non human here. The sense of shame, of guilt is overwhelming giving rise to sternness and arrogance in the owner. This is where animals are enviably different from human beings:

“The memories of the past take over the reality of present and are difficult to lift for the poet. The proportions of the memories of the bygone days are heightened by Bishop fulfilling Apollinaire’s definition of Surrealism as “super-reality.” Bishop emphasises the permanence of memory over the impermanence of temporal structures. The Act of memory may aggravate our losses, but they may also like brief encounters with the strange, offer experience of sudden coalescence of feelings and associations. The poem is about the burden of memories, of the past. Up to the last line, the contrast between human and the animal feeling is understated, implicit, and apparently general. There is no reference whatsoever to the first person. The last line, in
its directness and explicit personal application, is a shock. Bishop is a little reserved writer, but there are in her poems those moments when she suddenly and rather merrily pops up out of nowhere and corrects her previous perception or readjusts the focus a little, or asks a question and this quality of hers make her so loveable. Like Wordsworth, Bishop also has the persistent, tender regard for the experience of childhood, and a complicated nostalgia for the isolated, often neglected rural dwelling. It is a city poem but in the suddenness, simplicity, and off-handed reference in the last line, we are confronted with the most direct statement of personal despair in the work of Bishop. “Five Fight Up” is a contrast to “Poem.”

Bishop was known to be a reticent writer but her poem “One Art” is an exception for it is Bishop’s biographically most open poems. Bishop in this poem shifts her lens onto herself, making it the object of the poetry. She is the ‘autobiographer without ego’. Bishop’s life is a painful catalogue of losses which are boldly presented in the poem without a hitch. Bishop’s “One Art,” conveys the mastery she achieved over losses. Bishop is displaced into her past to list the losses occurred on the journey of life. In an attempt to convince herself that these losses are not so grave, the poem opens with declaring that:

“The art of losing isn't hard to master;  
so many things seem filled with the intent  
to be lost that their loss is no disaster.”[CP 178]

It soon becomes apparent that these losses truly are great as she tries to convince herself that they are not. Bishop’s final displacement to America changed many things in her personal life and her poetic subjects also became more direct, mature and filled with lessons of life. Bishop articulates the tension between losses in life and the force of circumstance. Bishop consoles herself by trying to acquire mastery over Emerson’s fatal vision. Making the losses destined, Bishop takes the poem to another level. The feelings of painful reflection continue as Bishop lists various personal losses and tells herself that the loss of "None of these will bring disaster":

“Lose something every day. Accept the fluster  
of lost door key, the hour badly spent.
The art of losing isn’t hard to master.”[CP 178]

The specific losses catalogued in the poem are listed from small trivial items such as "door keys" and an "hour badly spent". By mentioning such trivial losses Bishop distracts us from the cumulative force built in the poem. This functions as disarming form of humour that undercuts the self-pity, otherwise, latent in the subject of the poem. The poem expresses the feeling that in the course of writing or saying the poem the poet is giving herself a lesson in losing. Bishop's lines share her ironic tips for learning to lose and to live with loss. The poem presents a series of losses as if to reassure that control is possible:

“Then practice losing farther, losing faster:

places, and names, and where it was you meant
to travel. None of these will bring disaster.”[CP 178]

Loss of travel means her lifelong displacement is lost to her. Her displacement was in the wake of search for home; hence, she lost all her lovely homes. Harold Bloom has rightly expressed that, “In “Geography III,” Bishop settles at least partially for a home in the exercise of her art, harnessed alongside other of her kind.” Bishop structures her list of losses from least to most painful:

“I lost my mother’s watch. And look! my last, or

Next-to-last, of three loved houses went.

The art of losing isn’t hard to master.”[CP 178]

Bishop specifically mentions, indicating the loss of maternal love to insanity, was far before the actual loss. The loss of the watch is in fact three different losses: first, the literal loss of the watch; second, the memories of her mother attached to the watch; and third, a distant sense of childhood innocence which is lost. Bishop's mother not only gave her the watch, but also a sense of trust, which was lost with the watch. Bishop desires to regain the watch, her memories, and her missing childhood innocence. Loss of mother is apparently the loss of home for Bishop which was a major loss in her life and lead to series of losses thereafter. As Fairbairn's makes it clear in Guntrip's summary
that,
“...The more the need to love is frustrated, the more intense does it become and
the unhappy person oscillates between an overpowering need to find good
objects and a compulsive flight into detachment from all objects, under
pressure mainly of the terror of exploiting them to the point of destruction; for
the destruction of the love-object feels then to involve also the loss of the
helplessly dependent ego which is in a state of emotional identification with
the object.”16

Love, in the form of mother and object, in the form of her watch; this love-
object relations are the whole of the problem, and the conflicts over them are
an intense and devastating drama of need, fear, anger and hopelessness.
Bishop, paradoxically, is drawn, in hopeless dependence, to extreme
identification with the maternal object, but at the same time, as a result of past
disappointment and guilt, compulsively fears identifying with such an object.
It seems the poem is a lament over the art of losing, for Bishop, it is also a
preparation or a rehearsal, in order to keep going. With so many losses, Bishop
is still capable of saying, “I miss them.” Nevertheless, nostalgia, the pained
awareness of loss, is not equivalent of disaster. Anything less than total defeat
is victory.

“I lost two cities, lovely ones. And, vaster,
some realms I owned, two rivers, a continent.
I miss them, but it wasn’t a disaster.”[CP 178]

Bishop’s recount of her larger losses heightens the pathos of the poem.
Throughout her life, Bishop had travelled cities, continent, interiors of towns
in search of her Nova Scotian landscape and home, and was always there with
her in her memories, but suddenly she feels that they were lost to her. Bishop
is seen numbering her losses in this poem, suggesting that here the poet’s
memory is at work. As she admits in her memoir from Nova Scotia, “Primer
Class”:

“Every time I see long columns, handwritten in a certain way, a strange
sensation or shudder, partly aesthetic, partly painful, goes through my
diaphragm.... The real name of this sensation is memory. It is a memory I do
Bishop accepts this loss as no disaster for these houses had at some point in
time given her lots of warmth and love. Bishop lost three houses, a house in
Key West, Florida where she didn’t stay long; “Samambaia” in Petropolis,
Brazil, a much loved house share with Lota and lost to Bishop with the death
of Lota; and “Casa Mariana” in Ouro Preto, Brazil, which Bishop had
advertised for sale by the time she wrote “One Art.” To some degree, the
houses in Key West, Petropolis and Ouro Preto, and similar resorts and retreats
Bishop found throughout her life recalled Bishop’s maternal grandparents’
home in the tiny community of Great Village. These houses which Bishop lost
represent attempts to make a home, which for various reasons she eventually
lost. Bishop lost her Brazilian love of life, Lota and Alice Methfessel, the
companion, caretaker, secretary, and great love of the last eight years of her
life. In them, she lost her homes and the entire cities too. Out of this despair
and nostalgia for her lost past, apparently, came the traditional style of
villanelle "One Art." Bishop conceived the poem as a villanelle from the start,
and the play of "twos" within it—two rivers, two cities, the lost lover means
not being "two" any more—suggests that the two-rhyme villanelle is a form
appropriate to the content. Bishop told an interviewer that after years of trying
to write in that form, the poem just came to her. "I couldn't believe it—it was
like writing a letter." The iambic meter and refrain lines help to convey the
reflective tone of the poem. As a poet, the complexity and connotative
economy of the word fascinated her including the loved one's gestures and
mannerisms such as her "joking voice". The last lines tie the rest of the poem
together and serve as a resolution declaring:

“ – Even losing you (the joking voice, a gesture

I love) I shan’t have lied. “It's evident

the art of losing's not too hard to master

though it may look like (Write it!) like disaster.”’’[CP 178]

These lines exemplify her sense of loss and her displacement throughout her
life. They extend the sense of denial, reflection, and reassurance expressed in the first stanza and the refrain lines of the poem, preserving the tone of painful, understated loss evoked by the speaker's catalogue of losses. “One Art” is Bishop's elegy for her whole life. Working through each of her losses – from the bold, painful catalogue of the first loss to the final loss – is a way to overcome them or, if not to overcome them, then to see the way in which one might possibly master oneself in the face of loss. It is, perhaps, mastering loss, mastering grief, self-mastery. In the poem, Bishop distanced the pain a little more, depersonalized it, and moved it away from the tawdry self-pity and confession that Bishop disliked in many of her contemporaries. Bishop’s use of “Write it!” emphasises the compulsive urge to express the on-going pain in her life at all costs. Another interpretation of this poem could be that loss in life does not necessarily prepare us for major losses inevitable to follow, but because the experience of loss humanizes us; it shows us as we are, vulnerable, pathetic, and yet heroic in our capacity to endure and to continue our affirming act amid conditions less than propitious. When Bishop talks of losing as an art she does not mean losing well on the contrary she means losing considerable less. We are always losing things, from innocence to parents to house keys, so experience loss itself is the remedy.

“The Moose” is a poem expressing Bishop’s nostalgia which recalls the pristine wonders of her Nova Scotia. It is not on the heroic or picaresque adventures of the poet, or the growth of the poet’s mind, but on the ‘immediate, intense’ sensual experiences of the journey. This is not a pilgrimage or spiritual quest. It is the everyday journey of a provincial bus: the record of Bishop’s actual return journey from a visit to the Great Village of her childhood in year 1946. Bishop leads us through a maze to find her way back home towards Boston. If it ends with a sense of revelation, of having discovered something as amazing as the Holy Grail, it is simply because Bishop has stuck to her process of ‘endless heroic observation’. Bishop in this poem brings together all the elements - disorientation, dream, travel, sudden strange appearances, memory- which the other poems introduce in various combinations. The nostalgia in this poem is of different order. No less aware of herself Bishop looks back to her origin, her roots - as if she is both literally and figuratively moving away from them. The entire first half of the
poem is the movement of “goodbye, the movement away from “home”:

“From narrow provinces
of fish and bread and tea
home of the long tides
where the bay leaves the sea
twice a day . . .
where if the river
enters or retreats . . .
where, silted red,
sometimes the sun sets
facing a red sea . . .”[CP 169]

Bishop throughout her life was deeply in love with the concept of home, though she never had one permanent in her life. Bishop never lost touch with her Nova Scotian relatives; her favourite aunt- Grace Bulmer Bowers, to who Bishop dedicated “The Moose”- was a regular correspondent. Her search for home in poems created wonderful inviting pictures of home. Bishop’s poem arises from the Nova Scotia and develops into her spiritual narrative. Bishop uses the geographer’s knowledge in precise language, in her poems, to describe her impression of the physical world. “The Moose” is full of physical details – “long tides,” “bay leaves the sea,” “rivers enters or retreats,” “silted red,” “a red sea,” “veins the flats’ lavender,” “rich mud,” “burning rivulets,” . . . and the way to this enticing house is through:

“on red, gravelly roads,
down rows of sugar maples,
past clapboard farmhouses
and neat, clapboard churches,
bleached, ridged as clamshells,
past twin silver birches,”[CP 169]
There is something primordial about the description of the home in this poem, elemental, existing in a village, with houses, people – is the ultimate dream “home” of Bishop. In the first half of the poem, geography of the world is given an ineffable beauty, both plain and luxurious. Bishop does not seem to be in a hurry to move; on the contrary there is patient observation of the nature. The reflective nature is wonderfully captured by Bishop in its meandering form. Nova Scotia’s nature, its flora, and fauna are summoned into the poem as if for a last farewell from Bishop. “The Moose” is an extreme example of Bishop’s perfectionism for it took an incredible 26 years from the poem’s genesis in a letter to Moore in August 1946 to her completion of the final draft in June 1972. In fact, Bishop only finished the poem for this date because she had been asked to read a new piece of work for Harvard’s graduation ceremony. She displays a poet's eye, ear, and heart. It is not surprising to learn that she would work on a single poem for years, even a decade, and felt it had to be absolutely perfect before she could publish it. “She was determined 'to work harder, not to worry about what other people thought, never to try to publish anything until I'd done my best with it, no matter how many years it took—or never to publish at all.'” She would hold a poem for years, sometimes fretting over just a word or two, before parting with it. Bishop never published a work unless she was completely satisfied with it, which indeed she never was. She induced all the exquisitely minute descriptions in the poem - the evening harmony of settling and clinging and closing and creeping, the modulations of whiteness, the delicate touch of fog, the bumblebees, hens, etc all speak of the attentive and yielding soul of Bishop through which landscape is being articulated. And in the seventh stanza Bishop seems to board the bus:

“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 170]

Bishop is seen reluctant to board the bus, instead of being ready to take the journey, about which she is usually excited, she hangs on to the village capturing
each and every image of it. She seems to be lingering over the details of the Bay of Fundy, listing each building, house, elm, farm and dog before taking leave of Nova Scotia. In course of the poem as a whole, Bishop numbers the objects – “twin silver birches,” “seven relatives,” “Five Islands,” “Five Houses,” “Two rubber boots,” and “one moose.” When Bishop starts numbering things it reflects memory at work. The act of numbering objects and naming people is her way of paying tribute to their effect on her life. Yet it is done in a way that never claims possession or ownership over them. Nostalgia seems to be a big force in her poem but not the only one. When Bishop says “Goodbye to the elms,” she seems to be saying goodbye to a certain mood in the poem. Bishop doesn’t make clear who the “lone traveller” is who “gives kisses and embraces to seven relatives.” Instead Bishop hides behind the “we” and “us” in the poem, “we enter / the New Brunswick woods.” As David Bromwich states, “her work is a conversation which never quite take place but whose possibility always beckons.”

As darkness settles, an awakened soul is lulled into-

“The passengers lie back.

Snores. Some long sighs.

A dreamy divagation

begins in the night,

a gentle, auditory,

slow hallucination . . . .”[CP 171]

This passage embodies a regression into childhood and the muffled noises in the bus are the tones of “an old conversation.” Nova Scotia and its people offered Bishop a rich imaginative source from which she builds her poems. This heritage as was geographical, historical and linguistic. It proceeded from her intimate knowledge of the Bay of Fundy, her memories of childhood in Great Village and of her grandparents and other people who lived there. She has also absorbed the communicative patters of Nova Scotia which are reflected in the poem:

“Grandparents’ voices

uninterruptedly

talking in Eternity:”[CP 171]
Life, in the world of this poem, has so far got only two components: a beloved landscape and beloved people. Bishop was always in touch with Nova Scotia, the only valued connection in her life, through regular visits every couple of years. She also maintained a regular, gossipy correspondence with her mother’s sister, Grace Bulmer Bowers. Bishop, in a review of Silvia Plath’s Letters Home, celebrated her aunt’s ability to make daily life fun:

“One of my aunts, almost uneducated . . . use to write, two or three times a year superb, long, awful letters. Beginning at the village green, she systematically covered the houses . . . lanes to lonely farms: births, marriages and diseases . . . eventual crops, clothes, deaths; church affairs and funerals . . . . These were wonderful letters; I think even Henry James would have enjoyed them.”[VSC 54.20]

These letters are the source material with the help of which, and her past memories, Bishop constructs the Nova Scotian conversation in the poem. The grandparents’ voices have mulled over all the human concerns of the village:

“what he said, what she said,

who got pensioned;

deaths, deaths and sicknesses;

the year he remarried;

the year (something) happened.”[CP 171]

These lines from the poem reflects Bishop’s artistry, her poem are not past “recollected in tranquility” like Wordsworth but past reconstructed. Grandparents have accepted that the passengers do not understand their relation with Nova Scotia and yet they are moved by it. Grandparents are offered with a sudden feeling of liberation but also of placement in the bus “homely as a home.” Bishop’s characters never appear in places of origin or destination but they are in transitions. Her poems are not without idealized dwellings, but these are only viewed from outside, in a speculative attitude. A long chain of human speech resumes her:

““Yes . . .” that peculiar affirmative. “Yes . . .”
A sharp, indrawn breath,

half groan, half acceptance,

that means “Life’s like that,

We know it (also death).” ”[CP 172]

It is as if there is a discourse happening with the kinship. Bishop’s kin establish security and awe, of the world being left behind, to guarantee a nourishing and haunting place for it in memory. Bishop in this poem is seen gaining power over her losses. Out of this oblivion we overhear a conversation “in Eternity,” about pain and loss, where things are “cleared up finally,” where an unqualified “yes” is possible. These are not the voice of the people on the bus, nor do they hear it except in vague dream, and yet it belongs to them as their heritage. Passing through a beautiful terrain, the bus enters an enchanting forest and she is lulled to sleep by voices from the back of the bus:

“Talking the way they talked
in the old featherbed,
peacefully, on and on.”[CP 172]

In the description of rural talk and the sorrow, Bishop joins herself to the Wordsworthian style of the “Lyrical Ballads”. The domestic affections become, for a moment, all that is there in the world, Bishop’s Nova Scotia. The litany of names- Amos, Michael, and Thorn evoke the bond Bishop had and a domestic sympathy towards them; and the views of the - “meadows, hills, and groves” of Nova Scotia her only acquaintance and surrounding. But as she drifts into her sleep-dream, almost beyond consciousness of the world there is a jolt and the bus stops in the moonlight, because:

“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 moose’s arrival is both surprising as well as threatening. The bus stops with a jolt, as the moose “looms” “in the middle of the road” sniffing at the bus’s hood in a gesture that seems aggressive at first but after introspecting, the moose accepts the intrusion without threat. Animals and human beings exist in the same imaginative space in her poems; they do not necessarily understand each other. In a poem where the language is used with utmost simplicity the word ‘impenetrable’ stands out, halting the narrative almost as much as the emergence of the moose. The word ‘impenetrable’ implies the physical denseness of the wood. But it also implies a space that it is impossible to enter: a space of unfathomable mystery. Bishop uses the word ‘wood’ rather than forest because of its rhyming with ‘road’ and ‘hood’. But ‘wood’ anyway is the word that Freud associated with women in dreams, that for Jung was the symbol of the Great Mother, the place where our culture and literature evolve and flourish, a space of darkness and mystery and also of transformations and enchantments. The image of moose is also capable of symbolising safety and warmth of home in the poem:

“Towering, antlerless,
high as a church,
homely as a house
(or safe as houses).

A man’s voice assures us
“Perfectly harmless. . . .” ”

The Moose seems to silence the talks. Animal life is a pure presence in the poem, with its own grandeur. Bishop’s moose is at once maternal, inscrutable and mild. From the world of village catastrophe and pained acknowledgement there is a release of joy due to the other worldliness of the moose because she is large having grand solidity, even vaguely grotesque one, which exists outside their tales and sighs. This moment of joy in the poem is an epiphanic, for it releases the burden of past. In this poem there is no lasting exclusive companionship between human beings but there is a series of deep and inexplicable satisfactions which is precious. The poem domesticates- the land, the human affections and the non-human world.
The moose is given both sacred and homely associations. It is huge, appearing as much larger than it in fact is: like the imago of a parent in a child’s psyche, like a god, or goddess it turns out – “Look! It’s a she!” someone “childishly, softly” exclaims. The poem passes from adult observation of a familiar landscape to the unending ritual, first glimpsed in childhood, of human sorrow, to a final joy in the other worldly, in whatever lies within the impenetrable wood and from time to time allows itself to be beheld, for the sake of saving the humanity. The darkness drops again as the bus moves on;

“by craning backward,
the moose can be seen
on the moonlit macadam;
then there’s dim
smell of moose, an acrid
smell of gasoline.”[CP 173]

This is the epiphanic movement in the poem when Bishop projects the difference between the human world and the natural world is been acknowledged and recognised. Bishop restores to the poem a lovely music with the murmur of the consonant “m” as in – moment . . . moose . . . moonlight macadam . . . moose. Bishop creates a verbal trance in the final stanza of the poem to have a lingering effect. Adding a further sensation to the poem to keep it intact in our memories she ends with the “smell of moose, an acrid / smell of gasoline.” The smell of the moose coexists with the more toxic smell of mankind. But eventually the “dim smell of moose” would fade in comparison to “to acrid smell of gasoline.” Here is an interference of urbanity in the serenity of “the impenetrable wood” which pains Bishop the most. Bishop leaves us with the smell because it is one of the strongest aids to memory. As incense is used in a church, the lingering mingled smells of moose and gasoline allow the ‘sweet sensation of joy’ to go on. Though the human efforts are bent towards the elimination of the wild, nothing is more restorative than to know that Earth in a larger sense is a human enclosure i.e. a home. In this poem the stability of the homeland and the house is transformed into the locus of the gentle flux, and the journey begins, travel in space corresponding to the travel in time, to memory. The attractiveness of dream in this poem is less ambiguous,
but also less possible. Bishop ineluctably is drawn away from the dream, confrontation with the dream in a momentary grace. It is sweet and necessary to remember where we are from; but home is also the place we have to leave. Bishop is seen bidding adieu to her long desired dream of a home in this poem.

Bishop's “New Poems,” a collection of four poems was published in the year 1979 after she passed away. "New Poems" – those written since “Geography III” and collected posthumously in “The Complete Poems 1927-1979” – dispel doubts that the poet's death in year 1979 truncated a career still in its ascension. The craftsmanship displayed here is as impeccable as usual, the voice as reassuringly certain of itself, the intelligence as clear, as "awful but cheerful." In short, the trademarks of her best writing are amply represented in these last poems, as indeed they were in her first ones. Bishop, as a poet had arrived intact and confident in her early poetry, which set the tone and scope of what would follow.

Bishop’s most successful of her posthumous work, "Santarem," once again finds the poet travelling. Travel is to Bishop's cosmology the metaphysical vehicle that defines the place of consciousness in the world. Bishop seems to follow Thoreau's advice to "live at home like a traveller." From the security of her house, she cast her imagination abroad and thereby tested the extent of its authority. “Santarem” is one of the poems from the collection of “New Poems,” a poem from last year of Bishop’s life. Bishop's later work takes on a new and more involved descriptive style. Sensitivity to details turns her poems into a kind of travel books showcasing the effect of displacement in her writings. Travelling, especially of the lazy cruising type is at stake here. Some eighteen years after her 1960 trip to the Amazon, in “Santarém” Bishop cites her personal experience of that visit. This poem is a fertile ground for her beloved combination of triviality and the accidental experience. It stirs the alertness to details – however insignificant. Indolent cruises, in which everything is arranged in advance, and little exertion is requested, are doubtlessly replete with moments so gratifying that they may last forever (although they never do). In “Santarem” Bishop attempts to guide the reader by including her opinion of the scene. The poem is Bishop’s memory of a dream like journey down the Amazon river:
“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, Tapajos, Amazon,
grandly, silently flowing, flowing east.
Suddenly there’d been houses, people, and lots of mongrel
riverboats skittering back and forth”[CP 185]

This passage comes at the beginning of the poem, setting up the reader’s view of the scene. Rather than an ambiguous imaginary landscape, it is apparent that this poem comes from Bishop's personal experiences. Hence these descriptions need not be questioned but can be expressed with full certainty. Bishop involves the fictionalised quality of memory in this poem. She enters into a certain kind of nostalgia with the awareness of the reality. The fiction is between the memory and the threat it imposes to overpower reality. The opening two lines of the poem is a traumatic narrative arising out of Bishop’s alcoholism, where she is seen self-questioning the truth. So, is it the spell of alcoholism or the air of myth is the question in the poem. Brett Miller says of “The Santarem” that with a few rhetorical gestures it “escapes its author’s commitment to accuracy and takes on air of myth.” But it does not seem to be a drift toward myth; rather it seems to acknowledge on Bishop’s part that a shaping of the self in American poetry must engage with the sublime. It reflects fluidity on part of Bishop’s poetry to accept cultural changes arising due to her displacements. The “conflux of two great rivers, Tapajos, Amazon” is symbolic of two varied cultures coming together in the poem. The “riverboats skittering back and forth” indicate the hitch felt during the cultural and literal transformation happening due to displacement. But one has to find the midway in the cultures to find and make one’s space. Particularly interesting is how her alertness – clearly an active state – goes hand in hand with the rendering of control over what is to be seen in the outside forces. Bishop uses a plethora of motion adjectives in her description of the rivers.
This poem is actually a memory, something drawn directly from Bishop’s personal experiences, giving Bishop freedom to self-question without undermining her ability to describe the scene. Bishop, a great lover of flora and fauna falls in love with the conflux of the rivers for she adorned the place with “a sky of gorgeous, under-lit clouds” where everything is “bright, cheerful, casual.” Bishop it seems is impressed by the provincialism and casualness of the place. Suddenly from the casualness of the scene, Bishop takes the poem to another level:

“. . . . Hadn’t two rivers sprung
from the Garden of Eden? No, that was four
and they’d diverged. Here only two
and coming together. . . .”[CP 185]

The conflux of two rivers “Tapajos” and “Amazon” indicate the conflux of two cultures taking place. Bishop frequently switches back and forth between the descriptive and the reflective. The two rivers in the poem allude to the first two sexually different people. Bishop refers to the basic sexual difference between the Adam and Eve. And because they trespass their differences, they had to part from “the Garden of Eden.” Bishop tests the very origins of literary sexual difference by trying on a comparison between Eden and Santarem, the canonical genesis of guilt related to gender. The distinction between these two scenes for Bishop depends on the difference between divergence and union:

“. . . . 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]

In the flow of the two rivers the contradictions – “life / death, right / wrong, male / female” – collapse and dissolve. The dialect witness in Santarem is created not by divergence but by confluence of the two rivers. In her attempt to free herself from the Emersonian tradition of the hieratic distinction of Self-
Other, Bishop tries to avoid it completely in the poem. Her literary dialect, akin to the merging rivers converts her ground of loss, of deprivation, of gender into a source of strength. Overwhelmed with the emotion of two, Bishop confuses with places. The physical displacement to various places gave Bishop a release, a sense of freedom from the age old dogmas attached to sexuality and gender of an individual. There is conflux of two in the poem reflected in the confusion about the place:

“In front of the church, the Cathedral, rather,
there was a modest promenade and a belvedere
about to fall into the river,
stubby palms, flamboyants like pans of embers,
buildings one story high, stucco, blue or yellow,
and one house faced with azulejos, buttercup yellow.” [CP 185]

The first line reinforces the casual outlook in case of religious matter but when it comes to descriptions of landscape, Bishop is perfect in choosing her words. The places like church or cathedral not hold much importance for her but the houses and the buildings which she describes with great particularities and force. She seems to be very choosy about her choice of colours, in her poems, to enhance the perfect visual effects. Houses hold her attention, she presents them carefully and originally, and she wants the readers to meditate upon them. As a poet, her primary contribution lies not in selecting the significant facts, but rather in picking out the words employed to describe those facts. This strikes as an important poetic choice. It’s never entirely one thing instead of the other, of course. But in her case, moulding the language is clearly the greatest achievement. It’s not so surprising that Mrs. Bishop could leave her poems for years in the drawer. And that’s not because the facts changed much but the words did, imbued with history and set in context. Bishop in the following stanzas goes on to describe with the forces of a travel guides, who decide what’s worth to be seen:

“Two rivers full of crazy shipping—people
all apparently changing their minds, embarking,
This excerpt exemplifies the use of “motion adjectives.” Words like “changing,” “embarking,” “disembarking,” and “rowing,” all convey a sense of motion and freedom to the reader, allowing the scene to trail off into both past and future events. The theme of movement is characterized by the use of action words, shifting from one scene to another and motion-based metaphors. This new theme, which contrasts to her theme of “enclosure” used in her earlier poems, could require Bishop to delve into her experiences to explain the implications of her poetry. In this poem, Bishop begins to step outside the scene by referencing to the historical events:

“After the Civil War some Southern families came here; here they could still own slaves.

They left occasional blue eyes, English names, and oars.”[CP 186]

“Santarém” refers to the survivors of the Civil War who left their ancestors and oars there. What were once the facts of oppression are absorbed into charming oddities and local colour. The last paragraph exhibits an interesting way to end the poem, without breaking off its slowly murmuring, carefree atmosphere. Bishop ends the poem with a little chat with one of the fellow travellers Mr. Swan:

In the blue pharmacy the pharmacist had hung an empty wasps’ net from a shelf:

... 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, ...

... asked, “What’s that ugly thing?”[CP186]

Before departing the poet takes a souvenir from “the blue pharmacy” which she liked and admired so much that he presented it to her. She finds “an empty
wasps’ nest’ “small, exquisite, clean matte white” and “hard as stucco” which her fellow traveller finds ugly. But for Bishop they are valuable for they reconcile Bishop to loss; they are her Brazil relived. In “Santarem”, Bishop suggest a miniature form of a house, a “stucco” “nest” which reflects the complexities of all the homes she entertains in her poetry. The context suits her poetic style well, as she excels in carefully crafted descriptions, sometimes of close to nothing. Her painstaking attention most of the times to the various aspects of trivial things, is humbling, and discloses her respect for the ordinary. “Santarém” – the poem that Bishop insists “happened” and is redolent with details of setting which affirm and confirm its grounding in experience – is also a poem that in its opening invokes and then revokes both the conjuring and imaginative powers of memory, “Of course I may be remembering it all wrong.” “Santarém” in other words insists at once upon the primacy of what really happened one golden evening – and all of that, early in the poem, is presumably why the speaker advises that she wanted to stay there – and at the same time “knows”, is imbued from its beginning, with the consciousness that the ship’s whistle will blow and all the passengers at poem’s closing will have to embark; that neither the speaker nor the reader will be able to remain in Santarém.

Bishop taken on entirely different emotion and different subject in her “Pink Dog” writing scathingly of assaults inflicted upon the bitch, to which Bishop turns cruel as well as cold. She takes on the subject of Carnival and the social and political corruption of Brazilian society. This poem was evident in her early drafts dating from 1959 and perhaps written in 1964 under the title "Goodbye to Rio", but was published in 1979 after her death. "Pink Dog" was one of the first signs that she had started to think about leaving Brazil, where after more than a decade the sweetest life she’d known was beginning to sour." It is a bitterly ironic, grotesquely comic poem with a sub-title “[Rio de Janeiro]” set at the Carnival time. In the poem, Bishop advises a "poor bitch," a hairless scavenger with scabies, to "Dress up! Dress up and dance at Carnival!" Bishop opens the poem with the descriptions of the beach:

“The sun is blazing and the sky is blue,

Umbrellas clothe the beach in every hue.
Naked, you trot across the avenue.”[CP 190]

The subject of the poem is a sickly, depilated bitch. Bishop notices the bitch at the beach with no hairs on the body, virtually looking naked. The poor animal is dangerously exposed by Bishop. The bitch’s vulnerability is the result of her nakedness. The speaker, in this poem seems to be moving by a fury which is physical as well as sexual in nature. Afraid of contagion, the crowd draw back and stare at the dog:

“Of course they are mortally afraid of rabies.
you are not mad; you have a case of scabies
but look intelligent. Where are your babies?”[CP 190]

The bitch’s raw pink skin and her hanging teats need a defence that can only come through the use of intelligence operating as disguise. Bishop, in this poem, projects onto the animal world the hysteria of a woman who has been sexually insulted. She finds a reflection of herself in the diseased dog and makes that dog stand for her own sense of misuse as well as for the outrageous violations against womankind in a misogynist society. Bishop presents the bitch in the most vulnerable condition, with the weakness of a mother’s responsibility or sin to forbear:

“(A nursing mother, by those hanging teats.)
In what slum have you hidden them, poor bitch,
while you go begging, living by your wits?”[CP 190]

The artifice of the poem’s triple rhymes, the dressing up of poetic language in an adornment of form, appears to be the poet’s collaboration with the oppressor, a bitter use of her own talents. The tone of the poem is acrimonious, the rage spitefully controlled, and the sexual fury deadly. Bishop rhymes teats and wits with an apparently effortless humour, an association done to carry out the circumstantial truth. Bishop suggests that the “poor bitch” should redirect her wit in aid of disguise, she will join those “idiots, paralytics, parasites” thrown into nearby tidal rivers. Bishop was more literate in both Brazilian pop culture and history. Regina Przybycien, in his 1993 dissertation entitled “Black Beans and Diamonds: Brasil in the work of Elizabeth Bishop” gives a
particularly revealing historical background for “Pink Dog” that illuminates Bishop’s understanding of the Brazilian events of the early 1960s:

“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.”[CP 190]

Many American readers are horrified to read the punishment inflicted upon the beggars in the fifth stanza of the poem, but they don’t know the identity of the perpetrators. Przybycien explains the source:

“One of the scandals of Governor Lacerda (in 1962) was the discovery that the Beggar Recovery Service was “recovering” in a style that was not orthodox: drowning them in the Rio da Guarda—one of the many episodes of summary execution common until today in the suburbs of Rio de Janeiro. Except in this case there appeared to be an official sanction to this practice of “sanitation” in the problem of begging. The international repercussion of the scandal motivated investigations on the part of the government and the punishment of some of the guilty. The event, however, gave ammunition to Lacerda’s enemies who began to refer to him as the “governor [who] kills beggars.”20

The fact that Lacerda’s government, who was their neighbour in Samambaia, was responsible is a curve ball for both the poem and Bishop herself. Initially she and Lota had supported their neighbor’s rise to power. But once he achieved it, she began to doubt his intents. Both Przybycien and Paulo Britto, Bishop’s long time translator, affirm “Pink Dog” as Bishop’s closest embodiment of Brasilian culture of all her Brasil poems. Przybycien refers to the poem’s cultural elements, “striking yet subtle,” that “only an artist of great sensibility and experience of Brasilian things would be capable of capturing,” while Britto notes, “‘Pink Dog’ is a poem that shows how she had really become much more into Brasil than anybody thinks. She had to capture the spirit of Brasil at that moment in order to write [it].” In order to save the bitch from drowning, Bishop advises her to disguise herself so that she avoids being the object of scorn or ridicule and punishment. Bishop gives the bitch a practical solution:

“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.”[CP 190]

The practical solution in the form of carnival costume explains the level-headed sardonic voice of the poem. In “Pink Dog,” Bishop’s angry disenchantment, even her much-lover Carnival becomes complicit in monstrous civic heartlessness toward the poor and helpless. In order to camouflage the bitch so that she would not be the subject of scorn and ridicule, the “dilapidated dog would not look well,” Bishop insists that it needs to “dress up” for the “Carnival.” The only way to merge in the present and save oneself is through disguise. It is the poem that gathers the eroticism into the political interests of her later Brazilian poetry. It is not yet the time for penance and suffering but to disguise:

“Ash Wednesday’ll come but Carnival is here.

What samba can you dance? What will you wear?”[CP 191]

Bishop’s response to the bitch is due to its colour, her femaleness, to the biological embarrassments of being a nursing mother with scabies. Her discomfort is external hence it can be masked but not cured by disguise. Only the external form can control and ensure the safety of the bitch. Despite vast difference in tone, “The Pink” is related to Wallace Stevens’s “The American Sublime” for both addresses what one needs to survive in a place of deception. Stevens seeking what will suffice poses the question,

“How does one stand

To behold the sublime,

To confront the mockers,

The mickey mockers

And platted pairs?”[the American sublime]

Stevens provincial answer is a stripping away of the external self so that all that remains is “The spirit and space, / The empty spirit / In vacant space.” What can such a spirit draw upon for sustenance? Stevens poses this question
in sacramental terms, asking where one can find a sustaining faith. “What wine
does one drink? / What bread does one eat?” these lines are paradoxically
echoed in Bishop’s poem when she says “What samba can you dance? What
will you wear?” Bishop converts Steven’s sacramental question into dance
“mascara” where deceit becomes the only means of survival. Such a dance
would be like lie performed in order to win the guarantee of life’s
continuation. Bishop, in “Pink Dog,” confronts a world of disguise and
advocates a necessary defence, not, however, a stripping away but the armour
of costume:

“Carnival is always wonderful!

A dilapidated dog would not look well.

Dress up! Dress up and dance at carnival!”[CP 191]

She must don a costume to survive the continued “celebration” of life known
as carnival. Metaphorically Bishop refers to art as a costume through which
life can be rejoiced. The speaker of the poem and the pink dog are related by
their exposure, their gender, and perhaps by their vulnerability. Wit can protect
each of them - a wit that poet practice so as to disguise and preserve her
identity. Bishop in this poem confronts masking directly; her need for
protection is met by courage to insure the risk of exposure. The predicament of
isolation, exile and anomalous self keeps reappearing in Bishop’s poetry, for
example in “The Giant Toad,” “The Moth-Moth,” and in “Pink Dog,” because
it is related to her sense of being a women poet in relation to the tradition.

We know Bishop primarily as the eager traveller who wrote of distant,
tropical locations and lived for many years as an expat in Brazil. She was that,
of course, but she was also an aficionado of her native landscape and climate.
Bishop, a poet of geography, maps, and the mystery of spatial awareness loved
the oddly shaped North Haven, which lies about halfway between Boston,
where Bishop lived, and Nova Scotia, one of her childhood homes. North
Haven is one of the dozens of tiny islands that fleck Penobscot Bay, about
halfway up the coast of Maine. If pressed, you might say North Haven looks
like the head of a predatory bird, its threatening beak pointing west toward
Rockland. Or maybe the bird’s skull, with a pond at its centre for the eye
socket. "North Haven," is Bishop’s elegy for friend and fellow poet Robert Lowell. North Haven was the place where Bishop spent several of the last summers of her life. She returned to North Haven because, as she said with typical breathless lucidity in a 1978 Paris Review interview:

“I sometimes feel that I shouldn’t keep going back to this place that I found just by chance through an ad in the Harvard Crimson. I should probably go to see some more art, cathedrals, and so on. But I’m so crazy about it that I keep going back. You can see the water, a great expanse of water and fields from the house. Islands are beautiful.”

Bishop used to invite friends to stay with her on North Haven. Robert Lowell, a particularly good friend, stayed not far off in the tiny mainland village called Castine, due north of North Haven. He set his famous poem “Skunk Hour,” dedicated to Bishop, in Castine. Bishop dedicated “North Haven” to Lowell, published a year after his death in year 1977. In this poem, Bishop returns to a location she and Mr. Lowell enjoyed for years, she celebrates the natural beauty both enjoyed on this island. This six stanza poem begins by describing North Haven’s natural summertime beauty. Bishop, at the Connecticut shoreline, looks at the bay and the islands in it. The opening of the poem is very graceful as gracious as the arrival of the ship:

“I can make out the rigging of a schooner
a mile off; I can count
the new cones on the spruce. It is so still
the pale bay wears a milky skin, the sky
no clouds, except for one long, carded horse’s-tail.”[CP 188]

By opening the poem in italic, Bishop highlights the importance of the place, its beauty and also its stillness. Though the opening is gracious still there is a certain kind of stillness in the atmosphere as if everyone, including the island, morns for someone lost; even the bay morns by wearing white skin. Bishop personifies bay in order to make it a companion in her plight of a lost friend. She moves from looking at the shore, to thoughts of her departed friend and then back again to the nature around her. As she is lonely at the island,
similarly the cloud is alone in the sky. The “carded” shape of the “horse’s-tail” is a male imagery referring to the departed friend. Bishop seems to want the desperate motion of the nature, as seen in her early poems but now it seems nature has lost its movement its life; it is as dead as Lowell:

“The island haven’t shifted since last summer,
   even if I like to pretend they have
   —drifting, in a dreary sort of way,
   a little north, a little south or sidewise,
   and that they’re free within the blue frontiers of bay.”[CP 188]

Bishop depicts active, moving exotic nature as in her earlier poems. She dares to bestow movement to the static island, though however dreary it may sound. This drifting of static things is an allusion referring to the drifting of the soul, and hence it’s a kind of freedom of soul from all the worldly ties. Robert Lowell confessed in “For John Berryman” “I used to want to live / to avoid your elegy.” The death of one poet is an extraordinary occasion for another poet. It is like the day a stonemason dies and another has to carve his headstone. Like a rough ashlars, the elegy sits waiting to be shaped into a memorial for the one who is gone. We can trace the canon through the poems that poets have written to mourn their loved ones: Henri Cole grieving Elizabeth Bishop; Bishop remembering Robert Lowell; Lowell lamenting the death of John Berryman; Berryman longing for Roethke, Jarrell, Hughes, Plath, Schwartz, and William Carlos Williams; W.H. Auden elegizing Yeats; Shelley bemoaning the loss of Keats; all the way back to Ovid mourning Orpheus. Poets have forever elegized one another across the eras, through all the years, elegies have retained three features: lament, at having to confront the particular death of the subject, but also the subject of death; repetition, as a formal technique and mechanism for grieving; and the achievement of resurrection or apotheosis. Though, it’s tempting to find solace in the natural world around her she recognizes that the constancy of nature is illusory: “the goldfinches are back, or others like them.” Not even nature resists change, although it does repeat itself year after year, bringing new finches and growing different flowers even though the seasons themselves seem unchanging:
“The Goldfinches are back, or others like them,
and the White-throated Sparrow's five-note song,
pleading and pleading, brings tears to the eyes.

Nature repeats herself, or almost does:

repeat, repeat, repeat; revise, revise, revise.”[CP 188]

But the solace a lesser poet would find in the repeated cycles of nature is not what Bishop finds. The “White-throated Sparrow” that have returned are not the ones Robert and Bishop enjoyed; they are "others like them." Their song is not a celebratory own, but a plea. Sparrows sing because they are lonely or at least because they are looking for a mate. Elegies are not bashful: they foreground death, announce their sorrow, and draw others into their grief. Lament truly animates the form, but in this poem, nature laments on behalf of Bishop, the bird’s song “bring tears to the eyes.” It takes repetition—of the seasons and the songs, of the leaving and the taking leave—for Bishop to acknowledge and elegize Lowell’s death. Repetition as a formal poetic structure mimics the repeated elements of funerals, wakes, and rituals marking death. “Repeat after me,” the clergy say, and so we do. So it is not surprising that elegiac poems are built through the repetition of words and phrases. Together repetition and lament lead to something more than the words on the page; it calls for resurrection. Lowell is alive in the fifth stanza of Bishop’s poem:

“Years ago, you told me it was here
(in 1932?) you first “discovered girls”

and learned to sail, and learned to kiss.

You had “such fun,” you said, that classic summer.”[CP 188]

Eternally chatting about North Haven both friends shared their personal and wonderful moments with each other- where he “first ‘discovered girls’” and was always having “such fun.” Lowell speaks through the stanza, living forever between the lines—a miracle that did not trouble Bishop, but which obsessed W.H. Auden. The resurrection that is possible in poetry worried Auden, whose elegy of W.B. Yeats is one of the most remarkable ever
written. But unfortunately it’s an illusion for eternal realities can be altered in art. Things are not the same without Mr. Lowell. Nature doesn't give solace to the poet’s heart but it seems to be a monotonous repetition. Hence Bishop suggests nature to changes- to "revise, revise, revise." These are important words for a poet like Bishop who believed in perfection- repeat and revise- for Bishop was famous for working and reworking her writing and it one of the reasons why she published so few finished poems. The final lines of the poem take this idea further by focusing the life and work of a poet:

“You left North Haven, anchored in its rock,
afloat in mystic blue . . . And now–You’ve left
for good. You can't derange, or re-arrange,
your poems again. (But the Sparrows can change their song.)
The words won't change again. Sad friend, you cannot change.”[CP 189]

Lament often inaugurates elegies, but repetition organizes them as Bishop’s “North Haven,” written for Robert Lowell one year after his fatal heart attack. Although she is looking at one of Lowell’s most beloved seascapes in Maine, she resists the pathetic fallacy. Bishop does not believe that nature is shedding tears simply because she is. “The islands haven’t shifted since last summer,” she writes, and then acknowledges, “even if I like to pretend they have.”

In year 1978, Bishop was working on a little poem “Sonnet.” The New Yorker's poetry editor, Howard Moss, was thrilled to have this poem. He'd been devoted to Bishop and championed her work. When the publication of "Sonnet" kept getting delayed, however, Bishop got more and more frustrated. She liked Moss, but she vented her irritation in a satirical quatrain for her friends:“All our poems / rest on the shelf / while Howard publishes / himself.” Bishop’s sonnet was published in The New Yorker on October 29, 1979, three weeks after she died. Bishop's "Sonnet" is therefore taken to be her last poem. And it feels like a posthumous poem, with its images of release from illness, from emotional conflict, from being "a creature divided." It's the closest thing we have to her final poetic testament. This poem seems to be more directly autobiographical. Bishop deals with sexual identity and the struggle in this
poem. She was like "a creature divided" both accepting and nervous about her homosexuality:

“Caught – the bubble
in the spirit-level,
a creature divided;
and the compass needle
wobbling and wavering,
undecided.”[CP 192]

The image of a “compass needle” reflects the indecisiveness, the “wobbling and wavering” characteristic of Bishop’s mind. She loved living in Brazil, away from New York literary politics and gossip, yet it was hard for her to be separated from her native country and language, and from the recognition of her admirers. "Dear, my compass / still points North," indicate her pull towards her origins but she also loved living in Brazil. Bishop finds it difficult to decide and still wavering about her true home:

Freed – the broken
thermometer's mercury
running away;
and the rainbow-bird
from the narrow bevel
of the empty mirror,
飞行 wherever
it feels like, gay![CP 192]

In the “Sonnet” the “creature divided” is healed and “free,” suggesting the sense of dividedness established in the “The Man-Moth” and “The Gentleman of Shallot” is been resolved in this poem. Bishop imagines reaching the point where the creature is an emblem of freedom, one can be a rainbow bird, flying wherever it feels like. Bishop asserted that she wanted to restore the last word of the poem, "gay!" to what she called its "original" non-sexual meaning.
Perhaps the division did lie in her sexual orientation. Bishop needed to drink to cop up the stress of her sexual reality, yet ashamed of her self-destructive compulsion. The "rainbow-bird," the last and most complex image of "Sonnet" is clearly self-referential. "Rainbow" is a key word in many of her poems. Her most famous poem "The Fish" ends with the ecstatic "rainbow, rainbow, rainbow." In "Song for the Rainy Season," her love poem about the house she and her Brazilian companion were living in way up in the mountains outside of Rio, she calls the landscape "rainbow-ridden." The most poignant and frightening image in "Sonnet" is of “the empty mirror.” Always shy and self-conscious, Bishop hated the way she looked, hated looking at herself. She'd grown heavier due to her consumption of cortisone in order to get relief for her asthma; her hair had turned gray. She felt old and bloated; though everyone else thought she looked more elegant than ever. She would have preferred to look into an “empty mirror,” give the sinister implications. Bishop had been plagued by various illnesses all her life, from persistent eczema (like a pink dog?) to the chronic, sometimes life-threatening asthma for which she was repeatedly hospitalized. In the 1970s her beloved Aunt Grace, in Nova Scotia, was showing signs of Alzheimer's disease. Bishop was morbidly worried about an old age of illness and was terrified of becoming senile. Though she had been in relatively good health at the time she wrote "Sonnet," though dying seemed increasingly on her mind. Bishop nods to sonnet traditions in a couple of ways, but probably breaks more rules than she follow. Yet her rule breaking is extremely appropriate for her “Sonnet”— after all, it’s all about breaking free. Like Emily Dickinson (even down to the dashes), Bishop was a complicated mixture of formalist and formal maverick. She wrote sestinas long before they became common assignments in creative-writing courses. But she also loved to play with form. Her only previous mature sonnet, "The Prodigal," written nearly three decades earlier, was a double sonnet. Her remarkable villanelle, "One Art," altered tradition by varying the refrain lines, though the rules insisted on their being repeated verbatim. These dramatic "deviations" are, of course, one of the glories of "One Art." "Sonnet," with its unusually short lines, is a playfully form of the traditional sonnet. Bishop's octave (including two images of being "freed") follows rather than precedes the sestet, with its two images of being "caught" (thereby giving more room to being free
than to being trapped). Many of the rhymes (and delicious half rhymes) come not where expect them or where they're supposed to be – that is, the rhyming pair doesn't always appear at the end of a line: "bird" rhymes with "freed"; "rainbow" and "narrow" fall mid-line; the rhyme in "thermometer's mercury" comes at the beginning rather than at the end of the words. Like the "moon in the bureau mirror" in her poem "Insomnia", which looks out at a world "inverted," the newfound freedom depicted in "Sonnet" (including a liberation from traditional form) presents a topsy-turvy solution, an upside-down resolution, that doesn't fit the usual formula. This solution, this resolution, is death – the solution to all conflict, to all illness, to all decision-making, to all the claims and pulls that upset the balance of one's life.

Bishop addresses her ideas of home, love and loss by using her personal experiences, in this phase. Artist’s biography should be interpreted in a different way, as one of the possible origin of poems and stories rather than the inevitable or the only solution to their meaning. It is inevitable to provide a more nuanced look at the relationship between art and memory. Bishop’s work can be read in the light of biography but necessarily having a creative reading of it. If we begin to forget Bishop’s life, her poetry urges us to remember it. For example “One Art” as a creative genre is a wonderful piece but biographic revelations of Bishop’s life gives deeper and profound implication to the poem. Bishop describes her characters with immense psychoanalytical eye and projects her scene with very minutely details and descriptions; her poetic subjects no longer question their descriptions and she does not rely on imaginary or dream-based scenes to articulate her own experiences. In her poem “Crusoe in England” Bishop’s craftsmanship and her love for geographical detail is seen where her idea of home and dilemma related to it is revealed. Bishop's late work displays a theme of movement as seen in “The Moose” and “Santarem.” In the poem “The Moose,” she displays her love for Nova Scotian home and landscape, and upholds the concept of displacement by biding a farewell to her past memories and moving ahead. “Pink Dog” is another such “good bye” to the memories associated with Rio de Janeiro and Lota. The technique of movement incorporates the change of setting, movement-oriented diction, and questions that consider ideas outside the
discussed scene like that in “Santarem” where movement leads to conflux and can also drift the narrator in its past, leading to a backward movement. Bishop reveals and realises her burden of memories in her nostalgic pieces “Poem” and “Five Fight Up.” Bishop is no longer limiting her scenes, but rather, exploring the various implications of her observations as they correlate with her personal history as in “In the Waiting Room.” While the implementation of cultural metaphor in this phase of Bishop's writing may be the same, the implications are not. The metaphors were used as the core method of conveying imagery in her early work, in her later work they are used alongside Bishop's personal experiences to create understanding. Randall Jarrell wrote in Third Book of Criticism that Bishop's "minutely observant best poems [...] remind one of Vuillard or even, sometimes, of Vermeer [...] all exist on a small scale, and some of the later poems especially are too detailed and objectively descriptive." It is the traveller’s destiny to suffer loss in order to keep going, and he keeps going, even though, the object of his quest is illusionary as reflected in her poem “End of March” – “Another inscrutable house,” “a proto-dream-house,” or “home” “facing a red sea”, wherever that may be.” Bishop’s poems about travel reveal that we are not only lost, but there never was and never will be a home in any stable sense. Home is a fiction, a projection of ideal state. Tormented by the memories of past life, isolation, and staying at one place due to financial compulsions which means no physical displacement in her life, Bishop could no longer feel at home in her hometown of America. She succumbed to all the odds in her life and passed away due to a sudden brain aneurysm in her Lewis Wharf apartment on 6th October 1979.
CHAPTER IV
REFERENCES


20. Neely, Elizabeth. Findings from the Brasilian Basement. Fall 2013, Volume 19, Number 1, University of North Texas.
