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Fisher, Hazel Ann, Ph.D.

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ELIZABETH BISHOP'S REVISION PROCESS

by

Hazel Fisher

A Dissertation

Presented to the Graduate Committee

of Lehigh University

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(date)

Elizabeth D. Fifer
Professor in charge

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(date)

Dissertation Committee Members

Professor Elizabeth Fifer, Chair — Elizabeth D. Fifer

Professor Jack DeBellis — Jack DeBellis

Professor James R. Frakes — James R. Frakes

Professor David Lewis — David W. Lewis

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I dedicate this dissertation to my late mother and father, Hazel E. and Herman A. Smeltz, and to my late brother, Herman R. Smeltz.

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Abstract

Elizabeth Bishop's Revision Process

This study of Elizabeth Bishop's revision process focuses on a limited number of manuscripts: however, I believe the drafts chosen represent her drafting, writing, and revision techniques, as seen throughout the Collection at Vassar College Library. My examination of Bishop's work includes what Gabriel Della-Piana calls "methodological pluralism," a look at biography, autobiography, interviews, critical and reader response, and working drafts.

Elizabeth Bishop's manuscripts show one outstanding consistency: her laborious revision process. Once the verses are on paper, Bishop revises and polishes until a poem grows into a form that she accepts, discards, abandons, or stores, possibly for later revision. Bishop's rather limited output suggests her dedication to the well-made poem and her manuscript collection also reveals an almost obsessive need for perfection, as well as an insistence on privacy and "good manners." We see changes made to increase the power of a poem and changes made to decrease the

didactic tone of a poem. Bishop makes many revisions that reflect her changing attitudes and beliefs, especially in her unpublished works where some are abandoned for political reasons, others for personal reasons.

Bishop's revisions reflect what I see as "defense mechanisms"--she avoids certain painful subjects and places the emphasis, instead, on objects, a phenomenological "decentering" technique. The influence of her early experiences never seems to leave her as she plants her "tears" in words, thus relieving the artist of self-discovery yet forcing the reader to discover Bishop's "truth."

One way that Bishop accomplishes this difficult task is through her use of the Baroque poetic techniques. She uses Baroque devices, like rhetorical situation, time structure, stanza rhythms, questions, parentheses, and exclamations, to identify the speaker, to define the speaker's attitude, and to define the relationship between speaker and reader. We are actively involved in the poem, and we suffer the triumphs and the disappointments of the speaker, a Baroque poetic experience.

Elizabeth Bishop's revision process is tedious and exacting; her subtle yet lucid voice is contrived and cautious; her control and focus is remarkable. Her manuscripts are teachers in and of themselves.

Introduction

Shakespeare, Mozart, D.H. Lawrence--what do they have in common? Each produced his art without leaving us remnants of process; each "transcribed" his final drafts from creative brain to paper--no revisions, no slashes, no stars, no evidence. We can marvel at their genius; we can study their products; we can know nothing of their process. In the case of Shakespeare and Lawrence, we try to connect plot to history or biography; some even connect Mozart's musical crescendos to his lust for life. How did Shakespeare create the perfect poetic line? That we will never know does not diminish his genius; in fact, in some ways, the genius is enhanced by the mystery.

Mystery, however, does not teach us process. Perhaps, by the 21st century, computer delete keys will also rob us of process--no handwritten manuscripts, no revised typescripts, no marginal or parenthetical comments. All rough drafts will be lost to the mystery of technology. We will be the worse for this loss, especially if we believe that the study of a poet's literary process provides an important overview of his or her canon.

My study of Elizabeth Bishop's revision process is based on Wallace Hildick's categories of revision, "tidying up changes," "power changes," " structural changes," "ideological changes," and, finally, a "rag-bag" of changes made for various reasons. In addition, I use a "pluralistic" approach to Bishop's revisions, an approach encompassed in Gabriel Della-Piana's "methodological pluralism" theory. This approach includes "document analysis" as well as "audience response" and "autobiographical and biographical" information, in addition to "poetic criticism" and several other sources. By studying Bishop's revision process through this pluralistic method, we gain much insight about the elusive craft of writing.

For example, in Elizabeth Bishop's manuscripts, I found verb changes that influence the meaning and, ultimately, the power of the respective poem; shifts in form that show movement from the tenuous to the structure needed to best fit the poem; voice changes from the personal to the ambiguous that affect point of view; adjective and adverb revisions that move a poem from over-statement to the subtlety most often associated with the poet; and content changes that reflect her artistic views and her other political or ideological influences. Though Bishop's changes reflect most of Hildick's categories, her process

reveals some revisions unique to her manuscript collection, ones that I would label as "defense" revisions and others as "Baroque-influenced" revisions. We are able, through these manuscripts, to connect Bishop to the revision "commonalities" of all poets and yet see her individual development, as well. So, in the twentieth century, we are grateful when a writer like Bishop shares her working process with us and with posterity.

Elizabeth Bishop started writing poetry at an early age, and she published soon after befriending Marianne Moore while at Vassar College. Bishop worked through her poems for years, if necessary, before submitting them for publication; in fact, she cared more about writing the perfect poem than she did for the glories of publication. Although Bishop won "virtually every poetry prize in the country, she insisted, 'They don't mean too much'" (Vassar Register 3). Her first volume of poems, North & South, won the Houghton Mifflin Poetry Award for 1946, and in 1955 she received the Pulitzer Prize for a combined volume of poems containing North & South and A Cold Spring. In 1967, her next book, Questions of Travel, won the National Book Award and was followed by The Complete Poems in 1969. Her next volume of poems, Geography III, received the National Book Critics Circle Award in 1976. In that same year, Miss Bishop became both "the first American and the first woman

to win the Books Abroad/Neustadt Prize for Literature" (Vassar Register 4). Her work appeared in The New Yorker for many years. In addition to her own poetry and prose, Bishop translated a Brazilian diary, The Diary of Helena Morley, and edited and partially translated An Anthology of Contemporary Brazilian Poetry (1972). Besides many honorary degrees, Bishop received two Guggenheim fellowships, was a chancellor of the Academy of American Poets, a member of the American Academy of Arts and Letters, and a consultant in poetry to the Library of Congress, 1949-50. Elizabeth Bishop died on October 6, 1979. A newer edition of her poems, The Complete Poems, 1927-1979, was published posthumously in 1983, and in 1984 an edition of her prose, The Collected Prose was published.

Recently, the Elizabeth Bishop Collection was opened at Vassar College in Poughkeepsie, New York. After Miss Bishop's death in 1979, Vassar librarians organized her papers into nine series, which consist of correspondence, personal papers, working papers, notebooks, diaries, memorabilia, material about and by her friends and colleagues, as well as over 400 letters from friends like Robert Lowell and Marianne Moore and, most interestingly for my study, over 3500 pages of drafts of poems and prose. This material spans Bishop's lifetime, from elementary school papers to unfinished fragments that she may have

intended to complete someday. To peruse this Collection, one needs weeks or months; in fact, one could spend a lifetime deciphering her handwritten drafts alone. Initially, this Collection shows the artist's penchant for saving everything, even lines written on grocery lists. Finally, though, the Collection shows us how Elizabeth Bishop worked and reworked her craft. She has been called a perfectionist by many, and her manuscripts and typescripts prove that she was, indeed, a perfectionist. For some of us, even her unpublished poems would be good enough, but her literary standards demanded more. We can learn a lesson from her here, too--don't settle for good enough when time and trial will yield better results.

The study of Bishop's manuscripts may not answer all our questions about her composing process (indeed, some work is still restricted) but surely enables us to categorize certain kinds of changes she consistently makes. Wallace Hildick believes that

> Physically, an author makes only three kinds of alterations: he substitutes, he deletes, and he inserts. But when the intention behind each change is taken into account we find a much wider range of groups and sub-divisions. (Hildick 7)

Hildick then compiles his own groups and sub-divisions into those that concern "tidying up" and "more specialized but

still menial changes" (7) that include misspellings, grammar, recasting awkward constructions, language and diction errors, redundancies, and the "poet's minor readjustments to rhythm and metre, or his attempts to improve his rhymes" (7). This "tidying-up group" is the largest and most elementary of the alterations, additions, or deletions, according to Hildick.

But the changes made to "achieve greater accuracy of expression, or greater clarity of expression, or to strike a better balance between the two" belong to Hildick's "power group" (9). Hildick lists many other changes in this group, including the poet's "adjustment of sound to sense," "attention to images," and "timing and placing" as some of the "most important elements of the "power group" (10). Hildick defines "timing" changes as the "unfolding of ideas . . . or of images in a poem" (12) and "placing" as "the less common readjustments of view-point: the switching at the right time from a position of general omniscience . . . to a single point of view . . ." (12).

Elizabeth Bishop's manuscripts reveal these very changes as she works through those "tidying-up" alterations and "power" changes in her poems. In particular, her "power" changes include what Hildick sees as a strengthening device:

> . . . for to strengthen an argument or clarify an issue a series of parentheses, more or less

ponderous, may have to be added . . . (11)

Bishop's use of this parenthetical device is legend and certainly supports Hildick's theory, especially in a poem like "Night City," where we see the parentheses added to the entire final stanza, thus increasing its importance and power. Bishop's use of rhetorical devices like parentheses, questions, and exclamations not only adds "power" to the poem but also reflects her deep interest in the Baroque poets and their techniques.

Hildick's last three categories of changes include "the group embracing the major structural alterations," the "group of changes made for ideological reasons," and a final "rag-bag of types" dictated by "fashion . . . legal grounds . . purely mechanical reasons," and so on (18-9). Such categories are always too limited, Hildick admits, but necessary if we are to track the great manuscripts, a process he calls "an enthralling experience" (19). Bishop's manuscripts certainly attest to Hildick's notion that such a study explodes the myth of divine inspiration as well as heightening "one's appreciation of a particular writer" (20). Perhaps Hildick's most pertinent reason for studying manuscripts is found in his belief that

> it can give one a much deeper understanding of the possibilities and uses of language than any set of artificial exercises, because what it involves is,

> in effect, a series of practical literary experiences of great technical importance . . . . (21)

With Hildick's beliefs and categories in mind, we gain a greater appreciation of the technical changes in Bishop's working manuscripts, some that are similar to those found in most manuscipts.

Gabriel M. Della-Piana sees Hildick's categories as useful "to better understand revision processes, to direct research on these processes, and to lead to better assessment procedures and practices" (Della-Piana 127). Della-Piana does not imply, however, that there is "only one process or set of processes shared by all writers . . .yet idiosyncratic descriptions may well lead to the discovery of commonalities" (108). He suggests that a "theoretical pluralism" be used to approach revision process studies so that "a more complete account is likely" (110) when these commonalities do appear. Della-Piana believes that a "methodological pluralism" should consider the "use of a combination of research methodologies" as well as "document analysis (revision manuscripts of poets)" that would include some "studies of audience (reader) response," all of which might "yield different kinds of information" (111). Della-Piana then defines the "obstacles to revision" as he sees them:

> Initial obstacles are preconceptions which can be hindrances to seeing differently and to seeing what a poem does; following them are obstacles of the appreciative audience (including the poet) which limit one's vision of what a poem can do and one's objectivity in looking at what a given poem does. (113)

Della-Piana asks one question that "might be a highly significant direction for research on revision processes" and suggests the pursuit of that question:

> What are the varieties of ways and courses of development by which the poet removes the obstacles of revision? (113)

To answer this question, Della-Piana feels that "certain kinds of available documents will provide data on obstacles to revision and on how poets remove obstacles" (114). These documents include

> autobiography and biography, poetic criticism, poets or teachers on 'the craft,' accounts by poets of their process in writing or revising a poem, revision manuscripts, and research reports. (114)

Della-Piana's methodology combined with Hildick's categories gives us, then, criteria for an analysis of Elizabeth Bishop's manuscripts.

Chapter 1

An Overview of Elizabeth Bishop's Poetic Process

More than fifty years of Elizabeth Bishop's manuscripts are now accessible in the Vassar Collection, with a few new series being released from restriction in 1991.[1] Because of this vast amount of material, scholars will be studying Bishop's work for years to come; indeed, study of Bishop revision is in its infancy, though more critics seem interested in connecting Bishop's life (probably because she was such a private person) to her work than in examining her process. Yet critics are beginning the discovery of her process. For example, Barbara Page of Vassar has written a general description of Bishop's overall creative process, which serves as a guide for other scholars. Page then follows Bishop's manuscripts for the poem "Santarem" from beginning to end, noting that

> In composing poems, it was Elizabeth Bishop's habit to begin by jotting ideas--often descriptions

> of things observed--in a notebook, then to work the poem up, usually through many handwritten drafts, to a stage where it had taken something like its ultimate shape, when she would type it out and thereafter, in ink, rework, retype and rework the poem until it was finished. (Page 55)

This process does seem to hold true for the poems that have been followed through to publication. I believe that the key to the process is that "reworking" aspect that moves Bishop's persona from subjective to objective, her themes from tentative to positive, and her final product from overstatement to subtlety. It seems ironic that Page says the beginning "ideas" that Bishop jots down are "often descriptions of things observed" when critics like Randall Jarrell see Bishop's final versions as often "objectively descriptive" with "limitations" (Jarrell 325). Bishop herself, late in her life, "sometimes characterized her poems as 'just description'" (Ryan 519), an authorial comment that belies all the work involved in moving those early "jottings" into poems that carry the consistent, concise voice of control that has become her trademark.

Through her process of creating that controlled point of view, Bishop becomes involved with her subject yet remains distant enough to see it clearly. This attitude toward her subject keeps the tone of her observations consistent and

has earned her that reputation as a "distant observer," a reputation that she obviously valued since being a "confessional poet" was something she tried desperately to avoid. Using Della-Piana's methodological suggestion of autobiographical and biographical study as a guide to revision processes, we can follow Bishop through her childhood and later years to determine where this need for "defenses" (Weir 326) may have begun.

Her strong anti-confessional stance is documented in interviews and in her own writings about other American poets. Using Alice Miller's book Prisoners of Childhood, as our guide, we see some effects of Bishop's childhood traumas in her early poetry manuscripts. These effects seem to carry into her later poems as well as into her prose. In particular, Bishop seems to follow Miller's idea of "accommodation" as the grown poet wonders, too, what makes a person leave home in search of the right place or the "perfect journey" (Mazzaro 177). Thus, the escape from self-analysis in "confessional" poems and the need to escape physically through travel contribute to Bishop's writing process, in both her choice of subjects and her textual-revision process.

Bishop transposes the inward psychological journey to the exterior world of her travels. By observing and questioning the sights along the way, she develops some

unique thematic concerns. One such subject that seems to have been ignored by critics and that occurs in several series of manuscripts is Bishop's concern for the environment and its destruction by humans. If we follow this theme through sets of manuscripts, we gain a sense of how her purposeful "distance" from subject works to support a point of view that increases the intensity of the poem yet retains a subtle accusatory tone. For instance, in the creation of "Night City," rather than keeping a berating remark that immediately blames us for the city's problems and turns us away, Bishop moves from the subjective, emotional hyperbole to an objective point of view, thus creating a city we see rather than hear about. Bishop's revisions in "Night City" and other poems are a lesson in the subtlety of tone that convinces with the conviction of one who sees and, through the seeing, cares.

Because language is such an impersonal entity without the voice behind it, poets like Bishop use language to create voice, whether a voice of realism or a voice of classicism or a voice that mediates between the two. Czeslaw Milosz writes about the choices a poet must make between "real" and "poetic language" and how his own revisions reflect this dialectic:

> I affirm that, when writing, every poet is making a choice between the dictates of the poetic

> language and his fidelity to the real. If I cross out a word and replace it with another, because in that way the line as a whole acquires more conciseness, I follow the practice of the classics. If, however, I cross out a word because it does not convey an observed detail, I lean toward realism. Yet those two operations cannot be neatly separated, they are interlocked.
>
> (Milosz 71)

Milosz continues in his essay to analyze one of his own poems, showing that words of description are inadequate to describe a world "that can be seen with perfect impartiality only by God" (74): In his poem the poet resorts to the "historical strata that already exist as form" (75). Milosz contends that "a contradiction . . . resides at the very foundation of the poet's endeavor" between the "real" and the classical (75).

Though Milosz doesn't discuss Elizabeth Bishop in his book, his ideas about poetic endeavors are reflected in Bishop's own struggle between wanting to "always tell the truth" in her poems (Wehr 324) and her desire for conciseness. In her creative process, Bishop constantly struggles with this problem between "realism" and "classicism" (Milosz 75), and this struggle shows how structure sometimes interferes with meaning. To look at her

manuscript revisions for a poem like the villanelle "One Art" gives insight into the way in which structure and meaning are intertwined. How Bishop reconciles the problems "of an internal tension between imperatives" (Milosz 75) through her painstaking revision adds to our own understanding of process as choice rather than process as merely order.

Once Elizabeth Bishop decided on or adopted a form or structure for her poems, she began the task of finding appropriate rhymes, sounds, adverbs, adjectives, etc., to fit those forms. In some cases, Bishop wrote her drafts in two forms, prose and poem, so she could decide which form "fit" her subject better. Her challenge to find the exact word in either form does not go unnoticed in her manuscripts as certain words are repeated, deleted, reintroduced, and deleted again and again as she composes. This process reflects the idea of "retrospective restructuring," as proposed by Sondra Perl:

> Composing does not occur in a straightforward, linear fashion. The process is one of accumulating discrete words or phrases down on the paper and then working from these bits to reflect upon, structure, and then further develop what one means to say.
>
> (Perl 18)

Bishop's process, as explained by Barbara Page, does follow this pattern since the poet often begins by jotting down her observations in notebooks and, at times, even on hotel stationery. These "discrete words or phrases" move from notebook jottings to handwritten and, finally, to typed drafts. During this process, Bishop plays with structure and development through hundreds of changes and marginal comments and lists of rhyming words. Perl feels that this kind of process "can be thought of as retrospective restructuring" where

> movement forward occurs only after one has reached back, which in turn occurs only after one has some sense of where one wants to go.
>
> (Perl 18)

In Bishop's case, retrospection sometimes took years, as she confesses it did with her poem "The Moose":

> . . . I started that years ago--twenty years ago, at least--I had a stack of notes, the first two or three stanzas, and the last . . . I wanted to finish it because I like it, but I could never seem to get the middle part, to get from one place to the other. (Spires 129-30)

Apparently, Bishop finishes the poem rather quickly, after a twenty-year lapse, by "reaching back" to those early "bits" and pieces to find the solution: where she "wants to go"

with the troublesome "middle part." Perl describes this backward-and- forward movement as having "a clarifying effect" and becoming "a way of assessing whether or not the words on the page adequately capture the original sense intended" (18).

Perl also believes that "constructing simultaneously involves discovery" for the writer:

> Writers know more fully what they mean only after having written it. In this way the explicit written form serves as a window on the implicit sense with which one began. (18)

As we study Bishop's various changes, we see this movement back and forth, and by looking closely at the parts of speech that Bishop reworks or restructures time and time again, we discover patterns of revision, with adverbs for instance, that teach us how to be more explicit yet retain that "implicit sense" of an original draft.

In fact, Bishop seems to use adverbs easily in early drafts of poems; yet her revisions remove the "telling" adverbs in favor of images that "show" what she wants us to see or hear. For instance, on early "Night City" typescripts (labeled 7 and 8), Bishop uses the adverb "silently" to describe the "screams" coming from underneath the burning city; then, on "[draft 11]" she scribbles out (in black ink over type) the "ly" of the adverb. Finally,

Bishop removes the word "silently" entirely, choosing instead to show the effects of "tears" or water or fire as she moves to the image: "A gathered lake / of aquamarine / begins to smoke." Bishop makes this leap from sound to sight through the "discovery" inherent in her revision process, and she becomes more explicit as she reworks and embeds each word. Thus, we are able to see another way the poet moves from the use of directional adverbs or overstatement (a fault of most first efforts) to pure description or understatement, the hallmark of Bishop's style.

A published poem titled "Pink Dog" is one that Bishop reworks many times also, with special attention to word choice. This manuscript reveals Bishop's "disguise" theme as it moves through restructuring from implicit to explicit, from overstatement to understatement. If those two sets of movement seem at odds, we might do well to look at Bishop's interest in the Baroque style of writing, for then we see how understatement can be made explicit through patterns of repetition and through symmetry of word choice. For example, in the poem "Sonnet" Bishop struggles with the symmetry of words more than she does with the sonnet form. These drafts show a poet whose message is so intense that she must move beyond form to specific word choice as control, so that the elusiveness of the sonnet's "bubble"

retains its fluidity. How Bishop manipulated even the articles in her manuscripts tells us that each word, no matter how small, is important in writing.

In the mid 1940s, the importance of manuscript study received an unprecedented boost with the opening of the Lockwood Memorial Library of the University of Buffalo. After twelve years of collecting manuscripts from around the world, the Library invited four scholars "to explore the poetry collection's holdings, to point out paths that the hypothetical future investigator may follow to his advantage, to suggest the uses to which such materials may be profitably put" (Abbott 35). These four "assessors" worked independently as they set up a pioneering pedagogical path for others to follow. Though they do not discuss Elizabeth Bishop's manuscripts in their essays, their views on the creative and revision process can be applied to her work as well.

Professor Donald Stauffer discusses the "genesis" of poems, revealing that

> a work of art may have extremely small beginnings . . . a poem may develop by giving a kind of metaphysical skeleton to its initial inspiration . . . a poem may be sketched as a whole, including weak padded lines that must later be changed, but also including phrases that are already finished

> and characteristic . . . that at some point in composition a spark may flash that will illuminate the whole; a sudden insight may develop into a nervous system that brings the whole body alive. (Stauffer 51)

These kinds of beginnings and sparks are found in many of Bishop's drafts, particularly as she works from that first handwritten draft to a galley draft, with sometimes as many as thirty one drafts with marginal rewrites and comments. For instance, in the Bishop collection, we find a draft that contains a list of interesting "bumper stickers" that the poet had recorded. Later, we see one of these bumper-sticker sayings used in an unpublished poem about her donkey, Mimosa. In other cases, Bishop records fragments, catchy phrases, and notebooks of information for later use, though many of these beginnings never move to serious manuscript consideration. Stauffer believes that "Chance flowers into choice only when it is carefully tended," a statement that reflects the carefulness of a poet like Elizabeth Bishop.

In addition, Stauffer feels that "the progress of an artist in creation is always toward greater purity, intensity, and unity--in short, toward greater significance" (Stauffer 52). He sees, in the Lockwood collection, that "unending struggle between subject and technique" as well as

"a drive toward impersonality and concreteness, away from sentiment and autobiography" which he says is "indeed one of the most significant and well-attested processes in poetic composition that the collection as a whole demonstrates" (54). We see in Bishop's collection, also, this struggle between subject and technique, particulary when the poem takes on a strict form or a confessional bent. Again, in the "One Art" manuscripts, Bishop struggles with the villanelle form, yet manages to hold off the purely personal until the last line, a line that goes through sixteen drafts.

One of the techniques that Stauffer sees at Lockwood and that applies to Bishop's work is the marginal "listing" of "a generous display of words . . . [and] synonyms in profusion . . ." with the poet's "checks and crosses" (57) in the margins. On the "One Art" draft as well as on many others, Bishop runs lists of rhyming words, synonyms, commentary, and question marks at the side margins of each draft. Her work, then, reflects T.S. Eliot's opinion that the most important criticism of art is the criticism made by the artist himself during the process of creation. The decisions that Bishop makes on her manuscripts are clear examples of the poet acting as her own critic and teacher, examples that we can learn from and enjoy--from the early beginnings to the finished poem.

Bishop's poems, however, are not finished so easily, especially as she works through draft after draft toward the perfect ending to each poem. Her endings sometimes seem predestined or inspirational, known even before the poem gets off to a good start; most times, though, Bishop tries several different strategies for closure. For instance, that final stanza in "Night City" becomes parenthetical in early handwritten drafts and never changes from that form. In "One Art" Bishop wrestles with the last stanza through many drafts, finally adding parentheses around two words in the last line on a very late typewritten draft. Another closure method that Bishop uses frequently is the rhetorical question which, like the parentheses, is a Baroque poetic device. Barbara Hernnstein Smith discusses the rhetorical question as closure and calls it "anti-closural" in technique but not in effect:

> In much modern poetry . . . the occasion for a poem is more likely to be the existence of an ultimately unresolvable process, and the conclusion is more likely to be a question than an answer. (247)

Smith examines the poems of several modern poets for whom "unanswerable questions" became "a stylistic signature" and comments about a poem by Robert Graves:

> The poem has developed toward a moment of self-

> recognition; although for the speaker it takes the form of self-doubt, for the reader it is transformed into a stable enough revelation of character and circumstance. The expressive effect of the concluding question is, again, that sense of a lingering suspension so typical of modern closure. But closure it is. (248)

Smith calls this technique "thematic irresolution" and traces it from T. S. Eliot back to Yeats and then back to Blake (250). Smith finds that the ending questions convey

> the expressive qualities of weak closure--a sense of open-endedness, a refusal to speak the unspeakable, solve the unsolvable, resolve the unresolvable--but they also secure adequate closure. (250)

Like those poets that Smith studies, Elizabeth Bishop uses questions to convey that open-ended feeling in many of her poems, whether published or not. In "House Guest," a published poem, the last seven-line stanza consists entirely of two questions.[2] These conclusions seem appropriate since they reflect the questioning technique that Bishop uses to set up the thematic element in the poem where the seamstress or "house guest" speaks so little that others are forced to wonder about her life. The ending reveals as much about the curiosity of the speaker as it does of the sorrow

of the mysterious seamstress.

Poetic closure is found, then, in the appropriateness of the questioning technique, but not all of Bishop's manuscripts show this effective use of questions. One group of fragments in the collection seems to be working toward a poem first titled "Autobiography" then changed to "Syllables." In these handwritten fragments, the interrogatory last line appears in each draft, yet Bishop herself questions the word order of that line in more than half a page of changes, marking one line with a marginal, darkly written, and underlined note: **Conclusion**. She insists on the question for closure, but the question has to be exactly worded both for rhythm and meaning. Once Bishop rejects the questioning method in what appears to be a very early fragment of her poem "Invitation to Miss Marianne Moore." In this fragment, Bishop writes a mere seven lines which apparently serve as the central idea or start of the poem; she ends this fragment with a two-line question:

> What can we give, yet not be rude,
> to show the proper gratitude?

The final published version contains not one question; in fact, none of the seven lines as first written appear in this poem. Perhaps the poem, which seemed to start out as a tribute but later changed to an invitation, needs no "sense of lingering suspension" (Smith 248) because Bishop is

discussing "the admirable Miss Moore," the fragment title, a tribute to one of her favorite people. To see some of Bishop's closure or anti-closure techniques in the light of Smith's study reveals more than stylistic variety; we find ourselves appreciating Bishop's link to poets like Eliot, Yeats, and Blake, as well as her own Baroque favorites, Herbert and Hopkins.

Finally, though, the drafts of Bishop's unpublished works reveal more about her work ethics and discipline than her published ones do. Sometimes revision isn't enough to pull a poem from first draft to final, approved galley proof, and some Bishop poems may have been "in the rehearsal" stage, waiting for time and distance to work their magic on the writer. Donald Murray writes about this part of the composing process:

> But when the writer turns to read the page, it becomes apparent that the language is too stiff, too clumsy, has no flow. The reader will not follow it. Or, there is too much information; the writing goes off on tangents. Material has to be cut out and reordered. (Murray 11)

Bishop does much of this cutting-out and reordering in unpublished works like "Gypsophilia." In the drafts of "Gypsophilia," Bishop crosses out verses, lines, words, and entire sections; she uses the typewriter slash key as well

as her own pen scrawl of straight and wavy lines across the page to remove what is apparently "too much information" or awkward rhyme schemes like "aslant" with "(can't)" as a crossed-out rhyme, after several attempts to use it. The poem goes "off on tangents" too as Bishop tries to include all the "sounds" that she hears "just after sunset." The problem occurs when she tries to connect the sound of a "barking mongrel," a worker beating "an iron bar," "the last words of a bell-buoy out at sea," "a child's voice," and "a gong." Instead of staying with these sounds, however, Bishop goes off on another "tangent"; she begins to write about the sights of the "luminous world" as "the blue deteriorates all at once" and darkness sets in. Bishop, in fact, seems to have two poems here, one on sounds and one on sights.

Though Bishop cuts and reorders the poem, she never brings it to the tightened structure of her published works; in fact, the more changes she makes on "Gypsophilia," the worse it seems to get. Murray forecasts this problem, too:

> The writer may be able to help the piece of writing find its meaning through a modest amount of rewriting and researching, reordering and rereading. But many times the imbalance gets worse. The piece of writing has to follow a tangent; a new major point has to be included.

> Or, in fact, the major point becomes the main point. New material has to be sought out and its order discovered. The piece of writing is severely out of balance and will be brought towards balance only by rehearsing.
>
> (Murray 11-12)

Perhaps Elizabeth Bishop needed more rehearsal time for this particular poem because only three pages of drafts are available in the Vassar Collection.

Other unpublished drafts show similar problems; for instance, in the poem "A Trip to the Mines--Brasil" we see some of these "tangents" appear when Bishop moves from her major point that "the slaves have disappeared" to a new point about the "diamonds" that are "dull and blue" and the "gold" that is "so pure so bright" without a connection to her main point. As she pulls herself back to "But where are the three million slaves?" idea, she again returns to what the slaves have created "in the museum" and is seemingly stuck in that situation of "too much information" that Murray describes. Though we might guess that she is allegorically comparing the artifacts and the slaves, the poem can't be brought into balance successfully by a questioning refrain of "But where are the two million slaves?" In fact, Bishop even seems to worry about whether to say "two" or "three" million slaves in that refrain,

though she knows that the motto "Our Love Unites Us" should end the poem. Since we have only two drafts of this poem to examine, we can't see that sense of "reordering" that Murray finds so important.

Other unpublished poems show this imbalance, too, as tangents or new major points are abandoned or cluttered with an overload of images and description. The intrigue of these unpublished works makes one wish for the chance to do a variorum on her complete manuscripts. Someday, if published in its entirety, the unpublished work will show the imbalance, clumsiness, stiffness, and incompleteness that Murray discusses. Particularly in manuscripts like "Rock Roses" or "All Afternoon the Freighters," we see Bishop poems in limbo--waiting for that reorderering, reworking one more time. In some ways, the unpublished poems are more haunting than the published poetry; in addition, the unpublished fragments show the side of the poet who never discarded anything, even private memos, a person who had the impulse to write everything down. The unpublished poems and fragments also reveal that conflict between escapism and exercise--the **why write?** dilemma that we see only one or two times in Bishop's published works.

In an essay based on the collection at the Lockwood Memorial Library, Karl Shapiro states that he has

> never seen a discarded poem that excelled

> the final form. On the other hand, no final poem can ever tell as much about the intention of the poet or about the poetic psyche as those worksheets which he almost systematically destroys. (Shapiro 121)

Shapiro believes that "to get as close to the creative act as we can hope to get" we must, through the examination of "working- drafts, marginalia, personalia, and the like," proceed to

> the external form (psychology of imagery), to the materials of form (language and metric), to the sources of form (personality, tradition and the Unknown). (93)

Shapiro explains that the "more common term" for "form" would be "style" (93) and feels that form "must override any other consideration in the criterion of the true poem" (93). In the Bishop drafts we see the beginnings of many creative acts through those "external" psychological images that she either does or does not control with language and meter. The more difficult to determine "sources of form" depend on biography or autobiography with the "Unknown" being the most evasive, according to Shapiro. In his search for the "poet's psyche" or the "demonic muse" that stimulates "the poetry of the extremes" rather than just the "literary, or wide-awake poetry" that he calls the "poetry of reaction,"

Shapiro acknowledges that

> In many cases the most difficult preliminary stages of composition seem to have been accomplished mentally, that is, without the poet's knowledge of how many trials and errors he has overcome before his pen has touched paper. The habitual poet perhaps has learned a technique of discard of which he is no longer aware. Therefore much valuable material will always be missing from the record. (94)

Shapiro suggests that what might be missing through this mental discarding is the "subterranean places" that the "creative mind . . . shuns for its own safety" (86). Besides this kind of subconscious dismissal, poets make conscious decisions to avoid certain subjects and emotions, rejecting the "mystic" material that "arrives" and choosing, instead, "lucidity" (120). Shapiro calls this choice "more than a poetic method; it is a direction of life" (120).

A difficult choice that each poet must make, then, is which poems are worthy of publication and which are not. In spite of Bishop's anti-confessional stance, even in her published poems, there is that undercurrent of emotions, experiences, issues. Particularly in the unpublished work the emotional side becomes apparent; emotions, perhaps, that

were beyond the control of form or word choice, realism or classicism, the poet and the person. These fragments and poems show a poet who did not give up easily but who did, in many cases, abandon an idea or an emotion.

William Stafford talks about this idea of abandonment when he remembers "an Auden quote . . . that 'poems are not finished, they're just abandoned,'" and Stafford comments, "And I do understand this [Auden's idea], because I don't know when a work is finished . . .it's always subject to revision" (Stafford 105). Perhaps that is the very reason why Elizabeth Bishop saved lines, fragments, poems, short stories--she was never finished with these abandoned pieces, and some of her galley proofs show changes even right before press time. Why didn't Bishop publish a poem titled "Something I've Meant to Write About for 30 years"? If this picture poem stayed in her memory that long, she must have valued it highly. Ultimately, though, a poem like this one seems devalued because only one typed draft is in the collection. By comparing those poems good enough to be published and those abandoned, unfinished, or unrevised, we do find places where the process breaks down. We may think that an abandoned poem is good, but how can we know Bishop's ultimate objective? In some cases, we may believe her choices were made for psychic safety, and we may agree that some of those choices were good ones. But Bishop's

tenacious work ethic suggests that more of her unpublished poems are abandoned for aesthetic reasons--they are just "not finished." She teaches us not only how to write but how long it takes to write something worthwhile.

Some writing theorists, like Harvey S. Wiener, believe that manuscripts and drafts are teachers in and of themselves:

> For the most productive instruction in the writing process, students need to see what a writer's work looks like at as many stages as possible . . . . Little will impress students more than a pock-marked sheet of their teacher's own rough drafts scarred with erasures and cross-outs, with the loops and arrows all writers use to excavate their territory . . . . Another good idea in this vein is to find a page of rough draft from a well-known writer . . . . I try to show how tentative and exploratory are a writer's thoughts when they reach a page for the first time.
>
> (Wiener 89-90)

I would add that Elizabeth Bishop's manuscripts not only show the "tentative and exploratory" aspects of "a writer's thoughts" but also reveal the complicated process of revision as she moves from the loose outline of a poem to the controlled finished product. Her process proves

valuable if we believe that, as Robert Weiss suggests, "A writing regimen is really a learning regimen . . . " (Weiss 144). Few writers follow as strict a regimen as Elizabeth Bishop did, and we can learn, as she must have, from her untiring efforts.

In her book Poems in Process, Phyllis Bartlett studies the revision techniques of poets from conception and invention through the many ways that poets find incentives to continually make changes in their work. In one chapter, entitled "The Hard Way," Bartlett follows Edgar Allan Poe's methods of composing "The Raven," suggests that Poe planned the poem from beginning to end in ten steps, and says Poe "seems to have skipped the stage of inspiration entirely" (Bartlett 142). Poe's works contain that "singular unity of effect" that shows his constant goal "for greater perfection of effect in every reprinting"; the "idea" in Poe's case "is always subordinated to tone and feeling" (142). This methodical building of poems can be found in many Bishop drafts as she works toward that "unity of effect" so precious to Poe; in fact, we can see in drafts of an unpublished love poem titled "Rock Roses" exactly where tone and feeling unify in a physical response to a lover. Bishop, however, withholds publication of much material like this, even though its direction is clear. Although Bishop seems to build her poems carefully as far as sound and sense

go, she somehow manages not to subordinate the "idea" in the process.

This methodical building of a poem is not easy for all poets, according to Bartlett:

> Yet there are those who seem to have known from the beginning of each poem the direction in which it was to go, even the whole plan of it, but nevertheless have had to labor hard along the way. (150)

Bishop reworks most drafts toward "perfection," which for her includes taking a fresh look at lines and stanzas as she moves from handwritten to typed drafts, as well as changes she makes as she matures and reconsiders content. Bartlett believes that some poets make changes for "public relations" purposes, sometimes for the sake of "secrecy," sometimes for the sake of "nonaesthetic considerations" like "public taste" or the poet's "shifting views in light of either public events or his personal experience" (155). These nonaesthetic changes differ from revisions made to "make the poem better" itself because the "motives for change have nothing to do with the artistry of a poem" (155). We can and should trace Bishop's nonaesthetic revisions in order to differentiate between her revisions for aesthetic reasons and for utilitarian ones.

Many of the nonaesthetic changes proposed by Bartlett

can be found in poems and fragments that Bishop ultimately put aside--those unpublished political themes and personal confessions--but some published works reflect changes made from similar motives. In an interview with Elizabeth Spires, Bishop confesses that she didn't finish a certain poem about "whales" because she didn't want to be connected with a "cause" though the poem had been in process long before the cause had. Her plan to finish that "whales" poem during the summer before her death never resulted in its publication, though. In other instances, as well, Bishop's avoidance of political entanglement appears, enforcing the idea of change as motivated by reasons other than the stylistic.

A somewhat amusing change occurs in an early draft of "Arrival at Santos," where Bishop's revision of one word may reflect either her personal sense of propriety or her political awareness as a non-citizen in another country. In this draft, Bishop describes the harbor town where she sees "self-pitying mountains / . . . with a little church on top of one. And some whorehouses, / some of them painted a dirty pink, or blue" (Draft 2). The word "whore" has the "h" crossed out by pen and the image subsequently appears as "warehouses" on all other drafts. Though this is a minimal change, the effect of the revision is paradoxical, since it's more likely that the adjectives "dirty pink, or blue"

better fit the image of "whore houses" than of "warehouses." Of course, placing the "whore houses" next to the "white church" in the poem could be problemmatic politically, but the idea certainly fits the sense of the poem better as the tourist questions the impressions that ports have on travellers:

> . . .Oh, tourist,
> is this how this country is going to answer you
>
> and your immodest demands for a different world,
> and a better life, and complete comprehension
> of both at last, and immediately,
> after eighteen days of suspension?
>
> (Bishop Complete Poems 89)

Though "whore houses" seem more repulsive as a welcoming sign than "warehouses" do, having their sea-voyaging weariness answered by such sights would not suit this ship's particular passengers, Miss Breen and Miss Bishop. Bishop stuck by her change, which suggests a mistaken identification initially or a nonaesthetic choice for "public relations" purposes, one of Bartlett's suggested "methodical building" techniques. Whether for her own "public" image or the image of others, Bishop consistently shuns the directly sexual in her poems.

Bartlett also believes that "more poems . . . have been

revised because of their authors' changing critical standards than because of new attitudes toward the central matter of their poems" (183). One such tendency that Bartlett calls "fairly common in the history of poets' revisions" is the "tendency to make a poem less personal, more universal" (185). This "desire for universality is likely to grow with a poet's years and is a genuine change in literary standards" (185). Bishop records her own growth as a poet as she rewrites an early poem to her grandfather; the fragments of the new poem show her changing literary views, especially in stanza structure. The early poem reveals a strict end-rhyme structure that is abandoned completely in the later poem. The early poem, written in 1929 and published in The Complete Poems 1927-1979, reflects the romantic outlook of a novice poet while the later fragments of the new poem show the sophisticated style of Bishop's changing standards. Instead of an almost fairy-tale romanticized approach to memories of time spent with her grandfather, Bishop moves toward a more realistic description that has become her trademark. In revisions of this kind we can find the growth of the poet's style as well as that more mature, universal outlook.

By following the lead of Bartlett and other manuscript scholars like her, we not only study Elizabeth Bishop's writing process but we also examine her learning process.

Autobiographical and biographical data provide background material while articles and interviews reveal some extraneous views that the manuscripts don't show us. Using Della-Piana's "pluralistic" approach to Bishop's work, we may find a way to help those students who have not yet learned the art of revision; we also help ourselves enjoy our own revisions more. Finally, though, we agree with Phyllis Bartlett's statement that there "is much to learn too about poets from their attitudes to revision" (239).

Notes

1 All references to statistics, manuscripts, and drafts refer to information found in "The Elizabeth Bishop Collection" at Vassar College, Poughkeepsie, NY.

2 All references to published poems by Elizabeth Bishop are from Elizabeth Bishop: The Complete Poems 1927 - 1979. NY: Farrar, 1984.

I wish my students wouldn't spend so much time trying to "discover" themselves. They should let <u>other</u> people discover them. They keep telling me that they want to convey the "truth" in their poems. The fact is that we always tell the truth about ourselves despite ourselves. It's just that quite often we don't like how it comes out. If my students would concentrate more on all the difficulties of writing a good poem, all the complexities of language and form, I think that they would find that the truth will come through quite by itself.

Elizabeth Bishop

Chapter 2

Elizabeth Bishop's Defense Mechanisms

Much has been written about writers and how the "truth" about their personal lives may or may not be directly reflected in their works; thus, biographical criticism was born. Sigmund Freud's theory about artists and their "defense mechanisms" gave new impetus to the biographical critics in the late nineteenth century, and, though many subsequent critics have tried to dismantle Freudian interpretation, this type of criticism continues to be popular. French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan has attempted to rewrite Freudianism "in ways relevant to all those concerned with the question of the human subject, its place in society, and above all its relationship to language" (Eagleton 164). Later "response" critics cite the reader's psychological imprint as a necessary extension of the artistic interpretation process, acknowledging that the artist is himself one of those readers. In this chapter, I

will discuss Elizabeth Bishop's revision process in light of her biographical data and their relationship to the language in her poems. As Bishop develops her poems consciously through revision, her intent to "always tell the truth" undergoes some psychological pressure, to which she either succumbs or builds defenses against. As her own audience, Bishop follows a pattern of creation and revision, which could be seen as a pattern of revealing and restricting. Thus, Bishop's revision techniques show not only part of her poetic process but also her psychological and artistic "imprint."

To study more completely the poetic process, Gabriel Della-Piana proposes a pluralistic approach, one that includes autobiography and biography, as well studies of audience response and a poet's approach to audience. According to Della-Piana, that "audience may be the poet or may include the poet" (Della-Piana 113); "an appreciative audience (including the poet) . . . limit[s] one's vision of what a poem can do and one's objectivity in looking at what a given poem does" (113). Audience, then, creates "obstacles to revision," which, in turn, must be removed through the rewriting of the poem. How "audience" affects a poet can change, as the poet matures and changes; however a poet's awareness of audience is, or should be, constant. That the reader may respond in a "limited" way reflects also

the maturity or appreciativeness of each individual; thus, the poet's audience, whether himself or others, provides the catalyst for revision decisions, though the poet's "objectivity" may be impaired in some cases.

A more "subjective" school of "confessional" poetry developed in the twentieth century; however, even before this personal mode, a poet's words were looked upon as some kind of "truth," based on background, knowledge, and experience. If a poet creates a fictional character in his poem (as John Berryman did with his character, Henry), the reader still believes that the poet is the fictionalized character. I believe that the reader who picks up a book of poems has different expectations than one who chooses a novel. One major difference that the reader of poetry expects is the presence of the poet as persona; no one believes that he will become so lost in the "story" or "fantasy" of the poem that the writer/poet will disappear as the fiction and characters take on the primary role. An example of this phenomenon occurs with the audience of Edgar Allan Poe; his readers do not seem to think that Poe ever committed any of the horrendous crimes of his prose works, but they do believe that he was the madman fascinated with the black "Raven" and that he pined by the thundering sea for his "beautiful Annabell Lee." Though the poet's subject may sometimes be fiction, the poet's audience reads his

poems as a statement or confession of an "inner" truth, a reaction that Poe himself would have abhorred.

The truth is, no matter how private, no matter how painful, the poet wants to share his or her words, message, talent, characters, or "self" with that unknown entity--a reader. The more private poet may develop certain defenses of protection in his verse, which may confuse the reader and impede the connection between poet and reader. Perhaps the link between the two can be found by examining the inherent contextual experiences that surround the genre itself; poet and reader commune on a level of experience, a shared love of language and a need to interact directly with language through the medium of words. And though a reticient poet like Elizabeth Bishop may find speaking about personal concerns difficult or distasteful, her need to establish order out of disorder through writing may parallel the reader's need to learn and to grow through reading. The first communal choice has been made when the writer chooses to write his thoughts and feelings in poetry and the reader chooses to read it. In most cases, both writer and reader have made this choice freely. Once the poem or book of poems is in the reader's hands, certain responses take place that complete the intercommunication between poet and reader, a communication whose success or failure depends largely on the contextual world of each participant.[1]

For the most part, Elizabeth Bishop's poetry has been well received. Several of her early poems were immediately anthologized, and she was honored as "one of the finest" poets as late as 1976, when she received the Books Abroad/Neustadt International Prize for Literature, which was exactly twenty years after she won the Pulitzer Prize for Poetry. In addition to critical acclaim, Miss Bishop became a favorite of fellow writers like John Ashbery, who called her "a writer's writer's writer" (Ashbery 8) in his review of her first volume of Collected Poems. Ashbery later worried that his original "exaltation" of Bishop may have been "harmful" to the writer because "perhaps . . . , even as we say it admiringly, . . . it somehow diminishes the writer" (8). Ashbery asks if any writer should be "placed so far above the mass of readers, not to mention the mass of writers?"(8). Instead, he sees Bishop's work as "inspiring [to other writers] and delighting the minds of many different formations" (8). Ashbery claims that this inspiration is Bishop's "strength, a strength whose singularity almost prevents us from seeing it" (10).

Exaltation may have come too easily to Elizabeth Bishop, even in childhood, as she struggled to find her "self" through early poems about her family life. In Prisoners of Childhood, German psychologist Alice Miller writes about the effects of "narcissistic parents" on "gifted" children. I

believe much of what Ms. Miller proposes could be applied to Elizabeth Bishop, who was certainly a gifted child and who had a childhood filled with traumatic experiences. I would discourage a complete causal relationship between the poet's words and her life, but I also believe that the contextual circle contains background information and experiences that cannot be ignored or denied.

Elizabeth Bishop's father died when she was eight months old; when she was four years old, her mother was "placed permanently in a mental institution" ("Chronology" 12). The child was raised first by her maternal grandparents in Nova Scotia, then by her paternal grandparents, and, finally, by a "devoted" aunt in Boston. The young Elizabeth spent her summers in Nova Scotia, went to camp for several months during that time, and was sent off to boarding school in her early teens. Bishop herself recalls that her relatives "all felt so sorry for this child [Bishop] that they tried to do their very best" (Spires 140). She remembers that her "aunt was devoted" to her and "awfully nice"; however, in her relationships with these relatives she "was always a sort of a guest" and has "always felt like that" (141). Naturally we can't assume narcissism in their behavior towards the young Elizabeth, but, even if she were admired for what she could do (good manners, good poems, good girl) rather than for what she was, the effects on the gifted child would be

the same. Analyst Miller writes about her patients' search for "self" through analysis, and many of her observations seem reflected in the poetry of Elizabeth Bishop, in spite of the poet's denial that she is trying to "discover" herself through writing.

Bishop's search takes her back to her own origins in Nova Scotia, a place that she was "afraid to go back to" (Schwartz 310). Though her poetry reveals a search for "self," it also shows a "flight" from self. This flight is expressed in Bishop's life and works, particularly in her incessant desire to travel and explore new places while connecting them with tradition through historical facts. But her travels are not always satisfying, as she admits in an interview with David McCullough:

> There are so many places I'll never go back to. I change, the places change. I was afraid to go back to Nova Scotia, but I went not long ago and it hadn't changed very much . . . . (310)

Why she was "afraid to go back" to her childhood home is not clear, but one can almost sense a disappointment in her words, a wish, perhaps, that something would have been different in Nova Scotia. Certainly there is a sense of stoic acceptance as she says, "I change, the places change"; however, underneath that stoicism lurks a fear of the past coupled with the relief that "it [Nova Scotia] hadn't

changed that much." Bishop presents paradoxical feelings: the desire for things to remain the same and the desire for things to change, the need to return to childhood and the need to escape from it. Otto Rank believes that

> this need to detach ourselves from our past while we are still living on its spiritual value creates all the human problems and social difficulties which the humanistic sciences cannot solve because they themselves are victims of this "historization," due to man's gift--or curse--of memory. (Rank Beyond Psychology 65)

Throughout Bishop's poetry, too, the reader senses that same paradox, that need to detach and the inability to do so, as a wanderlust forces the poet to make her home in many different ports, noting:

> Ports are necessities, like postage stamps, or soap, but they seldom seem to care what impression they make. . . .
>
> (Bishop "Arrival at Santos" 90)

In this poem, Bishop's speaker does not find, in the port of Santos, the "answer" to the tourist's "immodest demands for a different world,/ and a better life, and complete comprehension/ of both at last, and immediately . . ." (89). The speaker decides, instead, to drive to the "interior" for her discovery or "complete comprehension" of the "world" and

of "life." The poet's words "ports . . . seldom seem to care what impression they make" seem to parallel the idea that psychoanalyst Miller states about the abandoned child who makes "accommodations to parental needs" through "intellectualization," which Miller calls a "defense mechanism of great reliability" (Miller 12). The child who feels abandoned "cannot develop and differentiate his 'true self' because he is unable to live it" (12). This kind of accommodation is revealed through a person's sense of "homelessness," says Miller (12). Since much of Bishop's poetry expresses a sense of "homelessness," it is easy to draw an analogy between the "abandoned" child that Miller writes about and Bishop, who was "abandoned" by her father and mother.

For the child/guest of Bishop's early years, since those many necessary "ports" where "devoted" relatives "tried to do their very best" obviously did not fill the girl's "parental needs," the young Elizabeth had to develop new strategies of defense. The idea that a child "builds up defense mechanisms" and "develops the art of not experiencing feelings" (like not returning to her homeland, in Bishop's case) is not a new one, Miller admits (10). Her observation, however, that the "abandoned child" could describe "childhood experiences that were free of conflict" and that "usually . . . concern experiences with nature" as

opposed to "more personal experiences" (10) seems to mirror Bishop's concern with nature in her poems, even in those poems written in her youth. Rather than "confessing" outright her feelings about "self," Bishop uses nature as a vehicle for discovery. This "transference" of feelings, or "recentering," seems to put Bishop into the school of phenomenology that "will typically focus upon the way an author experiences time or space, on the relation between self and others or his perception of material objects" (Eagleton 59). The Bishop poems that are written from a child's point of view show this relationship between "time and space" and "self and others" quite clearly.

Bishop has written one poem where the speaker, a child, discovers that she is a part of humanity, and, as a human being, she could feel the "pain" that others feel. As the soon-to-be "seven years old" Elizabeth sits "in the waiting room" of a dentist's office, she hears a cry of pain emanating from inside the office where her Aunt Consuelo is being treated. The small girl discovers that "it was me: my voice, in my mouth" as she tries to stop the sensation of "falling, falling" that accompanied her discovery:

> But I felt: you are an I,
> you are an Elizabeth,
> you are one of them.
> Why should you be one, too?

I scarcely dared to look
to see what it was I was.

(Bishop "In the Waiting Room" 160)

Realizing that "nothing/ stranger could ever happen," the girl asks:

Why should I be my aunt,
or me, or anyone?
what similarities---
boots, hands, the family voice
I felt in my throat, or even
the National Geographic
and those awful hanging breasts---
held us all together
or made us all just one?

(161)

The cry of pain that caused the young girl's discovery has been compared by many critics to the scream of the insane mother in Bishop's prose piece, "In the Village." Since Bishop admits that the story is more autobiographical than any other she wrote, the comparison seems valid; however, the girl experiencing the scream in the waiting room is a participant in the moment rather than an observer. Instead of hiding the painful facts from view (as the girl in the village hid the address of the sanitarium by placing the package close to her body), this "Elizabeth" questions:

How had I come to be here,
like them, and overhear
a cry of pain that could have
got loud and worse but hadn't? (161)

Contrarily, the cry of pain the young girl hears in "In the Village" is lost among the clang of the blacksmith's hammer and the surrounding noises of the sea and the warnings of the buoys; the cry of pain she hears in the dentist's waiting room is found in the girl's own throat, a discovery so real that it made the room slide "beneath a big black wave,/ another, and another." Once again, Bishop uses external "sea images" to drown out the screams from the "interior" of the "self." The poem ends with a return to the uncaring "port" of her childhood:

Then I was back in it.
The War was on. Outside,
in Worcester, Massachusetts,
were night and slush and cold,
and it was still the fifth
of February, 1918.

(161)

James Breslin believes that "identity" poses a "terrifying experience" for the young child as she experiences "a feeling of both a separate and a common identity" (Breslin

35). As the girl identifies herself with her aunt's scream of pain, she also struggles to "counter her loss of self" by hanging onto "detail, trying to locate herself" (35). Yet she never resolves the paradox and resists "taking on an adult identity" because of her "fears of adult sexuality" (35). Thus, the child, though coming close to self-realization, resists again, this time by forcing herself "back in it"--that exterior world/port where even dark, cold wars can't change the identity of people, place, and time.

The "inner necessity to constantly build up new illusions and denials, in order to avoid the experience of our own reality, disappears once this reality has been faced and experienced," according to psychologist Miller (101). Though it seems that young Elizabeth comes closer to self-realization in the previously discussed poem than in any other that she's written, the child's perspective is never quite this clear again; in fact, in other poems, when the persona is a child, the "self" seems hidden by models of impenetrable behavior. In her work on "defence mechanisms," Anna Freud writes about the "avoidance of 'pain'" and states that "it is open to the ego to refuse to encounter the dangerous external situation at all. It can take to flight and so, in the truest sense of the word, 'avoid' the occasions of 'pain'" (Freud A. 100). She calls this "mechanism of avoidance . . . primitive and natural" when

the "ego is defending itself . . . against external stimuli" (110). Freud further states that her "examples suggest the typical situations in which the ego has recourse to the mechanism of denial are those associated with ideas of castration or with the loss of love-objects" (190). Freud sees the "intellectualization" of "the instinctual processes as a precaution against danger from within" just as avoidance is a reaction to "dangers from without" (191). Thus, though a young "Elizabeth" feels the loss of the first "love-object," her mother, she learns "denial" at an early age from the model of loving but stoic relatives.

For instance, in "Sestina," the child watches her grandmother "laughing and talking to hide her tears," but the child sees "tears" everywhere in the house. She tries to express her situation through a drawing of "a rigid house and a winding pathway" where "the child/ puts in a man with buttons like tears/ and shows it proudly to the grandmother," who "busies herself about the stove" and "sings to the marvellous stove . . . " (Bishop "Sestina" 123-4). Because the grandmother "thinks that her equinoctial tears" are, like the rain, "foretold by the almanac,/ but only known to a grandmother," she hides her feelings with the rituals of tea time and "tidying up," thus denying the child, who, like the almanac, knows what she knows and needs to be read to be understood. "Time to plant tears, says the

almanac" and "the child draws another inscrutable house" (124). Like those "necessary ports" that do not offer "complete comprehension" to a tourist, this grandmother's home does not provide for the child's inner needs, though a warm stove and hot tea do provide a substitute "defense mechanism" as the child learns to "plant tears," hiding rather than acknowledging them. Bishop learns early, then, that ports can provide "necessities" but not necessarily comfort.

In contrast to "Sestina," when Bishop writes from the perspective of an adult speaker, she relies on the safety of nature imagery and confronts experiences that are relatively free of personal conflict. I say "relatively" because the conflicts do exist, hidden behind the intellectualization of the adult through technical devices such as form, ambiguity of meaning, imagery, and the search and flight techniques already discussed. A very large measure of Bishop's success is due, in the opinions of other writers, to her skillful manipulation of language and form, a skill that she believes necessary in order to write "good poems." She shares this belief in a conversation with her friend, Wesley Wehr:

> If my students would concentrate more on all the difficulties of writing a good poem, all the complexities of language and form, I think that they would find that the truth will come through

quite by itself. (Wehr 319)

Her impatience with students who want to "discover" themselves (and perhaps her resistance to self-discovery) is revealed as she places the burden of discovery on the reader:

> I wish my students wouldn't spend so much time trying to "discover" themselves. They should let <u>other</u> people discover them. They keep telling me that they want to convey the "truth" in their poems. The fact is that we always tell the truth about ourselves despite ourselves. It's just that quite often we don't like how it comes out. (319)

Of course, the "<u>other</u> people" that the poet is talking about are the readers. It seems she is saying that her audience also has a job to do in the communication transaction and that job is the discovery of the "truth" about the writer.[2] Because of Bishop's calculated attempts to discourage Freudian analysis of her poems through very limited release of biographical data, she forces us, as readers, to find her "truth" through her words--a method that releases her from the painful act of self-discovery but places <u>us</u> in the painful position of analyst.

One revealing aspect of Bishop's personality that consistently appears in her poems and interviews is her idea of what is "good," whether a formula for writing "good

poems," a recipe for a "good day's work," or a poem that discusses "Good Manners." One can't help wondering if Elizabeth was not a "good little girl" who spent most of her time "reading" and not making noises (or screaming), behaviors that would not disturb the various households in which she was a guest.

Though admittedly Bishop "suffered" because she'd been "so shy" all her life (Spires 146), she learned how to hide her feelings, as revealed in her conversations with Wehr:

> Because I write the kind of poetry that I do, people seem to assume that I'm a calm person. Sometimes they even tell me how sane I am. But I'm not a calm person at all . . . if they really knew me at all, they'd see that there are times when I can be as confused and indecisive as anyone. (Wehr 325)

How does Bishop deal with these "awful times"? Like the grandmother in "Sestina," the poet denies her true feelings when in front of her students and becomes a model of "good" behavior:

> There are times when I really start to wonder what holds me together--awful times. But I feel a responsibility, while I'm here at least, to appear calm and collected . . . so these young people won't think that all poets are erratic. (325)

Bishop's need to set herself up as an example of "calm and collected" behavior again reflects the intellectualized behavior of the "abandoned" child that the analyst Miller discusses. The creation of a "false-self" reveals the way in which the child "has dealt with his feelings and needs, and that this was a question of survival for him" (Miller 17). Reacting to the natural "abandonment" by her parents at a young age and the "inscrutable" behavior of those relatives who "meant well," Bishop learns to protect that "good-girl" reputation she developed as a self-defense mechanism--even to the point of protecting <u>all</u> poets from a bad image--and maybe protecting poets from themselves.

This kind of intellectualized behavior is never more apparent than in Bishop's poem "One Art," where she writes about the "art of losing" as an art that "isn't hard to master." Even in this cleverly wrought villanelle, however, Bishop reveals "the truth" about herself to any reader willing to search beyond appearances. This particular poem contains "all the complexities of language and form" that Bishop argues for in her teachings and conversations; however, the poem also expresses the irony felt by a person who is forced to "(Write it!)" rather than speak it. Like the little girl who has to "draw inscrutable houses," this speaker is forced to appear calm and collected when confronted with losses that are too unbearable to be shown

in public (or in free verse, perhaps). It is interesting that the "things" or "objects" in the poem "seem filled with intent to be lost," a statement that places blame on objects lost rather than on the person who loses them. This kind of transference can be connected to Jacques Lacan's language theory where "the loss of the mother forces us to make do instead with substitute objects" (Eagleton 168); thus, the "signified / signifier" relationship is born. "We move among substitutes for substitutes, metaphors of metaphors, never able to recover the pure (if fictive) self-identity and self-completion which we knew in the imaginary [before language]," writes Eagleton (168). Bishop's insistence, then, on transferring responsibility from the "self" to the objects lost is, in itself, ironic evidence that losing is <u>not</u> easy to master but, instead, can be turned into an "art" only by someone clever enough and with enough language "practice" to do so. In this regard, many critics connect Bishop's poetic techniques to the Formalists, which makes sense since Eagleton suggests that "phenomenology had some influence on the Russian Formalists" who "bracketed the real object and focused instead on the way it was perceived" (58). "Art," like a "good" poem, is acceptable; losing isn't.

And if Bishop had to put constraints on her appearances before a class, what greater constraints could she put on

her personal revelations in poetry than the very complex and limited villanelle? By using this restrictive form, the writer may lull the reader (and herself) into believing that "losing isn't hard to master" through the gentle rhythms and repetitions of the villanelle. A careful reader will have to overcome form and language to find the ambiguities inherent in the poem.

In "One Art" the most ambiguous sentence occurs at the beginning of the fourth stanza when Bishop writes:

I lost my mother's watch . . .

Whether the speaker actually lost her mother's wristwatch or the mother's "watch" over her is not clear, but either experience would be traumatic. An adult would suffer more, perhaps, over the loss of a keepsake than the child would, but a child would be especially affected by the loss of a mother, especially at a young age. Victoria Harrison states that Bishop "rarely finished poems about her mother" and that she "had to diffuse (unpack) her mother" for the publication of the prose pieces in which her mother appears (Harrison MLA Conference 1989). Harrison says that Bishop's prose manuscripts about her mother are "riddled with consistent slash marks" and that in order for Bishop "to diffuse her mother" she concentrated on "the discovery of objects," a decentering that might "compensate for pain" (Harrison). Again, the "defence mechanism" of transferring

"feelings" to "objects" goes back to the work of Sigmund and Anna Freud, followed by Husserl's phenomenological philosophy of "recentering," to create meaning in objects.

In the manuscripts of "One Art," Bishop works through eight drafts until she adds the loss of her "mother's watch" above a typed line where "last" is slashed out. Through the previous eight drafts, Bishop lists many articles that are "easy" to lose and suggests that we should begin mastering losses by "mislaying" objects like "keys, reading-glasses, fountain pens"--things that "are almost too easy to be mentioned" (Bishop Collection). As she prepares to "introduce" herself as someone so "fantastically good at losing things / I think everyone shd. [sic] profit from my experiences," she moves through the list of bigger things that she has lost like cities, beaches, and continents. In "[draft 3]" Bishop works over the simple objects, adding then deleting things like "Your Master / Charge plates" through the next draft. She writes on several of these early drafts that she "is lying" and later that "All I write is false," which states the irony of the poem rather clearly but is ultimately, on the galley draft, replaced by the command "(Write it!)" with no mention of "lying."

The line about the loss of her "mother's watch" is unchanged, however, after the first time it appears, except for moving to the more concise verb "lost" instead of "have

lost." The sense that the line appeared out of nowhere is intensified since all the other "objects" are written and revised over and over, both before and after the "watch" appears. What Bishop does work on with careful revision is the preceding stanza, which moves from the idea of losing trivial objects like car keys and reading glasses to the practice "of losing farther, losing faster: / places, names, and where it was you meant / to travel. None of these will spell disaster," later changed to "None of these will bring disaster" in the final version of line 3, verse 3. It is after the listing of things lost that won't "bring disaster" that the mention of the "mother's watch" appears, never changing from that spot and implying, by the quick follow-up to the denial in the previous line, that the loss of her mother is much more than trivial and may have, indeed, brought psychic disaster.

In fact, the absence of extensive revision of this phrase, when compared to other lines, suggests that the line, or emotion itself, is untouchable or, in comparison to prose about her mother, controllable since the loss of a lover rather than her mother is the primary focus of "One Art." Bishop's desire to control the emotions in the poem is obvious as the manuscripts show a very loosely structured first draft (an unusual typewritten first draft--almost sounding like a letter), with movement through subsequent

drafts to the very strict villanelle form. This first typed draft begins with two possible titles; then a couplet about how one "might begin" losing things. After a double space, another title appears; then an eleven-line stanza, a double space, then a fifteen-line stanza, double space, a five-line stanza, double space, and finally a four-line stanza, the only verse reminiscent of the villanelle. This first draft, then, shows little intention to write a villanelle though some rhyming words haunt the side margins and right bottom of the draft and "axb" and "aba" are written in side columns at the left and middle bottom margin.

Draft two shows some movement toward the three-line verse, especially in the first two stanzas, and, by draft three, the complete villanelle form is captured in dashes along the right side margin, though many lines are missing or incomplete. On subsequent drafts, the form seems secure, but the last verse (the one about her lover) undergoes heavy revision and moves from a personal, seemingly frustrated, confession of loss to a tightly structured revelation that shows more determination than frustration. The first letter-type draft reveals amazement that all her previous losses haven't prepared her for this final one:

> One might think this would have prepared me
> for losing one average-sized not especially-----
> beautiful or dazzlingly intelligent person

(except for blue eyes (only the eyes <u>were</u>
But it doesn't seem to have, at all...

a good piece of one continent
and another continent - the whole damned thing!
He who loseth his life, etc. - but he who
loses his love - neever [sic], no never never never
again -

Though there are some additional marginal comments that "(only the eyes <u>were</u> exceptionally beautiful and / the hands <u>looked</u> intelligent) / the fine hands)," the verse ends abruptly. Thus, the expletive, the "never" repetitions, and the Biblical allusion mark the emotional suffering that is so carefully controlled, through revision, in the final version.

As Bishop controls her emotions through revision, she admits that she must force herself to do so through the use of the parenthetical and italicized "(<u>Write</u> it!)." Apparently, this recent and final loss looks so much like "disaster" that even the speaker isn't sure that she "shan't have lied" about the "art of losing" (Bishop "One Art" 178). Of course, the poet has so much to protect here--the self, the role of "good girl" that serves her so well in every "necesssary port," and probably most importantly, her "art." In <u>Art and the Artist</u>, Otto Rank's definition of the artist

includes a "fundamental dualism" that "frequently damns and curses" the artist:

> There is in the artist that fundamental dualism from which we all suffer, intensified in him to a point which drives him with dynamic compulsion from creative work to life, and from life back to new and other creativity. According to the artist's personal structure and spiritual ideology, this conflict will take the form of a struggle between good and evil, beauty and truth, or, in a more neurotic way, between the higher and lower self.
>
> (Rank Art . . . 62)

As Elizabeth Bishop struggles with her "life" of loss, she also struggles with the curse of "goodness" in her soul and, therefore, in her art.

Not lying is especially important to Bishop, as she reveals in her conversation with Mr. Wehr, when she says,

> I always tell the truth in my poems.
>
> (Wehr 324)

Now, with the availability of her manuscripts, we can see that some of that "truth" is ambiguously stated or controlled, changed through word choice and form. Bishop does admit that she "did change one thing" in her poem "The Fish" because "Sometimes a poem makes its own demands" (324). This excuse seems akin to the "things" that "seem

filled with the intent to be lost" in "One Art," as the poet blames the poem for the falsehood in much the same way that she blames "things" for getting lost. Falsehoods don't come easy to Bishop, though, as she discusses another "error" in her poem "In the Waiting Room." She confesses that the wrong issue of National Geographic is mentioned; the actual issue of the magazine that she read in the dentist's office was dated March, 1918 instead of February, 1918. This error, she claims, was one of memory (326). A check of both issues reveals that the article isn't in either one. In her interview with Elizabeth Spires, Bishop again talks about a poem, titled "Poem," in which she "exaggerated a little bit." She again confesses that "There's a detail in the poem that isn't in the painting. I can't remember what it is now" (Spires 132). The fact that she remembers the exaggeration but not the details of it seems to prove that Bishop's conscience remembers "little" exaggerations quite well and hints at the importance of detail as a "covering" device for her.

Why she decided to reveal these errors or stretches of the "truth" can only be surmised, especially since poetic license doesn't require the artist to "confess" any such changes. The confessions become even more paradoxical in light of Bishop's aversion to "confession" in poetry:

> I hate confessional poetry, and so many people

> are writing it these days. Besides, they seldom have anything interesting to "confess" anyway. Mostly they write about a lot of things which I should think were best left unsaid . . . .
>
> (Wehr 327)

All of these "things" that "were best left unsaid" may be the very things that the confessional poet needs to say in order to achieve some kind of relief from inner pain or an overworked conscience. Though all people cannot deal with their own problems in this way, Bishop's passionate rejection of confessional poetry reveals more of the "truth" about her because it shows an aversion to something that is truly personal in human nature, the ability to talk about one's problems before an audience, even an imagined audience. Since Bishop tries to hide her feelings within the language and form of her poetry, her own "confessions" are easier to find in her conversations, interviews, and comments.

Ironically, Bishop sees Marianne Moore's reticence more clearly than she sees her own. When discussing Moore's reaction to "Insomnia," the Bishop poem that Moore called "a cheap love poem," Bishop says, "I don't think she [Moore] ever believed in talking about the emotions much" (Spires 136). Yet Bishop herself admits that she "never liked" the last line of the poem that ends "'. . . and you love me'?"

(136). In fact, she "almost left it out" though the two handwritten drafts in the collection do not show any sign of revision or deletion of this last line. The line, in fact, is intact on both drafts with revision work appearing on the middle stanza only. Bishop's denial of emotions, then, seems as strong as her purported view of Moore's denial.

In another case, when Elizabeth Spires asks Bishop if she's "ever had any poems that were gifts? Poems that seemed to write themselves?," Bishop answers:

> Oh yes. Once in awhile it happens. I wanted to write a villanelle all my life but I never could. I'd start them but for some reason I could never finish them. And one day I couldn't believe it--it was like writing a letter ["One Art"]. There was one rhyme I couldn't get that ended in e-n-t and a friend of mine, the poet Frank Bidart, . . . gave me a word offhand and I put it in. But neither he nor I can remember which word it was. But that kind of thing doesn't happen very often. Maybe some poets always write that way. I don't know. (Spires 131)

Since I have studied sixteen pages of handwritten and typed drafts for this poem, I feel that Bishop's insistence that "One Art" was as easy as writing a letter sounds like another "exaggeration." Only the first typed draft is

letter-like and unworked to any extent. The rhyme that Bidart gave her is equally as difficult to find, since from early handwritten drafts to later typed ones, Bishop marked most of the rhyme scheme on the margins. Certainly, a "one day" creative process seems highly unlikely in view of the many revisions on the manuscripts of "One Art," though it may have seemed easier to Bishop in restropect. These comments about her own writing process, then, may be more proof that Bishop's "truth" depends largely on her interpretation of what her audience needs or, more specifically, what she believes is "good" behavior when answering an interviewer's question. We remain cognizant of Phyliss Bartlett's warning that

> it is often unsafe to judge, as is so often done, the degree of a poet's labor by the number of drafts it has taken him to compose a poem. Sometimes, of course, the number can be a gauge . . . But usually it is a hazardous business to measure labor by the number of drafts.
>
> (Bartlett 101)

We would agree, in Bishop's case, that the rhyme scheme of "One Art" came easily, since fragments of it appear on each draft, from 1 through 16. The amount of line and verse repetitions and revisions throughout the drafts, however, suggests that Bishop labored over "One Art" more than she

remembers or is willing to admit. In her defense, though, we concede that when compared to a poem like "The Moose" (which Bishop claims took twenty years to complete), the villanelle must have seemed like a "gift."

In the interview with Spires, Bishop reveals her frustration with her own writing output when she admits that she begins "lots of things" and then "give[s] up on them" (Spires 129). She carefully avoids answering Spires' question about her "more recent poems" in Geography III as being "'less formal, more 'open' . . . " with "a wider emotional range" and more of the "you" [Bishop's self] in them. Bishop replies:

> This is what critics say. I've never written the things I'd like to write that I've admired all my life. Maybe one never does. Critics say the most incredible things! (131)

Though neither a denial nor an affirmation, Bishop's reply seems to suggest her desire to tell more about her life or, at least, her recognition that she hasn't written about many of the things she cares about or hasn't written poems as good as those she loves. Indeed, some of her later poems do seem to reveal a more mellow attitude toward "confession" though Bishop continues to insist that there is not much therapeutic value in writing poetry. She tells Wesley Wehr:

> People seem to think that doing something like

> writing a poem makes one happier in life. It doesn't solve anything. Perhaps it at least gives one the satisfaction of having done a thing well or having put in a good day's work.
>
> (Wehr 322)

It appears that the satisfaction of a job "well done" or that Protestant work ethic of "having put in a good day's work" does not protect Bishop from those doubts and questions that arise in the dark of the night.

For instance, in "Five Flights Up," the poem that she placed at the end of her final book, Geography III, Bishop acknowledges the "weight" of her past as she describes an early morning scene where an "unknown bird" and a "little dog" have questions in their sleep answered "by day itself" (Bishop Complete Poems 181). The "bird ... seems to yawn" and the "little black dog" commits an action for which his owner chastises him, saying that he "ought to be ashamed!" The speaker overhears that remark and wonders about the dog's actions, questioning, "What has he done?" She then hears the dog as he "bounces cheerfully up and down" and "rushes in circles in the fallen leaves." Whatever the dog has done, he "obviously . . . has no sense of shame," decides the speaker.

> He and the bird know everything is answered,
> all taken care of,

no need to ask again.

---Yesterday brought to today so lightly! (181)

exclaims the listening poet. Since the setting of the poem is autumn, the reader may sense that it is probably too late in the year or, metaphorically, too late in life, to repeat the same old questions. The speaker envies nature's (via the "unknown bird" and the "little dog") shameless acceptance of yesterday's problems and the new day's promise. In a poignant confession, made even more so because of its parenthetical honesty, she admits that her own days are heavy and difficult to carry as she compares her "self"-acceptance with nature's:

(A yesterday I find almost impossible to lift.)

This final statement expresses the "truth" that Bishop has been so eager to conceal: her past is so heavy on her mind that she is not sleeping (though it is "Still dark") because she feels the need to ask questions that have been asked before. Perhaps she also "ought to be ashamed" by her lack of faith in a new day that will forget the sins of the past. Apparently, the faith that "everything is answered" belongs to the instinctual, natural world and only humans feel the weight of an "Enormous morning, ponderous, meticulous" and devoid of "answers" for those who can't sleep. But this is the same speaker who didn't find the "answers" to her questions about life in all those "necessary ports" and who

obviously hasn't found any final answers in the "interior" or dark landscapes of her mind, either.

It seems ironic that, after all of Bishop's protestations about confessional poetry, the final line of her last published poem should be so confessional in content: "(A yesterday I find impossible to lift.)" As Bishop suspected, all of her verse forms and images, no matter how intricate, cannot hide the "truth" from those "other people," the readers. Bishop herself made this same kind of observation about Charles Darwin, one of her favorite authors:

> ---But reading Darwin one admires the beautiful solid case being built up out of his endless, heroic observations, almost unconscious or automatic---and then comes a sudden relaxation, a forgetful phrase, and one feels that strangeness of his undertaking, sees the lonely young man, his eyes fixed on facts and minute details, sinking or sliding giddily off into the unknown . . . . (Stevenson 112)

We could say the same of Elizabeth Bishop. Perhaps, as her audience, we must "ask again" and "again" about the meanings or feelings behind the poet's devices and that "solid case" she "builds up" against confession.

Detailed observations, complex language and form are,

perhaps, "unconscious or automatic" techniques that provide a defense against vulnerability for Bishop. "The fact is that we always tell the truth about ourselves despite ourselves," she says. Bishop's truth has "come through quite by itself," despite her intellectualized "defense mechanisms," her Baroque-like revisions, and her other literary techniques. Obviously, the poet spent her lifetime concentrating "on all the difficulties of writing a good poem," and "the strangeness of her undertaking," her desire to avoid self-discovery, may have been her greatest motivation:

> WW: Do I have too many defenses?
>
> EB: Too <u>many</u>? Can one ever have <u>enough</u> defenses?
>
> (Wehr 326)

Notes

1 Walter Ong theorizes that the readers have to "conform" to the "projections of the writer they read," or at least the readers have to "operate in terms of these projections" (Ong, "The Writer's Audience . . . ," 12). Through my experiences in the classroom, a communication can fail when the contextual experiences of writer and reader differ too greatly. Sometimes there is an unwillingness on the part of student readers to "operate" in terms of the writer's "projections"; for these students, author and speaker are never separate.

2 This statement by Bishop suggests that she fictionalizes a rather astute and intellectual audience for her own poetry, which coincides with Ong's theory:

> If the writer succeeds in writing, it is generally because he can fictionalize in his imagination an audience he has learned to know not from daily life but from earlier writers who were fictionalizing in their imagination audiences they had learned to know in still earlier writers, and so on back to the dawn of written narrative.
>
> (Ong 11)

Since Bishop's favorite writers are poets like George Herbert, Gerard Manley Hopkins, W. H. Auden, Edward Lear, and naturalist Charles Darwin, she may have imagined her audience as reflecting theirs. These writers do present a challenge to any reader, a challenge that requires patience and the willingness to delve through form and imagery to find the "truth" or "self" in their writing. Bishop, then, certainly seems to recognize the contextual importance of her reading experiences, as well as the importance of the reading experiences of those writers whom she admires, etc.

Chapter 3

"Night City": Power Changes Build a City

By examining available manuscripts in the Elizabeth Bishop Collection at Vassar College, scholars are able to determine certain aspects of Bishop's revision process, such as the exact details she revises in poems. In addition, we can follow her changes and the techniques she uses to create poems to fit her canon. Why so much attention to a line, a word? Gabriel Della-Piana summarizes Wallace Hildick's classification system of revision into five overall categories, suggesting that changes include "tidying-up changes, power changes, structural alterations, ideologically determined changes," as well as a "ragbag of types" category (Della-Piana 125-6). According to Della-Piana, in the "power changes" category Hildick includes the "readjustment of point of view changes" as well as the idea that "imagery can be made exceptional by either blurring or sharpening," thus increasing its "power" (125). It seems to me that Bishop makes many of these "power changes" as she

works her way through "Night City" revisions to construct a text between writer and writing and to make a "deeper impression on [the] reader" (125).

Bishop's own statements against the confessional and in favor of the objective provide a basis for her self-censorship; yet that conflict remains an elusive element in most of her poems. Changes that she makes, then, to create dissonance and yet create clarity of meaning become some of the most important of her revisions. When she makes her hundreds of manuscript changes, Bishop presses for a language specific enough to say what she wants yet subtle enough not to say it directly. Along the way, she increases the power of her poetry.

In several series of manuscripts, Bishop's "power changes" reinforce a recurring theme: her concern for the environment and its destruction by humans. This theme is most notably present in "The Armadillo," where the humans have created "fire balloons" that destroy the animals' habitat.[1] The speaker who "lifts" his fist in anguish over this destruction represents a more involved speaker, one who may be, as Bishop says of Darwin, "sinking or sliding giddily" out of control as the poem comes into being. On the other hand, the speaker in "Night City" allows the imagery to do the talking and, instead of raising a fist in anger, continues the "heroic observation" to build a

Darwinian-like "beautiful solid case" against man's destruction of the city. Bishop quietly blames man for his role in this destruction and often questions the future, given the human potential for pollution and decay of the environment.

In "Night City" Bishop's imagery explodes in a volcanic analogy that ironically portrays the builders of the city, the tycoons, as tear-producing hypocrites. A study of the manuscripts and drafts of "Night City" not only shows how Bishop produces these images but also reveals how she finds the proper perspective between confrontation and escape, diatribe and irony. Bishop works through this poem in more than twenty drafts, which show her spontaneous gift for the inspired, unchanged verse as well as her intense revision methods.

As we study these "Night City" drafts from early fragments to publisher's galley proofs, we see Bishop's environmental theme develop from a subjective to an objective vision so that the passion of the poem is found in the imagery and not in the tone of the speaker's voice. This method of confrontation through distancing allows Bishop to retain that "cold, observer" identity in the published version even though unpublished drafts show a very involved and emotional poet. By trusting her images and by removing her "cry" for attention to the problem of city

pollution, Bishop gives us a voice as distant and uncaring as the tycoon who weeps alone, a voice ironically chosen to emphasize the dilemma between man and his environment: he is responsible for it. Bishop thus implies that the ability to see clearly can come only if man observes his world meticulously yet objectively. Being too close to the "fires" is as bad, of course, as the poet who is too close to her subject.[2]

So important is this idea of distance to Bishop that she reworks the title of "Night City" through four handwritten drafts and twelve typed drafts, finally settling on "Night City" without the hyphen in the last typescript of the poem. In revisions, the poem's title moves from "City Lights" to "City at Night" to "The City at Night, below us" to "City at Night, Below," to cite just a few of Bishop's working titles. One draft alone contains five title changes and four epigraph changes. This constant reworking of titles and epigraphs suggests not only the perfectionist in Bishop but also her insistence on the distant observer; both speaker and reader must <u>enter</u> the poem in a certain way.

In addition, the change from "City at Night" to "Night City" lends to this city the symbolic adjective of death, which now describes condition as well as time of day. With the title "City Lights" one would naturally assume the darkness outside, but by using the word "Night" to modify

"city," the place itself becomes dark. Night's symbolic death imagery becomes more than the opposite of day; in this case, night implies the end of the city. In this almost God-like approach to the city's man-made problems, Bishop becomes the judge and her readers the jury in the trial on mankind's recklessness.

Even as late as the galley proofs, Bishop makes changes in the epigraph; instead of "from the plane," she prints emphatically with a double underline, "From a Plane." Viewing the city "from a plane" rather than "from above" or "from the hill" as first written gives the sense of the transience of travel rather than the stability of a hill. This idea, of course, reflects man's temporary stay on earth, especially since the hills have been here so much longer. When we view anything from a plane, we look down and try to recognize the landscape below us. How much more enlightening to look from "a plane" that moves across the landscape, giving us the all-encompassing view, rather than looking from "the hill," stuck with only one perspective. Of course, the word play on "plane" adds another surface dimension to a poem where the ability to see is all important. If Bishop had retained "from the hill" as the epigraph, she would have limited the scope of the poem's observation, thus limiting the poem's meaning and power.

Because we are looking "From the plane," as the final

epigraph states, our geometric viewpoint is at once removed and moving. What we see from this vantage point is what James E. B. Breslin calls one of Bishop's "harsh, stark" landscapes, one "which does not conform to human wishes and from which we are estranged and which provides the appropriate context for Bishop's sense of human loss, the painful changes of temporal experience" (Breslin 37). If we are estranged, however, it may be the result of the distant vantage point that Bishop has created for us as passengers on this plane; certainly, we are estranged from the "burning city" physically, but hardly "temporally" since we are part of the human race responsible for the uninhabitable "conflagration" below us. The weeping and crying tycoons who build the city's industries and skyscrapers are, after all, still answerable to us, even in their relentless quest for industrialization. So Bishop removes us from the city, but not without showing us how much damage has been done by the combining forces of chemistry and man.

In comparison to all the title and epigraph changes in the Bishop drafts, the first stanza remains almost unchanged throughout most of Bishop's revisions, although, on what I judge an early handwritten draft of this stanza, a dash is placed before "shoes" in the second line but dropped in subsequent drafts. The published version of the stanza is as follows:

No foot could endure it,
shoes are too thin.
Broken glass, broken bottles,
heaps of them burn.

(Bishop The Complete Poems 167)

When the speaker first says "No foot could endure it, / shoes are too thin . . . , " we assume that humans are the ones who couldn't walk "over those fires" burning in heaps.[3] In fact, this city is quite uninhabitable by humans, not even through "tears," though those same weeping and crying humans have created the city in the first place. This early stanza reflects the influence of the Baroque poets as Bishop builds her poem on a "rhetorical situation" that defies yet requires an answer (Nelson 56).

On all but one early typed draft, Bishop is sure of how she wants to begin her poem; on that one draft, she places the last stanza first, directly under the title "City Lights"; then, she retypes that final "creatures" stanza detached and further to the right about one/third down the page:

City Lights (from the hill)
But there are creatures
Careful ones, overhead,
They put down their feet, they trudge
green, red: green, red.

But there are creatures,
the Careful ones, overhead
They put down their feet, they
trudge
green, red; green, red.

She then reworks the third line of what is numbered (by Bishop) as stanza (4) but later becomes and remains stanza 10. These structural changes in placement of the stanzas give Bishop the freedom to build the poem's inner imagery. The first and last stanzas are worded on most manuscripts as seen above and as first written, showing that Bishop's inspiration for a beginning and ending of "Night City" remained constant: she begins with the image of feet and ends with the same image, though the "feet" that finally walk through the burning city belong to "creatures" rather than humans.

Although Bishop plays with underlining and capital letter changes in the last stanza, the only word changes occur in early handwritten drafts when "But" becomes "Still," "put down their feet" becomes "set down their feet," and "trudge" becomes "walk." In this case, "Still" works nicely to emphasize the careful movement needed to "walk" on fire as well as the stillness of a city where humans couldn't live anymore. The change to "set down their

feet" adds to the fragile, yet robot-like, mechanical movement, rather than the solid, confident action that the words "put down" and "trudge" imply, making this revision a "power change," according to Hildick's system. Also, "set down" lends the idea that the "creatures" might be airplanes whose landing lights are flashing "green, red, green, red." This image ties in with the change in the epigraph from "hill" to "plane" and adds an almost outer-space quality to the unidentified flying "creatures" who "set down" their feet on this burning city. When actually looking at a city "from a plane," the viewer also notices the green and red stop lights moving across the landscape as though walking carefully. Thus, the visual force of that stop and go motion is implied in the colors "green" and "red." Bishop's revision process, up to this point, reflects her method of revealing concrete action through abstract imagery.

Perhaps the most revealing change in that last stanza occurs when Bishop adds her trademark, parentheses, around her numbered tenth stanza, thereby whispering the parenthetical and adding the poet's cautious tone to the scene:

> (Still, there are creatures,
> the careful ones, overhead.
> They set down their feet, they walk
> <u>Green, red: green, red.</u>)

Bishop uses parentheses throughout her writing process as a rhetorical device, one that shares the speaker's special knowledge with the reader. In this case, we now know that the "creatures" who are "overhead" can survive in the "Night City." Then, on what seems to be this last handwritten draft, Bishop asks herself (in her usual method of parenthetical self-notes) whether there should be

(one more here?)

indicating that she considered an eleventh stanza though no further drafts can be found to show work on it.

The remaining fourteen typescripts, including the galley proof, show the ten stanzas pretty much intact insofar as order is concerned. Bishop's early choice of first and final stanzas as well as the comparative ease she had in developing them suggests that she had not only beginning and closing imagery in mind but that she also knew the tone she wanted to impart. By surrounding the "harsh, stark" landscape of a ruined city with an almost impossible physical approach, she emphasizes man's alienation from his environment. Yet that parenthetical "(Still . . .)" suggests a belief, however slight, in an ability to endure the pain of experience and make the changes that will save these nearly doomed yet not altogether uninhabitable cities.

Bishop presents the mysterious destruction of the city, beyond the title's dark imagery, in her difficult and

persistent work on the poem's inner stanzas, which, compared to the first and last stanzas, undergo extensive revision, moving back and forth in imagery and word-choice changes. As she develops her complex theme, Bishop contructs a "rhetorical situation" like those seen in the Baroque lyric:

> A poem whose rhetorical situation evolves is necessarily more complex. It can begin with only a suggestion of its theme and only a provisional relationship between its rhetorical members [speaker, audience]. In the course of the poem the theme is defined and the provisional relationship modified through refinement or complication.
>
> (Nelson 91)

Bishop's leaning toward the Baroque is particularly evident in "Night City" as the "city" evolves into an environmental holocaust while we watch, both removed and involved.

In what I believe is the first draft, a fragment that looks as if it were torn from a small tablet, then photocopied at the bottom (crosswise) of a later typescript (no indication who might have done this), Bishop begins her earliest exploration of the poem with a first line of "Shoes; years," which is either a working title or noted images or rhymes that she wants to remember. Under those two words, Bishop writes, "The city is broken glass," which is the only time this declarative sentence appears in the

drafts, as the imagery changes to pure description and alliterative repetition in all later drafts: "Broken glass, broken bottles." This spontaneity of imagery and alliteration gives us a glimpse at Bishop's initial inspiration process where phrases are already finished and left untouched. Also, on that tablet fragment when Bishop repeats the declarative pattern with another sentence, "The city is burning tears," we can see her end-rhyme scheme begin--from "years" to "tears"--yet end just as quickly as "years" is dropped in all subsequent versions. It seems apparent that Bishop wants to develop the sense of time lapse through imagery and internal rhyme rather than through end rhyme, to be more subtle again. This use of "time" as "viewed through eternity" (Nelson 162) is reflected in many of Bishop's works, which again connects her writing process to that of the Baroque poets.

In "Night City," as Bishop works stanza two toward the "burning" city imagery, she seems to vacillate more about the city dwellers (or invaders?) than she does about the city's destruction. She moves from the early "Oh - who walks there" to "nobody walks" to "no mortal" (crossed out) to the very indecisive "no one could walk what - mortal" of a later typescript. "Nobody" is written to the left side on what is marked as "[draft 5]" and again "no one can walk" on the marked "[draft 7]." Bishop finally settles on the

following version of lines 1 & 2 in stanza two:

Over those fires

no one could walk:

As she reworks the subject of these lines so intently, Bishop creates a more tentative presence in the city. Her removal of "mortal" seems to comply with the last stanza's "creatures" as a more vague and ethereal image than the definitive "mortal" would suggest. In addition, the idea of a specific presence is carefully impersonalized with the use of the vague pronoun "one." The poem's theme undergoes a change, too, as Bishop stops questioning man's involvement and sees man as both missing, physically, and present, culpably.

Bishop's numerous verb changes in this difficult stanza also reveal her move toward ambiguity and away from specificity as she carefully prepares her reader for that surprising "creature" that looms at the end of the poem. Throughout several drafts of stanza two, Bishop changes the verb from present tense "walks" to "could walk" to "can walk" then, finally, back to "could walk." These tense changes move from an active ability to a possibility while implying time changes and locking in the focus of the poem as well. Instead of wondering "who walks there" and looking at or for that person, we now see the "fires" as being so intense that we know "no one could walk" in this inferno, a

revision that adds to the time structure and sensibility of the poem. Using verb-tense changes to show movement in time again reveals Bishop's connection to Baroque poetry: "A pattern of tenses, in other words, is a pattern of meaning" (Nelson 30).

Also, by making walking impossible instead of possible, Bishop enhances the power of her imagery, emphasizing "Those flaring acids/ and variegated bloods" of the later (and ultimately published) imagery. In her earlier handwritten drafts, however, Bishop reworks fire imagery in her search for a sharpened visual argument. As she moves from "unstable embers" to "pulse of embers" to "white breathing embers," Bishop questions her choices in marginal notations, her usual "(?)" mark showing her uncertainty. Besides changing words and images on this stanza through four handwritten, unnumbered drafts, Bishop marginally notes rhymes like "pulsation ?" next to "pulse of embers," and below "pulsation" what looks like "(fibrillation)" appears in another apparent attempt at end rhyme. "Fibrillation" also suggests that Bishop was thinking of man's bodily reactions, with that implication of man's irregular heartbeat in conjunction with the fiery landscape, but she determines not to include man here as she omits both word and end rhyme. She stops directly identifying physical nature with man's physical nature, insisting instead on a

more subtle connection.

In a numbered typescript, "[draft 5]," Bishop has a different version of this line, one that contains the word "breathing" which she has put parentheses around in handscript with a marginal "?" :

> Over that fire
> no one could walk.
> (breathing) white embers, (?)
> sheer glares of smoke.

Though it seems as though the embers themselves are "breathing," Bishop removes the action of "breathing" from the stanza, a "power change" that reflects that distancing technique again. Taking extreme care to remove any suggestion of man's current habitation on this landscape, Bishop forces us to focus on <u>what</u> is happening rather than <u>who</u> may be there to endure it. In fact, logic alone demands that "breathing" would be impossible if "no one" could be there to "walk" (or breathe) in the first place. And to give the fire too much life in this early stanza might interfere with the slowly-evolving rhetorical situation, as well as the imagery of subsequent stanzas.

Obviously, Bishop doesn't make quick judgments about any imagery needed to effectively describe the destruction she imagines. Thus, in this same handwritten draft, Bishop places "embers" on the first line instead of "fires" but

subsequently moves "embers" to the third line in a rewrite of the verse farther down the page. Also, when this verse first appears on this draft, she uses "The (igneous) (acids)" imagery but questions it "(?)" and then crosses out that effort. This kind of vacillating revision continues through all the handwritten drafts until the word "acids" appears again in the typewritten versions of the verse and stays in the published version. By keeping "acids" instead of "embers" at the end of that third line, she keeps her sound values intact; the third line ends with "acids" and the fourth line with "bloods," serving both sight and sound. These sound changes also reflect the baroque influence as Bishop uses words that work as opposites yet are convergent: the word "acids" provides the harsher initial sound and visually matches the hard "c" of "could" in the second line; "blood" lends a fluid-like movement to the fourth line as well as an echo of the "l" in "walk" of the third line. So sounds diverge, then converge in a fugue-like movement on the page.

Besides worrying about rhymes and sounds in this second stanza, Bishop spends an amazing amount of time on modifiers, which is a reflection of her overall revision process. On those early handwritten, unnumbered drafts through what is labeled "[draft 12]" in the typescripts, she writes and rewrites the modifiers in line three, using

"high," "sheer," "unstable," but crosses them out, thus moving away from the specifics of dimension, sight, and feeling. In these changes, she reveals her insistence on the correct modifier, one that presents not only the appropriate sound but the correct image as well. She also writes "those" [plus a few illegible words] in her marginal notes and vacillates on the repetition of "those" in the verse on "[draft 11]" by typing "those flaring acids" then crossing out "those" with a pen. Ultimately, Bishop chooses to repeat "those" in what seems to be another move toward ambiguity (away from purely descriptive modifiers) to repetitive sound values in lines one and three. Even pronouns work as leitmotifs in a Bishop poem.

Bishop changes the adjective from "flaring" to "flaming" several times in the twelve typescripts, as the imagery of the fire moves from "unstable embers" to "white breathing embers" to "sheer flaming acids" to "high flaring acids." This change in one letter (flaming to flaring) adds sound value, especially since the "r" sound is repeated in the next line with the word "variegated" in later typescripts. "Flaming" works well in early handwritten drafts where Bishop uses the word "smoke," thus repeating the "m" sound; however, her later changes drop "smoke" until the next stanza, and the onomatopoeic "r" sounds of a roaring, spitting fire prevail in lines 1, 3, and 4, suggesting the

danger of the situation:

Over those fires
no one could walk:
Those flaring acids
and variegated bloods.

Bishop's work on this second stanza not only reflects the sounds she uses to emphasize her goal of distant observation but also shows her move toward images with heightened intensity. Her final choice of "flaring" makes the "acids" burst with the intermingling of flames and colorful bloods, creating a force within and beyond the "fires" themselves. This powerful marriage of sound and sight develops as a hallmark of Bishop's exacting revision process.

Though distance may be Bishop's primary concern in this second stanza, a secondary effect develops which Bishop seems to discover as she revises: the power of using life-sustaining imagery in a poem about the death of a place through fire, which not only personifies the city itself but also implies the elemental mixture of human / material forces. Once Bishop discovers the "bloods" and "acids" images, she creates middle stanzas that, through imagery, reflect man's involvement in the destruction of both himself and his world. In fact, in these middle stanzas, we can trace her movement beyond that "harsh, stark landscape" imagery to the ever-chilling final battle between the forces

of good and evil--Armageddon. Likewise, Robert Lowell discusses "two opposing factors" in Bishop's poems, "motion" and "terminus," and sees the "motion" as "stoically maintained . . . morality" and "terminus" as "a letting-go or annihilation . . ." (Kalstone "Prodigal Years" 192-3). In her revisions of "Night City," Bishop again shows these "opposing factors": man is both moral and immoral, involved and disengaged.

We can again connect this presentation of alternatives to the Baroque rhetorical device, as defined by Nelson:

> The last rhetorical device . . . to consider <u>in abstracto</u> is hard to name. It consists in a sort of negative definition that achieves precision by examining the alternatives or by taking the opposite into account . . . . An even more radical way of expanding and structuring the poetic cosmos can be found in Baroque poetry: allowing something to be several things at once.
>
> (Nelson 94-6)

The "nature of the divided human [which is] so often [the] protagonist" (Kalstone 193) in Bishop's poems becomes both divided and connected as Bishop works toward the paradoxical unity of man and city. On that early torn and oddly-copied fragment, Bishop writes "The city is burning tears," the first line of stanza three, and on a later handwritten

draft, she writes a similar line, "The city burns guilt," which remains as the first line on most subsequent typed drafts of stanza four. At this point, we can see the city's involvement with human emotions and yet, to further interconnect man and nature, Bishop uses words like "lymphs" and "clots" to describe the flaming landscape. So she both distances destruction and identifies with it: the body of the cityscape is our body.

Then, on a handwritten draft, Bishop writes that the fire "Spattered outwards" in "golden clots," which she rewrites in a marginal stanza as "molten clots," thus adding that volcanic imagery to the poem. In the next stanza, these "clots" and "lymphs . . . join forces, feeding / the darker environs / from [crossed out] green & luminous / silicate rivers." Though this is not too different from the final, published version, it is interesting to note that Bishop seems to trust her imagery and so removes the "join forces" phrase as well as the more human "feeding" imagery. The human qualities of the city's fire move, then, from one whose emotions are burning to one whose insides (clots, blood, lymphs) combine with man and nature's "silicate" creations. To distinguish the "dark environs" of the city from the dark "inner side" of the human body (and human nature) becomes more impossible as the two "join forces" with nature, thus "consuming its heart." We know we are

limited, mortal--but nature should be everlasting, eternal.

As in that first stanza, Bishop continues to show us spectacular imagery while also giving us the sounds of the city's anguish. On TS 5, after the first line, "The city burns tears," she adds, then crosses out by hand the lines "tears and sighs, at night, / Coals and red screams, / eat at its heart." With Bishop's usual double meaning, these "screams" might be coming from the city or the people. In handwritten stanzas on the right margin, Bishop even plays with the number of screams, writing then crossing out "Thousands of screams" and "a hundred screams" several times. On typescript 6, the "screams" appear but change to a milder image as Bishop writes, "The city dumps / burn tears every night / while flickering screams / lick at its red [crossed out] heart." On subsequent drafts, Bishop reworks the "screams" again by numbers, first "thousands," (TS 7) and then "hundreds of screams / make little flames" appears on TS 10. On this particular draft, Bishop seems to realize that the "screams" imagery is not working since she expresses doubt in a side, handwritten comment "Omit?" with parentheses around the entire stanza. The "screams" appear on TS 11 but are thereafter replaced with the "aquamarine lake" imagery that has been scattered around the edges of drafts from that first fragment on. Possibly "screams" is too palpable a reaction for this stanza,

especially as Bishop works toward a less obvious human involvement in the poem. Also on TS 10 an interesting line is typed to the side of line 2 but then crossed out: "and around their pyres" occurs with an illegible word written above "their." One might wonder why Bishop discarded a word like "pyres," which seems to fit her message so completely with its suggestion of burning corpses. But again, man must not be seen or heard in this inferno though "tears" (man's or the city's or both) have created that "aquamarine lake."

The influence of the metaphysical poets is found throughout Bishop's canon and is particularly obvious in "Night City" where Man's involvement is implied metaphysically by Bishop as she uses his creations to describe the intensity of the fire's heat. Before Bishop determines final stanza order, she notes, on that first tablet fragment, that "The heat has to be intense / to burn heaps of tears." Apparently, this stanza's content gives Bishop little trouble as she moves from that fragmented note to an early handwritten draft where the "central heat" idea appears:

> The city burns tears [crossed out] guilt.
> For grief [crossed out] /guilt/-disposal
> the central xxxx heat
> must be intense.

On the left margin, a left parenthesis encompasses the

stanza, with a line and arrow directing the stanza from fifth to third place on the page; the stanza number changes from third to fourth on subsequent drafts but the content remains almost the same. Bishop's use of the words "central heat" and "guilt / disposal" brings man's influence into sight as his own creations burn his "tears" and "guilt" in this final "conflagration." The interesting final placement of this stanza as number four seems to reflect Bishop's continuing desire to establish repetitive sounds and phrases, since stanza three begins with "The city burns tears" and stanza four follows with its first line: "The city burns guilt." Man's tears and guilt cannot be saved from this fire, nor will we hear his screams though Bishop was so tempted, time and again, to include them in the poem. Her sensibility prevails, though, and the poem retains its focus.

Although these middle stanzas show Bishop's careful reworking of images, sounds, and placement in "Night City," her many drafts reveal more problems with the ninth stanza than with all the others combined as she seems to battle, again, with how best to describe what's left of the environment after man's intrusion. Stanza nine deals with the idea of the "fire" as also fighting for its life in this gruesome place, though the "conflagration " of the published version does not appear in early handwritten drafts at all.

If we follow the progression of stanza nine from its early appearance on a handwritten draft, we see it as a numbered stanza only, "9." with four blank lines next to the number; then, we see it on another handwritten draft as stanza "8" followed by two blank lines noted by dashes "--" with the last two lines of the stanza apparently written for the first time as "--there is no "sky" / --nothing at all up there." Bishop moves away from the statement, "nothing at all up there," for several reasons: the line is too specific; the epigraph of the poem includes a "plane" that must be in some kind of "sky"; the thematic development of the poem needs a "sky" as the vantage point.

This troublesome ninth stanza moves through tormented revision on yet another handwritten draft, again labeled as "9." Bishop reworks that "no air" idea and the "sky" modification changes from "hollow" to "exhausted" with "black" inserted (for the first time) above the word "exhausted," after being crossed out on the previous line. "Black" seems to fit the dark imagery of the city better though, as observers, our vision would be impaired by the blackness of the sky--we would not see what the speaker wants us to see. Eventually, she uses "a blackened moon" in stanza eight, which deletes all color from stanza nine, a change more acceptable with the "vacuum" imagery and our observation of the event. Finally, Bishop moves the entire

stanza to the bottom of the page and rewrites the verse with only two illegible words crossed out. After adding that parenthetical stanza as number "10," Bishop reworks this "sky's exhausted" stanza (now numbered "9") up until the galley draft, adding, deleting, and questioning as she revises it. The placement of the ninth stanza, however, remains stable on all subsequent drafts.

The primary importance of this ninth stanza seems to be its relevance to the last stanza as Bishop builds toward a landscape that only "creatures" could inhabit; thus, the ninth stanza plays the role of the transition from the humans who both built and destroyed the city to the "creatures" who now walk carefully through the city streets. Using nine as a transitional stanza requires a movement from life to death imagery, as the "tycoons" (in stanza 8) create skyscrapers whose "wires drip" with "incandescent" light. We are told to "Look!" at these burning buildings with the element of shock found in the exclamation point. By using the exclamatory rhetorical device, Bishop "suggests a dependent relationship between speaker and reader" as she produces "an effect of immediacy, creating an expectant attitude in the reader" (Nelson 93). Then, in nine, the poem returns to a more solemn tone where the fire itself seems choked off from existence, as is man. Here we see Bishop's revision process moving toward what Donald Stauffer

calls the "changes" that result in "greater purity, intensity, and unity--in short, toward greater significance" (Stauffer 52).

Even Bishop's small changes show a movement toward more significance. For instance, in early versions of stanza nine, Bishop gives the fire life as she works and reworks verbs in lines like "This burning seeks / more sky, more air./ But there is no air; / the sky's exhausted." Bishop changes the verb "seeks" to "wants" in the typescript of "[draft 5]" but then handwrites several versions on the margin of the page, where "conflagration / needs air, more air" appears. This word, "conflagration," needs to be seen for all it's worth in the context of the power of the poem. In that early handwritten draft, Bishop works toward the idea of an "exhausted" sky, but she seems unable to get the rhyme she wants for "sky." Then, on that same draft, she looks for a stronger word to describe the scene and changes "blaze" to "The burning" [crossed out diagonally by pen with the even stronger word "fire" handwritten above it]. All of these changes occur in the first line as she moves "sky" to an internal position in line 2, thus removing the necessity for the "sky" rhyme. Off to the side margin, Bishop writes, then crosses out, "This combination" as the first line. Above and to the right appears, for the first time, "This conflagration / needs air, more air"; thus, the more

powerful image "conflagration" derives out of "blaze," "burning fire," and "This combination."

In all subsequent handwritten drafts and typescripts, "conflagration" remains though other changes are made within the stanza. By finally settling on "conflagration," Bishop denotatively changes the intensity of the image from the rather informal and mundane "fire" to the quite formal and all-encompassing, consuming conflagration. This change also allows Bishop to work with more appropriate and lively verbs as she moves from "seeks" to "wants" to "needs" to "requires" to "fights," her final choice. Thus, the stanza begins to take its alliterative structure as "The conflagration / fights for air" on "[Draft 10]" though the article "The" appears as a replacement for the demonstrative pronoun "This" on "[Draft 5]" in a marginal handwritten rewrite of that stanza, and remains thereafter.[4]

Although this change from pronoun to article may seem to fit Hildick's "tidying-up" category, I see it as a "power change," a further move toward the impersonal, which has more power because we don't know exactly <u>who</u> is speaking. Here, Bishop's use of the impersonal implies that she doesn't want to be saying it directly from the persona--thus giving the statement more weight. Also, with the use of the article, both the first and fourth line begin with the same word in the published version, merging sound,

sight, and meaning:

> The conflagration
> fights for air
> in a dread vacuum.
> The sky is dead.

The power, then, of the word "conflagration" coupled with its alliteration to its verb combines with the repeated article towards Bishop's solidification of a most troublesome verse. These changes conform to what Donald Stauffer calls a "gradual crystallization" in the "selection of the final images and words" of the poet (Stauffer 55). Though Stauffer is discussing Robert Frost's poetry in this instance, the effect is the same in Bishop's work. Stauffer calls these kinds of revisions "examples which illustrate more general principles of composition by which a poem comes right" (55).

To make the poem "right," Bishop needs to make the "vacuum" imagery more plausible, and she accomplishes that in the move from a simple "fire" to a "conflagration." We can see that she moves from the possibility to the impossibility of a human existence as she incorporates the unbreathable "vacuum" into the ninth stanza, thus preparing us for those alien "creatures" (who must be able to exist in a vacuum). Thus, the final transition from imperative voice to distant observer takes place in stanza nine as the

revisions change from merely "sight" imagery to a state of nothingness--a "vacuum."

Throughout these revisions, Bishop has given the burning city its own persona; yet she needs to move away from that personification near the end of the poem in order to remove the "human" element and to allow the non-human "creatures" into the scene. Thus, the work on the transitional stanza nine becomes important to the total concept of the poem--human uninhabitability. Working again on a typescript ("[draft 11]") where she has settled on "conflagration," she still crosses out and changes from "The conflagration / fights for air / in its own black vacuum. / The heavens are empty" to a side column, typed verse where "In (an awful) vacuum" has "an awful" crossed out. Above that, several handwritten "dread?" notations and, between the two typed verses, the word "great?" appears. Bishop first has a sky with "no air"; then, she changes to an "exhausted" sky but then plays with "The vacuum's black" and moves to <u>"A black vacuum:"</u> in her marginal revision notes, returning again to the dark night imagery of her title. She finally chooses "dread vacuum" as the sense and sound match her final statement in stanza nine: "The sky is dead."

This constant questioning of one adjective shows Bishop's desire for the perfect word, but the galley proof shows that some revisions never stop. On this final

publisher's typed draft, Bishop has handwritten the verse, not only switching lines but also still fighting with that troublesome "vacuum" imagery as she writes "in a _____ vacuum" as though still dissatisfied with stanza nine and that adjective in particular. In fact, she moves the first line around on this galley draft, too--proving the difficulty of this ninth stanza. Next to the typed stanza, Bishop handwrites:

> The sky is dead
> The conflagration
> is fighting for air
> in a --------vacuum.

In the published version, Bishop returns to "dread vacuum" in the third line, and "The sky is dead" moves back to the fourth and last stanza line. This final change works in several ways: "dread" and "dead" appear in consecutive lines as an alliterative rhyming pair, and the power of the "vacuum" becomes more evident and empty of matter and color as the sky dies, taking both fire and man. The simplistic yet awesome last statement, "The sky is dead," shatters our hopes for this city, and we are eager and willing to accept the parenthetical "(Still, there are creatures, . . .)" of the final stanza. Perhaps all life is not doomed.

Bishop's revision process on this one poem is both inspiring and enlightening. We see on one draft a poet who

wants all end rhymes; we see on another a move toward internal rhyme; on a single typescript over eighteen handwritten verse revisions appear; on a galley proof more than fourteen line changes and a title/epigraph change appear; on that torn-off, cross-copied fragment the core poem begins and ends, only to begin and end again and again. Many of these changes reflect Bishop's continuing interest in the Baroque stylistic devices, which can be found throughout her canon--an important part of her overall revision process. Perhaps not all of these changes classify as "power" changes, but surely the power of the poem builds and sustains as each revision takes hold. The poem itself takes on inverted dimensions as our point of view is at once removed and unremovable from the scene of the crime, much like Bishop's early poem "Love Lies Sleeping," where, in the inverted eye of the dead man, the city's true "image" is "inverted and distorted" as "the city grows down in to his open eyes." In that poem, as well as in "Night City," Bishop concedes that it may be too late for man to see, "if he sees it at all." Though the content and theme of "Night City" are quite reminiscent of the earlier poem, Bishop works the content of the later poem in the opposite direction--the city grows upward, in flames, toward man's diminishing sight. Though Bishop may have begun "Night City" with the idea of the city as victim of man's

interference, through her revisions the poem ends with man as both victimizer and victim.

ELizabeth Bishop may not have been totally satisfied with the published version of "Night City" since some of her suggested galley changes were not made in the published version. Her revision methods, however, seemed to satisfy her, especially since she worked on most of her poems in the same deliberate and intricate way. "Night City" is a perfect example of Bishop's arduous work process and her artistic instincts toward the sight, sound, and sense of language. Within the nineteen pages of these manuscripts, we can see a process not so much defined as it is refined, an exploratory process of revision that Bishop's drafts have described.

In a talk that Bishop gave two years before her death, she speaks of a "show" in Philadelphia of Marianne Moore's works. What Bishop says of her friend and mentor applies to her own work as well:

> All her [Moore's] papers were there, her letters, and they had a wonderful show of her manuscripts. If you want to see an example of hard work, you should see those . . . Her notes are maddening sometimes. She doesn't tell you what you'd like to know, but she does tell you a lot of other things.

Accuracy is really what she admired most . . . It's a certain obsessiveness, and it doesn't necessarily mean great poetry, but in her case, it did.

(Bishop "Influences" 12)

Notes

1 All excerpts from Elizabeth Bishop's published poems are taken from Elizabeth Bishop: The Complete Poems: 1927 - 1979. NY: Farrar, 1980. All drafts, typed and handwritten, are found in the Elizabeth Bishop Collection at Vassar College, Poughkeepsie, NY.

2 In an essay titled "Vision and Change: The Poetry of Elizabeth Bishop," Carolyn Handa sees "Night City" as metapoetry where the "modern poet's problems and doubts" are considered. Handa claims that Bishop's answer to the poet's dilemma of detachment "involves enduring, observing, transforming through appropriately chosen metaphors the best one can, resisting the impulse to withdraw, and continuing to set down poetic line--to write poetry. By voicing a determination to continue creating art, the poem itself reflects the power of poetry" (Handa 21).

3 See Handa for her interesting suggestion that the "foot" implies "much more than the physical appendage." Handa sees the word "foot" as a reference by Bishop to "the difficulty of setting poetic feet down upon material which threatens to consume them" (24). I see Bishop's use of syllabic verse as her attempt to show control in a situation where an uncontrollable force causes the destruction of the

city.

4 The Vassar Collection contains a marked "[Draft 9]" which shows a typed version of the poem as it is in its final published form. I believe, however, that this is a much later draft because some five pages of subsequent drafts show evolving changes toward the final version; these changes by necessity must have been made before the marked draft 9 could have been typed.

Chapter 4

The Value of Unpublished Manuscripts

If poets were to write about the daily process of their compositions, they would inevitably fail to record much of the valuable material that goes into the creative act. Karl Shapiro believes that "in many cases the most difficult preliminary stages of composition seem to have been accomplished mentally, that is, without the poet's knowledge of how many trials and errors he has overcome before his pen has touched paper" (Shapiro 94). The study of manuscripts, then, must be an incomplete study of process, since the poet may have discarded much of investigative value through "a technique of discard of which he is no longer aware" (94). What, then, can we learn from unpublished works, those poems that have been consciously discarded or abandoned? In some cases, time itself may be the interloper; in others, boredom or dissatisfaction with the subject sets in, and, sometimes, outside influences affect the poet's decisions. Although we may not be able to study the "preliminary" material discarded before "pen touched paper" (94), manuscripts can

show how and, perhaps, why a poet consciously discards or abandons material once it is on paper. The choice of form may be "mentally" changed also, but work in progress can show additional choices along these lines. For instance, in various Elizabeth Bishop manuscripts, she maneuvers the material (whether prose or poem) through several form changes before making a final decision on the way the work will be published or even <u>if</u> the work will be published. The Elizabeth Bishop Collection at Vassar College reveals much about those tough decisions a poet must face--decisions made after the recording act has begun. This chapter will explore Bishop's unpublished material and the evidence it shows about her publication choices.

Elizabeth Bishop admits that she hadn't published a poem at a certain time because she didn't want to be connected to a "cause" (Spires 130). In this particular instance, Bishop thinks that she "could finish it very easily" during her 1978 vacation at North Haven, but the poem never does get published before her death. Whether she worked on the poem at North Haven we may never know with certainty; however, some manuscripts do show us a movement away from that "cause" she wants to avoid. Phyllis Bartlett sees "nonaesthetic considerations" like these as "concessions to public taste and his [the poet's] own shifting views of the poem in light either of public events or his personal

experience" (155). Bartlett believes that "a poet may revise with the intention of avoiding offense or even of influencing an individual or group. Such motives will have nothing to do with the artistry of the poem" (155). Since Bishop held onto her "cause" poem about "whales" for over twenty years, her renewed interest in the poem is quite intriguing and may support Bartlett's theory.

In a 1978 conversation with Elizabeth Spires, Bishop reveals her intentions about this "unfinished poem" that she considered revising for a reading at Harvard:

> BISHOP: . . . I was rather pleased and I remembered that I had another unfinished poem. It's about whales and it was written a long time ago, too. I'm afraid I'll never publish it because it looks as if I were just trying to be up-to-date now that whales are a "cause."
>
> SPIRES: But it's finished now?
>
> BISHOP: I think I could finish it very easily. I'm going to take it to Maine with me. I think I'll date it or nobody will believe I started it so long ago. At the time [of the Harvard reading], though, I couldn't find the one about whales--this was in '73 or '74, I think--so I dug out "The Moose" and thought, "Maybe I can finish it," and I did.

(Spires 130)

In Bishop's manuscripts, the "whale" poem seems to be the one called "All Afternoon the Freighters"; unfortunately, she didn't date any of the eleven pages of typescripts nor did she type a finished version of the poem. What she has left us, however, is a powerful statement on the destruction not only of whales but also of the environment--a statement that voices early concerns the environmentalists later reiterated in their movement.

Since the unpublished typescripts of "All Afternoon the Freighters" show no draft numbers, their sequence must be arbitrarily established. What is obvious is that at least two different typewriters were used in these pages, one with large pica type with an old, but then a newer, ribbon used, and one with elite type. This switch in typewriters seems to substantiate Bishop's promise to work on this poem, since the elite typescripts match those on her "North Haven" manuscripts, dated 1978. The pica typescripts may be early drafts because they match the print on the circa-1950 manuscripts, both in type size and in letter formations. I also think two of the three elite typescripts placed with this set are the drafts of another poem and are probably misplaced in the "All Afternoon the Freighters" collection,[1] which leaves us with one elite typescript showing new work. Although Bishop did not date any of the

thirteen pages as promised, the elite typescript contains several lines and images not seen on any of the pica-typed drafts, further suggesting this later revision work.

Another clue that suggests Bishop's attempt to "finish" this poem is revealed in the study of her handwriting on the drafts. Early, pica-type drafts show Bishop's usual bold strokes and numerous marginal rewrites of verses and lines, plus deletions and insertions in firm, dark pen. The elite draft, on the other hand, contains a few cross-outs by hand but only one handwritten insertion. Those two handwritten words, with final punctuation, appear as "All gone."; this insertion slides downward on the page in larger than usual letters that seem written by a shaky hand; in fact, this revision hardly matches Bishop's strong handwriting style at all. The unsteady hand in this one revision might be a sign of Bishop's failing eyesight and health one year before her death. In any case, these few revisions show that little serious work on the poem occurred at this time. In contrast, Bishop's usual prolific changes are on the pica drafts, changes that support the idea that these are earlier drafts than the elite typescript is, changes that also support her statement that she "could finish it very easily now [at North Haven]."

On several pica drafts, Bishop gives us the location of the poem where she adds the word "Rio" after the title, once

in her own handwriting and once typed. Also, one pica draft is titled "SEASCAPE--RIO DE JANEIRO," a title suggesting Bishop's "painter's eye" approach to description. The elite draft, however, shows no title but concentrates on the first and second stanzas and the idea of "Behemoth" and the "blessed whale." Incidentally, on none of the pica drafts does the word "blessed" have an aigu accent over the last "e" yet that accent appears on the one elite draft both times the word is typed. Although the elite draft and the pica drafts differ in these and other ways, the poet's thematic concerns remain constant, making "All Afternoon the Freighter -- Rio" that "one about whales."

Though Bishop worried about the "whale"-cause theme, other "causes" surface in this poem also, particularly within the theme of concern for the environment. Besides protesting the senseless slaughter of whales, Bishop writes of the ship's "smear of grease" left on the water and the "holds full of dying animals," but ironically consoles us with the finger-pointing fact that "we'll consume them all, / past, present, and future." Several times she plays with the idea that we'll "consume ourselves" also but later seems to reject stating that idea so clearly; perhaps, she wants the focus of the poem to be on our actions toward the whales and the sea rather than on "ourselves." Thus, the speaker can blame man's insatiable appetite and uncontrolled

population growth for the extinction of the world's natural state.

On an early pica draft, in addition to the loss of the whale Bishop objects to the slaughtering method used:

> Then fifteen whalers,
> and after them the smoking
> big factory-ship.
> It left a smear of grease,
> so it was working.
> They kill the whales with cannon. Can't
> they leave the blessed whale in peace?
> (Behemoth, ruminant,
> it was goodbye, then!)

This stanza goes through many revisions; yet the method by which the whale is killed remains throughout. Of course, Bishop obviously likes the idea of using "cannon" and "Can't" on the same line as the alliterative sound patterns and the negative contraction strengthens the protest. Another interesting change occurs several times on the drafts as Bishop types then slashes out the "they" of line 7, substituting "we" on three drafts while retaining "they" on four others. On the elite-type draft, the same line moves from an imperative voice "leave / the blessed whale in peace" to a completely ambiguous noun followed by the accusatory pronoun "you":

. . . . . .oh my oh citezens [sic]

oh citizens,

why can ' t [sic] you leave

the blessed whale in peace,

oh god, in peace, in peace, in peace.....

Since the word "citizens" does not appear anywhere else in the collected drafts, the move from "they" to "we" to "you" seems to take the blame away from the fishermen and to place it squarely on all the "citizens," whether Brazilian or not. Also, in a repeat of that last line, several spaces down, "god" is capitalized as the line is typed, " in peace, oh God, in peace, in peace, in peace.....," which is the first and only time that "God" appears on any manuscripts. Bishop may be working more toward the religious symbolism in the poem in her later years, a not uncommon occurrence (Kalstone Becoming 232).

Though Bishop herself may not want to be connected to the "cause" through publication of the poem, she certainly connects man to the destruction, especially by using "Behemoth" as a parallel example of man's interference in the natural order. And "Behemoth" effectively puts man in his place since it represents something very large, and we are small in comparison. Also, in subsequent stanzas, Bishop is trying to connect the "past, present, and future" to the idea of consumption, and "Behemoth" works well as an

Old Testament reference to the past, as do other Biblical references found on the elite-type draft. Here again we see Bishop's effort to use the Baroque "time structure" device as the poem evolves through "eternity" (Nelson 50), and if man continues his ego-centered slaughter of the universe, what is left for eternity may be only "time."

If Bishop started the poem when she was living in Brazil, her "present" situation may have affected her decision not to publish the poem at that time. Perhaps she worried about being a "good guest" in her adopted country; therefore, criticism against their way of life would be inappropriate, as well as politically embarrassing to her friends in Brazil. Since she didn't date the drafts or publish the poem after 1978, we can assume she simply lost interest in it, especially since her attitude toward "causes" is quite evident in later poems, as we have seen in "Night City."

Another part of the poem that might have caused her embarrassment while in Brazil is the revealing and risky section that usually appears as the third and final stanza; in this stanza, Bishop presents the sound she hears, then tells us what makes the sound:

> . . . . . Splash . . .
> What was that sound? The trash.
> They throw it overboard at night.

The implication here is quite strong, especially since she saves this action until the end of the poem in most early drafts. Revisions of these lines show Bishop inserting, then crossing out, "only trash" and "oh, trash" several times. The idea that "we can consume / it all" is handwritten marginally with that additional suggestion of consuming "ourselves, if we care to--/ and throw the trash / into that transparency." Then, working toward a final denial in an unfinished line, "Tomorrow will be fine; tonight," Bishop tries to repeat the "Night" rhyme but then drops the rhyme in other drafts. In fact, on one typescript, the word "night" is crossed out twice and then typed two more times, with an additional side-column insertion questioning the use of the word "night?" and showing Bishop's tentativeness about the overuse of one word. Though "night" rhymes with "delight," Bishop consistently seems to shy away from obvious end rhyme, even when the use of the word would work well with the poem's movement from the sights on the late-afternoon sea to the innocence of tomorrow's sea, with the guilt of the "Night" trash throwers hidden by daylight. This movement back and forth between end rhyme and internal or slant rhyme seems to be a pattern found in most of Bishop's manuscripts.

At one point, after crossing out a typewritten line, "the lucid afternoon," (appearing as line twelve on the

page), Bishop handwrites it again at the bottom; underneath that line the word "clear" appears underlined; then, under that, a "visionary afternoon---" is written. In those few changes, we can see Bishop's move from the "present" as "lucid" to the "future" as the word "visionary" implies. Thus, Bishop attempts to get sound, sight, and sense together at the end of the poem but still changes the ending several times again on other drafts.

Bishop seems to be fighting a dichotomy of tensions in this poem, though, as she moves from what she sees and hears to the way she wants to present it. Though the connective tissue of the poem holds together with that "past, present, and future" idea, the drafts show Bishop's tendency or desire to blame somebody for the slaughter as overpowering her judgment. She has one pica typescript where rhyme schemes seem to be her main concern as she introduces "charity" and "clarity," plus "pale," "pallor," and "sailor," and other rhyming words in side marginalia. At the same time, she is trying to connect the first stanza's "transparent" sea with its "church" imagery to a final stanza's "clarity" of vision as the "blood and oil" mixture of the kill needs to "be drawn--taken from that" scene. The imagery of "blood and oil" suggests religious imagery as well: the blood of Christ can't be part of this slaughter scene. In one lower- margin, handwritten revision, Bishop

insists on an image of calmness following the day's work; she writes, "we never saw / such a still evening, / such clarity -" and, separated by a drawn line, "You've left the area paler / extracting blood & oil," which suggests a different ending than the verse with "the trash thrown overboard" does.

It seems as though the poem is working its way toward a less tempestuous ending in these drafts; yet further revisions show a return to accusation (and religious implications) as "charity has not yet begun" appears, written on side columns and in retyped stanzas. Apparently, the "charity / clarity" rhyme has become important to Bishop at this point, and she even works in the word "purity" on the one elite draft. The search for rhymes and more ambiguous imagery reveals Bishop's tenuous position in regard to the poem's "cause" message. On one hand, she seems to lean toward a strong statement about what she sees, but, on the other, she seeks rhyme sounds and structure as a means of controlling the bloody seascape.

One image does not change throughout the poem's composition: the religious experience she feels when looking at the sea. Bishop's use of "church" imagery in the first stanza sets the situation for the slaughter and coincides with her use of the "Behemoth" analogy. On almost all drafts, with only a few modifiers changing from time to

time, Bishop writes the first stanza as follows:

All afternoon the freighters
kept rising from a sea
transparent as a sky.
Only their high white bridges
caught the sun,
like calcamined [sic] facades
of old Brazilian churches:
a diocese astray
in pale blue pastures.

The last two lines of this stanza are crossed out on several other drafts; then, they are omitted completely on the elite typescript, with "like calcamined [sic] facades / of country churches, / catch the light, and glitter" replacing the last four lines, but adding the alliteration of the "c" to both lines. The change works to keep our focus on the "church imagery" instead of on the "pastures" metaphor, which seems to overload the stanza with mixed images. On the elite draft, too, the removal of "Brazilian" from the line makes even the location of the poem obscure. Since all of the pica drafts use "Brazilian" to modify "church," the "country church" imagery seems further proof of the elite draft as a later attempt at revision. If Bishop made this choice in the late seventies, as I believe she did, her own location had changed, as had her feelings for Brazil (Kalstone 231).

Bishop's feelings about the poem itself seem to have undergone a change, too, as she leans more toward the religious imagery on the elite draft and away from the sea imagery found throughout the pica draft. Earlier drafts show the sunset as "the sea and sky turn red" for the "delight" of the "Sailors"; yet the "high white bridges blush" as the "holds . . . full of dying animals" pass by. Though the "blush" changes to "flush pink" on one pica draft, the purpose seems more to match the end sounds of "blush" and "trash" in the same verse than to make much of the "blush" idea. Only on one pica draft do the "unlikely church-fronts blush" from embarrassment at the slaughter. Of course, that "Sailor's delight" proverb works to prepare us for the "tomorrow will be fine" denial found on several drafts. By contrast, the elite draft contains none of the above lines, though the first stanza is typed twice on the right lower half of the page.

On the elite draft, Bishop seems to concentrate more on the location and loss of "Behemoth" as she writes:

Behemoth
was beautiful, perhaps,
and stood beautiful in a bright
2- 2- 2-, in Ethiopia. green field
beautiful in the brilliant fields
in Ethiopia.

and not to mention

the mourning dove ???

That "2- , 2-, 2-," configuration seems to represent meter intention as she counts syllables, especially since Bishop works and reworks those outside lines next to the stanza, looking for both meter and alliteration. Furthermore, a line scattered to the right, several spaces down and next to "leave / the blessed whale in peace?," combines both the whale and Behemoth images as Bishop moves toward an animal's description as she writes, "with glossy hide and [. . . . .] horns." She repeats the "mourning dove" image again further down the page, with her usual question marks (but four of them the second time) that she uses when in doubt about inclusion. Since this elite draft also has the lament to "God" on it, the focus on these religious images moves the poem away from the vibrant description of the "tankers" and their bloody cargo and toward a more mournful scenario.

We can't help feeling sad at these changes, especially as the tone of the poem becomes more despairing, less angry. When Bishop types "The world is getting on, &Charity's [sic] / not yet begun" off to the right lower corner of this draft, we feel a sense of the Ages on our shoulders. Although she may merely have been looking for the rhyme to "such clarity" in that "Charity" line, she sounds tired and

unenthusiastic on the draft where she's handwritten "All gone" in place of the typed phrase "And he is gone," [crossed out by hand]. Perhaps what is most revealing about this elite draft is its mood, its lack of revisions, its forced religious imagery, its repetition of words like "peace" (twelve times in five lines), and its overall failure to bring the poem closer to what we normally expect of Bishop. The early pica drafts show the start of a "good" cause poem (possibly a great one), <u>if</u> the author could have polished it without straying so far from the original. Since Bishop never did finish this poem, she may have been dissatisfied with its lack of focus, beyond the idea of not wanting to be writing for a "cause."

Political "causes" show up in Bishop's unpublished Brazilian circa drafts with enough regularity that we might think them unpublished for that reason alone. Politics, however, may not be the only reason that one of Bishop's poems remains unpublished, especially since the verse version is so much like W. H. Auden's "Musee des Beaux Arts." Two sets of Bishop drafts reveal work in "verse and prose" about the "Suicide of a (Moderate) Dictator"; in fact, Bishop's note at the top of the prose draft implies that she intends to publish the work in the following order: "1st the Poem--this to follow --" ("this" being the prose version). Because the versified set begins with "[Draft 4]"

and is incomplete, Bishop's revision work on the poem is difficult to substantiate. Then, to make matters more difficult, included in the prose set are three pages of typed journal notes that describe one of Bishop's trips to Rio, which, though interesting, seem to have little else binding them to the poem about the dictator. The actual "Suicide" prose drafts concentrate on reporting the funeral itself; in addition, the second page of the prose draft shows other personal comments and notes by Bishop, which apparently have nothing to do with the report, as Bishop calls it: "Suicide of a (Moderate) Dictator - A Report in Verse & Prose."

The "verse" drafts, however, show none of the funeral but contain distinct elements of theme; these are the drafts that seem to "borrow" Auden imagery. A handwritten "[Draft 4]" of three verses is followed by a typewritten "[Draft 5]" with the same number of verses and minimal revisions also. On both poem drafts, a dedication appears, "For Carlos Lacerda," but no dates are attributed to these drafts. What Bishop seems to be looking for in this poem is an answer--some kind of "truth," as she calls it in the first verse:

> This is a day when truths will out, perhaps;
> leak from dangling telephone ear-phones
> sapping the festooned switchboards' strength;
> fall from the windows, blow from off the sills,

the vague, slight unremarkable contents
of emptying ash-trays; rub off on our fingers
like ink from the un-proof-read newspapers
crocking the way the unfocussed photographs
of crooked faces do that soil our coats,
our tropical-weight coats, like slapped-at moths.

"Truth," then, may be found in the air or in some substance that is right there on our fingertips, writes Bishop in a suggestion of dark "proof" that we don't notice in ashes and ink. With the very clever use of "crooked faces," Bishop hints at the political climate of dictatorship and public display of crookedness.

But the people "are idling" on this day and walk their "dogs . . . along the famous beach," Auden-like, as though nothing has happened. The dogs leave "their pawprints draining in the wet," and "By eight two little boys were flying kites" above the "steady and the pinkish" breakers. This innocent scene covers up the night's activities where "headlines wrote themselves." The juxtaposition of what happened and what is an apparent obliviousness to it echoes Auden's poem "Musee des Beaux Arts" so fervently that Bishop may have shied away from publication of her poem for that reason alone. Though in Auden's poem the "Children" are "skating / On a pond at the edge of the wood" and "the dogs go on with their doggy life," the comparison to Bishop's is

remarkable. And the Auden idea that "the splash, the forsaken cry" of the "boy falling out of the sky" is "not an important failure" is matched in Bishop's poem by the unimportant death of the "moderate dictator." Even Bishop's first line, which hopes for the "truth" but leaves doubt with that "perhaps" at the end, juxtaposes Auden's assertion that "About suffering they were never wrong, / The Old Masters:." Bishop cleverly compares the "Unfocussed photographs" to "The Old Masters" and suggests that "truth" will not be found in newspapers, only in Art.

Why not publish a poem that so clearly uses allusion to state its message? Perhaps one answer to that question can be found on the back of the handwritten "verse" draft, where Bishop has written a line that does not appear on the typed draft anywhere: "Perhaps truth is a shadow, Carlos." Though the poem itself shows "truth" as evasive yet so close to our grasp, Bishop's allusion to Auden implies that it may be found in Art, perhaps hers. Yet she realizes that this artful poem is more Auden than Bishop; thus, she is using a deceptive device herself to show "truth." Her truth, too, is a "shadow."

David Kalstone claims that "Bishop's notion of stealing is overly fastidious" (Kalstone 62) as he discusses Bishop's concern over some imagery that she confesses she may "have stolen" from Marianne Moore. Also, Bishop herself receives

an "apology" from Robert Lowell, who had used one of her letters indiscriminately in a poem. Lowell's unauthorized use of this material as well as his way of "misappropriating creations and lives not one's own" bothers Bishop, as evidenced in her letters to Lowell (205). Therefore, Bishop would be very careful not to consciously use a word from someone else's poem, even when that person was a favorite of hers, like Auden.

Bishop had said in past interviews that she "didn't believe in propaganda in poetry" because it "rarely worked" (Spires 145). Does her vivid prose "report" of the dictator's funeral seem too much like propaganda? According to that comment written on the prose draft, Bishop did plan on publishing this poem/prose report. Her intention, then, differs from Phyllis Bartlett's idea about prose drafts:

> But for poets who do not wait on inspiration for all of their work, the keeping of notes and writing of prose drafts are steps forward. With such aids they will be all the freer when the time of composing arrives to concentrate on the art of their poem rather than the idea. (Bartlett 120)

Since Bishop's prose draft of "Suicide of a Moderate Dictator" differs so greatly from the poem, we can only assume that both views of the suicide are important to the

overall artistic effect Bishop was seeking. In fact, the prose draft concentrates more on the transport of the coffin through the crowd and on an aberrant "wreath" that "is a patented life-preserver" and "as buoyant as the coffin" as it is put into a plane. Bishop's comments at the end of the prose draft imply that the funeral scene is taken from a "newsreel" she "saw Sept 1st or 2nd--The suicide took place the morning of the 24th." Apparently, Bishop records the scene in prose first; then, she composes her poem, which is opposite from the presentation she plans for the two pieces.

Since both poem and prose drafts seem rather complete and contain few revisions, Bishop may have simply abandoned the idea for lack of interest in Brazilian political "causes" and particularly "suicides" once her Brazilian companion and lover, Lota de Macedo Soares, committed suicide. According to Kalstone's report, Bishop had been feeling the "growing pressure" of life in Brazil for several years before Lota's death:

> . . . everything depended on a balance of circumstance that in Brazil in the sixties was quite precarious: Bishop found the city of Rio and the turmoil of Brazilian politics more and more trying, and especially so as they put Lota de Macedo Soares under growing pressure. (Kalstone 230)

In December 1969, Bishop writes to Robert Lowell about Lota's suicide: "Now I feel her country really killed her--and is capable of killing anyone who is honest and has high standards and wants to do something good . . ." (231). Bishop's desire to "get out" of Brazil affects her desire to finish any Brazilian poems; thus, she leaves "Suicide of a Moderate Dictator" and other poems about Brazil unfinished and unpublished.

Part of Bishop's dissatisfaction with Brazil can be found in a one-page typed, unpublished draft that has three handwritten titles: "Letter to Two Friends"; "A Letter Home"; and "Letter Back." The "two friends" are, appropriately, Marianne Moore and Robert "Cal" Lowell, to whom Bishop wrote often from Brazil. As Bishop composes and revises this poem, she complains:

> Heavens! It's raining again
> and
>
> and the "view"
>
> is two weeks overdue/ and the road is impassable
>
> and after shaking his paws
>
> the cat retires in disgust
>
> to the highest closet shelf,
>
> and the dogs smell awfully like dogs,
>
> and I am sick of myself,
>
> and sometime during the night
>
> the poem I was trying to write

has turned into prepositions:

ins and aboves and upons

overs and unders and ups [line slashed out]

What am I trying to do?

Change places in a canoe?
method of composition -

Next to the line "and I am sick of myself" Bishop has handwritten the word "slightly"--as either an addition for meter or for alliterative effect but with her usual "good girl" tendency not to complain too much. That "method of composition" insertion, after she questions what she is "trying to do? / Change places in a canoe?," hints at what may be a "change in composition" for Bishop, since around the time of these drafts, she began to write prose poems about the "Complaining Creatures" of Brazil "(Giant toad, Giant snail, crab .....etc.)," which were later published. Like her, these creatures complain about the rain and about being so far from home. The "Strayed Crab" may be appropriately compared to Bishop, who "strays" far from home, too.

After another verse about her toucan Sammy's "rage" and her request that "Mario do Carmo, please / give him a piece of raw meat" (with the handwritten phrase "throw him a [piece of raw meat]" written in the margin next to the typed line, Bishop asks for something to control her raging

problem, too:

Marianne, loan me a noun!
Cal, please cable a verb!
Or simply propel through the ether
some powerful p [sic] more powerful meter

Thus, Bishop worries about her composing abilities and techniques and connects her problems to the weather. But when the poetry isn't going right, nothing else goes right either. Facetiously, Bishop sees her poems as changing by themselves "during the night" rather than admitting she may be at fault. Not wanting to live in a world composed of "prepositions," Bishop pleads for "a noun" and "a verb" and a "more powerful meter." Since she doesn't seem to need adjectives, her descriptive powers must not be diminished yet.

In fact, Bishop continues the poem with some of her usual "nature" description as the next stanza describes

the toads as big as your hat
that want to come in the house
and mournfully sit at the door
spotted, round-shouldered, and wet,
with enormous masochist eyes.

This "toad" may have been the inspiration for Bishop's "sulking toad" who appears in the prose poem "Giant Toad." Then, in what seems self-descriptive, Bishop discusses "the

biggest snail seen yet, . . .with no gift for languages / and even less for gesture" before acknowledging her own feelings again:

exchange?/ anxiety
with a visa about to expire,
with a car with one good tire --

Next to the "exchange?" line, Bishop writes by hand, a comment that the "dollar goes higher & higher," which may contribute to her "anxiety" at this point. Below this remark, Bishop writes that infamous line from "Charley's Aunt," which serves as a final comment on her feelings and, as is usual with Bishop, has a double meaning:

Brazil, "where the nuts come from"

Because only one typewritten draft of this poem is available in the Collection at Vassar, Bishop may have also abandoned this "complaint" about her surroundings (thus her writing) in favor of other pieces, more ambiguous and less confessional in nature. For instance, she may have once again objectified her own feelings through the complaints of creatures while also changing her method of composition, if only temporarily--till the rains stop and metric inspiration arrives.

Obviously, she is calling once again to her two American "Muses"--Moore and Lowell-- to help her out of a writing predicament. Cut off from the outside world because "The

radio battery is dead," Bishop ruefully admits that "for all I know, so is Dulles," which gives us the time-frame of the poem under investigation.[2] This line also shows us how her own "battery" for writing is "dead" and how far away she feels from the action in the States. The tone of "for all I know" implies, of course, that she doesn't care as much about what is going on there as she cares about her own inability to compose. Though the poem plays with the weather and the inconveniences of Brazil, Bishop is not yet willing to leave and seek inspiration elsewhere; she wants it cabled to her from the outside, from her more prolific and, perhaps, more confident friends.

The fact that she misses her friends in America, particularly Lowell, is evident on this and another draft titled "New Year's Letter as Auden says--" (this title is crossed out by hand on the one draft). In this poem, Bishop addresses Lowell by his nick- name, then crosses out his name and handwrites "Dearest" to the left of it:

> hat and gloves and all
> your picture on the wall
> as if you had just said something,
> something good I just missed
>
> Cal, you look,
> up from the back of a book

Over the article "a" Bishop has handwritten in dark ink the word "your," making the last two lines parallel: "Cal, you look, / up from the back of your book." Whether the "Dearest" (written to the left of the crossed-out "Cal") is a more endearing salutation to her friend, an addition for metrical sake, or a replacement that would add the ambiguity Bishop might prefer is unknown, but the sentiment is pure as she reveals how she looks and talks to a picture of Lowell pasted on her kitchen bulletin board. Later, she also crosses out a statement "Sammy" the toucan makes to "Lota"; Bishop then writes another name on the left margin that is illegible but could be "Polly," the usual subject of a parrot's greeting. These revisions show that Bishop was working the poem away from the personal and toward a more ambiguous audience, possibly for later publication.

The reference, though, to Auden's "New Year Letter" seems paradoxical: he publishes his open letter for anyone "to read . . . anywhere," but Bishop hides hers from the public's eye for decades. Bishop may have realized the inappropriateness of the comparison as she crosses out that first title and types a line under it, which is quite personal yet not in sync with any other image on the page. The line, though, reflects the theme of the poem. Under the deleted title and before speaking to "Cal," Bishop types, "where the shoes don't fit my feet [.]" This line sounds

like one from an American folk song, with a similar thematic refrain: "Goin' down the road feelin' bad / 2-dollar shoes don't fit my feet / Goin' where the water / tastes like wine, honey-babe." Though other interpretations of her "foot" imagery are possible,[3] the song seems to be the most logical choice of inspiration.

What the draft does show is quite a lot of handwritten marginalia, which may have been written at two different times with two different pens, one with dark, thick ink and another with a pale, fine pen tip. The writing done with the fine tip is also much larger and more relaxed in stroke than Bishop's normal revisions are. Much of the handwritten work is difficult to decipher though some side verses add an unusual touch as they are placed next to the verse to "Cal":

> I learned [or know] one thing
> I seem to be able to bear
> is having things up in the air
> like a [illegible] private plane
> but the motor keeps it <u>up</u>.
>
> Through the thin days & the fat
> the drab colored days & the darker
> reading the same old mountain [?]

Here Bishop's mood seems to be one of boredom or homesickness, which fits the mood of the typed stanzas where

to "drink / an intense black cup or two [of coffee]" a "pleasant / state of cafeinization [sic]" is reached. Bishop writes "civilization" under that last line as she looks for rhymes and meaning. Adding to the heavy tone is the "frayed green silk" of "the Lent Trees mournful beauty." So, both her typed stanzas and her side verses reflect her discontent and her efforts to quench it.

Another final comment that Bishop writes at the bottom of this draft reveals a mood of which the poet is all too aware: "'Go home, Yankees!'" To the left of this familiar remark, Bishop repeats, by hand, the line "Instead of what we consider appropriate," which appears earlier as a remonstration against the toucan's request for "A Coffee." This repetition signals how out of place she may have felt in her "adopted" country, and, because she encloses "Go home, Yankees!" in quotation marks, she is either saying it to herself or planning to use the unfriendly chant in the poem. No wonder she wants to hear from Lowell "something good" she "just missed."

To end her "New Year's Letter . . ." Bishop works at rhyming words with her own name, typing first "Shibboleth / With love, Elizabeth." She consistently uses rhymes on the draft and tries to find a rhyme for "Portuguese" also, writing "ese" and "these" at the right side margin. In a handwritten stanza close to the bottom of the page, with a

line directing where it should be inserted, Bishop writes:

> If I cannot speak Portuguese
> shall I just say Shibboleth?
> But ---ese,
> With love, Elizabeth

Earlier, she asks "Who can say Shibboleth?," above which she writes "Can we all" and underneath adds "manage it?" Not speaking the language presents problems for any "Yankee," and being homesick is a natural response to the situation. Bishop, however, never leaves the idea of a poem as rhymes seem paramount in this allusion to both her own distance from friends and beliefs and to a Biblical situation.[4] For Bishop, rhymes seem never far from any poem; whether along a side margin in lists or in rhyming couplets scattered on the page, all of her drafts reveal a predominant interest in assonance and rhyme.

This one-page draft, then, shows us some of the problems Bishop faced during her poetic process--problems common to all writers at one time or another, like the rhymes just not working, but also additional problems connected to the fact that Bishop lives so far away from her trusted critics. Bishop may have abandoned this poem as her mood changed and as she found Brazil to be a more acceptable and accepting place to live. Bishop may been "confusing ends and means / in the country of coffee beans," as she states in the last

typed couplet on the draft. For a poet like Bishop, that realization alone would impede any further evolution of the poem.

In fact, one solitary manuscript, titled "Something I've Meant to Write About for 30 Years," reveals imagery that stuck in Bishop's mind for that long a time, but the initial draft never evolves any further. This draft also shows how long she waits for inspiration. Bishop notes the time and place in a subtitle, underlined: "The FLorida East Coast Railroad; dawn." After noting that "one felt dirty, dirty, with swollen feet," Bishop describes the train's passengers, then looks outside to the train stop--"a small town/ in southern Georgia ? probably" as the train jerks "backward and forward there." Bishop then juxtaposes the "unpainted houses" of "nigger-town" with the image of a moving "picket fence" that she saw "slide back/ then forward like a slide several times/":

> Somoen [someone] had fixed
> with nails, half hammered on [in], then bent,
> a piece of broken mirror to each picket top
> gothic shape--
> these fragments
> catching the light, reflecting, white
> and blueish [sic], sadly, over and over again
> as we shunted

only the mirrors seeing the morning coming
20 or 330 [sic] of them--I lost count 20 or more
a crazy iconography decoration why not <u>decorate</u>
morning?
irregular jagged jagg'd disconnected mad [.]

Though this draft has much of what Bishop usually strives for in a poem--the reflecting "surface" idea that covers the deep knowledge of reality--she seems content just to "write it!" after all this time. Perhaps Bishop would have published this one someday (I think even the rough draft is worthwhile), but she may have to avoid that "nigger-town" remark in order to salvage her "good girl" image or as a concession to "public taste" (Bartlett 155) even though she is recording the diction as it was spoken "30 years ago." But holding on to such ideas, images, and fragments makes us think that Bishop either knew her manuscripts would someday be studied or, more likely, knew that she could "make" poems after the initial draft was on paper. Thus, creative ideas and fragments might someday be worked into finished products, with time and energy.

Karl Shapiro believes that through the study of "working-drafts, marginalia, personalia, and the like" we can get "as close to the creative act as we can hope to get" (Shapiro 93). Though I have chosen only a few of the unpublished poems to analyze in this chapter, I feel that we

can judge Bishop's "creative act" as well as her composing process from these representative drafts. What we see on Elizabeth Bishop's unpublished manuscripts reveals a poet who works and reworks certain poems until near completion; in fact, some poems may have been scheduled for publication by the poet, if her marginalia remarks are any indication. In addition, Bishop withholds publication for political as well as personal reasons, a theory that "Suicide of a Moderate Dictator" proves. She also relies heavily on the open-ended "letter" as a starting point for poems, whether published or unpublished. Ultimately, if the poem is published, she moves away from the epistolary approach, toward a more ambiguous audience as reader. Not only does Bishop remember images for 30 years, but "All Afternoon the Freighters" shows us a poet who saves poems and fragments for thirty years or more, waiting for the right time or mood to bring them to polished form but never sacrificing her own integrity to publish for a "cause."

We see also on Bishop's unpublished drafts her involvement with assonance and rhyme; she seems to use rhyme as a control, as Dryden did. He "preferred rhyme to blank verse because it curbed his fancy, held him down, kept him from going on and on" (Hall 84). Bishop works very hard not to "go on and on" in her poems, and rhyme seems to keep her within bounds, whether personal, political, or artistic.

The Baroque influence continues and reminds us of a quotation from Morris Croll's The Baroque Style in Prose, found in Bishop's papers:

> For baroque art always displays itself best when it works on heavy messages and resistant materials; and out of the struggle between a fixed pattern and an energetic forward movement often arrives at those strong and expressive disproportions in which it delights. (Bishop Collection)

Bishop's use of the Baroque devices helps her to find the control she needs so that those personal poems can be polished for publication. For Bishop--no control, no publication.

Finally, the study of unpublished material makes us appreciate all the work that went into Bishop's published poems. Her "art" is conceived in inspiration but polished by her intelligent use of language and form. The progression or lack of it found in her unpublished drafts shows us how Bishop always moves toward that "greater purity, intensity, and unity" that give the poem "greater significance" (Stauffer 52). When these goals are not reached, Bishop abandons the poem (at least temporarily) and moves to others, showing that her choices need to be the best, her poems complete and unified before all else.

Though we might infer this kind of work process because of the sheer volume of Bishop's drafts, we can, through the study of her unpublished drafts, "authenticate traits that we have uncertainly sensed in . . . published works" (53).

Elizabeth Bishop truly had "one art"--the art of composing the perfect poem. Otherwise, imperfections are withheld until further "tending" of the flowers could occur. Sadly, Bishop died before some of these buds could blossom as majestically as she, and we, would have liked.

Notes

1 Although similar in content, these two drafts seem to connect more to other unpublished drafts in the Collection because the "emperor" idea is mentioned and the "We got the giggles" line is intact. In addition, the lines a "million tankers lolled, / adrift & empty" do not match the content of "All Afternoon the Freighters--Rio" poem. I can see why these drafts were included in the group though, since both discuss "tankers" and "oil slicks"; however, I believe the following stanza has no discernible connection, as it is not found on the other drafts of the "whale" poem. There is no "emperor" speaking and nothing to laugh about in the "cause" poem, especially as that idea appears on the two stray drafts:

> It was no joke
> but even so
> we got the giggles
> when he spoke.

Thematically, then, the two drafts are misplaced.

2 During the time that Bishop was in Brazil, John Foster Dulles served as U.S. Secretary of State and was active in many South and Central American treaty negotiations. Dulles was diagnosed with cancer in 1958 and

died in May of 1959. Since this draft is not dated and no other person by this name appears in Bishop's notes or drafts, we can reasonably assume the connection to John Foster Dulles, especially since his illness would have been broadcast on the radio. I think, however, that Bishop uses the name "Dulles" here as much for its syllabic content as for its thematic implication.

3 It's odd to note that "feet" or the idea of "swollen feet" appears on several different fragments and drafts. We might assume that Bishop suffered from hypertension and was extremely aware of fluid retention, or she may have been complaining in this letter that Brazilian-made shoes don't fit her feet. Whatever the reason, Bishop certainly seems to begin many poems with "foot" imagery, which may or may not have to do with meter, as Carolyn Handa proposes in her analysis of "Night City." The weary tone of this letter, however, suggests the allusion to the American folk song more than any other.

4 "Shibboleth" is defined in Brewer's Dictionary as "a test word, a catch word or principle to which members of a group adhere long after its original significance has ceased. Shibboleth (meaning ear of wheat, stream, or flood) was the word the Ephraimites could not pronounce when they were challenged at the ford on the Jordan by their pursuers, Jephthah and the Gileadites. The Ephraimites could only say

Sibboleth, thus revealing themselves to the enemy (see Judges xii, 1-6)" (993). Bishop's use of the word works both to show her alienation from her "group" of fellow writers and to show her inability to fit in because of language problems.

Conclusion

My study of Elizabeth Bishop's revision process focuses on a limited number of manuscripts; however, I believe the drafts chosen represent her drafting, writing, and revision techniques, as seen throughout the Collection at Vassar College. In addition, the examination of Bishop's manuscript work alone was not my full intention. I believe that Gabriel Della-Piana is correct when he suggests "that it is impossible to assess, elicit, or operationalize completely any part of the complex process of writing a poem. All one can do is arbitrarily isolate parts of the process and examine them" (Della-Piana 105). Through a pursuit of process, however, we may "uncover new knowledge or confirm conventional wisdom" (106) which may, in turn, lead to a "functional analysis" of both individual and communal revision processes. But we must describe the individual before we can arrive at the communal; therefore, my examination of Elizabeth Bishop's work included what Della-Piana calls "methodological pluralism," a look at biography, autobiography, interviews, critical and reader response, and working drafts. After examining these sources, I have also found it impossible to separate any of

these areas of investigation--her life affects her work as much as her work affects her life.

As described in the preceding chapters, Elizabeth Bishop's manuscripts show one outstanding consistency: her laborious revision process on paper. She systematically records her observations in notebooks, diaries, and even fragments of tablet paper and hotel stationery; then, when time and inspiration allows, she writes out her first verse sketches in longhand, though an occasional typescript surfaces, particularly where she is writing an open-ended letter to a friend. Once the verses are on paper, Bishop revises and polishes until a poem grows into a publishable form that she accepts, discards, or stores, possibly for later revision. Many of Bishop's notebooks and drafts seem to be "repositories for the future" as were Whitman's (Bartlett 132), yet her total lifetime output is comparatively small in comparison to many writers. Out of thousands of pages of drafts, Bishop's published poems fill less than 200 pages in four books: North & South, A Cold Spring, Questions of Travel, and Geography III. The posthumously published book, The Complete Poems: 1927 - 1979, contains some unpublished work and translations but still totals only 276 pages.

Bishop's rather limited output suggests her dedication to the well-made poem and her manuscript collection also

reveals an almost obsessive need for perfection, as well as an insistence on privacy and "good manners." In addition, we see in Bishop's revision process some of the techniques that Wallace Hildick says are common to other poets, like "power changes," "ideological changes," and "tidying-up changes." Yet in Bishop's work we find more than Hildick suggests, especially when we look at what influences affected her work, whether in her personal or professional life. There is both a dependency on friends like Marianne Moore and Robert Lowell, and an independent streak in Bishop's work; she outgrows her need for them as she finds confidence in her voice.

The objective eye of Charles Darwin exerts a strong impress-ion on Bishop as she looks and records the natural world in her search for answers to life's questions. Known for her descriptive detail, Bishop emphasizes the landscape or seascape through the use of adjectives and modifiers that usually contain a double meaning; the outer world of nature representing the inner world of man. Bishop specializes in making a word or phrase work in context as she moves from a contentualized to contextualized style in her poems. These micro-revisions show the world from an objective point of view, yet they subtly add the macrocosmic message that Bishop wishes to impart. Seeing is knowing with Bishop, and the more clearly we see, the more knowledge we gain.

As I followed Bishop's environmental concerns in her drafts, I found many revisions that reflect the poet's changing attitudes and beliefs. Though she wants to inform through imagery, some themes are taboo, sometimes because of personal preference or political restrictions. In the case of the "whales" poem that she refuses to publish because it sounds like ecological propaganda, Bishop's attempt to revise two decades later doesn't work. She seems no longer interested in the content of the poem as she has left Brazil and its problems behind her. Her revision work on "All Afternoon the Freighters" shows specific word changes and several rhyme attempts, but also she fails to publish it before her death. Since I believe that "committed" poems can still be "good" poems, I think the poem should be published as it appears on a late draft where Bishop stops making her usual micro-revisions--a sign that the poem is finished in her mind.

Other fragments and drafts reveal Bishop's interest in the politics of her adopted country, Brazil, yet they, too, remain unpublished for reasons unknown. A speculative guess would be that Bishop's interest in these poems diminished after the suicide of her companion, Lota de Macedo Soares, who was involved in the Brazilian political scene. Bishop's later poems and revisions also show her changing attitude, a movement away from the political and cosmic toward the

introspective.

No matter what theme a poem may espouse, one kind of revision that doesn't change throughout Bishop's career is her consistent use of the devices used in Baroque poetry. Musically, the Baroque influence of her favorite poets, like Herbert and Hopkins, leaves its imprint on Bishop's verses as she develops stanza rhythms, rhymes, and images that reflect that co-mingling of sight and sound. The Baroque rhetorical situation is a favorite with Bishop as she ponders the "what if" question through draft after draft but provides no answer for the dilemmas she creates on paper. Instead of a theme being announced first, then explored, as in a Baroque rhetorical situation, the theme of the poem evolves into a complex and dynamic situation, as with Bishop's theme in "Night City." The drama of the poem is further enhanced by Bishop's use of other rhetorical devices that unify theme, structure, speaker, and reader.

Bishop's use of time as structure also shows the Baroque influence and many of her "power changes" concentrate on verbal subtleties that effectively show the importance of time on thematic concerns. Poetically, the verb tense changes in "Night City," for example, can be viewed as reinforcing the thematic ideology of man as both victor and victim over nature--man "could" not walk on the landscape he destroyed yet he is destroyed with it as other "creatures

set" down their feet and "walk" after man is enveloped in the "conflagration." According to Lowry Nelson Jr., "It was in the Baroque age that poets first took up the notion of time viewed through eternity and found that its paradoxical nature admitted liberties that common sense and subjective time did not" (Nelson 162). Using time as another plane of dimension, Bishop moves the city from life to death, yet something lives on even after the "sky is exhausted" and man no longer exists. Time is eternal; man and nature are not.

In many instances, the Baroque technique also influences Bishop's revision process as she inserts rhetorical devices, like questions, parentheses, and exclamations, which reflect the very poetry she so admires. These rhetorical devices serve to remind us of the speaker in these poems, to define the attitude of the speaker, as well as defining the relationship between speaker and reader. When Bishop questions her reader, she is creating a "dependent relationship between speaker and reader" (Nelson 91), a more complex and specific relationship than if her speaker asserted some "truth." The exclamations in Bishop's poetry work in the same way: "Look! Incandescent, / its wires drip" forces us to become a part of the cityscape in "Night City." The exclamations also create "an effect of immediacy, creating an expectant attitude in the reader" (93). Parentheses, too, work to establish a dependent and

complex relationship between speaker and reader. For instance, in "asides" in many of her poems, Bishop's parenthetical remarks effectively acknowledge the confidential relationship between speaker and reader. We are actively involved in the poem and suffer the triumphs as well as the disappointments of the speaker, also a Baroque poetic experience.

This overview of Bishop's process cannot begin to explore all of the influences on her work, but it would be remiss to deny the importance of her traumatic childhood. The influence of her early experiences never seems to leave her as she struggles until the end with "yesterdays" and objects "lost." The loss of her father and, a few years later, her mother, leaves Elizabeth in the care of well-meaning but stoic grandparents and relatives. As a gifted child who had an unusual curiosity about her world, Bishop watched her grandmother "plant tears" and learned to "plant" or bury her own concerns in her poems. In fact, Bishop deplores the confessional mode; she believes, instead, that "truth" can be found in a writer's words. After the "tears" are planted in words or art, the onlooker must deal with the "truth" as he sees it, thus relieving the artist of the pain of self-discovery. Bishop sees art reflecting life, yet she knows that the artifice is an "inscrutable house" where real feelings hide behind words or colors. In Bishop's own

impenetrable way, she reveals more than the most vivid confessionalist ever does. The "good girl" who had to have "good manners" and be a "good guest" grew into a woman who had to write a "good poem." Bishop's obsessive concentration on "all the difficulties of writing a good poem, all the complexities of language and form" serves as a defense mechanism and, perhaps, as a catharsis for the troubled poet. Bishop's failure to publish so many nearly-completed poems that we see as "good" suggests another psychological analogy: the poet/mother refuses to "abandon" the poem/child. Metaphorically, Bishop's fear of change personally affects her need to revise constantly, as well as her instinctual desire to hold on to that which she creates. Though Bishop remains aloof in her poetry, she knows her readers well; based on her own reading experiences, she expects her audience to penetrate form and language in order to discover the true meaning behind the art.

In a recent interview, Richard Wilbur says that he continues to read "poets of [his] own generation" to whom he's "especially attached; Elizabeth Bishop, for example, I go back to her all the time," claims Wilbur. When asked "what it is in Bishop that delights" him, Wilbur replies,

> A kind of lucidity. Some cleanness of the language. Subtlety, humor . . . I never get tired of her work. (Wilbur 55)

Wilbur then compares Bishop to George Herbert, saying, "they had many qualities of clear subtlety in common and there's a kind of sprightliness of soul in both of them which is very attractive" (55).

Paradoxically, Bishop seemed never to tire of Herbert or of her work, either. Her desire for "lucidity" and "cleanness of the language" is revealed in many worksheets. Even galley proofs reflect her incessant revision process as she worked for "subtlety" and "humor" by removing the excess and more overt words for those with double meanings, the implied rather than the explained. Bishop's revision work is tedious, exacting, and unending; how she manages to have that "sprightliness of soul" is mystifying, in the face of the demands she put on herself. But Bishop selected that "sprightly" voice as both a cover-up and a musical device, and her control over her work (as her voice) is remarkable. Also, because Bishop was so selective in her choice of poems for publication, her control remains intact and only a full disclosure of all her manuscripts would reveal completely the poet and her process. Until that time, we must "go back" to the available poems and manuscripts as often as possible. With each visit, we will learn something new about poetry and process.

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Biography

Hazel A. Fisher was born in Northumberland, PA on December 22, 1934 to Hazel E. and Herman A. Smeltz. Ms. Fisher is married to Robert S. Fisher; she is the mother of four sons and grandmother of seven.

Ms. Fisher received her Associates Degree in Liberal Arts from Bucks County Community College, Newtown, PA in August 1982; Bachelor Of Arts in English from East Stroudsburg University on December 19, 1983; Master of Arts in English from Lehigh University in May, 1987. She was a Teaching Assistant at Lehigh University for seven years and an adjunct faculty member at Bucks County Community College, Allentown College of Saint Francis de Sales, and Lehigh County Community College, Schnecksville, PA from 1989-1991. She is currently employed full-time as an Assistant Professor at Bucks County Community College, Newtown, PA.

Ms. Fisher won the Language and Literature Award at Bucks County Community College (1981), the Esther Larson Award and the EAPSCU Award at East Stroudsburg University (1982), and a Graduate Ressearch Grant at Lehigh University (1989). Ms. Fisher won a Commendation Award in the 1987 Chester H. Jones Foundation Poetry Contest; her winning poem was published in the 1987 Chester H. Jones anthology.