

Elizabeth Bishop Society of Nova Scotia

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

Volume 6, Issue 1

NEWSLETTER

Spring, 1999

Editorial

Not Bishop's "cold spring" at all this year in Nova Scotia; the leaves did not wait; the trees only barely hesitated: grass and flowers and weeds are weeks ahead of their usual seasonal growth.

And it is dry. Country people with crock wells shake their heads and say how dry it is, and this summer will be drier than last summer, yes (with that indrawn, withdrawn breath like the sudden shudder of back-draught after a gust of wind shakes the poplar leaves).

All that is to suggest that things change, while the cycles of art, nature and human life continue, with various gains and losses.

Bishop's poem "A Cold Spring" was written for her dear friend, Jane Dewey, while Bishop was staying in Dewey's house in Maryland during her absence. Like so many of Bishop's poems, therefore, it refers to a relationship between herself and someone she knew. The details of such poems can be read as oblique homage. In other words, such poems exit from themselves. They are not self-sufficient. Even at their saddest, they refer us back into our lives, not away from them.

These thoughts occur as The Elizabeth Bishop Society of Nova Scotia prepares to say a goodbye of sorts to Alan and Lois Bray. Both were founding members of the Society. Alan was its first President, Lois, its first Treasurer. Lois also worked in the hundreds of extra

ways only those who have been part of any volunteer organization can fully value.

Alan and Lois have moved from their house in Great Village, which so many Bishop scholars and visitors will always remember as a place of happiness and hospitality, to a new home in Dartmouth, Nova Scotia. They will remain active members of the Society, but their presence in Great Village will be missed, for it played a very large part in the Society's creation and success. With their life in Great Village, the Brays added something memorable for many of us to the open, generous contexts of Bishop's art.

Peter Sanger

News and Information

The E.B.N.S. held an ordinary meeting of the Society's officers and directors on March 20, 1999. The main business of the meeting was to discuss funding for a feature length film on Elizabeth Bishop's background in Nova Scotia and her life-long involvement with the province. The script of the proposed film has been written by Sandra Barry. Don Duchesne, a Nova Scotian director and producer, is to handle the film's production. Discussion at the meeting focused upon whether the EBNS would submit an application for a grant to help finance the film to the Millennium Fund, which has been set up by the Canadian federal government to support projects which

celebrate the continuance of Canada into the second millenium. A subcommittee, consisting of Peter Sanger and Angus Chisholm, was appointed to find out more details concerning the application and make recommendations at the next meeting of the Society.

In preparation for the Annual General Meeting of the Society to be held on June 5 in the Legion Hall of Great Village, a Nominations Committee was appointed. Its members are Ann Marie Duggan and Sandra Barry.

Lastly, the Society has learned, with deep regret, of the death of Dr. Margaret Dickie, the Helen S. Lanier Distinguished Professor of English at the University of Georgia, on January 11, 1999. Dr. Dickie visited Great Village during the Elizabeth Bishop Day celebration held in June, 1995. She made many friends who had hoped to see her again. She enlivened and encouraged all those who admire Bishop's work and used the record of her own accomplishments to help make their voices heard.

That Primary Primer: Some Pages from Bishop's Childhood

by Peter Sanger

The remaining pages of this *Newsletter* reproduce some of the pages of a copy of a primer which is the same as the one which Bishop used when she attended primary class in the Great Village School between 1916 and 1917. The primer is identifiable because of two passages in Bishop's memoir, "Primer Class" (*The Collected Prose*, Edited and introduced by Robert Giroux, Farrar, Straus, Giroux, New York, 1984, pp. 5 and 10 respectively.) The first reads:

By the time school started, I could read almost all my primer printed in both handwriting and type, and I loved every word. First as a frontispiece, it had the flag in full color, with "One Flag, One King, One Crown" under it. I coloured in the black-and-white illustrations that looked old-fashioned, even to me...

The second passage reads:

I already knew by heart "The Gingerbread Boy" and "Henny Penny," in my primer, and had turned against them.

As the following pages prove, Bishop's memory for detail in this instance (as in so many others) was notably exact. She misremembered only the frontispiece motto, which reads in the original: "One Flag One Fleet One Throne." She did, indeed, correctly remember the Union Jack as coloured; those colours cannot, unfortunately, be reproduced.

The pages are offered here as documents. Elsewhere, in a paper presented to the Acadia University Bishop Symposium in September, 1998, I have tried to suggest some of the effects Bishop's childhood reading had upon her work. That paper will appear in the Symposium Proceedings. At the moment, there is room for only two short comments. The first is that the mixture of text and illustration in the primer pages resembles illuminated texts Bishop made for several of her friends. (I suspect, in fact, that her mature painting style owed much to a very sophisticated recollection of her childhood art training.) My second comment is that the

methods of language education used in the primer, in particular, the isolation of simple words by listing them or by placing them in very basic syntactical contexts, helped Bishop form certain characteristics of her poetic style. Primer words are charged with multiple meanings and have many narrative possibilities because of their very lack of explicative context. Something similar happens in many of Bishop's poems, as any number of critical commentaries attest.

The original primer from which the following copies were made is held by The Little White School House Museum in Truro, Nova Scotia. I am grateful to the museum's curator, Mr. Thomas Acker, for his help and the generous courtesy of an extended loan period. The primer bears marks of honourable usage. As will be seen, words have been underlined, sometimes perhaps to denote the sing-song emphasis of repetitious *ictus* as children read together aloud and their voices were heard outside, in the silent playground, by someone who had stopped to listen.

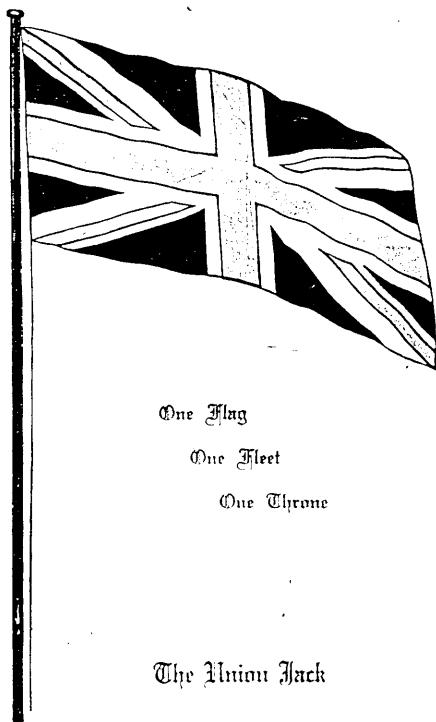
Membership in the Elizabeth Bishop Society of Nova Scotia is available for \$8 per year or \$20 for three years (Canadian funds). Either membership entitles the holder to take full voting part in the Society's deliberations and to receive the Newsletter for free.

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



THE
 NOVA SCOTIA READERS

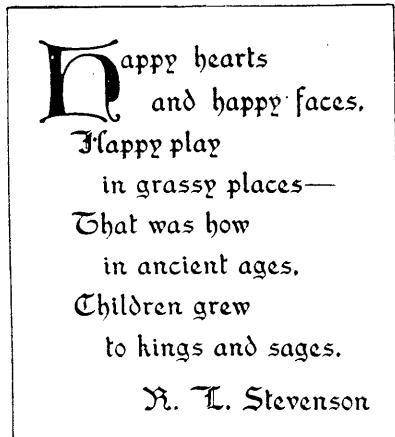
PRIMER

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Entered according to Act of the Parliament of Canada, in the year 1914,
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PRIMER

5



*hop
Sam, hop.
Run and hop, Sam.*

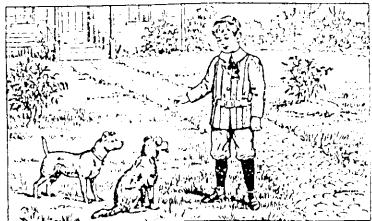


Phonics:—e, a, m.

16

PRIMER

Here is my home.
My little garden is at the back.
I hoe and rake in my garden.
One day I broke my hoe.
I had to get the spade.

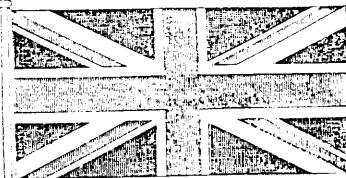


These are my dogs, Dane and Rover.
Here, Dane! Here, Rover!
Rover stole a bone off the table.
He ran to the garden with it.
He dug a hole at the root
of the rose bush.
He put the bone in the hole.
Dane came and dug it up.

Phonics:—e, o.

PRIMER

17



This is our flag.
It is the Union Jack.
There are three crosses on it.
Can you see them?
The flag is red, white, and blue.
The red says: "Be brave!"
The white says: "Be pure!"
The blue says: "Be true!"
Do you like our flag?
I like it best of all the flags.
Can you find another one in
this book?



Phonics:—e, u.

18

PRIMER

(For directions, see Manual.)

Put the slate in the bag.
 Put five books under the table.
 Put your hand on the paper.

Did you ever see a stove?
 Did you ever get a letter?
 Did you ever find a knife?

Name nine trees.
 Make a line with a ruler.
 Find a copper on my desk.

Have you ever made a fire?
 Have you ever seen a silver cup?
 Have you ever made paste?

Who can make seven dots?
 Who can see something white?
 Who has on something blue?
 Who has a sister or a brother?

Phonics:—v, cr.

20

PRIMER



Look at the bird
 by the bench.
 Baby wants it.
 He has a pinch
 of salt to put
 on its tail.

Can he catch it that way?



Have you a ball, Fred?
 Yes, but it is a small one.
 Where is it?
 It is on the chair in the hall.
 Get it and let us have a game.
 Pitch it against the wall.
 Here, Watch! Catch it as it falls.

Phonics:—ch, tch, u before l.

PRIMER

19



This little pig went to market.
 This little pig stayed at home.
 This little pig had roast beef.
 This little pig had none.
 This little pig said:
 "Wee, wee,"
 All the way home.



Rain, rain, go away,
 Come again some other day,
 Little Tommy wants to play
 In the meadow on the hay.
 It is too wet to play in the
 meadow to-day.
 Ray will play train with him in
 the barn.

Phonics:—w, wa, ay, ai.

PRIMER

21

Good-day, Mrs. Cow!
 Old Jack and I have come down
 to the meadow for you.
 He will not growl nor jump at you.
 What have you in your mouth?
 You seem to chew all day.



I see a big black cloud.
 There will soon be a shower.
 Now, old cow, just get up and
 come with us.
 We want a big jug of milk
 for our supper.

Phonics:—j, ow, ou.

30

PRIMER

THE LITTLE RED HEN

The little red hen found a grain of wheat.

"Who will plant this grain?" said the hen.

"Not I," said the goose.

"Then, I will," said the little hen, and she planted the grain.

"Who will water the grain?" said the little red hen.

"Not I," said the goose.

"Not I," said the cat.

"Not I," said the dog.

"I will, then," said the little red hen, and she watered it.

When the wheat was ripe, the little hen said: "Who will grind this wheat?"

"Not I," said the goose.



48

PRIMER

THE STORY OF HENNY PENNY

Henny Penny was walking in a garden. A cherry fell on her head, with a thud.

"The sky is falling," said Henny Penny, "I must run and tell the King."

As she ran, she met a Rooster, who said: "Where are you going, Henny Penny?"



And she cried: "Oh, Rooster Pooster! the sky is falling, and I am going to tell the King."

"I will go, too," said Rooster Pooster.

So they ran and ran till they met a Turkey.

"Oh, Turkey Lurkey!"



PRIMER

31

"Not I," said the cat.

"Not I," said the dog.

"Then, I will grind the wheat," said the hen, and she did it.



"Who will make this flour into cakes?" said the little red hen.

"Not I," said the goose.

"Not I," said the cat.

"Not I," said the dog.

"Then, I will," said the hen, and she baked the cakes.

"Now, who will eat these cakes?" said the hen.

"I will," said the goose.

"I will," said the cat.

"I will," said the dog.

"No, I will," said the little hen, and she ate all the cakes.

PRIMER

49

said they, "the sky is falling, and we are going to tell the King."

"I will go with you," said Turkey Lurkey.

So they ran and ran till they met a Fox.

"Oh, Fox Lox!" said they, "the sky is falling, and we are going to tell the King."

And the Fox said: "Come with me Henny Penny, Rooster Pooster, and Turkey Lurkey. I will show you the way to the King's house."

But they said: "Oh, no; Fox Lox, we know you. We will not go with you."

So they ran and ran, but they never found the King's house.

And the King never knew the sky was falling.



56

PRIMER



OLD MOTHER HUBBARD

Old Mother Hubbard
Went to the cupboard
To get her poor dog a bone ;
But when she came there,
The cupboard was bare,
And so the poor dog had none.

She went to the hatter's
To buy him a hat ;
But when she came back,
He was feeding the cat.



58

PRIMER

A SECRET

We have a secret, just we three,
The robin, and I, and the sweet
cherry tree ;
The bird told the tree, and the tree
told me,
And nobody knows it but just we
three.
But, of course, the robin knows it
best,
Because she built the—I shan't tell
the rest ;
And laid the four little—somethings
in it—
I am afraid I shall tell it every
minute.



PRIMER

57



She went to the tailor's
To buy him a coat ;
But when she came back,
He was riding a goat.

The dame made a curtsy,
The dog made a bow ;
The dame said : " Your servant,"
The dog said : " Bow-wow."



PRIMER

59

There was once
a man who had a
goose. She laid
an egg every day.
One day she laid
a golden egg.



The man went
to town and sold
the egg. Next day the goose laid
another golden egg.

" Wife," said the man, " we shall
not be poor any more."

Every day he found a golden egg
and sold it. Soon he was not con-
tent with this.

" Wife," said he, " I shall kill this
goose and get all the eggs at once."

So he killed her, but he found no
golden eggs. The greedy man
would not let well enough alone.

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PRIMER

THE GINGERBREAD BOY

Once there was a little old man, and a little old woman. They lived in a little old house.

The old woman made gingerbread cakes.

One day she made a cake in the shape of a boy. She put it into the oven to bake.



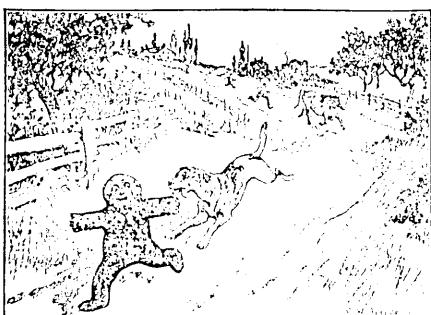
When she opened the oven door, out jumped the Gingerbread Boy and away he ran.

The little old man ran after him, but he could not catch him.

The Gingerbread Boy met a big man on the road. He said: "I

64

PRIMER



the Gingerbread Boy. He began to eat him.

The Gingerbread Boy said :

" Oh, dear ! my legs are gone !
Oh, dear ! my arms are gone !
Oh, dear ! my body is gone !
Oh, dear ! I am all gone ! "

And he never spoke again.

Forget and forgive,

East, west, home is best.

PRIMER

63

have run away from the little old woman. I can run away from you, too, so I can."

The big man ran after him, but he could not catch him.

The Gingerbread Boy met a cow. He said : " I have run away from a little old woman and a big man. I can run away from you, too. Yes, I can."

The cow ran after him, but she could not catch him.

Soon the Gingerbread Boy met a dog. He said : " I have run away from a little old woman, a big man, and a cow. I can run away from you, too. Yes, I can."

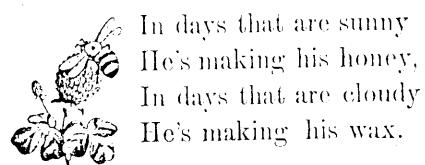
Then the dog ran after him. The dog ran very fast and caught

PRIMER

65

THE BEE

Buzz ! Buzz ! This is the song of the bee,
His legs are of yellow, a jolly good fellow,
And yet a great worker is he.



In days that are sunny
He's making his honey,
In days that are cloudy
He's making his wax.

Bees don't care
about the snow ;
I can tell you why
that's so ;
Once I caught
a little bee
Who was much too warm
for me.



66

PRIMER



You may hear me call,
but no one has ever seen me.
I fly kites for boys.
I play with the leaves.
I scatter the seeds of plants.
I rock the bird in her nest.
I move clouds across the sky.
 as ships on the sea.
 Who am I ?
 Wind blow on the hilltop ;
 Little wind blow down the plain.
Little wind blow up the sunshine ;
 Little wind blow off the rain.

92

PRIMER



This little Indian boy lived in a wigwam with his grandmother, Nokomis. Have you ever seen a wigwam? Let me tell you where this wigwam was.

By the shining Big-Sea-Water,
Stood the wigwam of Nokomis.
Dark behind it rose the forest,
Bright before it beat the water,
Beat the clear and sunny water,
Beat the shining Big-Sea-Water.

PRIMER

67

THE NORTH WIND DOTII BLOW

The north wind doth blow,
And we shall have snow,
And what will the robin do then?
 Poor thing!

He will sit in the barn,
And keep himself warm,
And hide his head under his wing,
 Poor thing!

The north wind doth blow,
And we shall have snow,
And what will the honey-bee do?
 Poor thing!

In his hive he will stay,
Till the snow's gone away,
And then he'll come out in the
 spring,
 Poor thing!

PRIMER

93

Old Nokomis made him a little cradle. In it she put a bed of moss and rushes. When he cried, she used to say: "Hush! the bear will get thee!"

The boy learned the names of the birds. He learned how they built their nests in summer. He found where they hid themselves in winter. He learned how to talk with them. He called them his chickens.

He learned—

Where the squirrels hid their acorns,
How the reindeer ran so swiftly,
Why the rabbit was so timid.

He talked with them and called them his brothers. He learned their names and all their secrets.

94

PRIMER

When he grew older, he was given a bow and arrows. He went into the woods, but he did not shoot the birds, his chickens. He did not shoot the squirrels or the rabbits, his brothers.

He hid in the bushes till the red deer came. Then he shot an arrow and the deer fell dead. He carried it home to his grandmother. She made a feast, and everybody came and praised the boy.

Humpty, Dumpty, dickery dan,
Sing hey, sing ho !

for the gingerbread man!
With his smile so sweet,
and his form so neat,
And his gingerbread shoes
on his gingerbread feet.

A a N n

B b O o

C c P p

D d Q q

E e R r

F f S s

G g T t

H h U u

I i V v

J j W w

K k X x

L l Y y

M m Z z

A a N n
B b O o
C c P p
D d Q q
E e R r
F f S s
G g T t
H h U u
I i V v
J j W w
K k X x
L l Y y
M m Z z

PRIMER

95

EVENING HYMN

Now the day is over,
Night is drawing nigh,
Shadows of the evening
Steal across the sky.

Now the darkness gathers,
Stars begin to peep ;
Birds, and beasts, and flowers
Soon will be asleep.

Through the lonely darkness,
May the angels spread
Their white wings above me,
Watching round my head.

When the morn awakens,
Then may I arise,
Pure, and fresh, and sinless,
In God's holy eyes.

**Elizabeth Bishop: An Archival Guide
to Her life in Nova Scotia****by Sandra Barry**

Published by The Elizabeth Bishop Society of Nova Scotia, 1996, 226 p, \$25.00 (no GST), postage included.

The EBSNS is proud to offer this description and analysis of the Bishop and Bishop-related archival material which is held in institutions in Nova Scotia.

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