

# ***Elizabeth Bishop Society of Nova Scotia***

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

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NEWSLETTER

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## ***Editorial***

Yes, this is the autumn, 1998 *Newsletter*. Here are my apologies for the delay. Like a number of other people, I suspect, I let everything else drop while involved with the Bishop Symposium held at Acadia University last September. Since the Symposium, everything which was dropped has had to be picked up, dusted off and, in some cases, patiently repaired.

For the Elizabeth Bishop Society of Nova Scotia the Symposium was the culmination of activity which began nearly six years ago. There have been many other important accomplishments for the Society. For example, among them are the incorporation of the Society in 1994; the sponsorship and publication of Thomas Travisano's Bishop Memorial Lecture, "Expulsion from Paradise: Elizabeth Bishop, 1927 - 1957" in 1995; the publication of Sandra Barry's *Elizabeth Bishop: An Archival Guide* in 1996; and, of course, the acquisition by the Province of Nova Scotia in 1997 of the Bishop archival material now on deposit at Acadia University's Vaughan Memorial Library. But the Acadia Symposium held between September 24-29, 1998 differs from these in being an occasion of radical *exchange* when many scholars, drawn from many different places were able not only to say what they knew and thought about Bishop but also to confirm, refine and enliven their knowledge and opinions within the context of an actually experienced Nova Scotia, one of Bishop's several homes, which has, as she knew, its own very resistant and

subtle definitions, traditions and possibilities. If there were times when some of the presenters of papers felt beleaguered by responses based upon accurate local history, sociology and psychology, that was surely what Bishop herself would have expected and been delighted by. She believed in particular detail.

That belief was echoed by Anne Stevenson in remarks she was invited to make at the Symposium's conclusion. Stevenson spoke of the pleasure she took in the presentation of "information" that was new to her and warned against "talking the life out of poetry." At one point, as she told us, she "couldn't sit any longer among the words" and went walking in the dyked marsh fields which are within close sight of the Acadia's campus buildings and which are also so very similar to the dyked hayfields around Great Village.

As Stevenson noted: "One has to be very careful not to leave text far behind." That admonition provides a sufficient, reasonable and honourable guide for the Society's continuing existence and development. Perhaps it also helps answer questions which Gary Fountain (who, together with Stevenson and Jeffery Donaldson, was a member of the concluding panel) asked of the "hardy band of Nova Scotians" present at the Symposium and, by extension, of the other Canadians present: What does Bishop mean to you? How does that meaning shape you? Truth, justice, the value, dignity and honour of great poetry -- there are some very old-fashioned words which could figure in a reply to these

questions, words we may well, occasionally, need when walking on Nova Scotian dykeland trying to reclaim and recuperate a language almost adequate for our needs.

## **News and Information**

### ***Annual General Meeting***

The EBSNS held its Annual General Meeting on June 6, 1998. Much of the business of the meeting centred upon arrangements for the Acadia Symposium to be held in September and in particular upon the proposed visit by some Symposium participants to Great Village after the Symposium ended.

EBSNS officers for 1998-1999 were nominated and elected. They are: President, Peter Sanger; Treasurer, Angus Chisholm; Secretary, Art Chisholm; Vice President, Donna Smyth; Directors, Sandra Barry, Anne Marie Duggan, Meredith Layton, Lois Bray, Joy Graham and Terry White. Signing Officers are Angus and Art Chisholm and Alan Bray.

The Society was deeply saddened to learn of the passing of one of its honorary members, Miriam Sutherland. At the Annual General Meeting arrangements were made for a donation to the Special Olympics Fund to be given in her name.

At the end of the meeting, a raffle draw for the seriagraph print of Great Village donated by artist, Joy Laking, took place. The winner was Sandra Barry.

### ***The Society At Home***

On Monday, September 28, the EBSNS was delighted to introduce Great Village to a number of symposium participants who had chosen to spend an extra day in Nova Scotia. On Sunday night, they lodged in Truro, after having travelled by mini-bus through the countryside from Wolfville, with stops at Grand Pré (setting for Longfellow's "Evangeline" and site of the eighteenth century New England settlers' Covenanters Church); at Maitland (where they visited the home of W.D. Lawrence, a nineteenth century shipbuilder); and at The Little White Schoolhouse Museum in Truro, where (thanks to curator, Tom Acker) they were able to examine the kind of texts and school environment Bishop experienced as a primer class student. After touring the Village on Monday morning (with special visits to Bishop's childhood home, thanks to its owner, Paul Tingley, and to the Great Village School) the visitors were entertained by the EBSNS at the home of the Society's present Treasurer and former President, Angus Chisholm, and his wife, June. It was a very happy occasion for all those present, recalling for many one of Gary Fountain's remarks during his summing up of the Symposium: "I now feel myself among a group of friends."

### ***Symposium Proceedings***

A committee consisting of Gwen Davies, Sandra Barry and Peter Sanger is presently working on the task of collecting, selecting and editing papers presented at the Acadia Symposium for publication. The Proceedings will appear as soon as possible.

A Note on the Arts of the  
Artichoke in Bishop's  
"The End of March"

by  
Mary McLachlan-Sanger

Let us consider greenness, artichokes and bicarbonate of soda as they appear in these lines from "The End of March": *my cryptodream house, that crooked box/set up on pilings, shingled green,/ a sort of artichoke of a house, but greener/(boiled with bicarbonate of soda?)...*

It is interesting that Bishop chose the term *bicarbonate of soda*, rather than the more commonly used kitchen term, "baking soda." *Bicarbonate of soda* immediately calls to mind a medicinal purpose, and it is this use that is cited first in the *Larousse Gastronomique*: "In medicine, this is used as an alkali and antacid." This, of course, is the bicarbonate of soda used to settle a digestive system over-burdened with food and drink. In this context one thinks of the over-indulgence in alcohol that frequently makes its way into discussions of Bishop's life and work and which causes the victim to turn a sickly, bilious *green*.

No doubt Bishop expected the reader of her poem to make such a connection. But there may be another, more complex allusion at work as well, one which clarifies and exemplifies the meanings of the poem even more profoundly. *Larousse* continues on the subject: "In cooking it [bicarbonate of soda] is used to soften the water used for cooking." What about this matter of actually cooking vegetables in bicarbonate of soda, or more aptly in this situation, baking soda? After all, Bishop herself suggests that an artichoke be

boiled in it.

An experiment seems in order here, so we now select the very freshest, the most unblemished artichokes available to us. At their very best, their colour is a soft, dun, grey-olive green. We divide our artichokes between two pots. One batch we cook in the traditional manner, acidulating the water with lemon juice. The other batch we cook, following Bishop's suggestion, in water softened with a generous spoonful of *bicarbonate of soda*, that is, baking soda.

From the acidulated water we remove artichokes whose original olive dun has deepened in colour pleasingly. But in the second pot, the baking soda pot, a magical transformation has taken place. Here are artichokes as they never were. They are astonishingly vivid, a bright, unnatural, dyed green, a stubborn green capable of maintaining its brightness for many days.

Cooks of Bishop's generation (and she was an accomplished one) sometimes used the baking soda trick to preserve the original bright colour of green vegetables during cooking. However, in the case of artichokes, that colour is not just preserved, it is also completely changed from dun to green. Unfortunately, the change doesn't stop with the colour. As our experiment further shows, the desirable and delicious, slightly resistant texture of the edible parts of the artichoke is destroyed. What becomes a sight to behold also becomes an unpalatable, soggy, quite inedible disaster.

There is authority to explain our disaster. Rombauer and Becker in *The Joy of Cooking* note: "Colour should never be maintained by the addition of baking soda for this method not only destroys nutrient values but also makes

the vegetables mushy in texture." It was perhaps knowledge of this fact that lessened the popularity of the method. But our own knowledge of the results of its use, obtained experimentally, permit a clearer picture of the impossible green Bishop envisioned for her proto *crypto-dream-house*. That the baking soda process produces an artichoke of such intense colour while at the same time spoiling its texture so that it becomes inedible may well be also, like so many Bishop details, an entirely different story for an entirely different time.

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### "Looking for something, something, something": The Acadia Symposium

by Jeffery Donaldson

It may not be hard to imagine what Elizabeth Bishop would make of all the conferences on her work that have cropped up on the map in the past couple of years, the search for poetic origins bearing the giddy Bishop scholar to Key West in Florida, Great Village and Wolfville in Nova Scotia, Worcester in Massachusetts, and soon this spring to Ouro Preto in Brazil. Bishop would probably have stared and stared. The conference names run

out past the university towns like interpretations that too far exceed their cause. But if she were going to smile somehow upon all these celebratory gatherings -- if only upon the idea of them alone -- perhaps it would be because of the ways in which all her converging and diverging readers have come together into a watery dazzling dialectic. As we speakers come up one after the other to the podium we make a kind of metaphoric tapestry or Cornell Box. Bishop was a great lover of Cornell Boxes, those framed miniature containers of keepsakes, curios and memorabilia pasted together in whimsical and revealing juxtapositions. I thought of us there, in Acadia's interior spaces, like so many magazine cut-outs stuck together in serendipitous triplets and pairs.

But now, in February, the Thomas Raddall Symposium on " 'Division of the Heart': Elizabeth Bishop's Art of Place and Memory," amply and generously hosted by Wolfville's Acadia University in late September of last year, fades itself into memory. What one ends up doing -- to keep those clear days fresh in mind -- is building little mnemonic Cornell Boxes of one's own, reshuffling the bright particulars into other patterns -- personal and retrospective, discerned from a distance -- to hand on collaterally to Bishop lovers who will look at them sometimes, or not bother to. I think of the traveller who would bring back an empty wasp's nest in order to save in its original clarity a brief time in a far-away place, closer to home in the end (both the nest and the place) than any actual bed she or he might travel back to.

If geography were altogether at the heart of the matter, Acadia's gentle and sloping campus gave us a number of views, the staked out

higher ground of the glassy Wheelock lounge, or the labyrinthine interiors of the brickly Beveridge Arts Centre. One thing was sure as we climbed up and down the hill, we were moving about at the centre of the poetry's concern. Place and memory were the watchwords that returned us time and again to the asking voice at the heart of Bishop's verse: where is it we come from? what do we come out of? where do we belong? These are all questions of identity of course. They embody a desire to puzzle out the origins of who we are in relation to our travels in time, our driftings in space. They return us to the child's world of intimate but inscrutable houses, receding family and loved ones, and the adult's world of unique but replaceable geographies and national boundaries: the departures, transgressions and losses that make of all these a bitterly dazzling dialectic.

Our travels come to this: as Bishop tells us in "Santarem," there are places and there are ideas about places. Any revealing meditation on who we are and where we come from would want to start with that. Just so, out of all the juxtapositions of theme and approach that we enjoyed in the Symposium, three patterns of emphasis become clear. We had papers that looked at the contexts of actual place and experience in Bishop's life and work. We had papers that discerned in the poetry's imagery of time and that place a set of articulated or suggested attitudes towards the very meaning of place and memory in the poet's work. And finally, we had papers that theorized on general questions of place and memory, finding analogies for, or embodiments of, those arguments in the details of the poetry. I hope that the snippets and cut-outs that I paste together here will give some impression of the whole tapestry, and the

overall extraordinarily high quality of the contributions made. I hope also I will be forgiven for not discussing all the papers that were presented. Like most of us at the Symposium, I grieved over the necessity for concurrent sessions and could not be in two places at once.

### "It must be Nova Scotia"

It makes sense to start with the argument that -- wherever else our poems come from -- we as their makers come from actual times and actual places, say, from Great Village, or a provincial British colony at war, or a motherless grandparent's house. Many of our speakers focused very effectively on one or another detail of Bishop's personal experience and environment as a way of coming to terms with aspects of the poetry, its style, technique, thematic preoccupation and concern. In the opening address of the conference, Peter Sanger presented details of a copy of the Nova Scotian elementary school primer Bishop recalls in "Primer Class" and of other period volumes of children's nursery rhymes and stories which Bishop owned as a child and which are now part of the Bishop archival material held at Acadia University. Using these, he suggested possible sources for aspects of Bishop's style and sense of place -- the limpid simplicity of her language that feels at once formal and innocent or unpretentious, the sense of a metaphoric pictorial space governed by playful juxtapositions of word and image, her diffident or self-effacing national identification with the British King and flag. Sanger may also have uncovered the earliest example of Bishop's creative art, in a scribbled (and improving) revision made to a word in her copy of Robert Louis Stevenson's

*A Child's Garden of Verses*. Other speakers outlined historical investigations concerning Bishop's connections with the Bulmer-Bowers family. Lilian Falk, for example, in her discussion of the life and career of Bishop's great uncle, George Hutchinson, recontextualized our sense of Bishop's artistic aspirations and self-esteem in relation to Hutchinson's own reputation. She offered a clear picture of the amateur *and* serious artistic and literary environment to which Bishop was exposed in Great Village.

Attendees were also greatly indebted to the carefully choreographed tour through the Nova Scotian Bishop archive in Acadia's Vaughan Memorial Library offered by Sandra Barry in an exhibition she had organized and in her accompanying commentary. Paintings, photographs and artifacts revealed over and over how Bishop remained faithful to, and expressive of, her Nova Scotia heritage. Barry showed us in particular how deeply Bishop's idiom begins in the process itself of remembrance and reconstruction. We were able to confirm this with Anne Shiffrer's consideration of how keepsakes and heirlooms get reorganized into art. Shiffrer showed how something like a cabinet that was restored could recall for Bishop its earlier use and the invisible ties among the family hands through which it had passed. The heirlooms and personal folkart -- as, for instance, the Hutchinson painting in "Poem" -- come to embody communities of stories, or the idea of community itself, thoughts deeply resonant of the important places in Bishop's life and poetry.

Given the acknowledged importance of her Nova Scotian heritage and experiences, one could wonder why Bishop is so silent about it

in her early poems. British poet and critic Anne Stevenson made some very convincing distinctions between the more exclusively aesthetic concerns of the early poems and the intimate engagements with private life in Bishop's later years. Stevenson looked both at how the young Bishop was profoundly stimulated by the intellectual excitement of modernist writing, particularly its promise of a release into a clarifying impersonality, and at how Bishop very likely couldn't bear to be reminded at the time of her family troubles and her institutionalized mother. Events in Bishop's childhood were too painful or threatening to write about at the time, Stevenson argued, and for a long while Bishop avoided thinking of her family for fear that it would drag her out of a made world into a world where she was more vulnerable. We were able to clarify this consideration further after hearing Judith Page's interesting account of the concept of resilience, one that Page brings from her own activity in social work and family counselling, and which she applies to Bishop's work and personality. Resilience points to the ability of an individual to bounce back above a level expected in relation to the traumatic experience. This skill, Page argued, is developed in the early years, where the child learns to make positive dissociations that enable the experiences to be used later in life, once a kind of critical detachment has been achieved. Feelings of alienation, a search for surrogates and for a sense of belonging, a thriving on difficult relationships, an emphasis on intellectual and creative life, independence and tenacity: these characterize the "resilient" character. One can draw one's own conclusions in thinking of Bishop's experiences and personality. It is certainly possible to see correspondence here with Laura Menides' perceptive and original paper on "Tears and

Laughter: Elizabeth Bishop's *Memories of Worcester*." Through close readings of such stories as "The Country Mouse," Menides reminded us not to forget Bishop's use of subtle humour in reconstructing the hard years, how she could bring a kind of comedic existential energy, or tragic joy, to experiences that were difficult and painful at the time.

### "I liked the idea of the place"

In addition to these compelling attempts to reconstruct the personal and environmental influences in Bishop's work, there were meditations during the Bishop Symposium on the poetics of place and memory as embodied and articulated in the poetry itself, its language and imagery. I think first of Gary Fountain's paper, "The Maple Leaf (Forever): Elizabeth Bishop's Poetics of National Identity," in which he offered readings of "The Moose," "Santarem," and "Pink Dog," to look at the "watery, dazzling dialectic" of national identity, the sense of converging and confluent thresholds and national boundaries. Fountain drew upon Homi Bahbah's thoughts on "the unhomeing of the dispossessed," and asked the question of whether Bishop could, or whether anyone can, actually possess a national identity. Then he invited us back to the resilient wasp's nest, the mongrel river boats of "Santarem," the carnival costumes of "Pink Dog," the border crossings of "The Moose," and showed how out of our dualisms we make connections, and out of those connections a sense of universal identity in response to our alienation.

Further addressing the question of formations of cultural identity was Laura Strong's excursus on "the transient poetic subject" in Bishop's "Brazil, January 1, 1502." She

particularly emphasized how the speaker's sense in that poem of national or racial identification shifts as we read, becoming indefinite and transgressive. The speaker first aligns herself with the native women, but then gradually distances herself in an ironizing reversal of perspective. The transient subject, appeared also in Jane Shore's discussion of Bishop's paintings. In her careful and revealing commentary upon the painting "Cabin with Porthole," she noted how the darks under the lights in both the sea and in the cabin itself and the dark pot under the light flowers (everything in dialectical twos) suggest not only a dark underside, but also a certain longing for ballast, if not rootedness itself, in a world of transience and temporary dwelling.

In the course of the Symposium, we saw how the theme of transience and identify can be developed in so many ways. It wasn't far in time, space or conception from Fountain's talk on national borders, margins and thresholds, for example, to Brian Bartlett's presentation on Bishop's coasts and shores, those geographic outreaches that display the untidy nature of our lives. Coastal scenes are sites of human wandering and questioning in Bishop's poetry, and Bartlett's careful reading of the details illuminated our sense of what we do, in Bishop's poetry, at the edge of things when we come, as in "At the Fishhouses," to the ice-cold sea of knowledge beyond us: we test the waters, delineate, observe, speculate, and play. Sara Meyer's talk on maps and mapping in Bishop's work led us to similar considerations. Meyer reminded us that when we use all these geographic images we are talking about imaginative and recreative spaces rather than actual ones, and that in Bishop's figures we are looking at a process not a product, a continual mapping and not a finished map. Such

unfinished spaces also characterized Priscilla Paton's talk on Bishop and "the landscape of memory": feminized "misty" landscapes that calm the traveller into meditation and link the past and present -- think of "The Moose" -- remind us of how Bishop can use geographic spaces as symbols of temporal ones, landscapes that suggest the loss and absence of what we at the same time are travelling through. The neighbouring idea of interior spaces was developed in Marian Bannerman's discussion of voice and place in Bishop's poetry. Bannerman connected voice with the mind's interior spaces of memory, the overheard cry, from "inside," of Aunt Consuelo that turns out also to be the speaker's own. The metaphors of voice, of people speaking and conversing in the mind and in memory, touch on how identity and place are both functions of the sorts of interior conversation that we have with others and ourselves. One could see Patricia Dwyer's piece on interior mappings in "Sestina" tying together several of the themes noted above. Using Gaston Bachelard's wonderful book, *Poetics of Space*, Dwyer found that sentimental notions of where we can abide are dismantled into the indeterminate borders of an imaginative activity.

What we find then in Bishop's poetry are not actual places and times, but imaginative spaces and reconstructions of memory. In those imaginative spaces and memories are fostered every imagination and play of identity, every liberation from anxiety, every anchoring of the mind and heart, however bitterly or joyfully conceived. Bishop's poetic spaces can hardly appear to us as restful oases: we find them in *medias res*, while we are engaged in a mental struggle with the conditions of time, distance, accident and misfortune. Bishop manages

such negotiation with a unique mingling of verisimilitude and recreation, place and the idea of place as became apparent in Neil Besner's perceptive reading of "Santarem," where he reminds us that while Bishop writes close to the facts, she manages by a kind of poetic soft-shoe (sight into sound into sense) to get those facts to speak in many different registers.

### "Rainbow, rainbow, rainbow"

I'm not sure that the papers I'll mention next are sufficiently distinguished from those noted above to warrant my fussing about with a third category. But I feel there were some very interesting papers that looked at broader questions of place and memory, not, that is, trying to illuminate the conditions of place and memory at the centre of Bishop's work, but using the poems to construe theories of place and memory in general. Ross Leckie, for instance, talked about Bishop's poetry in terms of "the American sublime," looking at how gesturings towards either history and politics or the sublime will eventually meet a limit. In the twentieth century, Emersonian notions of the sublime -- the apotheosis of the oversoul -- seem to many of us no longer tenable. What we have instead, for example in Bishop, is a realism that is attenuated by a continual irony that gestures towards and away from the historical, towards and away from the transcendent, never settling in either. Michael Happy's excellently argued distinction between metonymic and metaphoric criticism -- the former positing an order outside the poetry, the latter invoking the counterlogical, hypothetical acts of associative consciousness within -- was amply demonstrated through a reading of "In the Waiting Room," one that revealed in the end the recreative power of a

poetry that begins in experiences of loss and lack but always ends up somewhere else. I admired too Glen Gill's compelling typological reading of "The Fish." In walking us through the Leviathan and Christ archetypes of the poem (with an interesting thought on the "Caribbean Jew-fish" that Bishop once caught), Gill reminded us that one essential form of memory for the poet is mythological in form, the kind of memory that is communal without being of one's immediate community, and of a heritage without intruding upon one's inalienable solitude.

**"Should we have stayed home, wherever that may be?"**

Someone at the conference (I'm sorry to say that I forget who he or she was) kept a tally of the revealing words and phrases that turned up most frequently in our talks. I think we concluded that "charity," "home," and "abidance" made the final short list. They were words that could also describe the generous hospitality of Gwen Davies and Donna Smyth, Peter Sanger and Sandra Barry -- and of Acadia University in general and its President, Kelvin Ogilvie, in particular. The Exhibition of the EBSNS archive, the dinner at Blomidon Inn, the performance of Donna Smyth's play "Running to Paradise," and finally Peter Sanger's overnight excursion to Great Village, complete with rented mini-van and himself as guide, all of these served to enhance what was already a feeling of intimate community, a community based on our shared response to a poet who dwelled invisibly and modestly at its centre. A brief walk from the Arts Centre could take you to a view of the low, mucky, reaches of the Bay of Fundy (depending of course on whether the bay was *at home* or not). You could pick along that

shoreline for a while and find yourself back in Bishop's world; that is, find yourself back where you already were. It seems to me that Bishop's readers and admirers around the world -- on whatever mapped shore they find themselves -- are like so many coastal sandpipers, wandering and questioning. We scurry about along her shoreline of luminous particularity, in search of an unacknowledged quartz-gem of fresh perspective, but with each wave of Bishopian irony we scamper upshore, then come back to see what new arrangements have formed under the fresh wash. We don't reach conclusions, but keep our abidance, along with Bishop, beside a place that is larger than we are, her poems and the great villages that gave rise to them.

We like to think of conferences as sending its community back out into the diaspora to spread the word. Gary Fountain's promising reference to the possibility of a joint EBSNS and Bishop Society Journal, with editors and contributors on both sides of the border, brought this to a bright focus. Let's see how the idea develops.

Brian Bartlett noted a comment Bishop once made to Robert Lowell in a letter, that her fantasy was to live in a light house, "unbearable as the reality would be." One could argue that there is always something unbearable about the realities of time and place as we experience them, and Bishop's comment partly makes the case that where we really want to live is a state of mind. We are all in search of it, and Bishop's poems offer important clues as to where we might look. In that light, we said our goodbyes as the Symposium ended and headed off variously to airports, border crossings and our own distant homes.

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## "Little cousin Arthur" and the Snow in the Gloaming

by  
Peter Sanger

In a letter she wrote to Charlotte Russell on October 11, 1939, Bishop described watching schoolchildren from her window memorizing "the same awful old poems I did at Public School." She continued in her letter by quoting three verses of one of them, as she remembered it. The whole passage reads:

-- you know the one that goes

*The snow had begun in the gloaming,  
And busily all the night  
Had been heaping field and highway  
With a silence deep and white.*

And then goes on with:

*But I thought of a wood in sweet Afton,  
Where a little headstone stood,  
How the snowflakes were covering it gently,  
As the robins the holes in the wood.*

And comes to the finish -- that warped me emotionally for years:

*-- and I kissed her,  
But little did she know,  
My kiss was given to her sister,  
Buried deep 'neath the drifting snow..."*

I used this passage as part of the evidence for the effect that Bishop's reading of elementary school texts had upon her sensibility and poetic techniques in a paper presented at the Bishop Symposium at Acadia University in

September. The imagery and tone of the lines Bishop remembered are strongly reminiscent, for example, of "First Death in Nova Scotia," and the irony with which Bishop deals with them in her letter (an irony with something of a double edge) also registers in her account of Arthur, "the smallest page at court," in a poem which is, in addition, an ironic re-writing of a Tennysonian idyll.

Back in September, I could not give a source for the quatrains Bishop quoted in her letter. But one of those who listened to me did. Janet Pope, the fabric artist and poet who lives in Hantsport, Nova Scotia, returned home after my talk, flipped through a copy of the *Library of World Poetry* edited by William Cullen Bryant and found Bishop's original, written by James Russell Lowell, entitled "The First Snow Fall."

Bishop's memory of Lowell's first verse was perfect. Her second stanza, Lowell's fifth, changes *Auburn* to *Afton*, bringing in a memory of Burns, some of whose work she almost certainly also had to memorize. Bishop's third stanza, Lowell's last, is rhythmically crippled and incomplete, and substitutes the more charged and quite uneuphemistic *buried deep* for Lowell's comforting *folded close*.

Notice, by the way, that *ermine* appears in Lowell's second stanza and twice in the last stanza of Bishop's "First Death..."

As for that *Chanticleer* in Lowell's third stanza, perhaps he eventually wandered, as Janet Pope has suggested to me, into some part of the genesis of "Roosters." Here is Lowell's poem:

## The First Snow Fall

The snow had begun in the gloaming,  
 And busily all the night  
 Had been heaping field and highway  
 With a silence deep and white.

Every pine and fir and hemlock  
 Wore ermine too dear for an earl,  
 And the poorest twig on the elm-tree  
 Was ridged inch deep with pearl.

From sheds new-roofed with Carrara  
 Came Chanticleer's muffled crow,  
 The stiff rails were softened to swan's-down,  
 And still fluttered down the snow.

I stood and watched by the window  
 The noiseless work of the sky,  
 And the sudden flurries of snow-birds,  
 Like brown leaves whirling by.

I thought of a mound in sweet Auburn  
 Where a little headstone stood;  
 How the flakes were folding it gently,  
 As did robins the babes in the wood.

Up spoke our own little Mabel,  
 Saying, 'Father, who makes it snow?'"  
 And I told of the good All-father  
 Who cares for us here below.

Again I looked at the snow-fall,  
 And thought of the leaden sky  
 That arched o'er our first great sorrow,  
 When that mound was heaped so high.

I remembered the gradual patience  
 That fell from that cloud like snow,  
 Flake by flake, healing and hiding  
 The scar of our deep-plunged woe.

And again to the child I whispered,  
 "The snow that husheth all,

Darling, the merciful Father  
 Alone can make it fall!"

Then, with eyes that saw not, I kissed her;  
 And she, kissing back, could not know  
 That *my* kiss was given to her sister,  
 Folded close under deepening snow.

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**"Nice of Elizabeth to get out and walk": The Great Village Elementary School Symposium**

*On March 11, 1998, children in Grades Two and Three -- ages seven to nine -- were asked to compose short essays of response to Bishop's poem "Manners" and her memoir, "Primer Class." We publish some of these responses here, with corrections, where needful, to conform to MLA guidelines. We are very grateful to Connie Smith, Principal of the School, for sending us these essays and for her active interest in Bishop's Great Village life. Each essay is prefaced in what follows by a different number. The authors are anonymous -- and universal.*

- 1 -

I wonder what "on foot" means. I wonder what it would be like if we didn't have cars today. I think it would be neat if half the world was like 1918, and the other half was 1998.

- 2 -

When an automobile went by, I wouldn't be saying "Good Day" I would be coughing like crazy! I don't think crows would be that friendly. And how would people be able to hear you when an automobile [passed by]. And if you used the top of your voice every time, I think you would get a cold! I wonder what the mare looked like. I'm glad there isn't a whip now.

- 3 -

The poem "Manners" reminds me of when my next door neighbor said "What a fine dog you have." His name is Bob. It reminds me of when me and Korren Adams walked home from the blueberry field in our bare feet on the hot pavement but my Grampy would stop and pick us up on his way to the Londonderry store and got us an ice-cream for a treat. It reminds me of when I was late for school in Primary. It reminds me of when I was in Grade Primary. I couldn't get my glue to work and when I went to get it to work, it went all over my desk. It reminds me of when I was in Grade Primary, Dustin brought pop to school. It got shoke up on the bus and at lunch time when he went to open it, it went all over the place. It reminds me of when Mom told me when her best friend and her were teetering on the teeter totter and Mom fell off of it.

- 4 -

That would be annoying if you had to speak to everyone you met. It's not bright to pick up someone that you have never met before. I think a crow is not a very fine, nice looking bird. I would not be likely to use my manners if an automobile came by and tried to hit the pedal to the metal and try to make dust go into people's faces. I think most strangers would not try to use their manners, if they had any, if they met a stranger they had never met before.

- 5 -

Good thing the strap isn't used today, and if you met up with a bully, you wouldn't say "Hi" would you? And would you have a pet crow? Now people don't have dust in cars blow in people's faces. Wouldn't that be strange riding horse and cart! That's strange to ask everyone for a ride.

- 6 -

I wonder why manners are so different than we have now. If I saw a stranger I would not talk. My Mom says I should talk nicely to people, but not talk to everyone I meet. Elizabeth's grandfather reminds me of my Mom because he gives good advice. If I had to talk to everyone I met, I would not be happy. In my mind, it would be scary to ride in a wagon with a crow! It was nice of Elizabeth to get out and walk.

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