

Elizabeth Bishop Society of Nova Scotia

P.O. Box 138, Great Village, Nova Scotia B0M 1L0

Volume 2, Issue 2

NEWSLETTER

Fall, 1995

Editorial

Sometimes at present a common reader of Bishop's work may feel driven to silence. During the last five or six years, there has been so much interesting talk about her in books, articles, seminars, conferences and newsletters. There is vastly more one should know. There are so many new and various readings and considerations, such generously elaborated contexts of antecedents, connections, parallels and prefigurations. In short, there are apparently so many additional opportunities to reveal one has loved and valued Bishop's work in ways that some might consider simple-minded.

This issue of the Elizabeth Bishop Society of Nova Scotia Newsletter is intended to encourage common readers to speak. Those of us who have a scholarly stake in a poet too often end up talking only with one another and with an unfortunate editor who must persuade us to mind our manners. We may need reminding that poetry is a conversation between poets and readers of many kinds which it is our job to help sustain, not interrupt by overly-insistent deflections into some secondary world of our own.

In this Newsletter, are examples of two of Bishop's favourite forms of common conversation: poems and letters. The four poems of homage published here are all by Canadians. John Reibetanz teaches at Victoria College, the University of Toronto.

He has published two collections of poems, *Ashbourn* (1986) and *Morning Watch* (1985) both issued by Signal Editions, Vehicule Press, in Montreal. Richard Outram lives in Toronto. He recently retired from the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation. His first major collection, *Exsultate, Jubilate* (1966) continues to be a touchstone and talisman for many Canadian poets. His most recent collections are *Hiram and Jenny* (1988) and *Mogul Recollected* (1993), both issued by The Porcupine's Quill Inc., Erin, Ontario. P.K. Page's glosa, "Poor Bird," originally appeared in her collection *Hologram: A Book of Glosas* (Brick Books, London, Ontario, 1994) and is printed here by her gracious permission. P.K. Page is the author of over a dozen books of poetry, fiction and non-fiction, including *As Ten as Twenty* (1946), *Cry Ararat! Poems New Selected* (1967), *The Glass Air* (1985 and 1991) and *Brazilian Journal* (1988). The letters, by Michiru Oguchi, are preceded in the Newsletter by a brief introduction and need no other words here than those expressing an editor's gratitude for their author's consent to allow her gentle conversation with three friends to become a gentle conversation with many.

News and Information

No, this is *not* the Spring, 1996 issue of the Newsletter. It is the Fall, 1995, issue. Like Thomas Travisano, editor of our cousin

publication, the American *Elizabeth Bishop Bulletin*, members of the Nova Scotia Society have been overwhelmed by the number of events and activities involving Bishop during the last six months.

Much of the Society's attention was directed to preparing for, running and putting-things-back-together-after the Elizabeth Bishop Celebration Day held in Great Village on June 10, 1995. Dr. Travisano has published a lengthy, full, very generous account of the Day in *The Elizabeth Bishop Bulletin* (4 (1-2), Winter 1995) which it would be redundant to try to emulate here. The Elizabeth Bishop Society of Nova Scotia was honoured by Dr. Travisano's presence and the superb Memorial Lecture, "Expulsion from Paradise: Elizabeth Bishop, 1927-1957," which he delivered in the afternoon in St. James United Church, the church of the hide-and-seek buttresses opposite the house of Bishop's Bulmer grandparents. Dr. Travisano's lecture has been published by the Society and, as indicated at the end of this Newsletter, is still available. It contains information not yet public elsewhere. The Society was also honoured and delighted by the presence of many visitors who became friends during the day's events and at an evening reception held in the home of Alan and Lois Bray, in particular Margaret Dickie, Susan McCabe, Michiru Oguchi, Douglas Lochhead, Diane Brushett and Ted Colson.

At a Society general meeting held on June 10, Alan Bray reluctantly announced his resignation as President. Members present unanimously passed a vote of thanks for his tireless working helping to found the Society, establish it on a firm footing and promote its activities. The Society's new President is Angus Chisholm, a resident of

Great Village and a member of the business community in nearby Truro.

Sandra Barry, the Nova Scotian Bishop scholar, has been employed by the Society to catalogue the material relating to Bishop presently held in Nova Scotia (which mainly consists of the Bulmer-Bowers-Hutchinson-Sutherland Family Fonds owned by Bishop's first cousin, Mrs. Phyllis Sutherland). She has completed work, but for the final, editing polish, on her nearly 200 page finding-guide. In addition to descriptive lists of books, documents, photographs, letters and artifacts, the guide contains a wealth of genealogical detail, family history, reviews of literature and critical analysis. The Society plans to subsidize trade publication of Sandra's work as soon as possible. Preliminary negotiations to do so have begun with Lancelot Press in Hantsport, Nova Scotia.

Membership in the Elizabeth Bishop Society of Nova Scotia is available for \$8.00 per year or \$20.00 for three years (Canadian funds). Either membership entitles the holder to take full voting part in the Society's deliberations and to receive the Newsletter for free.

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Contributions to the Newsletter, or suggestions for its contents are most welcome. Please contact Ms. Murphy about either.

Bulmer-Bowers-Hutchinson-Sutherland Family Fonds For Sale

An urgent challenge facing the Society at present is creating a fund to purchase the Bishop-related material owned by Mrs. Phyllis Sutherland who, with a pressing sense of the responsibilities incumbent upon any custodian of the material, wishes to sell it. Bishop's letters to the Sutherlands, which were originally part of the fonds, were acquired by Vassar College. The Society strongly feels that all possible efforts must be made to keep the remainder of the material in the fonds in Nova Scotia, on extended loan to a public institution. There, it could be accessible to Canadian scholars, on display for Canadian students and available to scholars from other countries as part of the cultural, social and physical environment Bishop knew and loved, which she visited whenever she could and which she made a central part of her poems, stories and autobiographical essays. Thus far, a total of \$1,500 has been pledged to the Society for use as part of a purchase offer for the fonds.

From Three Letters to Nova Scotia by Michiru Oguchi

(Editor's note: Michiru Oguchi lives in Tokyo where she works as an editor with particular responsibilities for foreign language publication in the publishing house of Iwanami Shoten. She was present at the Key West Literary Seminar devoted to Bishop which was held in January 1993. She flew to Nova Scotia in early June, 1995, to attend the Elizabeth Bishop Celebration Day. After her return to Japan, she wrote three letters to Nova Scotia friends from which the following extracts are taken.)

A Poet's Words (from the First Letter: 8:30 a.m., June 12, 1995, Halifax)

Here I am, seated in the Northwest aircraft, waiting for my last flight. When I arrived at the airport at 6:30, I was half dead. Last night I could hardly sleep for fear of missing the hotel front-desk's wake up call; I kept saying "I've got to go home!" for I knew my mind was rebelling. Morning came and my time was up. The taxi driver who took me to the airport was a pleasant old man from Pakistan whose name was, believe me, Ali-Baba! Awful but cheerful, as Bishop would say.

Do you remember our conversation before Professor Thomas Travisano's seminar at the Agricultural College? We were talking about the identity of poet's words. Now I am convinced how deeply Bishop's words are rooted in Nova Scotia. "The Moose", for example. You showed me the place where the poem starts. Because I was on the bus which passed the Bowers' farm in Glenholme twice, I cannot help relating things to words and scenes to stanzas, and thinking: why do these seemingly commonplace words, images and metaphors lie there as if subtly placed waiting to be noticed? What phonetical role do they actually play in the long journey of verbal music? How do readers discover evidence of Nova Scotia, in vocabulary, geography, or whatever? Once you're stuck in such a guessing game, everything becomes a key to the riddles.

Academically speaking, the Vassar College Library seems the ideal keeper of material pertaining to Bishop. In fact, her Brazilian papers have crossed the continent to New York and are now safely kept at Vassar for scholars. But things can also be seen in different light. I often wonder why Bishop left

her papers in the hands of her Brazilian friends who didn't read English. Of course, we know she told them: "Keep these, someday they'll make you some money." A practical, realistic approach, quite Bishop-like. But is that all you hear from what she said? That way of putting it all down to money makes me a little suspicious. Didn't she say that in order to hide something, the intention or impulse of a poet? I'd rather believe Bishop on another level than that of her overt words in this context. She must have been looking for a place to return to. Her "home" was split into three: Canada, the U.S., Brazil. And remember what she said to Mrs. Phyllis Sutherland about where she wished to be buried? In the old cemetery at The Falls, near Tatamagouche, Nova Scotia. As old age approaches, we begin to think about where we should go back. So did Bishop, and having lost most of her life spent with the people dearest to her and in places she loved; she must have also been wondering where her words should go. Didn't she actually want her friends to keep her words in Brazil, even if they wouldn't read them? It would be too presumptuous to assume that she did not care at all about her papers being left unread among her Portuguese speaking friends. But I would like to imagine, at least, that she was ready to leave her words in Brazil because she had been ready to die there once. A poet's words are something like the ashes of her body. Words know, in a sense, where they should be buried. Therefore, what Phyllis heard has its meaning. If Bishop wished to be buried in Nova Scotia, her words, too, would rest in peace there. I'm sure Bishop would be happy if some of her papers were kept in Nova Scotia to give people genuine pleasure, along with the Bible of "Over 2,000 Illustrations...", her mother's needlework, and the other beautiful things you showed me on display in the Colchester County Museum in Truro.

Things Seen and Unseen (from the Second Letter, Tokyo, June 24, 1995)

Let me start my story with things unseen.

Before coming here, I had three things in mind that I must see: Peggy's Cove, the schooner "Bluenose," and the hospital in Dartmouth where Bishop's mother lived and died. All quite well known sites: the first two for tourists, and the third for Bishop travellers, because it is where Bishop's mother lived and died. The only really important thing for me was that hospital. I had the chance to see it twice: once on June 9 and again on June 11.

June 9 was the day after I arrived. Jet-lag made me wake up before dawn. Too early for breakfast. I went out to see the sunrise over the Halifax Harbour. The weather was perfect. I wondered what to do next, then thought of Dartmouth across the harbour: voyaging there became practically the first thing I did on the first day of my trip. I took the ferry to Aldernay Gate, the Dartmouth ferry terminal complex.

After some hesitation, I chose a lady working in an Italian cafeteria and asked: "Is there any hospital around here?" She looked at me curiously. "Or, are there several?", I hastily asked again. "There's one", she replied, "Dartmouth General". "Is it the only hospital in this town?" (I didn't dare add "mental" before "hospital".) "Yes, it is". I was scared to dig deeper, so I just followed her instructions. I took the No. 63 bus up the hill with the other passengers, mostly people on their way to work and schoolboys with back packs. By that time, the sky had turned gray with clouds and the last trace of the bright sunrise was gone. I got off the bus in front of a modern building that gave the impression of

being nothing more or less than "functional". I walked around and went in. Inside, it was older than it first appeared. I asked a couple of questions at the information desk, picked up a leaflet for patients, and left the place quickly. The bus took me back to Aldernay Gate again. It was less than an hour's excursion.

I knew it was not the hospital I was looking for. I knew I had been to the wrong building and still had gone in. I had been fearful to face it. In a sense I felt relieved at not having reached the spot. It was an exploration which was really an excuse to escape exploring. Tracking down a mental hospital for a literary reason seemed to be an act of either voyeurism or, somehow, blasphemy. I had mixed feelings about it, wishing on the one hand to find out, and on the other to give up the search. Half voluntarily, I had botched my first chance. Getting on the ferry back to Halifax I had a slight regret. All right, I said to myself, nobody's mother was in that particular hospital, not Bishop's, after all. The sky cleared up again as if nothing had happened.

The second chance came on the afternoon of June 11. Peter drove us from Truro to Halifax, and we went through Dartmouth on the way. We were heading for your house. Jeffery and Annette were in the back seat. As we crossed the bridge over the Harbour, I plucked up my courage to ask Peter exactly where the Dartmouth Asylum was located. He seemed hesitant at first, perhaps caught by his sense of decency, but tried to open up and help me. Of course it was not the Dartmouth General. "I'm not sure," Peter said, still reserved, "but can you see the smoke over there?" Looking in the rearview mirror, he tried to show me the landmark. "I think it's that brick building behind it." "I see," I replied automatically, but I didn't really. All I could

see from the speeding car was dozens of similar brick buildings, overlapping one another like shapes in a cubist painting. The trace of smoke was soon effaced, and I was left behind with my desire to see. It was as if my whole vision was blinded, so to speak, with the overwhelming 'Dartmouth brown' that covered the landscape.

Suddenly I came to myself and turned around. A different color, 'Halifax silver' beamed from the waterfront window panes, filling the view through the windshield. Then the masts came in, some vertical, some slanting, and the sight brought me back to another mundane thought (Oh, "Bluenose"...), but this time, dozens of similar masts hid the ship from my sight. Our car pierced through the silver into downtown Halifax.

There, a story of three lost sights. But do you really think I saw nothing? Let me close my story with things actually seen, though none are famous or recognized.

It was the night of June 10. Elizabeth Bishop Day in Great Village. All the events and parties were over, and only one promise was left: to go down to Layton's Store in Great Village, right next to the house where Bishop's grandparents had lived. It was indeed from this general store where all my Nova Scotia journeys with Bishop in 1995 had started. I met Meredith who, with her husband, runs it, four years ago. All that time she kept my address and sent me a Christmas card telling me about the Day. When I called to tell her I was coming, she had given a joyous cry and said in a low but sure voice, "That's grand!" So I came, and it was now time to share the end of the day with her. It was around 9 o'clock. In a small room behind the check-out counter, I sat watching Meredith and her

husband finish up the day's work. Meredith's cousin, Grace, was with us. We kept on chatting. They showed me an "egg-checker," an old-fashioned tool that helped me understand the wit and ingenuity of Bishop's forebearers in Great Village, a lovely, lively town at the turn of the century.

Soon the Laytons locked the store to go home. We stepped out into the triangular space in the center of the three-forked road. "Listen!" Grace whispered, "Can you hear?" I listened. "It's frogs, small frogs calling for mates," Meredith added. I saw nothing, but the vacant center of the village was filled with the chorus. In the black of the night, I heard the clear, high pitched voices.

After another half hour's chat at the Layton's house, we got in the car to go back to my bed and breakfast lodgings. "Look!" Grace whispered again, "Can you see?" I turned my head and looked through the window. A silvery view spread, out before me, shimmering brightly in the distance. It was the Bay of Fundy. At first (I don't know why) I thought it must be a ball-park lit up for the night game. Everything looked highlighted as if in an aquarium. "No, it's not the town lights," Grace laughed, as if she had read my mind. (Surely, no artificial light could brighten up the whole bay. Ridiculous, and in this vast Canadian expanse of land and water..) "It's the moon. The moonlight makes the bay shine on such a grand night." I liked the way she said it. "Grand" again. (Remember the elderly woman who says "a grand night" in "The Moose" when she gets on the bus?) It sure was a grand view. I couldn't take my eyes off the huge fragment reflected in the mirror of the Bay. Then something flickered in my brain. ("A big tin basin!") Another irrelevant thought? Maybe. It's a phrase in "The

Shampoo", one of Bishop's Key West to Brazil poems. How can you resist the thought that this "basin" resonates with 'Minas Basin', the name of part of the Bay of Fundy? It was only in Brazil that Bishop could start writing about Nova Scotia, describing her life in South America "a delux Nova Scotia", her home up North. Is it a delusion to relate her addresses in North and South, by way of a word mutual to the two place names: in the north, Minas Basin, and in the south Minas Gerais? No, there is no answer. Only the view spread over this petty word game. I stared at the magnificent view. So beautiful -- I had never seen anything like this in my life. I thought of my family: my husband and daughter who were not with me. My mother, and relatives. I was alone, but aren't we all? We come to this world alone and leave alone again, no matter how deeply we love the people around us. But visions remain, and if we are lucky, our visions meet with those of others as they do in "Poem". Moonlit Minas Basin started me thinking about a thousand illusions. Maybe I was a bit moon-struck, but I kept on looking and looking till the sight faded away.

History and Questions of Madness (From the Third Letter, August, 1995, Tokyo)

One thing I had to answer were the continually posed, solicitous questions: Why I had come all this way for only four days and if it was worth it. I was stuck, for I must say, I had more questions of travel than anybody else. Should I start now, asking the details I've always wanted to clarify, such as the exact model of the "Little Marvel Stove" or the precise color of "that awful shade of brown"? Well, I can wait for these. Let me ask you about what I learned from your writing that day in the village. In the EBSNS Newsletter

-- What suits the character or the native
waters best.

Do pick your color, please, and show me the local inscape. As a scholar, it's natural for you to be attracted to various themes and viewpoints shared among the scholars of your generation; feminism, psychoanalysis, or various aspects of literary tradition, any approach is possible. But stay with your original color; it's not narrow provincialism at all. Wouldn't it be better if Canadian and American scholars would seek their own ways and cooperate, hopefully someday also with Brazilians, to show us an image of the poet in full color, filled in with details both factually accurate and historically sensitive? The literary historian's color can be as delicate as any map-maker's.

"In the Village" and the facts about Bishop's life touched me, for I shared, though to a far smaller extent, Bishop's struggle as a child. I learned that a mother is not an Absolute Being known only as "Mother", but a person with a certain individual name; she is free to renounce God or to think of dying apart from her child, no matter how strongly the child feels that she must be a part of all of Mother's decisions. Though the Mother may always tell the child not to, the Mother herself is free to lie when she needs to hide the truth; but the child can find it out through asking true-false questions and hearing Mother's reply, "Oh, you must have been dreaming!" I can't tell you how strong an impression I had the first time I read "In the Village". Every phrase said and unsaid every action and reaction seen and unseen of the little girl and the adults around her in that prose masterpiece were only too real, too true to me. It was as if this foreign poet, a remote existence who could not possibly know me, had grasped my most private feelings and

written them into a universal tale.

Do not misunderstand me. I am not trying to apply my personal experience to the analysis of a literary work. Nor do I believe that the theories and patterns of psychology or psychiatry can explain everything... The two problems I really want to focus on here are, 1) the complexity of the human mind that no theory can fully explain, and 2) the tolerance needed to deal with this such a situation.

Let me prepare to discuss these problems by offering quotes from three of Bishop's letters. The first occurs in a letter to Dorothee Bowie. Bishop wrote: "Schizophrenia can be cured [...] -- my mother was too early a case, historically I mean... Look at Robert Lowell (all my friends are mad) -- with a new drug, he hasn't had a breakdown for over three years, I think -- no psychiatry or anything, just pills." (14 June 1970. M.M. Lombardi: The Body and the Song, p. 222).

You said you had trouble with Lombardi's book, finding too much stress on theoretical interpretations. But it supplied me with other remarks of Bishop's, some of which are rather well known, having already been quoted in Brett Millier's biography or Mr. Giroux's edition of Selected Letters. But let me give a second quote using Lombardi's context: "The only prose book I ever thought I wanted to write is a book about the life of Dorothea Dix [...] a wonderful young woman who devoted herself to the insane, and the awful asylums in the US, in the 19th century -- she died quite young, shipwrecked, I think." (14 June, 1970, Ibid., p. 225). The third quote refers to her recovery from the shock of Lota's death: "I spoke to Dr. Baumann on the telephone Sunday last, and she said she thought my 'New England' character had triumphed. Well, when

(Vol. 1-1) issued last fall, you said Bishop's childhood was the most difficult and complex period in her artistic development, affecting her personal psychology and poetics; you pointed out that Bishop incorporated so many experiences and memories from this time into her poetry and prose; and that this "should induce critics to afford her childhood *factually accurate and historically sensitive treatment.*" [My emphasis.]

You are right, I said to myself on reading that last phrase. This is extremely important in the biographical study of an artist, especially when such a delicate issue as madness is involved. I would like to come back to this last point later. ... your latest article has let me see your stance much more clearly than before. I'm afraid I don't know enough about Hopkins to discuss his work with you. But I'm fascinated by the story about the shipwreck of the "North Star" in 1919 and the "shipwreck" theme, and by your sometimes dryly quoting from the Truro Daily News and sometimes earnestly evoking the verbal echo of this shipwreck in Bishop's poems. I also liked the way you analyzed the imagery of "surface" and "underneath", the relations of Sable Island and the map, and so on. Could this perhaps be an example of what you mean by "factual accuracy" and "historical sensitivity" -- tracing the process whereby the factual shipwreck took root in Bishop's own historical sensitivity? Whether it is or not, it led me to a whole set of free associations, for example, Easter with "A Norther - Key West", or the shipwreck with the housewreck in "Twelfth Morning; or What You Will."

You would be surprised at how little I know about Nova Scotia except for Bishop. I have only three reference books and some videos. This is my entire collection -- laughable, really. Just three books: Off-Trail in Nova Scotia

(1956) by Will R. Bird, Folklore from Nova Scotia (1931) by Arthur H. Fauset and a children's guide to Indian legends in Canadian literature (published in the late 1980's). The only videos I have, besides PBS's and CBS's programs on Bishop are two Japanese TV programs, one on lobsters, the other on the Bay of Fundy, and one of -- of all things -- the Disney movie "Little Kidnapper"! (I know by now that Peter's books in the Agricultural College were used in that movie, but this is almost a joke). You see how remote we are from each other culturally.

This is why I expect great things from you as a Canadian scholar. I'd love to know more about Bishop's favorite sea chanties, about Micmac legends, about Great Village family histories, the villagers' tastes in literature or art, their favorite recipes and pastimes, medicines, yard goods, price lists of popular commodities and novelties in the general stores, or gossip, proverbs, and the native usage of language: all such things of Nova Scotian and wholly Atlantic sea-bound characters. You said you have just finished writing an archival guide to Bishop in Nova Scotia. I am anxiously waiting for its publication. On the other hand, when I heard that you were going to Cancún for a symposium on "Woman Poets of the Americas" and will be meeting Margaret Dickie and Susan McCabe there, I remembered that Canadians and Americans share with Mexico a vast continent "North", next to another vast continent "South", with Brazil in its center. The land is continuous. However, the land lies in water. And, remember these lines in "The Map"?

Are they assigned, or can the countries pick
their colors?

she is talking it is hopeless to try to correct her -- but I must tell her the only real New Englander was my Bishop Grandma, who was pretty [...] helpless -- it [the power of recovery] must be my English Tory ancestry, I think." (4 Jan., 1968, *Ibid.*, p. 222).

All these quoted remarks reflect Bishop's situation, feelings, and attitude concerning madness. Really, since early childhood, "deaths, deaths, sicknesses" haunted her life, and these burdens, too heavy for one woman's life, make people see more tragedy than happiness in Bishop's life. So recent biographies tend to portray a darker Bishop, including even Millier's fine work. But was she that morose? Helped by her "New England" blood, did she live the afterlife of Crusoe, sulking over the past as a descendant of Puritans, like her friend Robert Lowell? Heavens, no! I don't believe that's how she was -- or at least that's not the whole story. Listen to the teasing tone in the last quote given. She was only 'half' New Englander. The other 'half' was Nova Scotian, a sea-bred soul, a wholly Atlantic character: a short elderly lady looking somewhat like her cousin, Phyllis. (When I said this to Phyllis, she smiled and said, "Yes, my mother, too. We've lots of family resemblance".) Bishop's own pride in her "English Tory ancestry" reminds me of the words George Orwell used to describe a desirable human character: "humane, comely, decent". And there are other examples of her sense of humour: "No, I'm only crying in English," she assured her Brazilian friend who was upset to see her in tears (a memory recorded by late James Merrill) and then, "my mother was too early a case, historically" -- the dry, subtle humor of these remarks always makes me smile. And this humor is observed by almost everyone interviewed in the book

Remembering Elizabeth Bishop (edited by Brazeau & Fountain).

Suddenly I thought of the French word 'Comédie', which originally stood for both comedy and tragedy. Life's like that: Bishop's instinct is to awaken us to this simple, ordinary fact. I hope we get used to seeing madness in a light fair enough so that we can stop over-dramatizing it. There should be a sane approach to insanity in biographies about her, where her brightness and darkness are balanced.

I bring up this sunny image of Bishop, remembering the ending of David Kalstone's Becoming a Poet. I love that book most among the books on Bishop. Some of my friends feel the same way. With the growth of the Bishop phenomenon, his book has, admittedly, become "old". People know more and more facts about Bishop now. What, then, makes this book survive, and continue to fascinate even well-informed readers? It is the sunny essence, I believe, in his portrait of Bishop. Kalstone might, on occasion, be mistaken factually and historically but he treated Bishop accurately and sensitively enough to capture this essence. I only hope that present and future writers on Bishop will not lose sight of this essential light.

Four Homages

Touching in Detail: A Glosa for Elizabeth Bishop

by John Reibetanz

*I never knew him. We both knew this place,
apparently, this literal small backwater,
looked at it long enough to memorize it,
our years apart. How strange. And it's still loved.*

Elizabeth Bishop: Poem

I never knew *you*, never even met you
(although--who knows--we might have shared the same
subway car once in Brooklyn, strangers: you
paying a visit on Miss Moore, and me
a kid riding home from a visit to the zoo,
both of us going to sleep that night graced
with visions of exotic animals),
but when I think of you, the sight of *him*
comes into mind. Although I see his face,
I never knew him. We both knew this place.

and loved it--he, because he'd spent his childhood
running among the trees in the old orchard
(ramshackle even then, worm-eaten apples
dropping forgottenly into the tall grass)
and I, because I'd never known such peace,
lulled in my cradle by the ceaseless clatter
of wheels along the elevated tracks
running outside the living-room window
of our walkup third-floor cold-water flat.
Apparently, this literal small backwater

(its well tapping a spring that fed a nameless
rill that itself flowed to the widely unknown
Coates Creek) gave us sufficient common ground
to raise a rare grin on his taciturn
face-- you would know its like from your childhood
in Nova Scotia: poor soil to grow smiles in--
the night he first walked me around the fencelines
and I picked up one of the worthless windfalls
and polished it. He, seeing I prized it,
looked at it long enough to memorize it

and, through the grin that broke out, said "I must
have picked a great grandparent of that apple
when you were far-off as a speck of dust
up there among the stars." Yet, that detail
brought us together: it was where we touched,
although we met just once before he moved
away. And you? I see him when I think of you
because your art is also a prized windfall
you--dust now, exotic--touch me through, over
our years apart. How strange. And it's still loved.

Service

by Richard Outram

Guess what (no prizes)? No, not that there is no Nobodaddy, honing Old Testament dirty tricks to perfection in solitude, lurking behind or within the massive tumid organ which in skilled hands can almost bring one to believe in Bach: but He never was, was He? Well, we knew this all along, of course; but it passed, oftentimes, for a necessary fiction.

And, that the stark light that floods through the blood-stained glass to splatter the ogive with colour beyond the wildest dreams (so we are told: how do they *know*?) of lap-dogs, falls, to employ an archaic verb, from the only sun, our very own daystar, to which we are all hopelessly indentured, is common knowledge. They teach it in school.

And it's not that at six o'clock no Mummy and Daddy will take you home again because you're tired little of being bullied by big girls who can get you down with a knee on your chest and give you a knuckle head-rub and a wrist burn and, when at last you cry, jeer 'Sissy!' or 'Cowardly Custard!' Because when they both died you knew it. It was explicit. Like sex. Just as natural.

And it's not (*Sweet Jesus!*) even the evident fact at three AM that there but for the Goddess of Grace it could be you in the cage framed small to ensure that you can't turn, kept in your own squitter and total darkness and fed slop, weak as a veal calf (that can't mind): a house-guest of Pol Pot.

No, as a matter of fact, it's good news. The answer, I mean. Well, it's only that, even if with much ado we were corrupted, and made to learn the dirty devices of this world, somebody loves us all. No, not the Esso folk who for profit kowtow to an over-all black translucency, to darkness visible. No, it's somebody like (there was nobody like) Elizabeth Bishop. And that, if on a good day we are all weighed and found wanting, she still loves somehow undeserving us. So, what else is new?

A Sensible Horizon: For E.B.

by Peter Sanger

("The *sensible* horizon is that circle of the heavens whose plane touches the earth at the spectator." Bowditch: *Practical Navigator*.)

Your friend rang up from Florida
as if you might be here,
escaping the death which fetches us
together by flying back
to late imperial Canada.

Like you I trust the relative
where secrets can be told,
Boomer, Bulmer, Bowers, spy-glass
eye-glass Hutchinsons
who gather and divide

those things which are and those which had
to be. Inside the double
rivers of a dream you saw that
accurate tautology split
through your rooted heart

and carry racing images
of all two rivers shut
inside themselves of consummate
reflection, continuing
insistently as art.

Which family really was your own?
North turned to south
the farther north you went. I think
of where you said you should
be buried, some four miles south

of a house you often visited,
some seventy north miles,
one watershed away from obvious Great Village:
the old, abandoned
graveyard at The Falls

where frost breaks every marker
into alphabet, and a shallow
river cutting down one side
flutters white capes of ice
on all three seasons of the year.

I've also watched such rivers flowing,
depthlessly purged of static
recollection, expelling all but light,
resolved like you to one uncertain element,
chillingly dark, anciently unfree.

Poor Bird: A Glosa

by P.K. Page

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

Elizabeth Bishop: Sandpiper

From birth, from the first astonishing moment
when he pecked his way out of the shell, pure fluff,
he was looking for something -- warmth, food, love
or light, or darkness -- we are all the same stuff,
all have the same needs: to be one of the flock
or to stand apart, a singular fledgling.
So the search began -- the endless search
that leads him onward -- a vocation
year in, year out, morning to evening
looking for something, something, something.

Nothing will stop him. Although distracted
by nest-building, eggs, high winds, high tides
and too short a life-span for him to plan
an intelligent search -- still, on he goes
with his delicate legs and spillikin feet
and the wish to know what he's almost guessed.
Can't leave it alone, that stretch of sand.
Thinks himself Seurat (pointilliste)
or a molecular physicist.
Poor bird, he is obsessed!

And just because he has not yet found
what he doesn't know he is searching for
is not a sign he's off the track.
His track is the sedge, the sand, the suck
of the undertow, the line of shells.
Nor would he have it another way.
And yet -- the nag -- is there something else?
Something more, perhaps, or something less.
And though he examine them, day after day
the millions of grains are black, white, tan and gray.

But occasionally, when he least expects it,
in the glass of a wave a painted fish
like a work of art across his sight
reminds him of something he doesn't know
that he has been seeking his whole long life --
something that may not even exist!
Poor bird, indeed! Poor dazed creature!
Yet when his eye is sharp and sideways seeing
oh, *then* the quotidian unexceptional sand is
mixed with quartz grains, rose and amethyst.

publication, the American *Elizabeth Bishop Bulletin*, members of the Nova Scotia Society have been overwhelmed by the number of events and activities involving Bishop during the last six months.

Much of the Society's attention was directed to preparing for, running and putting-things-back-together-after the Elizabeth Bishop Celebration Day held in Great Village on June 10, 1995. Dr. Travisano has published a lengthy, full, very generous account of the Day in *The Elizabeth Bishop Bulletin* (4 (1-2), Winter 1995) which it would be redundant to try to emulate here. The Elizabeth Bishop Society of Nova Scotia was honoured by Dr. Travisano's presence and the superb Memorial Lecture, "Expulsion from Paradise: Elizabeth Bishop, 1927-1957," which he delivered in the afternoon in St. James United Church, the church of the hide-and-seek buttresses opposite the house of Bishop's Bulmer grandparents. Dr. Travisano's lecture has been published by the Society and, as indicated at the end of this Newsletter, is still available. It contains information not yet public elsewhere. The Society was also honoured and delighted by the presence of many visitors who became friends during the day's events and at an evening reception held in the home of Alan and Lois Bray, in particular Margaret Dickie, Susan McCabe, Michiru Oguchi, Douglas Lochhead, Diane Brushett and Ted Colson.

At a Society general meeting held on June 10, Alan Bray reluctantly announced his resignation as President. Members present unanimously passed a vote of thanks for his tireless working helping to found the Society, establish it on a firm footing and promote its activities. The Society's new President is Angus Chisholm, a resident of

Great Village and a member of the business community in nearby Truro.

Sandra Barry, the Nova Scotian Bishop scholar, has been employed by the Society to catalogue the material relating to Bishop presently held in Nova Scotia (which mainly consists of the Bulmer-Bowers-Hutchinson-Sutherland Family Fonds owned by Bishop's first cousin, Mrs. Phyllis Sutherland). She has completed work, but for the final, editing polish, on her nearly 200 page finding-guide. In addition to descriptive lists of books, documents, photographs, letters and artifacts, the guide contains a wealth of genealogical detail, family history, reviews of literature and critical analysis. The Society plans to subsidize trade publication of Sandra's work as soon as possible. Preliminary negotiations to do so have begun with Lancelot Press in Hantsport, Nova Scotia.

Membership in the Elizabeth Bishop Society of Nova Scotia is available for \$8.00 per year or \$20.00 for three years (Canadian funds). Either membership entitles the holder to take full voting part in the Society's deliberations and to receive the Newsletter for free.

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Contributions to the Newsletter, or suggestions for its contents are most welcome. Please contact Ms. Murphy about either.