

Univerzita Karlova v Praze

Filozofická fakulta

Ústav anglofonních literatur a kultur

Filologie – Anglická a americká literatura

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Elizabeth Bishop: Translation as Poetics

Elizabeth Bishopová: Překlad jako poetika

Disertační práce

vedoucí práce: Doc. Justin Quinn, Ph.D.

2011

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V Praze dne 21. března 2011.

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Contents

List of Abbreviations	4
Introduction	5
The Concept of Translation	5
Method	6
Structure.....	7
I. Elizabeth Bishop's Translations	11
Aristophanes	33
French Poets and Spanish War Poems.....	46
Max Jacob	49
The Diary of "Helena Morley"	66
Clarice Lispector.....	92
An Anthology of Twentieth-Century Brazilian Poetry.....	100
Sambas and Popular Songs	144
Octavio Paz.....	150
II. Translation as Poetics	159
The Map.....	171
The Bight	187
The Sea & Its Shore	197
Cape Breton	201
Brazil, January 1, 1502	210
Santarém	217
Conclusion	239
Notes	244
Summary.....	249
Resumé.....	250
Works Cited	251

List of Abbreviations

CP	<i>The Complete Poems 1927-1979</i>
CPr	<i>The Collected Prose</i>
EAP	<i>Edgar Allan Poe and the Juke-Box</i>
OA	<i>One Art. Selected Letters</i>
PPL	<i>Poems, Prose, and Letters</i>
VC	Elizabeth Bishop Papers, Archives and Special Collections Library, Vassar College Libraries
WU	Elizabeth Bishop Papers, Washington University in St. Louis

Introduction

The Concept of Translation

The underlying and unifying concept of this thesis is the concept of translation. I will examine it from different points of view and work with different levels of its meaning. As a translator of Elizabeth Bishop's poetry into Czech I will speak about translation in the narrow and strict senses. First, translation as a rendering of a text written in one language in another language. But, second, dealing with Bishop's poetry as a critic I will use the word translation metaphorically to describe certain features of her poetics which I consider essential and typical. I realize the dangers of using one concept for different things but I think that the risk can be taken for reasons I will explain. Translation is one of the first and basic activities of human mind and an indispensable part of our culture as language itself. The study of theoretical problems of translation not only proves helpful for the practice of translation (in fact, it is not so quite often) but also leads us to reflect on some more general problems of language and understanding and also of poetic creation. We approach these questions through the theory of translation and although these questions are not necessarily answered in this way, they can at least be seen in a certain revealing light.

Translation has been seen and discussed in a wide range of terms: as an almost mystical undertaking reaching towards the angelic *Ursprache* (Benjamin), as an art not lesser than that of the original writing, as a paradoxical effort to which mankind is doomed (Derrida), as a noble and impossible quixotic task (Ortega y Gasset), as a political tool (Venuti), as a merely mechanical job of substituting one language with another. My thesis is based on the concept of translation as an aesthetic stance. I see translation in rather broad terms as a way of approaching poetic creation neither limited

to the practice of translating from one language to another, nor universal to all writing in general. In order to speak about this aesthetic stance, I use the term “translation poetics”, which can be defined as a creative attitude which shares some of its features, methods and values with those often found in the work of a translator. Seeing translation as an aesthetic stance and defining the type of poetics based on this stance can offer a fresh view of the poems of Elizabeth Bishop (1911–1979), who can be seen as a representative of “translation poetics”. Elizabeth Bishop as a “translator poet” is the main theme of my dissertation.

Method

While I use the concept of “translation poetics” to speak about Bishop’s writing, my own critical approach to Bishop can be seen in terms of translation as well. I approach Elizabeth Bishop’s works primarily as her translator into Czech. In the course of my doctoral studies I published two book translations of her works: a selection of her poems and letters (*Umění ztrácet* [2004]) and a translation of *The Collected Prose* (*Ve vesnici* [2007]). My aim was to introduce Elizabeth Bishop to the Czech cultural context (she was virtually unknown here before), but also to get to know her poetry closely through the work on the translations. Although poetry translation as such can be perceived as a form of criticism (in fact, it is the closest form of close reading; the translator is left with the text only and has to stick to it all the time, nothing can be brought in, nothing should be left out), it serves a different purpose and its uses as criticism are limited. However, it can stand at the start of a critical effort and shape the principles on which the criticism is based, which is the case of this thesis.

When studying Bishop's poetry my main interest lay in the poem as a work of art. As a translator, I believe that the translation should have the same effect on the reader as the original has on its readers, and I always try to appreciate its aesthetic qualities and reproduce them in a different language. Similarly, my main concern as a critic is the perception of the aesthetic effects of the poem and the apprehension of the means of achieving these effects. While a translator can work intuitively, to a large extent, a critic must examine these through a careful analysis – in many respects my close readings can be seen as rationalizations of my intuitive decisions as a translator. At the same time, I am interested in the creative principles which lie both behind translation and the original creation, and I try to define these and find them in the particular poems. This concern leads me to focus not only on Bishop's own poetic work, but also on her work as a translator – I see her poems and her translations as the products of the same creative mind, betraying the same preoccupations and revealing analogous creative principles.

The contribution my thesis attempts is threefold: firstly, to present an overall view of Bishop's life work as a translator; secondly, to suggest a new perspective of Bishop's poetry by seeing it in terms of translation; and thirdly, on a more general level, to outline a type of poetics, "translation poetics", which could be developed further and offer a framework for the study of the works of other poets as well.

Structure

My thesis is divided into two main parts, which differ in their focus, their material, and their method, but which complement each other and are inherently connected by the concept of translation. The first part – "Elizabeth Bishop's Translations" – deals with

Bishop's work as a translator; it offers an overview of all her translations. I put each of her translation projects into the context of her life and work, and I analyze it stressing the features which are relevant in relationship to Bishop's own works. Although I am primarily interested in texts Bishop published in her lifetime, in this section I also deal with unpublished translations, the manuscripts of which can be found among the Bishop papers in the archives at Vassar College. In tracing the context, I rely partly on the published biographies, partly on Bishop's correspondence, both published and unpublished.

The section starts with a discussion of the extant critical response to Bishop as translator. I comment on the marginal position her translations occupy in the body of the Bishop criticism, and I summarize the main tendencies of those critics who do pay attention to this part of Bishop's work. This overview is followed by an outline of my critical approach, which differs from the previous ones both in scope (my thesis covers all of Bishop's translations) and in method (translation is in the centre of my attention, and I study its various aspects in the context of Bishop's own poetry, viewing her translations a part of the same creative universe as her own poetry).

The examination of Bishop's translations starts with a passage on her views of translation, which can be found scattered in her letters, notes and reviews. Each of the following chapters deals with one of Bishop's translation projects, in chronological order, from her college translation of Aristophanes' *Birds* to her versions of Octavio Paz. In the case of each translation I discuss the context in which Bishop worked on it, trace its publication history (in the case of published translations) and look into Bishop's own commentaries on it. Apart from offering context and background information, the analyses of the particular translations focus on those features which

resonate with Bishop's own creative concerns, exploring their potential to enrich and deepen our reading and understanding of Bishop's poetry.

This approach leads me, for example, to an examination of issues of humor, comedy and the carnivalesque in the translation of Aristophanes. In the chapter on Max Jacob, I focus, among other aspects, on surrealism, the grotesque, but also on religious concerns. I pay detailed attention to *The Diary of "Helena Morley"*, the longest of all of Bishop's translations and one she was most deeply personally involved in: here I explore the tension between the foreign and the familiar, problems of authenticity, spontaneity and childhood vision, as well as Bishop's interest in genres on the border between fiction and non-fiction. The theme of the foreign and the familiar, the relationship to "the other" appears again in the chapter on the translations of Clarice Lispector's stories, particularly "The Smallest Woman in the World". A chapter is dedicated to the project of *An Anthology of Twentieth-Century Brazilian Poetry* and the translations Bishop did for this volume, with particular attention to two of the poets: Carlos Drummond de Andrade, whose poems chosen by Bishop share many of her poetic concerns, and João Cabral de Melo Neto and his Christmas play *The Death and Life of a Severino*, which is seen in relationship to Bishop's interest in the problems of socially engaged poetry, and also to her preoccupations with form. Bishop's translations of sambas and popular songs bring up the question of the carnivalesque again, and the issue of Bishop's interest in popular culture. The final chapter of the first section is dedicated to Bishop's translation relationship with the Mexican poet Octavio Paz, which can be seen as a kind of creative dialogue as the two poets translated each other's poetry and exchanged comments on each other's translations.

The second part of my thesis focuses on the definition of "translation poetics" and the reading of Bishop's poems in terms of this concept. The core of this part is a

detailed close reading of a selection of her poems, in which I trace the features characteristic of this poetic type. I have limited the selection on the texts Bishop published in her lifetime, that is, those she considered finished and corresponding to her aesthetic standards.

This section opens with the explication of the concept of “translation poetics”, that is, a type of poetics based on translation as a creative principle. Its main constitutive feature is the openness towards “the other”, which is accompanied by other aspects: the awareness of the limits of language, the experience of the plurality of languages, tentativeness, skepticism. The general discussion of these features is followed by the analyses of particular poems, selected from throughout her works. I focus on the ways the “translation poetics” principles shape these poems, be it on the most obvious thematic level (as in the case of the explicit meeting of “the other” in “Brazil, January 1, 1502”), in the setting of the poem (the border spaces), the language and rhetoric (e.g. self-corrections, explicit or implicit quotations), on the level of form (e.g. Bishop’s work with rhyme), imagery, intertextual references, etc.

I.

Elizabeth Bishop's Translations

The body of Elizabeth Bishop's translations is not very large, but it is varied and it has a wide scope, both in terms of genres (there is a play, a diary, short stories, poems) and in terms of languages she translated from (Ancient Greek, French, Portuguese and Spanish). She worked on her translations throughout her life, and they always tended to reflect her interests and preoccupations in any given period of her career. Bishop was first and foremost a poet, and we can see her translations in the context of her poems, as products of the same creative mind and as expressions of the same aesthetic stance.

Elizabeth Bishop's translations have never been at the center of critical attention. They have been commented on by critics, and their relevance has been repeatedly acknowledged. However, the material of her translations has never been examined as a whole, as a substantial part of her work which not only complements her own writing, but also illuminates it and serves as one of the keys to its interpretation. This neglect is not unique to Bishop criticism, but reflects a general tendency in Anglo-American literary culture to overlook translation, and to focus on original creation. This imbalance is apparent in criticism, as well as in publishing, book sales, etc. Translation, particularly the translation of modern poetry, tends to be seen as something marginal, secondary and derivative, both in terms of national literature, and in terms of a poet's work. Original writing seems to be considered the "real art", the central space, while translation is regarded more as an exercise and a side excursus into literatures which remain foreign, and as a byline in a poet's work.¹

This trend is particularly conspicuous, and even surprising, for someone coming from a culture where the position and perception of translation is radically different, which is the case of Czech culture. Being small and limited on its own, Czech culture tends to perceive and respect translation as a part of the national literature and as an essential part of the creative work of particular authors.² The role of translation is obvious in smaller literatures, but the neglect of translation in Anglo-American culture is hardly appropriate as translation always forms an essential part both of literature as a whole, and particularly of the works of individual authors. We could even attempt a typology of poets based on their experience with translation or the lack of it; the work of a translator, the intimate experience with someone else's language and poetry and its recreation in one's own language represents a new dimension of the original creation.

Critics usually mention Bishop's translations more or less in passing to show how particular texts she translated could have influenced or inspired her own particular poems or stories; most often, her translations of Brazilian literature are discussed in this way – *The Diary of "Helena Morley"* (in relationship to Bishop's childhood stories and poems), her translations for *An Anthology of Twentieth Century Brazilian Poetry* (most often Drummond's family poems in relationship to Bishop's family poems), and the stories by Clarice Lispector (in relationship to Bishop's Brazilian poems, particularly "Brazil, January 1, 1502"). In critical monographs on Bishop, translations are rarely examined consistently and in a focused way; the most common approach is to include a short passage on a particular translation to provide a context for a text (or texts) by Bishop. One exception to this approach is Marilyn May Lombardi who dedicates a full chapter to Bishop's translations in her book *The Body and the Song* (1995), focusing on her translations from Portuguese. The Brazilian translations are also discussed at length by Victoria Harrison in the fifth chapter of her *Elizabeth Bishop's Poetics of Intimacy*

(1993). In other books on Bishop, the discussions of her translations have a rather marginal (if any) place; translation appears more often as a topic of shorter essays on Bishop.

There have been various critical approaches to the study of Bishop and translation, from the finding of parallels between her aesthetic views of translation and those of art, through comparative studies of the relationship of her works to the works of the authors she translated, to detailed analyses of particular texts she translated. A thorough examination of different aspects and levels of Bishop's life-long experience as a translator has not been carried out; critics do not make translation the point of departure or the goal of their interpretation. Rather, they use Bishop's translations as one of the arguments to support or illustrate their points, theoretical or interpretative. In the following passages, I will offer an overview the critical discussions of Bishop as translator, not through an exhaustive list of texts dealing with the issue, but rather through a closer look at the texts that represent the main approaches to it.

One of them is to consider Bishop's general aesthetic approach to translation in relation to her poetic principles. This is what David Kalstone does in one of the first book-length studies of Bishop, the posthumously published *Becoming a Poet: Elizabeth Bishop with Marianne Moore and Robert Lowell* (1989), when he discusses the controversy between Bishop and Lowell concerning Lowell's *Imitations* (1961). Kalstone shows how the two poets' ideas about what translation is, and how it should be done, represent their overall attitudes towards poetic creation. He summarizes Bishop's critical commentaries on Lowell's "translations" of Rimbaud and Baudelaire, which she thought lacked respect for the original poems, and he concludes: "Their disagreement about tone, about the autonomy of the original texts, is almost a parody of their temperamental differences about poetry" (207). Here, Kalstone insightfully uses

Bishop's and Lowell's opinions on translation to illustrate their respective poetics, making an important point: that translation has features common with original writing and one can be used to illuminate the other. Lorrie Goldensohn comments on the Bishop/Lowell controversy in a similar way in the tenth chapter of her *Elizabeth Bishop: The Biography of a Poetry* (1992 [223-25]). More recently, Peter Robinson briefly discusses Bishop's translation principles (which he again contrasts with Robert Lowell's) in connection to her own creative methods – stressing the attention to detail and the respect to the original – in his book *Poetry and Translation. The Art of the Impossible* (2010 [158–62]).

“‘Travelling Through the Flesh’: A Poetics of Translation”, the fifth chapter of Marilyn May Lombardi's book *The Body and the Song: Elizabeth Bishop's Poetics*, is the longest and most thorough commentary on Bishop's experience with translation in relation to her own aesthetic and ethical concerns, particularly in relation to her Brazilian experience. Lombardi stresses that “the very task of translation helped [Bishop] to clarify the qualities she valued most as a poet and person: forbearance, humility, and practical wisdom” (137); her main focus is on Bishop's Brazilian translations, and the way the experience of translating other literary voices parallels, or even forms, her concerns about writing her own poetry about the foreign country. Drawing on Kalstone's discussion of Bishop's disagreement with Lowell over translation, Lombardi shows that Bishop was fully aware of the danger of the translator turning into a predator “assimilating or appropriating the literature, the landscape, and the culture of other peoples” (141), and knew that the same can easily happen in one's own writing. Bishop's main requirement for translation was its faithfulness to the original work of art, and she had similar ethical requirements about original poetry; in fact, argues Lombardi, Bishop perceived “poetic creation as an act of translation” (140).

However, as Lombardi shows, through her reading, translating and writing, she realized ever more strongly how easy it is to betray this faithfulness and to become a colonizing intruder. In Lowell she saw “a monitory example of literary predation” (141); she could see examples of the same in other writers (Lombardi offers the examples of W. H. Hudson and William Wordsworth who interpret and through interpreting appropriate, “translate” in the sense that they “remove something from its natural or proper place and convey [...] it to an alien context” [147]), and she became fully conscious of the danger for herself. Unfortunately, Lombardi’s argument gets somewhat blurred in the course of the chapter by the growing use of body and market metaphors and the focus on questions of gender. There is also confusion between Bishop’s aesthetic and personal concerns, between the poet and the person. Lombardi clearly shows the poet’s awareness (acquired partly through her experience as a translator) of the risk of violating the original world, but she is not so clear on the topic of what (if anything) the poet does to avoid it. She mentions two strategies – sympathy, as “the only protective barrier between the poet and the poet’s worst instincts” (149), and the distance of a “*flâneuse*” observing the crowd – but she does not really explain their mutual relationship nor does she show how these strategies work in Bishop’s poetic practice. The end of the chapter moves back to the somatic (the main theme of the whole book) in a rather disappointing turn:

[Bishop] found in translation one more gesture of rapprochement to add to her poetic repertoire. With no parents, siblings, or children of her own, Bishop relied on poetry to perform the rites of reproduction. Translation allowed her to partake in the play of bodies (‘one flesh / multiplied and crossed with other loving flesh,’ CP 255]) that provides us all with our only taste of immortality. (164)

Lombardi's observations on the shared artistic preoccupations of translation and writing are highly relevant and inspiring, but her main line of argument is outside the area of aesthetic and ethical concerns of art. Her interest lies in the exploration of Bishop's somatic imagination, and her ideas on translation are shaped by this perspective.

Victoria Harrison also deals with translation as a way to approach Brazilian culture, a way to enter into a dialog with it, and also to figure out how to write about this new world. In her *Elizabeth Bishop's Poetics of Intimacy*, she sees Bishop's Brazilian translations as a "meeting ground" (173) of Bishop's voice with another's, as an intimate dialog with Brazilian culture. She offers a discussion of *The Diary of "Helena Morley"* (an authentic diary of a young girl from Minas Gerais) in connection with Bishop's autobiographical childhood poems and stories, showing how "a diary distant from her time and place" proved to be "entirely familiar in the pull of emotion" (177), introducing her "to Brazilian language and culture" and "at the same time reviv[ing] the memories and longings of her childhood" (176). Harrison does not enter into a deeper analysis of the relationship between Bishop's own work and the translation of *The Diary*. She sees clear thematic parallels: Bishop translated a young country girl's diary at the same period when she was strongly concerned with writing about her own childhood in rural Nova Scotia. She compares Bishop with Helena Morley, the narrator of *The Diary* ("[I]like her, Bishop was commonsensical and unsentimental. [...] But unlike Helena, she was shy as a child" [176]), which seems to be a rather problematic approach. We could compare the ways in which the authors portray themselves in their respective texts, but it is always dangerous to mix fictional and real lives. Harrison does not go beyond the obvious thematic similarities to reflect on the literary qualities of the diary that make it an interesting part of Bishop's work: its

authenticity, “un-literariness,” its language, the very genre of a diary, etc. The way *The Diary* deals with childhood seems crucial, not the mere fact that it deals with it.

In the passage on Bishop’s translations of Brazilian poetry, Harrison focuses on two of the texts: Carlos Drummond de Andrade’s “Travelling in the Family,” which she compares to Bishop’s own unfinished poem “For Grandfather,” and João Cabral de Melo Neto’s socially conscious Christmas play *The Death and Life of a Severino*, which she connects to “Songs for a Colored Singer” and (rather surprisingly) to “Sonnet,” figuring it as an opportunity for Bishop to extend “her own reach into the political and social concerns of a speaker otherwise wholly removed from her” (181). Seeing translation as a kind of extension of the poet’s own creative reach is one of the possible ways to approach the problem of the relation between Bishop’s translations and original writings: the author decides to translate a poem she would never write herself, as Harrison suggests in the case of the socially critical poem by Cabral; or she learns a new poetics through translation, and later uses it in her own poetry (as, for example, Marilyn May Lombardi asserts: “[t]he act of translation, [...] compelled or seduced Bishop into expanding her emotional repertoire” [*The Body* 138]). Harrison does not develop this argument; she does not interpret the decision of Bishop’s to translate something she “would not have written” (180), and she does not make it clear what, if any, bearing this decision has on her poetics.

Finally, Harrison briefly analyzes Clarice Lispector’s story “The Smallest Woman in the World” which she sees as “an unwitting sequel” (181) to Bishop’s “Brazil, January 1, 1502”. The connection of the two texts is certainly valid, as I will show later, but the poem comes, in all probability, after the story, which may have even provided direct inspiration for it. Rather than developing Bishop’s theme, the story seems to have played a role in its formation. Seeing translation primarily as a dialog

between two cultures, Harrison finds parallels between Bishop's discovery of Brazil through her translations, and her own efforts to find a way to write about Brazil: like translations, which serve as "intimate guides to Brazil" "her own writing about Brazil, where cultural and political differences meet, asserts in its tones, structures, and thematic insights that representation is in part a collaborative effort" (182). There seems to be a valid implication concerning Bishop's poetic method in her writings about Brazil: just as translation allows Bishop to enter into contact with Brazil through someone else's words and vision, so in her own texts on Brazilian themes, Bishop often includes other speakers and subjects who offer their own interpretation and way of seeing things. But again, Harrison's conclusion turns away from Bishop's aesthetic strategies and returns to the thematic concerns of her poetry: "her poems inevitably concern themselves with the dynamics that bind and distance her speakers and her subjects in relationships of power, possession, and love" (182).

Both Lombardi and Harrison see the relevance of Bishop's translations in the context of her writing, and they make inspiring points about the connection between her experience with translation and her attempts at grasping the foreign in her own poetry. But as the relationship of the art of translation and the art of writing is not the primary interest of their studies, they do not explore the aesthetic implications of their points.

The collection of essays *"In Worcester, Massachusetts": Essays on Elizabeth Bishop From the 1997 Elizabeth Bishop Conference at WPI* (1999) contains a section on different aspects of translation and Bishop's art. One is the study of Bishop's poetry from the point of view of the translator of her work; this approach does not necessarily imply a mere discussion of particular difficulties of translation caused by differences between linguistic systems, but it can offer new insights made possible by the confrontation of the original with the other language it is being turned into. There are

two essays by the Japanese translators of Bishop who both read her through the prism of their own experience of translating her poetry. Michiru Oguchi's essay "The Art of Naming: The Poetry of Elizabeth Bishop and the Problem of Translation" (291-99) discusses the issue of names in Bishop's poetry, which she sees as connected to issues of translation. The author summarizes Bishop's views of translation (her stress on faithfulness) and her practical experience as a translator, and suggests that a translator of Bishop has to apply Bishop's requirements and try to adopt her approach "to words, things and human experience" (292). Oguchi sees the key to Bishop's approach in naming; she examines the role of names and naming in Bishop's poetry, the way Bishop used names and disguised names in her texts. Again, she finds a similarity between the process of translation and the process of writing; naming can be seen as translating: "This act of naming and renaming resembles the process of translation. Losing and gaining names of people and places, a hide-and-seek of meanings: the narrator is a translator of herself, already living in a dubious world" (296). The use of names may appear elementary, but it shows some crucial qualities of Bishop's writing which bring it close to translation.

In her essay "Lost and Found in Translation: The Poetry of Elizabeth Bishop in Japanese" (301-08), Margaret Mitsutani studies two issues of Bishop's poetry that both seem to arise when the poems are read by a Japanese translator. The first is a hidden (and possibly unintentional) haiku in "Night City"; the other is the problem of gender in "Crusoe in England," a problem which is revealed in the process of translation into Japanese. Where English can remain ambiguous about the gender of a first-person speaker, Japanese has to be quite clear about it and about the relationship between the speaker and the people he or she addresses. The difficulty the Japanese translator faces when gendering the speakers of Bishop's poems (which is similar to the problems of a

Czech translator) shows the importance of ambiguity in Bishop's literary style. Translation can lead, argues Mitsutani, to new insights into the author's poetics, there are things "waiting to be 'found' in translation" (307). Some aspects essential to the poet's writing are revealed precisely because they are difficult or impossible to keep. Translation is therefore a unique way of reading, which through a confrontation of the language of the original with the language that tries to recreate the original enables the reader to see clearly things that may not be so obvious when the text remains in the context of its own language only.

Some of the critics dealing with Bishop and translation focus on the comparison of her own works and the works of one of the authors she translated. In the abovementioned collection of essays, it is, for example, a study of Bishop's translation of Clarice Lispector's story "The Smallest Woman in the World" by M. Sheila McAvey and Lee Fontanella's essay on the translations of Octavio Paz, and an essay on her relationship to Carlos Drummond de Andrade by the Brazilian scholar Maria Lúcia Milleó Martins. Martins is also the author of a more extensive study of this relationship: she wrote a dissertation entitled *Elizabeth Bishop and Carlos Drummond de Andrade: Verse/Universe in Four Acts* (1999), which she later turned into a book in Portuguese, *Duas artes – Carlos Drummond de Andrade e Elizabeth Bishop* (2006).

Yet another approach to translation in Bishop's works is to be found in a manuscript of an article or a lecture by Ashley Brown, Bishop's friend and co-translator for the anthology of Brazilian poetry. (An undated eight-page-long typescript of the text titled "Elizabeth Bishop as Translator" is in the Vassar archive.) It discusses Bishop's life-long work as a translator, where the stress is on her translations from Portuguese. Brown mentions Bishop's translations of Max Jacob and of Octavio Paz, but he views her translations of Brazilian poetry as more important: "Elizabeth Bishop's translations

from Brazilian poetry are not extensive, but they have set the standard for the rest of us who have tried this. Pre-Bishop translations are mostly lumps of words that have no rhythmic life in English, and part of her superiority comes from her verve and control of the meter” (VC 79.7). Brown sees Bishop as a distinguished translator who mediated Brazilian poetry to the American audience keeping its poetic qualities, thus raising the standard for poetic translations (at least from Portuguese). He analyzes several poems in more detail and shows the way Bishop recreates them in English. He stresses Bishop’s attention to the sound and the form of the poem, which does not consist in a mechanical attempt to keep all qualities of the original intact in the translation, but in a careful substitution of the qualities that cannot be successfully rendered in English by other means that help to achieve a similar effect. Brown’s main focus is not on Bishop’s translations in the context of her own poetry, but on the translations themselves, which he considers a success in the craft of translation.

Brown’s conclusions are not universally accepted. There are critics of Bishop’s translations who find mistakes in them, and argue that she was a bad translator who did not care about the rhythm and musicality of the poem (Oliveira 64) and whose translations “lack the care with language and precision of phrasing one learned to expect from the poet” (qtd in Oliveira 67n). This opinion is advanced by some of the Brazilian critics who tend to criticize Bishop’s imperfect knowledge of Portuguese and see her as approaching Brazilian culture from an imperialist position, Americanizing it and dissolving its cultural identity. This is the position of Eduardo Luis Araújo de Oliveira Batista, who in his essay “O método de Elizabeth Bishop na tradução de poemas brasileiros” draws on an unpublished lecture of Thomas La Borne Burns on Bishop’s translations of Drummond. There is no doubt about Bishop’s mistakes and debatable decisions in her translations, but the ideological implications are problematic. Oliveira’s

argument that Bishop's translation method can be seen in terms of Lawrence Venuti's concept of "domesticating translation" (that is, translation which aims at fluency and the suppression of the fact that it is a translation, and therefore subduing its foreignness) is doubtful and simplistic. He mixes the concept of literal translation – by which he means purely semantic or lexical translation which disregards the aesthetic qualities of the original – with the concept of domesticating translation, while the two are by no means analogous. Oliveira interprets Bishop's method of "literal translation" and the mistakes it involves as a result of her political (ideological) position of a member of a dominant culture. He does not consider the fact that Bishop's concerns were primarily artistic, not political, and he disregards the aesthetic motivations behind her decisions. Apart from building his argument on a rather shaky theoretical basis, Oliveira does not offer concrete examples from Bishop's translations to illustrate and support his rather general arguments (the only one he gives is the use of the ballad form in the translation of *The Death and Life of a Severino* which he interprets as assimilation to the "literary tradition of the receiving system" [64]³), and the conclusion he reaches is the assertion that despite their questionable quality, Bishop's translations are important because they introduced modern Brazilian literature to the United States (one can only wonder why this is a good thing if the author believes that the translations misinterpret the originals and dissolve their cultural identity), and they influenced Bishop's own works. Although Oliveira's arguments and implications are disputable, the criticisms of Bishop's translations have to be taken into account; they remind us of the fact that the translations should not be taken for granted. And it can be interesting to study some of Bishop's controversial (or mistaken) decisions in terms of her aesthetic principles and in the context of her work, as they can show us some of her concerns even more clearly than some of her unproblematic solutions.

My position is in many ways different from all of the above mentioned approaches, although there will be common points. The scope of my study is wider than in the previous works: I examine the whole body of Bishop's translations, not just a selection. My method is more focused: I make translation the centre of my interest, which enables me to study translation in its many aspects. My aim is to see Bishop's translation from a new perspective, not as a marginal activity by which Bishop was occasionally and accidentally distracted from her real work as a poet, but as a recurrent presence in her creative life, which wasn't by any means dominant, but which was present there all along, sometimes more and sometimes less conspicuously, like a *basso continuo* beneath the main voice of her own poetry. My dissertation studies the whole corpus of Bishop's translations, published and unpublished, ordered chronologically, from her college translations of Aristophanes, to her translations of Octavio Paz in the 1970's. I will discuss the circumstances in which each of the translations was made, and give information on the dating and on the publication (if the text in question was published). This should provide a comprehensive and detailed overview of the work done by Bishop in the field of translation, which is something that has not been available so far.⁴ But my aim is not purely descriptive and informative. I will examine the translations in the context of Bishop's art, as a creation of the same imaginative mind, and a product of the same aesthetic approach that lies behind her own writing. My main interest lies in Bishop's poetry and Bishop is relevant for me primarily as a poet. I will not attempt an evaluative criticism of her translations. I will compare them with the originals, but not in order to create a minute analysis of her decisions – my aim is not a critique of her professional translating skills. Bishop was not a professional translator and should not be judged as such. If I examine her decisions, I do not do so in order to establish whether they are right or wrong according to my own or to general ideas about

what a good or a bad translation is. Bishop was an artist, and we may assume that most of her decisions in art were motivated by her artistic intuition, and thus reveal her aesthetics. Her translations interest me as literary texts which are highly relevant for the reading of Bishop's own writings because she chose to work on them, to make them part of her works. The choice itself suggests that she considered the particular text important or attractive for some (presumably aesthetic) reason. I will examine the reasons that might have led to Bishop's choice of texts for translation by contextualizing in her own poetic concerns in the given period. But it is not only the fact she picked a particular text (the choice may sometimes be partly coincidental) which gives it significance in the context of Bishop's writings. It is also the very experience of translating the text. Literary translation can be seen as a form of creative reading – a reading which is not passive but through which the reader actively participates in the creation of the text. Translation enables the translator to enter into an intimate relationship with the original work, a unique relationship which cannot be reached through close reading or a critical analysis of the text. The fact that Bishop had such intimate experience of these texts gives them a unique position in relation to her own poetry. Through her close experience of these works of literature they became part of Bishop's creative universe, not necessarily as simple "influences", but as a space in which Bishop's own work, her words and her imagination interact with another work of art, with the words and imagination of another.

It is not uncommon for a poet to do occasional translations of poetry, but in Bishop's case, translation seems to be more than an occasional caprice. Although she would often disparage her translations, and insist that she was not a translator (especially not in the sense of a cultural mediator between Brazil and the U.S.), there

was no extended period in her life when translation would not figure in her work, however inconspicuous its presence might have been. From the 1940's on she would publish translations in the same magazines and with the same publishers as her own poetry, and she included her translations in her books of poems. Even though "ranking her among the most important translators of the twentieth century" (Read 299) seems far-fetched, her translations of Brazilian poetry (and the editing of the anthology) undoubtedly played a crucial role in introducing modern Brazilian poetry to an American readership – a fact which even the Brazilian critics of her translations acknowledge (Oliveira 68).

Bishop did not have a theory or an explicitly defined method of translation and never wrote consistently on the topic. However, the problem of translation comes up time and again in her letters, interviews and notes. In general, she valued translation very much, but at the same time was quite skeptical about the possibilities of poetry translation, which she considered limited, to say the least. "Translating poetry is like trying to put your feet into gloves", she wrote in her notebook from the 1960's (EAP 314), laconically summing up her opinion on the issue.

Her longest text on translation is a two-page draft called "Remarks on Translation – of poetry, mostly" (VC 54.12), which was, with all probability, written in late 1978 or early 1979 when Bishop was asked to give a talk on translation at Boston University. Unfortunately, the talk never happened, as Mildred J. Nash, her student at Harvard, remembers: "She had spent five days preparing a talk on translation and then found out that the B.U. professor who had asked her for it thought she had turned him down and had not included a place for her on the schedule" (Monteiro 135). The notes are rather chaotic and fragmentary, but they do give some general idea about Bishop's views on translation. Quite tellingly, the remarks start with a polemic with Lowell's

opinion that “What’s worth doing at all is worth doing badly”. Bishop suggests that although “translating is hard, if not impossible”, it “doesn’t *have* to be done as badly as it frequently is”. Her main complaint about translations is their inaccuracy and lack of faithfulness: “the attempt to make a ‘readable’, smooth ‘beautiful’ poem all right in English but untrue to the original”. Among the possible causes of bad translations of poetry she lists, typically for Bishop, carelessness, egotism, and lack of politeness: “a literal translation in prose [...] wd. be more *polite*”.

The requirement of “politeness” and of respect to the original text and author stood also behind her disagreement with Robert Lowell about his free versions of the French poets which he published in his *Imitations* (1961).⁵ Bishop considered these texts too distant from the originals; she thought that Lowell’s “free” treatment of the originals may actually “*look* like mistakes” (OA 395). The lack of “faithfulness” and accuracy is also a recurrent complaint in Bishop’s criticism of the translations of her own poetry into other languages. In a letter to Juju Campbell, who translated several of her poems into Portuguese, she says:

[Y]ou should really repeat a line *exactly* if the original repeats it *exactly*
[...] You should also keep exactly to the original spacing, capitalization,
etc. [...] You shouldn’t put in words that aren’t there [...] You should pay
attention to repeated words and phrase – etc – well, I’m sure you really
know all this and were just careless sometimes. (PPL 888)

Similarly in an unpublished letter to Jaime Manrique, the Venezuelan translator of “The Moose”, written in 1978 she protests against his use of “long words, or words that sound ‘poetic’” and insists on sticking to repetitions, etc.:

I wanted to repeat the word RED. In fact in several places I have
deliberately repeated words, so they shd. be kept the same word. (I know

this is not, or was not – it all depends – considered good style in English prose – probably Spanish as well – but in poetry on CAN repeat if one wants to!) (VC 10.7)

Interestingly enough, she does not complain at all about the translations not keeping the form of the originals.

Bishop considers translation hard work which requires patience, care and accuracy. At the same time, she believes that apart from “sensibility and skill”, the success of a translation “depends (about 50 percent, I’d say) on luck” (PPL 696). Accordingly, she claims repeatedly that she only chooses to translate those poems which seem to yield to translation easily – which is also about the only explicit statement she gives about her own translation method. In a letter to Anne Stevenson from January 8, 1964 (“the Darwin letter”) she says:

I don’t think much of poetry translations and rarely attempt them, - just when I see a poem by someone I like that I think will go into English with less loss than usual. That means it isn’t necessarily one of the poet’s best poems. My translations are almost as literal as I can make them, – these from Brazilian poets are in the original meters, as far as English meters can correspond to Portuguese – which uses a different system. I wouldn’t attempt the kind of ‘imitation’ Robert Lowell does, although he makes brilliant Lowell-poems that way, frequently. (PPL 856)

And again in the interview with Beatriz Schiller, thirteen years later: “As for myself I translate a poem only when I feel that it can work in English, when I can preserve its meter and rhythm.” (Monteiro 77), and in the letter to Juju Campbell (July 4, 1972): “I never do [translating] myself unless I think a poem just happens to go into English

without losing too much of the original – but probably at least 50% is always lost, in another language” (PPL 888).

Bishop did not regard herself as a translator, and she was particularly wary about being considered a cultural mediator. Although she thought translation played an important role in our awareness of foreign cultures (“I would say one thing of great importance is the quantity of translations, which open our eyes to foreign cultures,” Monteiro 76-77), she did not want to assume the position of one who mediates this awareness, particularly in the case of Brazilian culture. She wrote to Anne Stevenson in 1965:

I wish you'd skip the translations. They amount to next to nothing, no real work, and no real interest. Or just say I have translated some prose & some poetry, from the Portuguese. I can't be considered a cultural go-between, *nor do I want to be*. The fact that I live in Brazil seems almost entirely a matter of chance... (WU 1.2)

Ironically, her work on the anthology of Brazilian poetry put her exactly in this role, and she is still considered a key person in introducing modern Brazilian poetry to the American readership.

There is another aspect of translation which Bishop keeps stressing in her comments, and which she clearly considered no less important and educative than the “opening of our eyes to foreign cultures”. It is the importance of the precise meanings of words and the necessity of dictionaries, both of which we learn through translation. She wrote to her friend May Swenson (November 16, 1968): “Stevens says in his letters [...] that translating is a waste of time – but I don't agree with him completely – it gets one to going through dictionaries and that is a helpful activity.” (OA 501) And in an

interview with Eileen MacMahon in 1978 she quotes Evelyn Waugh in connection with her experience with her college translations from Latin and Ancient Greek:

Evelyn Waugh has a very good passage in his first autobiography about the value of translation both ways, from a dead language to a live one. He said that through translation you learn that certain words mean things and they have to be in certain places in a sentence to be effective.” (Monteiro, p. 109)

She clearly valued this “practical”, educative use of translation, which turns our attention to words and their meanings, a vital issue for Bishop and her poetics. Bishop loved dictionaries (as she confesses, for example, in the interview with Beatriz Schiller: “I like words very much and I love dictionaries” [Monteiro 77]), she mentions them often, referring to the particular dictionaries she worked with throughout her career. The last letter she wrote the day she died is basically about the importance of the students’ ability to use dictionaries (nor for translation in this case, but in order to understand poems in their own language): “If a poem catches a student’s interest at all, he or she should damned well be able to look up an unfamiliar word in the dictionary. (I know they don’t – or most of them don’t – but they should be made to, somehow)” (OA 638). Poetry is made of words which “mean things” and it is absolutely necessary to know these words and these meanings well. Translation teaches us this elementary truth, and in this way, it opens our eyes to the basics of poetry.

The main aim of the following chapters is not primarily to present Bishop as a major translator and to defend her translation skills, but to read her translations as works of literature created by a great poet, and to establish a context in which Bishop’s own poetry and prose can be read. Each of the texts Bishop translated can be related to her

poetic preoccupations in the given period. Sometimes, there are clear similarities between her translations and her poems – some of the texts she translated deal with the same issues, discuss similar themes as her own poems, etc.; but sometimes we can see that some concerns and ambitions which are present but never fully materialized in her own works found space in her translations. This does not happen only in the case of themes. The study of the texts Bishop translated draws attention to various issues: different genres, the treatment of forms, the problem of words and names, the questions of authenticity, humor.

Bishop's translations cover a wide range of genres; not only those she wrote herself, but also those she was intrigued by and was interested in writing herself, but never did (as in the case of a play), or did only marginally, and only through translation the importance of the particular genre becomes obvious (popular songs, prose poems, elegies). Her translations betray her interest in genres lying on the border between fiction and non-fiction, like an authentic diary. In her translations she also explored methods of writing which she would sometimes use in her poetry, but never embraced unconditionally: her translations of Max Jacob's poetry – never studied in detail – add a new dimension to the surrealist presence in her work.

Another issue which can be seen in a new light thanks to translation is poetic form and prosody; examining Bishop's treatment of the formal features of the poems she translated, we can see what elements she considered important enough to be kept in the translation. One of the intriguing points here is that there is a certain discrepancy between her proclaimed opinions (according to which the formal features of a poem should be kept) and her translation practice (which often abandons many of the formal aspects).

Translation is an interaction between two languages, and as such it necessarily draws attention to the minute details of language – the differences between words in the two languages, but also to the strangeness of the languages themselves. The problem of finding the right word, of naming, becomes crucial here. Each word of the original has to be supplanted by another word, and it has to be “the right word”; even if the word is kept untranslated, its quality and effect is very different from the original. Bishop’s strong consciousness of words and names is ubiquitous in her own works, but it is in her translations where it is developed fully. I will study the various ways she deals with the translation of words and names – literal translations, mistranslations, phonetic transcriptions, conspicuous “non-translations” – and later I will connect these with her naming strategies in her own works.

One of Bishop’s key preoccupations in writing was the problem of authenticity. The question of authenticity is also at the heart of the translator’s job: can translation be authentic at all if it is necessarily in a different language, it is *never* original? More explicitly, the issue of authenticity is present in the choice of the texts Bishop decided to translate, particularly *The Diary of “Helena Morley”* which attracted Bishop not only because of its theme – rural childhood – but also because of its authenticity, its “artlessness”.

I will also pay attention to humor, which is an aspect that gets easily lost in translation, but in Bishop it rarely does. Many of the texts she chose for translation are humorous, or at least have streaks of humor; it comes in different kinds (from satire and slapstick in Aristophanes, through the playful humor of Brazilian Modernists, the irony and grotesque of Clarice Lispector, to the sometimes unintentional matter-of-fact humor of “Helena Morley”), and make us more perceptive to the various kinds of humor in Bishop’s poetry.

Probably the most obvious (and perhaps the most superficial) parallels between Bishop's own texts and her translations lie in the sphere of themes and motifs. There is the childhood diary translated in the period Bishop wrote extensively on childhood themes; there are Max Jacob's seaside landscapes and his dream visions; there is Cabral's concern for the Brazilian poor; there is Lispector's modern "conquistador" in the jungle, or the motif of Robinson Crusoe in Drummond. I will discuss many of these connections because I consider them relevant, but at the same time, I will try to show that the texts Bishop translated do not relate to her own writings merely on the level of themes or imagery, but on the level of genres, of aesthetic questions, of language, form, etc.

In the following chapters, I will discuss Bishop's translations, both published and unpublished, in chronological order. This chapter will be partly informative, offering some basic facts about the translations, such as dating, publication details, circumstances in which the translations were made, etc., but my main focus will be on the texts themselves, as I try to see their relevance in the context of Bishop's own artistic preoccupations. I will examine the interaction between Bishop's poetics and the texts she translated, and I will try to point out those aspects of her poetics that become more pronounced when seen against the background of her translations. The study of Bishop's translations can offer a new perspective for the reading of her poems and prose – rather than applying a new theory on her writings, I will try to read them from a different point of view, that of translation. The following part will provide grounds for this reading.

Aristophanes

Bishop's first practical experience with translation was probably in her high school Latin classes, which were largely based on translating Latin prose and poetry. Although she was not very good at Latin at first (she received a C in it at North Shore Country Day School, which she attended in 1926-27),⁶ she improved during her years at Walnut Hill School (1927-30), and looking back on her training in Latin prose and poetry some forty years later, she called it "the best possible exercise for a poet" (Monteiro 21). Her Latin teacher at Walnut Hill, Miss Daniels, was very strict but very good. According to Bishop's classmate and friend: "She had a basic method of analyzing a sentence in order to translate it properly. It involved analyzing each single word. That kind of attention to detail Elizabeth liked" (Fountain and Brazeau 24).

Bishop's interest in classical languages continued at Vassar College, where she started with Greek. She took four years of Greek there, including a course on Homer and on the dramatists. Her first big translation project was the verse translation of Aristophanes' comedy *The Birds*, which she decided to translate for her independent study project in her senior year. Her translation was supervised by her Greek teacher, Miss McCurdy. Bishop mentions working on the Aristophanes translation repeatedly in her letters from 1933 and 1934. It is clear that she considered it an important part of her creative work in that period. In her first letter to Donald E. Stanford, a Harvard graduate student and poet, who contacted Bishop at Yvor Winters' suggestion, Bishop writes about her studies and her work, calling the Aristophanes translation "the nicest thing I'm doing" (OA 10). The two young poets exchanged poems and commented on them, discussed their sources of inspiration and their views of poetry. Apart from her own poems, Bishop also sent Stanford a part of her translation of *The Birds* with brief

comments on her method, which suggests that she perceived her translation an integral part of her writing, not a mere school exercise. In December 1933 she spent a part of Christmas vacation at Vassar working on the translation, because she hoped the play might be performed on campus: “There is just the faintest chance of their considering giving *The Birds* for third hall, so I want to get it done,” she wrote to her close friend Frani Blough (OA 15). She was also looking for someone to write music for the play, and obviously had some ideas for a production in mind. But she did not finish the translation, and the performance never materialized. According to Gary Fountain’s and Peter Brazeau’s *Oral Biography*, Bishop did not finish the translation until 1950, when her friend and Vassar classmate Margaret Miller encouraged her to do so (363). However, the Vassar College archive holds only parts of the translation: there are three typed pages in Folder 53.1 (dated 1933-34) containing translations of the very beginning of the play and the parabasis (lines 676-800), and a notebook (dated 1933-34, 1954) that contains handwritten translations of parts of *The Birds* (VC 72B.4a, pp. 1-35, 56-59) and the translation of *The Diary of Helena Morley* (VC 72B.4a-d, pp. 41-55, 63-300).

Aristophanes’ comedy *The Birds* was first produced in Athens in 414 B.C. It is a rather wild satirical play, in which two elderly Athenian citizens, Pisthetaerus and Euelpides, leave Athens because they are tired of the local life obsessed with endless lawsuits. They’re looking for a place to live peacefully in, and decide to search out Tereus, a king whom the gods turned into a hoopoe, and ask his advice. Talking to the birds about their way of life gives Pisthetaerus the idea of founding a city of birds in the skies, and making people worship birds instead of the Olympian gods. The city is built, with Pisthetaerus (now turned into a bird) as its ruler. After a series of bizarre visits from both men and gods, who end up acknowledging the superiority of birds,

Pisthetaerus marries an Olympian princess and acquires all the powers that used to belong to Zeus.

Translating a classic Greek drama into modern English verse presents a challenge attractive to someone who wants to try her skills and practice her dexterity with language and form. It brings a stunning variety of problems, from dealing with individual words, puns or cultural references, to general questions of poetry (English and Greek), of the relationship between two cultures, or of the translator's/poet's method.

Bishop's Greek teacher, Miss McCurdy, was apparently a big fan of Gilbert Murray's wordy archaistic translations – in order to please her at the exams her students memorized whole passages in Murray's translation, and used them as their own when they were asked to translate the passage in question. "It took a lot of self-control not to be Gilbert Murray verbatim. We had to be careful not to use *whilom*," Bishop's classmate Frani Blough remembered years later (Fountain and Brazeau 55). The course on Greek dramatists was taught by Phil Davis, a handsome man and a students' idol, but a severe teacher whose ideas on Greek teaching and study were very different from those of the "dear old lady" Miss McCurdy. Bishop sank from A-plus down to D in his Greek class, and although her independent study project in her senior year consisted in translating a play, she decided to work on it under Miss McCurdy. Bishop said, somewhat jokingly, that the translation was hard because for her supervisor an ideal translation was something "halfway between Gilbert Murray and T. S. Eliot, and with nothing 'cheap' in it" (OA 10). T. S. Eliot's famous essay "Euripides and Professor Murray", which condemns Murray's translations of the classics, certainly was an influence on Bishop's approach to her translation of Aristophanes, however displeasing it may have been for Miss McCurdy and her devotion to the eminent Oxford Hellenist.⁷

Eliot's main complaint about Murray's translation of Euripides is that instead of letting the English be "revitalized" by the poetry of the original, Professor Murray produces a bad imitation of Pre-Raphaelite verse, destroying both the Greek and the English poetry. Eliot respects Murray as a scholar, but brusquely rejects him as a poet/poetry translator, calling for "educated poets" to create better translations of Greek drama. It would be perhaps too much to believe that Bishop saw herself as someone who could answer this call, but Eliot's harsh criticism must have turned her attention not only to the major problems of translation of the classical drama (and of poetry in general), but also to the close relationship between translation and poetry, and the ways they can mutually influence each other.

Bishop's first translation was not poetry, but a play, a genre she is usually not connected with. However, she was deeply interested in theatre as a teenager and a young woman. At Camp Chequesset, a nautical camp for girls where Bishop spent parts of her summers from 1924 till 1930, she would write skits to be performed on Sunday evenings. She impressed her classmates and teachers at Walnut Hill School by writing plays and organizing school productions of them, often coming up with a play overnight (Fountain and Brazeau 25). She also acted in the school performances, often taking up male roles. The school's literary magazine, the *Blue Pencil*, published her play set in Nova Scotia (Millier 36), and together with Frani Blough she wrote a Christmas miracle play with songs, which was put on as the school's Christmas play for over the next twenty years (Fountain and Brazeau 27). Among her other school productions was a parody of a late 19th century melodrama, or a happening-style Greek feast she organized as the *Blue Pencil*'s editor-in-chief to raise the number of submissions to the magazine: the magazine staff set up a Greek tavern in the dining room, the students arrived in Greek costumes, and submitted a literary manuscript as the entrance fee. Bishop played

the tavern owner, Ignatius Acidophilus, who was celebrating the christening of his son Blupi. There was a lot of food to eat, and the organizers even “staged a fight among some sailors in one corner and planted a fake rat beneath the faculty table” (Fountain and Brazeau 33). Later that year the magazine invited a group of professional puppeteers to Walnut to perform for the students.

Theatre was also a part of Bishop’s life at Vassar College, where she played in students’ on-campus productions during her sophomore year (receiving a good review in the school newspaper). The Vassar Experimental Theater, apart from students’ socially conscious propaganda plays, also staged the American premiere of *Sweeney Agonistes* by T. S. Eliot, who visited Vassar on that occasion, and was interviewed by Bishop. Bishop did not write plays at Vassar; but towards the end of her studies, she was intrigued by the idea of writing a verse masque. In a letter to Frani Blough, in which she mentions her work on *The Birds*, she also writes about her sudden “unreasonable desire to think about a new drama *in poetry*” saying that “Eliot seems to be working that way” (with reference to *The Rock*), and that seeing Gertrude Stein’s opera with Virgil Thomson’s music (*Four Saints in Three Acts*) in New York made her “feel cheerful about the return of the masque-like entertainment”. After the exclamation: “Lord, I’d like to attempt that sort of thing”, the letter ends on a more skeptical note regarding the project: “I suppose it would take years of theatrical training to get anywhere with it” (OA 22). However, she entertained this idea throughout the following year, making notes for the play and agreeing with her musician friend Frani on musical collaboration (Fountain and Brazeau 364-65; Millier 80).

The Birds resonates with these preoccupations. The play combines formal poetry with the swift flow of the action, and fanciful costumes. Bishop’s stage notes and her attempts to find someone to write music for the play suggest that the visual, musical and

dramatic issues were no less important to her than the poetry and the formal aspects of the play. She was far from being interested in the play as a mere text, but perceived all the dramatic and theatrical potential inherent in it (quite naturally for someone experienced in staging practice).

In her letters, Bishop repeatedly mentions the humor of *The Birds*, and she clearly appreciated the comic qualities of the play. The humor in *The Birds* operates on various levels, from satire on contemporary Athenian public figures and events, through parody and situations verging on the absurd, to slapstick and crude sexual puns. The comedy is wild in places, breaking all kinds of rules, bursting with unrestrained energy. Its farcical boisterousness is in stark contrast to the restraint, gentle humor and grace known to the readers of Bishop's own poetry. At the same time, it is not completely alien to Bishop's poetics. Throughout her works, there is a playful, grotesque and carnivalesque line, which tends to be disregarded or marginalized in favor of her more serious note, but which forms an important counterpoint to it. Seeing her works in the context of her translations (*The Birds*, some of the texts by Max Jacob and Manuel Bandeira, the sonnet by Vinícius de the sambas) makes Bishop's interest in this type of poetics stand out more clearly. Although it is far from dominant in her poetry, she kept exploring it and returning to it, sometimes quite explicitly, sometimes only as a hint in one line or image (we can think of poems like "Pink Dog", "Exchanging Hats" or "Chemin de Fer", "The Gentleman of Shalott", the playful rhymes for Manuel Bandeira or Frank Bidart, but also the home-brew drunk Crusoe dying a baby-goat red, or Manuelzinho in his grotesque outfit growing bizarre vegetables).

Bishop's translation of the play clearly tries to emphasize the comedy for a contemporary audience. The translator's main aim does not seem to be to keep the ancient quality of the text, but rather to emphasize its accessibility for a modern reader

or spectator. In the comic parts, she uses colloquial American English, full of short forms and common phrases, destroying any illusion of the antiquity of the play, but pointing out its qualities as good comedy, a work of literature not stuck within the limits of certain period, a part of our contemporary culture. For the same reason, she cuts many of the satirical references to particular figures of Athenian politics and culture, as these would be impossible to understand without explanatory notes – again, it is clear that the translation was done with the potential staging in mind.

The opening dialog of Euelpides and Pisthetaerus flows vividly in slightly irregular heroic couplets, with notes describing the speakers' tones and gestures. The fact that the two characters are using perfectly contemporary colloquial idiom adds to the comic effect.

Pisth: Sap that I am, to let a simple crow

Fool me, and tramp a hundred miles or so.

Eu: Well, look at me. Swindled by a jay.

My poor toe-nails are wearing quite away. (He examines them)

Pisth: And where in the world we are, I've no idea.

Eu: D'you think you could find your way back home from here?

Pisth: (dubiously) Well....

Eu: (mildly) Oh hell....

Pisth: That's right, that's right – that's where you're going yet.

Eu: Philocrates said they'd show us how to get

To Tereus, the hoopoe. It's a dirty lie.

They're absolutely no good. And we had to buy

This crow for three whole obols, and to pay

Out still another for this lousy jay.

They can't do anything but bite and chew.

(To his jay)

What are you yapping at? What's the matter with you?

(Shakes him)

You want us to fall down and break our bones?

There isn't any road through all those stones. (VC 53.1)

The rough informal language of the dialogue flows naturally, but at the same time it is controlled by the form. The meter is not perfectly regular, but there is a strict rhyming pattern, which is absent in classical poetry and drama, and which Bishop introduced to achieve a stronger effect of both regularity and flow using a means natural to English prosody. The tension between the informal language and the form governing it adds to the comic effect, and so does the sudden breaking of the form, as in the replacement of the pentametric line with the short rhyming "Well... / Oh, hell."

The translation is accompanied by many stage notes, which stress its visual theatrical quality, too, and often put the play in a surprisingly modern perspective. The first scene is described in openly anachronistic terms as "a gloomy, Dante-esque sort of place". The characters are sketched vividly in a few words:

Euelpides is blond, very fat and inclined to pant in the middle of his lines. Pisthetaerus, on the other hand is very thin, with a short black beard and a bald spot. They are both loaded with sacks, baskets, etc., and, of course, the birds. Euelpides holds a nice bright blue-jay on one plump finger; Pisthetaerus holds a ferocious big crow on his wrist. They are all very much out of sorts. (VC 53.1)

These notes show an interest not only in the text of the play, but also in its potential staging. The stage notes throughout the text, commenting on the movements of the

characters, the tone of their voices, etc., add considerably to the theatrical effect, and to the dynamics of the dialogs. At the same time, these notes bring a feature rather uncommon in a translation – it seems as if the translator distanced herself from the play at places, breaking the illusion of her invisibility, and entering the text from the distance of two millennia. The anachronism of the adjective “Dante-esque” is one such moment – deliberately pointing out that we are seeing the play through the prism of all the literature and culture that stands between it and us. And maybe also saying that it is perfectly legitimate to mix Dante and Aristophanes in this way, as they are part of the same cultural universe, they can be connected and read one through the other. In his essay “Kafka y sus precursores”, Borges suggests that knowing Kafka, we can find Kafkaesque features in the authors writing before Kafka – features that have always been hidden there, but which are now visible thanks to Kafka’s writings (106). In a similar way, Bishop sees Dante’s landscape in Aristophanes. Another example of this anti-illusory distance can be found in the expression: “and, of course, the birds”. A translator (or an editor) pretending to be invisible could not possibly phrase the stage note in this way. The “of course” brings a certain irony into the text; it suggests we all expect the birds to be there. We know it is a play called *The Birds*, and we know it is about birds. There is no illusion of the play happening now, before our eyes, for the first time. More than a translator’s/editor’s note it is a critic’s meta-textual note, commenting on another version of a well-known text.

Apart from an exercise in Greek, the translation was also an exercise in poetic forms, styles and techniques for Bishop. In the occasional comments on her method, she says she is using a different kind of meter for the different parts of the play and “letting my fancy run wild on the bird songs themselves” (OA 11). She also mentions making use of her readings of English poetry – particularly Richard Crashaw’s “Music’s Duell”,

in her translation of the “Parabasis” of *The Birds* because “the imagery and the lightness of the whole thing is so like it” (OA 24). Crashaw’s lengthy poem about a contest between a nightingale and a lute player, in which the nightingale dies in the end, is very decorative, its main aim being to convey the richness and beauty of music through the medium of language. His inspiration for Bishop’s translation appears in a more sober form in the song parts of the parabasis where the birds’ music is dominant:

Nightingale, come now and bear
Delight upon the heavy air.
Fair-throated, strike the little strings
Of song till every accent sings.
As in the spring, the melody
Begin! Begin the song for me! (PPL 267)

The main theme of the speeches in the parabasis is the superiority of the birds over mankind. This part is the most serious one in the play, the comic element disappears both from the content and from the style, which becomes solemn, without being pompous:

Blind race below, in your uncertain day,
Like to the short-lived leaves, as frail as they,
Of feeble strength, a forgery of clay,
Whose shadowy troops drift past in sickly throngs,
Dream-like, unblest with bird-wings or bird-songs,
We are immortal beings, men, attend;
Our airy lives know neither age nor end,
Our thoughts imperishable are and high.
Learn now the pure transactions of the sky,

Learn what a solitary bird forebodes,
The origins of rivers and of gods,
Secrets of Chaos and of Erebus
Beyond the sophists' wisdom, learn from us. (PPL 267)

The heroic couplets become perfectly regular, the language moves far from the colloquial – it is formal, archaic, the syntax obeys the form. The translation of *The Birds* required adopting different styles and different voices, something Bishop often does in her poetry, too. She never wrote the play in verse she had planned in the 1930's, but her poetics shares some basic principles with dramatic creation. Her poems often involve dialogues and other people's voices. It is common for Bishop to adopt a persona's voice for the whole of the poem (e. g. "Jerónimo's House", "Songs for a Colored Singer", "The Riverman", "From Trollope's Journal", "Crusoe in England", or "Manuelzinho" with the intriguing stage note at the beginning "A friend of the writer is speaking"), to include dialogues, other people's speeches, or quotes into her poems (e. g. "The Moose", "Poem", "House Guest", "Under the Window: Ouro Preto", "The Burglar of Babylon", "First Death in Nova Scotia", "North Haven", "Santarém", "Cirque d'Hiver", "Five Flights Up"...), dialogues appear as a motif ("At the Fishhouses", "The Moose"), poems are addressed as messages to someone, even the titles of the poems imply dialogue and communication ("Conversation" – the first of "Four Poems" –, "Argument", "Letter to N. Y.", "Invitation to Miss Marianne Moore"). She has not only people, but animals and things speaking and sounding (the sheep in "Cape Breton", the gulls in "Crusoe in England", the cans in "The Filling Station", the almanac in "Sestina", the weed in "The Weed"...). Adopting others' voices or letting the other speak in her poems is one of the basic methods used by Bishop, and it is this openness to other voices, the dialogical dimension of many of her texts that can be seen as an

echo of her theatrical preoccupations, which also materialized in her first major translation.

The translation of *The Birds* was the longest of the poetic translations Bishop ever decided to undertake. It was certainly a great exercise, and an experience different from the experience of reading, or that of one's own writing. The translator has to work within the given frame of the original work, which makes the creative work easier, on the one hand, but more difficult on the other. The themes, motifs, tone, style, etc. are given, and the translator doesn't have to seek them or make them up; perception and sensitive interpretation are more important here than imagination. Yet one has to be imaginative in finding ways to move within the set limits, to make the translation beautiful and true to the original. Translating regular verse forms makes the translator examine the utmost possibilities of their own language, and learn about the ways it works. It also teaches them a lot about the limitations of their language, and of language in general. Translating old poetry brings the strange double experience of closeness and distance, of familiarity and accessibility on the one hand, and strangeness and obscurity, of the possibility to access "the other", and the ultimate impossibility to do so; an experience which is present in every literary translation, and also one of the deep preoccupations of Bishop's own poetics (as I shall examine later). In her translation of Aristophanes, Bishop seems to believe that the other, which might appear quite distant and inaccessible at first sight, is in fact closer and more familiar than one would think. Her main aim is to show this closeness, rather than to stress the foreignness, a strategy she did not quite stick to in her later translation efforts, where the otherness of the other becomes more pronouncedly an issue.

The translation of *The Birds* remained unfinished, unperformed and unpublished. However, its fragments show that in her first big translation project Bishop

explored many of the principal issues of her poetics which she developed in her own poetry, such as the openness towards the other, the plurality of voices, humor, playfulness and the grotesque. Seeing her poetic works in the context of her translations, make the undisputable presence of these aspects stand out clearly and evidently and prove them crucial for her poetics.

French Poets and Spanish War Poems

Although it took Bishop some twenty years before she started working on another big translation project after the translation of Aristophanes, she turned to translation occasionally in the meantime. After graduating from Vassar in 1934, she moved to New York where she attended some lectures and classes, including a course in reading and translating French poetry (Fountain and Brazeau 62). She spent the following year in Europe, mostly in France, where she read and studied modern French poetry a lot: her library contained works by Baudelaire, Rimbaud, Corbière, Reverdy, Apollinaire, Jacob and others. In her unpublished “Remarks on Translation – of poetry mostly”, written in the 1970’s, she remembers her stay in the village of Douarnenez in Brittany. She speaks about the intuitive “understanding” of poetry, which does not depend on the perfect knowledge of the language:

In 1935 I spent a few weeks quite alone in a small fishing village in Brittany. I had only school French – a dictionary Cassells – and some books of poetry. It was fairly near where Corbière had lived – When I read in “A Season in Hell” – *Me voici sur la plage armoricaine...* (which is in Brittany) I thought I understood Rimbaud. And I looked up all the words... I had taken a long, day-long pilgrimage, on foot, with villagers, to a shrine of St. Anne – and then I’d felt I understood Corbière... (VC 54.12)

This may not be translation in the proper sense of the word; Bishop did not translate Rimbaud or Corbière for publication. But this close work with poetry in a foreign language and a dictionary, and the strong experience of sudden deep understanding, which she first described in a letter from Douarnenez to her friend Frani Blough, was

connected to translation, and it came back to her many years later when she was preparing a lecture on translating poetry. She clearly valued her experience with reading and translating the French poets during her stay in Brittany, and felt a similar experience was lacking in Robert Lowell's translations of the same poets. In her letter to Lowell, in which she cautiously criticizes his translations, she offers to share this experience: "If you want me to, I'd be glad to give you more benefits of my past experience in Rimbaud-translating. (I spent a month alone in Brittany once doing nothing much but that.)" (OA 396).

Bishop's travels in Europe included a trip to Spain in the spring of 1936. She left for the U.S. just before the Spanish civil war started. In April 1937, she wrote a letter to the translator Rolfe Humphries, who was looking for translators of Spanish War poems, offering her services. Other American poets contributed to Humphries' edition of Spanish War poetry, including Muriel Rukeyser, Bishop's Vassar contemporary and the author of "Mediterranean", a poem on the Civil War in Spain. Bishop's attitude towards the Spanish Civil War was reserved and ambiguous. Unlike many other artists and intellectuals in Europe and America, Bishop was certainly not a decided supporter of the Republican cause – she was very critical of "the Communists" when she traveled in Spain in 1936, during the short period of the Popular Front rule, when churches started to be burnt down: "If you really want to see what Communists are up to, what beautiful things they have ruined, you should come here," she wrote to her friend Hallie Tompkins (qtd. in Millier 97-98). In her own poems and prose, she does not deal with her Spanish experience, and it is rather difficult to see what her exact position in relation to the Civil War was.⁸ Bishop did not write political poetry, and although this decision must have been quite conscious on her part, she had a tendency to feel guilty about the lack of political and social engagement in her poems in the politically difficult war era.

(She even insisted on having a note in the first edition of *North & South* saying that most of the poems were written before 1942 to explain the absence of the war theme in the book.) This feeling may have contributed to her decision to answer Humphries' call for translators. Whatever her reasons were, Humphries gave her a poem on the death of the Republican militia woman Francisca Solana to translate. A month later, Bishop sent another letter, refusing to translate it because it was not worth the effort:

After having puzzled long and thoroughly on "Francisca Solana," I have come to the conclusion that the poem is not really worth the time and the work of putting it into English ballad form. It could be done as you suggested, but I feel that the dullness of the original would only be increased by the translation. In fact, I feel that a simple obituary notice would be more moving. I am very sorry to be of no more assistance than this, but please believe me, I am as interested and should like to help as much as when I first wrote. (OA 60)

Bishop was clearly interested in translating politically engaged poetry (partly, perhaps, to compensate for the lack of it in her own writing), but she required that such poetry remained aesthetically satisfactory. She was not in search of political poems at all costs, she wanted good political poems. She believed that engagement and poetry are not mutually exclusive, and would abandon aesthetic qualities for the sake of a message. However, Humphries' anthology did not offer what she was looking for. It was only much later, in Brazil, where she encountered the poems of João Cabral de Melo Neto in Brazil, that she translated and was inspired by poems in which the two aspects were in harmony.

Max Jacob

If the experience of Spain does not figure largely in Bishop's works, her French stay, on the contrary, proved to be rather influential and is reflected both in her original poetry and her translations. She met with surrealism there – more through her readings than personal contacts – which she found interesting, although she was critical of some of its ideas of creation and of its methods. The presence of surrealism in Bishop's early works, especially in the poems she wrote in France and published in her first book of poems *North & South* (1946), has been noted. It is perhaps a coincidence that the influential surrealist magazine Pierre Reverdy started publishing in Paris in 1917 was called *Nord-Sud*.

Bishop's relationship to surrealism has been discussed repeatedly by critics, but a thorough, in-depth study of the ways surrealism influenced her work and was transformed in it is still missing. Her attitude to surrealism was ambiguous, but she was mostly critical of it. Although she acknowledged her early interest in it (Monteiro 25), which was quite natural for a young poet living in Paris in the mid 1930's, her usual use of the term "surrealist" suggests negative connotations. Speaking about a story by Jean Casson, which she read in France in 1935, she said: "I read it, and like it – although it is a sort of mixture of Surrealism and romanticism & Hemingway.... I guess maybe he's just Surrealism popularized" (qtd. in Millier 89). And about Pablo Neruda whom she met and read in Mexico in 1942:

I bought Pablo Neruda's poetry (he and his wife have been very nice to us) and I am reading it with dictionary, but I am afraid it is not the kind I – nor you – like, very very loose, surrealist imagery, etc. I may be

misjudging it; it is so hard to tell about foreign poetry, but I feel I recognize the type only too well. (OA 108-09)

Later, in a letter to Anne Stevenson (October 2, 1963) she acknowledges Neruda's influence on her work: "While in Mexico I knew Pablo Neruda and I now realize he had more influence on me than I knew at the time" (PPL 854). In the following letter, she denies it: "Since I was interested in surrealism long before I met him, I don't believe his poetry had much influence on mine."

One of the first critics to examine the presence of surrealist influence in Bishop's poetry, and also her critical distance from it was Richard Mullen in his article "Elizabeth Bishop's Surrealist Inheritance."⁹ Mullen sees Bishop as sharing the surrealist interest in the unconscious, yet at the same time refusing "the 'split' between the roles of conscious and unconscious forces in our perception of the world" (64). He discusses Bishop's preoccupation with dreams and with the "otherness" of objects, which were also important preoccupations of the surrealists, but he argues that Bishop's poetics is, in the end, radically different. One of the main features that distinguish her poetry from surrealism is her turn from the self and the subjective towards the outer world of things:

Breton wrote that for the surrealists, there were no objects, only subjects. They had no interest in the natural world *per se*. Throughout Bishop's poetry, this strangeness of our subjective selves, the queer struggle between conscious and unconscious, is projected outward into a world where the "thingness of things" dominates. (80)

This seems to be a valid observation. Breton's stress on subject as opposed to object, does not mean that surrealism ignores objects, things – it is deeply interested in things, although not *per se* but always filtered through the self; it stresses the freedom of the

self from the objective, the power of the subject over the object, and the ways the self can handle anything outside the self, transform it, change it and play with it. They explore different, new ways of seeing things, they also realize that the way we see things comes from ourselves, our minds, not from the things. The surrealist concept of automatic writing does not mean the abandonment of the self, its resignation to some outside forces and voice; quite the contrary, it is letting the self speak really for itself, without the restraint of the outside forces of conventions of language and perception. The self's domination over the outside world is one of Bishop's main concerns, too, but the overall movement or gesture of her poetry is quite the opposite to that of surrealism: instead of reveling in the self's power to dominate what it sees, she perceives this power as dangerous and limiting and tries to step out of the self towards "the other" lying outside it. Although sharing some of the main concerns of surrealism, she would be wary about the arbitrariness and anarchy surrealism can lead to when it loses the objects from its sight and revels in its own constructions. She puts this "made-up", artificial, self-centered surrealism in contrast with what she calls "surrealism of everyday life" in the famous passage on Darwin in her letter to Ann Stevenson:

Dreams, works of art (some), glimpses of the always-more-successful surrealism of everyday life, unexpected moment of empathy (is it?), catch a peripheral vision of whatever it is one can never see full-face but that seems enormously important. (PPL 861)

I mentioned that the 'surrealism of everyday life' was always more successful, – or more amazing – than any they can think up, – that is for those who have eyes to see. (PPL 864)

In Bishop's view it is an achievement to see common, everyday things clearly, and it is more rewarding than to make things up out of one's self. In Bishop, the self is always

unmistakably present (in comparison to, for example, Marianne Moore), but it tries to open up, to turn outward and let other voices sound next to its own.

The name most commonly mentioned in the context of Bishop's relation to surrealism is that of Max Ernst. Bishop herself was not quite happy with the connection. She mentions the inspiration by Ernst's *frottages* from his *Histoire Naturelle* in two of her early poems: "The Weed" (OA 478) and "The Monument" (Stevenson 68, 132),¹⁰ but clearly she was worried about being automatically related to surrealism, particularly to Ernst, by the critics. In her letter to Ferris Greenslet from Houghton Mifflin discussing some technical details of the publication of *North & South*, she wrote:

I don't know whether this is at all likely or not but it occurred to me that you might be using some of my original "sponsors'" remarks for publicity purposes. In the letter Miss Marianne Moore wrote for me she commented on some likeness to the painter Max Ernst. Although many years ago I once admired one of Ernst's albums, I believe that Miss Moore is mistaken about his ever having been an influence, and since I have disliked all of his painting intensely and am not a surrealist, I think it would be misleading to mention my name in connection with his. (OA 135)

A similar complaint appears in her letter to Ann Stevenson from January 8, 1964 (PPL 859). Despite these explicit reservations and attempts to distance herself from Ernst, he figures prominently in the discussions of the surrealist (and French) presence in her poetry, unlike another French surrealist, the poet and painter Max Jacob, whose influence on Bishop has not been fully examined. It is surprising, as the translations of Max Jacob were the first translations Bishop ever published, which seems an explicit acknowledgement of interest and approval. The translations of Max Jacob are relatively

late: apparently, Bishop did not translate these poems in the 1930's, when her contact with surrealism was most intense, but only in the late 1940's. Four of them appeared in the May 1950 issue of *Poetry*, and were later included in *The Complete Poems* published by Farrar, Straus & Giroux in 1983. Bishop is supposed to have worked on them during her stay at Yaddo, the writer's colony in Saratoga Springs, N.Y., in the summer of 1949, which coincided with a period of self-doubt, inability to concentrate on her own writing, depression and drinking problems; translation could have been a form of compensation when she felt unable to work on her own poetry.

Max Jacob (1876–1944) was a French writer and painter of Jewish origin, born in Quimper (a town in Brittany not very far from Douarnenez where Bishop stayed in 1935). He lived in Paris and was friends with many great poets and artists of the Paris avant-garde, including Picasso, Apollinaire, Cocteau and Modigliani. He converted to Christianity, and Christian motifs figure in his poetry. Apart from being a respected poet and well-known painter (there were two exhibitions of his paintings in New York City, in 1930 and 1938), he was also known for his homosexuality and heavy drinking. He died in 1944 in Drancy deportation camp, before he could be moved to a concentration camp. His works – both writings and paintings – use surrealist methods, such as free association of thoughts or exploration of dreams, combining them with symbolist features.

The four translations of Max Jacob that Bishop published in 1950 are two short prose poems “Hell is Graduated,” “Patience of an Angel,” and two poems in verse, “Rainbow” and “Banks”. Among her papers at Vassar there are several more of her translations of Jacob, but never published.¹¹ Among her translations of Jacob, we find texts which may be surprising in the context of Bishop's own works, at least at first sight. There are overtly religious motifs, dadaist playfulness, dreamlike stories, explicit

preoccupation with artistic creation – aspects which are not often connected to Bishop's poetics. On closer examination, however, we realize that all of them are present in her works, only less conspicuously. Jacob is rhetorical and abstract, while Bishop's style is famously modest and concrete, the atmosphere of Jacob's poems is either more somber or, on the contrary, more playful than that of Bishop's, the imagery less organized, but it seems that the translations of his poetry allowed Bishop to explore areas she was interested in using another voice and other ways of expression.

The poem "Rainbow" ("Arc-en-ciel") is one of the four picked for publication; the original appeared as the opening poem of the final part of Max Jacob's book *Le Laboratoire central* from 1921. The overall tone and atmosphere of the poem is different from Bishop's own poetics, and so is the theme, but there are moments when the two poetic visions come close:

It was the hour when night makes the mountains lament
And the crags creak under the footsteps of animals,
The birds flew away from the countryside like poison
To get to the sea, to get to a better horizon.
Pursuing a poet then the devil went.
The poet stared at the sea as if he were dead,
For there the sea powdered the edge of a bay
And covered the skin of the giant rocks with scales.
But Jesus, with fire shining behind his head,
Came to climb up the black crags, bearing the cross.
The poet stretched out his arms towards the Saviour
And everything vanished: the sombre night and the beasts.
The poet followed God for his happiness.¹²

(C'était l'heure où la nuit fait gémir les montagnes
Les rochers noirs craquaient du pas des animaux,
Les oiseaux s'envolaient des sinistres campagnes
Pour approcher la mer, un meilleur horizon.
Le diable poursuivait un poète en ce temps.
Le poète fixait la mer comme une mort
Car la mer en ce lieu poudrait le cap d'une anse
Et la mer écaillait la peau des rocs immenses.
Mais Jésus, rayonnant de feu derrière la tête,
Portant la croix, vint à monter des rochers noirs.
Le poète a tendu les bras vers le Sauveur
Alors tout s'effaça : la nuit sombre et les bêtes.
Le poète a suivi le Dieu pour son bonheur. [149])

Symbolist, even allegorical, rather than surrealist, this is a fairly straightforward poem about religious conversion: the poet pursued by the devil in the dark night of the soul is led out and saved by Jesus. This thematic line is quite conventional and so is some of the imagery: Jesus with fire shining behind his head bearing the cross, the poet stretching his arms towards the Saviour and following God, the darkness disappearing at the moment of his turn towards God. However, the setting of the poem, the images used to describe the dark night are far from conventional, and they are not so alien to Bishop's own poetics: the poem is set by the sea, on the coast (one of Bishop's favorite settings), bay, in particular, it focuses on the interaction between the land and the sea, with the animals coming out of the night, and birds flying from the land to the sea. It

brings to mind poems like “At the Fishhouses”, “The Bight”, or “Cape Breton” (all of which are from the late 1940’s, when the poems by Jacob were translated).

Looking closer at Bishop’s translation in comparison with the original, one notices several changes. The original poem is written in more or less regular alexandrines with an irregular rhyme scheme; the meter of the translation is less regular, and the rhyme pattern is even looser. There are several shifts in meaning, some of them rather striking. The most curious intervention of the translator occurs in line 8. Bishop seems to have interpreted the verb incorrectly, creating a line which is wrong as far as translation goes, but beautiful in terms of poetry. Where Jacob has “And the sea peeled the skin of the immense rocks”, in Bishop’s version the sea “covered the skin of the giant rocks with scales”. The difference is caused by misinterpretation of the verb *écailler*, “to peel” (or to remove scales), which Bishop connects with the noun *écaille*, “scale”, and reads as meaning “to cover with scales”. In Jacob’s poem, the sea is corrosive, it takes away the protective skin of the rocks – the image gives an unpleasant physical feeling of uncovering, exposure; “the skin” as the object of the verb “to peel” naturally evokes the idea of the skin of a fruit or a vegetable, the rocks maybe more vegetal and therefore more endangered here than the stone mass usually is, but they are still inanimate. On the contrary, in Bishop’s poem the skin of the rocks is covered with scales, the sea adds another layer, which is not only protective, but also beautiful. The image is more visual, we see the huge rocks covered with scales; and it is, in a way, more surreal, or more dream-like, than the original one – the scales are like glittery snow, not lying just here and there, but covering the rocks, it is millions of scales brought by the sea onto the rocks. The “skin” in this line is not the skin of a fruit; its connection to scales makes it seem more like the skin of an animal. The rocks are turning into large fish whose skin is covered with scales. And the image of the layers of

scales covering the rocks brings to our mind Bishop's own imagery of "At the Fishhouses":

The big fish tubs are completely lined
with layers of beautiful herring scales
and the wheelbarrows are similarly plastered
with creamy iridescent coats of mail,
with small iridescent flies crawling on them.

The poem "At the Fishhouses" was first published in *The New Yorker* on August 9, 1947, that is two years before Bishop's stay at Yaddo in the summer of 1949, where she quite probably translated the poem by Jacob. There is no evidence that she worked on the two texts simultaneously, and no direct influence of the translation on the original poem can be assumed. Rather, we can suppose that the image evoked by the words "sea, cape, bight, scales, rock" resonated in the poet's mind with the images and words her own imagination was occupied with at that time (her poem "The Bight" was published in February 1949, "Cape Breton" in June 1949).

Several of Jacob's texts which Bishop translated, but did not publish, are full of playfulness and nonsense, as, for example, the short poem "Rain" (La pluie), dadaist, rather than surrealist:

Mr. Yousouf forgot his umbrella
Mr. Yousouf lost his umbrella
Madame Yousouf, someone stole her umbrella
There was an ivory handle on her umbrella
What stuck in my eye was the end of an umbrella
Didn't I leave my umbrella
Last night in your umbrella-rack?

I shall have to buy myself an umbrella

I never really use an umbrella

I have a duster with a hood for the rain

Mr. Yousouf you are lucky to dispense with your umbrella. (VC 56.13)

Or the short “Story Without a Moral”:

Once there was a locomotive so good that it stopped to let pedestrians pass. One day an automobile bumped over its tracks. The engineer whispered into the ear of his steed: “Shouldn’t we take it to law?” “It is young,” said the locomotive, “it doesn’t know.” It contented itself with spitting a little disdainful steam in the out-of-breath “sportsman”. (VC 56.13)

These – and some other – unpublished texts can be related to the playful, grotesque line going through Bishop’s works, which I have suggested in the discussion of the translation of *The Birds*. Jacob’s humor is different from that of Aristophanes: it is more bizarre and childlike, less accessible, but it has a similar tendency to anarchy and breaking the rules. Bishop was interested in this kind of humor, but when she occasionally explores it in her own poems, it, paradoxically perhaps, often acquires a dark undertone. The childlike obsessiveness of Jacob’s umbrella may remind us of the grotesque nursery rhyme of “Visits to St. Elizabeths” (which refers to her visits to Ezra Pound in 1949–1950, the same year in which she translated Jacob), yet the French poem is much more cheerful. Its playfulness does not cover any darkness beneath it, which is what happens in Bishop, whose poem is about the poet confined to a mental asylum. The outwardly funny and playful “Pink Dog” or “Exchanging Hats” are similarly disturbing. Jacob’s polite speaking locomotive is less wild than “The Rain” and its humor is closer to Bishop’s own; it brings to mind the Esso oil cans which say the

soothing “Esso-so-so-so” to “high-strung automobiles” in “Filling Station”, or the grandfather and children greeting the passing automobiles which cover their faces with dust in “Manners”.

Bishop and Jacob shared an interest in visual arts – they both painted and they explored the visual in their poetry. Jacob’s free-verse poem “Rotsoge” is dedicated to Marc Chagall, and the theme of the visual appears in it side by side with the theme of lost childhood, two Bishopean themes par excellence:

And I begin to cry remembering our childhoods

And you show me an amazing violet

This little picture with the cart reminds me of the day

A day made of mauve yellow blue green and red pieces

When I ran away to the country with a charming chimney holding a dog
in leash

I used to have a flute which I wouldn’t have exchanged for the baton of a
Marshal of France

There are none like it now I no longer have my little flute

Far away from me the Chimney is smoking Russian cigarettes (VC
56.13)

The style is different, and so is the tone – we do not find such explicit nostalgia in Bishop’s childhood poems (there is a hint of it in the last stanzas of “Crusoe in England”). Jacob’s poem is quite direct and straightforward, in spite of its surrealist imagery (the chimney smoking Russian cigarettes), yet at the same time rather loose, losing itself in a flood of images. We can see that clearly if we compare it to Bishop’s poems on similar themes, for example “Poem” (written much later), where a picture also brings the memory of the childhood village to the poet’s mind. Bishop would never

write like Jacob, but translating his poems allowed her to explore paths she would not choose for her own writing, to experience different possibilities, and probably to define her own position better.

Another example of an alternative way of treating a theme of Bishop's interest is Jacob's poem "Etablissement d'une communauté au Brésil" (Establishment of a Community in Brazil), which Bishop translated, but the translation never got beyond a handwritten literal draft and was never published. The comparison of this poem to Bishop's "Brazil, January 1, 1502" is the topic of one of the few essays discussing Bishop's connection to Max Jacob: Sylvia Henneberg's "Elizabeth Bishop's 'Brazil, January 1, 1502' and Max Jacob's 'Etablissement d'une communauté au Brésil': A Study of Transformative Interpretation and Influence". Interestingly enough, the author of the essay seems to be unaware of the existence of the translation and assumes only that Bishop had read Jacob's text before she wrote her poem or that "both poets independently drew on the 1502 map of Brazil that was to be reprinted in Bishop's Time Inc book *Brazil* (1962)" (338). Henneberg argues that "Bishop reacts to and departs from Jacob's model, crafting a piece that redirects and sharpens Jacob's critique of imperialism" (339). Her argument is based largely on thematic parallels between the two poems, rather than similar poetics, structure or direct references, and her reading of Jacob's text as a "critique of imperialism" seems to be slightly out of place. I copy Bishop's translation of the poem here – it is basically a word by word rendering of the French original, I only leave out the occasional brackets she inserted where she was in doubt:

Establishment of a Community in Brazil

They were received by the fern and the pineapple

The timid antelope under the ipecacuanha.

The illuminator-monk left his water-color
And the vessel had not folded its sail
When a hundred light shelters flowered the forest.
The nuns plowed. One of them wept
Finding in a letter a subject for grief
An intemperate monk got drunk on grapes
And they prayed pardon for him for his sin.
Poisons were gathered from the tops of the branches
And the basket-making monks wove white urns.
An escaped convict who lived by hunting
Was cured of his wounds and touched by grace:
Became holy adored by all the others
He compelled the wild beasts to lick his feet.
And the birds of heaven, the beasts of the earth,
Brought to all of them every necessary object.
One day there was an organ in the hollow of the plastered walls.
Herds of sheep which nibbled the ears of corn.
One monk is a harness-maker, another a distiller.
[a line missing]

Salute to the mango-tree and bless the mango
The flute of the toad speaks to you its own language
[The a]ltars are adorned with really strange flowers
[Their per]fume would draw a smile from the angels,
[...] spirits crouched in the forests

[...] the square walls of the community.

But here is one morning when the bleeding Dawn

Made the cloud purer and the plant fresher

The forest where the vine cling to the cedar,

Appeared to have the scurvy. A Negro appeared

Then two, then a hundred, then a thousand & the grass was black with
them

And the Saint who could tame the animals

Could do nothing with these people who were his executioners,

The head of the convent rolled in the green grass

And the place was deserted by the ruined monks

without anything murmuring of death in the azure.

It is thus that arrayed in innocence & love

I advanced laying out my work every day

Praying to God & believing in the beauty of things

But the cruel laugh, the cares that are imposed on me

Money and opinion, the stupidity of other people

Made me the unfeeling bourgeois who signs himself here. (VC 64.11)

The first stanza of the poem creates the image of a utopian religious community, in the style of those established in the New World; it brings up the idea of the paradisiacal place of innocence and harmony with nature, which was one of the ways America was seen by the conquistadors. In the second stanza, the new world which had received the newcomers in such a welcoming way suddenly turns against them in the form of

“Negroes” who destroy the idyllic community brutally, while the beautiful nature serves as the disinterested scene for the destruction, untouched by it – “without anything murmuring of death in the azure”. The last stanza shifts from the original image of the community completely. It introduces the “I” and turns the image built up in the first two stanzas into a metaphor: I, the writer, used to be as innocent and loving as those who established the community in the first stanza, I worked and prayed and believed “in the beauty of things”, but just like the community was cruelly destroyed by the “Negroes”, I was destroyed (turned from a sensitive creative man into an “unfeeling bourgeois”) by the pressure of the hostile and misunderstanding society around me (the cruel laugh, the imposed cares, money and opinion, people’s stupidity).

The comparison with “Brazil, January 1, 1502” is a felicitous one, although perhaps the parallels lie somewhere else than in the “critique of imperialism”, which does not seem to be among the themes of Jacob’s poem. The poems share the same setting – and in both cases we learn that the exotic place is Brazil explicitly from the title, and indirectly from the language of the poem: “ipecacuanha” in Jacob, “‘one leaf yes and one leaf no’ (in Portuguese)” in Bishop. Both texts move between two temporal planes – the time of the first colonists (referred to in third person plural in Bishop, and using the French impersonal “on” in Jacob) and the contemporary time of the speaker (first person plural in Bishop, first person singular in Jacob). The movement is in the opposite direction: Jacob starts with the colonizers to move to his own situation, whereas Bishop moves from “us” to “them”. Importantly, the two poems create an analogy between the first settlers – monks and nuns in Jacob’s case, soldiers in Bishop’s – and the speaker, although the outcome is different. The more traditional and explicit poem by Jacob sees both the builders of the community and the innocent poet in positive terms, bringing beauty and harmony into the world – a utopian attempt which

does not meet with the acceptance from the world and is destroyed. In Bishop, the analogy is not explained, but it's left to the reader to infer: the speaker is received by the new world in the same way the conquistadors were, and just like them she brings in her own conceptions, ideas, cultural patterns, and appropriative attitude which can potentially lead to violence, and which certainly prevents harmonious communication with the new world. Bishop's poem leaves a lot unsaid, she merely puts "our" coming to Brazil side by side with the arrival of the Portuguese colonizers – seen as a negative, potentially destructive element. Our first arrival and our first view of the country is the same as theirs: "Nature greets our eyes / exactly as she must have greeted theirs", the beginning is the same, and it is implied that the ending – violence and failure to meet the newly discovered world – could be the same as well. Where Jacob's poet and his work are like the pious monks creating a harmonious community in the bosom of paradisiacal nature, Bishop's poet/traveler could be like the armed conquistador violating the new world by appropriating it and applying her own voice and vision to it. In Jacob, the building of the community in Brazil is a metaphor for artistic creation; in Bishop, such relationship remains implicit. But if we read "Brazil, January 1, 1502" on the background of Jacob's "Establishment of a Community in Brazil" the analogy (or allegory) comes forth much more clearly. Knowing the poem by Jacob Bishop translated, we can see her text as kind of answer to or development of it: if the creativity of the colonizers and the creativity of the poet are comparable, so is their destructive potential. "Brazil, January 1, 1502" can be (and has been) read as a poem about the creative powers of the poet and their dangers; in the context of Jacob's poem this meaning comes forth in a much more pronounced way. Here, like in other cases, the text translated by Bishop makes some particular aspects of her work stand out and supports certain readings of her poems.

Bishop's translations of Jacob have been largely overlooked by critics, however, they offer interesting insights into some of Bishop's important poetic concerns. This chapter has discussed some of the possible ways to read these texts in relation to Bishop's poetry, but it not exhaustive, and the comparison of the works of these two poets would deserve a detailed, in-depth examination.

The Diary of “Helena Morley”

Context

The Diary of “Helena Morley” is Elizabeth Bishop’s longest and best-known translation. In fact, it is the longest text Bishop ever published. She started working on the translation shortly after she moved to Brazil, in 1952. Her Brazilian friends had recommended the book to her, she enjoyed reading it and decided to translate it – with the necessary help of her partner, Lota de Macedo Soares, because Bishop’s Portuguese was far from perfect at that point. “I am not sure now whether someone suggested my translating it or I thought of it myself, but when I was about half-way through the book I decided to try,” she says in the Introduction to her translation (*Diary* x). *The Diary of “Helena Morley”* is the title the publisher, Farrar, Straus and Cudahy, finally, and against Bishop’s wishes, chose as the English name for *Minha Vida de Menina* (My Life As a Young Girl), a book which was first published in Portuguese in 1942, and soon became a Brazilian classic. It is an authentic diary or notebook of a teenage girl growing up in the Brazilian mining town of Diamantina in the 1890’s, describing the everyday life of her family in the course of three years, from 1893 to 1895.

It took Bishop almost four years to complete the translation. After she finished the first draft in spring of 1956, she decided to visit Diamantina to see the real setting of the book. This trip gave her the material for the introduction, in which she speaks about the town in detail. The translation and introduction were finished by September 1956, and it took more than another year for the English translation to be published on December 3, 1957. Apparently, Bishop started translating the diary with the publication already in mind. At the time she started working on the translation, she was preparing her new book of poems, *A Cold Spring*, for publication with Houghton Mifflin. She

hoped the new poetry book would appear in the fall of 1953, but the publisher kept asking her for more poems, and *A Cold Spring* came out only in July 1955, in one volume with her previous book to make it longer. The publication of *A Cold Spring* was preceded by an extensive correspondence with the editors of Houghton Mifflin arguing about the number of the poems in the book, and later about its design, with Bishop displaying her notorious fussiness about the production details. In these letters Bishop also offered Houghton Mifflin a book of her short stories, and the translation of the diary:

The other thing I asked you about [in a previous letter] was a book I am translating from the Portuguese, and in case you do not have my letter I shall describe it again. It is, I am certain, a real literary “find,” and a “gem,” etc. (and I’m rather critical) and should be known outside Brazil. It is the authentic diary of a young Brazilian girl in the 1890’s, in the diamond-mining region, living in a large family, very poor, very religious, and extremely lively. She wrote really beautifully; the characters, the Negro servants, the old grandmother, etc., are really well presented, and it is *funny*. (I have seen a dignified lawyer here laughing his head off, reading it.) It isn’t a Daisy Ashford kind of book – she is about 14 or 15, and toward the end the man she later married appears. It is not “cute,” but it gives a beautiful little picture of a way of life that has vanished, etc. [...] I wrote telling U. T. Summers about it, I was so excited when I first started translating it, and she said it sounded like “a publisher’s dream”. (OA 269-70)

Despite the translator’s enthusiasm, Houghton Mifflin was not interested in publishing the diary. Bishop found an agent, Bernice Baumgarten, who started looking for another

publisher for it. Realizing that her own poems were much more appealing for American publishers than a translation of an unknown book from Portuguese, Bishop decided to give the rights to her next book of poems to the publisher who would take the diary, an offer which became doubly attractive after her *Poems: North & South – A Cold Spring* was awarded the Pulitzer Prize in May 1956. When Robert Giroux from Farrar, Straus and Cudahy met Bishop's agent, he agreed to the publication of the translation (admittedly because of his interest in Bishop's future poetry, not the diary), and he became Bishop's editor and publisher for the rest of her life.

Bishop was deeply and personally involved in the translation and publication of *The Diary*, which she originally wanted to be called *Black Beans and Diamonds* (a title she later planned to use for a book of her Brazilian prose). She thought the book was a jewel and felt sure it deserved a good translation and a proper, nicely designed publication. Seeing to the publication was one of the reasons she and Lota traveled to New York in the spring of 1957, and stayed there for six months. According to Robert Giroux, Bishop fussed over the proofs, and insisted on making many changes and corrections up to the last stages of the publication process, even though she had to pay extra money for the corrections:

Her contract included the standard allowance for author's alterations – 10 percent of the cost of composition. (If the setting costs were three thousand dollars, for example, the allowance was three hundred dollars, and any charge above that was the author's responsibility.) Elizabeth's corrections were particularly expensive because she rewrote the page proofs. Though she was angry at being billed for an overage of six hundred dollars, Bernice [her agent] settled the matter by reminding

Elizabeth that she had agreed to this arrangement at Bernice's advice.

(Fountain and Brazeau 154)

She was similarly fussy about the design of the book, and argued with Robert Giroux about the dust jacket because it was too black for her taste, but it was already too late to change.

Bishop enjoyed working on the translation, but eventually she was disappointed not only by the difficulties with its publication, but also by the attitude of the author of the book herself. Bishop met "Helena Morley," whose real name was Alice Brant, in Rio after she started working on the translation. (They were introduced by Manuel Bandeira, one of the most famous Brazilian poets of the time.) Mrs. Brant was in her late seventies, a rich woman of society, wife of the president of the Bank of Brazil. Both she and her husband were flattered by the idea of having the diary published in English, and tried to help with it. The author's husband, Mr. Brant, who read English, actually proofread the translation word by word, and suggested many corrections – some of them useful, but most of them simply wrong, as Bishop mentioned in a letter to her doctor friend Anny Baumann:

The translation is really finished. The authoress's husband, aged 82, I think, is "going over it", though, word by word by word. A lot of his corrections are completely wrong, poor dear, but it is his right, and every so often he does turn up something local, or old-fashioned slang, etc., that I couldn't have got right without him. (OA 317)

But Bishop's appreciation of the Brants' help cooled shortly after the book's publication. Although *The Diary* had good reviews, including one by Marianne Moore, it didn't become a bestseller as Bishop – and the Brants – hoped. It didn't lose money but it certainly didn't bring much profit for anyone. The Brants, who had hoped for a

bigger success and a lot of money, were disappointed, and so was Bishop, who felt that such greediness in this well-off family was inappropriate. When *The Diary of "Helena Morley"* was finally published, Bishop expressed her mixed feelings about it in letters to her friends:

If it hadn't been for Pearl's help I think I would have abandoned the whole thing. I did swear for a week never to publish anything again in my lifetime. Please don't expect much. It's a mess, "physically," and there are lots of corrections we just couldn't afford to make, finally. I also think now that my introduction is longwinded. However, if you "get into it" I think you'll enjoy "Helena"... I almost feel I shouldn't tell you the latest about "Helena" but then I think from her early diary you can see she was no idealist. Yesterday Lota called her up to tell her I'd got my copy – and after screaming to make her understand it was really *out*, "Helena"'s one comment was, "Is it giving any results?" meaning money, of course. (And she's a billionaire now.) If I ever translate again, I'll choose someone good & dead. (OA 342)

Nevertheless, the responses to the book were good, and after the first disillusionment and tiredness passed, Bishop was even thinking about trying to persuade the Brants to let her translate Alice Brant's unpublished accounts of the years following *Minha Vida de Menina*. Although that never happened, the translation of *The Diary* was ultimately a success, even if not as roaring as Bishop may have felt the book deserved. Among the people Bishop sent *The Diary* to immediately after its first publication, and who shared her enthusiasm about the book, was Flannery O'Connor. In her letter to Bishop from February 6, 1958, she thanked her for the book saying: "We've all enjoyed it. My mother got hold of it first and could not help reading it aloud every now and then

so I feel I have read it twice already” (VC 17.11). The translation was reissued in a paperback edition in 1977 by Ecco Press, with a cover by Cynthia Krupat, the daughter of Bishop’s college friend Frani Blough, and the author of the covers of later books by Bishop. The 1995 Noonday Press edition used Bishop’s original watercolor of a Diamantina landscape on the cover.

The Diary: Exotic & Familiar, Authenticity, Child’s Vision, Humor

The Diary of “Helena Morley” is a charming book, and difficult to approach critically. Bishop herself felt that all the reviews were “very ‘favorable’ but rather disappointing” (OA 357) because the critics didn’t explain the reasons why they liked the book. After its first publication in Portuguese, the French writer Georges Bernanos, who was enchanted by it, also realized its strange elusiveness. In his letter to Alice Brant, he speaks about his appreciation and his inability to explain or define the source of the book’s charm and power:

It is possible that you do not even know the value of what you have given us. As for me, who feels it so deeply, I would not know how to define it. You have made us see and love everything that you saw and loved yourself in those days, and every time I close your book I am more than ever convinced that its secret will always escape me. (*Diary* xxxviii)

As an authentic diary, it certainly has a documentary and informative value: we learn a lot about life in a small Brazilian mining town towards the end of the 19th century, we learn about family values, customs, superstitions, religion, education, economy, food, etc. in much detail, and all these things are full of interest. We enter a life different from our own, full of the exotic charm of both a distant culture and bygone times. However,

what captures the readers and makes them want to follow the daily life of the teenage Helena is the strange and surprising familiarity, which glimmers through all the differences. One of the attractions of the book is the ever present tension between the exoticism and foreignness on the one hand, and the familiarity, on the other. As Bishop said in her “Introduction”:

The scenes and events it described were odd, remote, and long ago, and yet fresh, sad, funny, and eternally true. The longer I stayed on in Brazil the more Brazilian the book seemed, yet much of it could have happened in any small provincial town or village, and at almost any period of history. (*Diary x*)

Although Helena grew up in a culture and in circumstances very different from the foreign readers of her diary, her observations, her preoccupations and her everyday troubles seem to have universal resonance. It is partly due to the style of the diary – the narrator does not present things surrounding her and accompanying her everyday life as foreign or exotic, of course; she has grown among them since she was born. At the same time, a certain childlike wonder is present – Helena observes the world and the people around her with an intriguing mixture of naivety and sharp intelligence, and everything is interesting for her, every small occurrence is noticed, written down and commented on. This wonder at the everyday, the ability to find an adventure in the commonplace, and the lack of distinction between the “important” and “unimportant” – all these create the unique effect of a child’s vision of the world, a vision natural to every mind when growing up, and later lost. The diary manages to revive this forgotten vision in the reader’s memory; reading about the fourteen-year-old Helena’s despair at having to wear a navy-blue dress instead of a pink one for a wedding, or about her hiding in the mulberry tree sounds strangely familiar – more like our own family stories than a story

of a Brazilian girl long time ago. It certainly worked this way for Bishop, as she wrote to Marianne Moore: “So many of those remarks took me right back to Nova Scotia [where Bishop lived as a child]; I’m sure I’ve heard most of them before” (OA 357), and she was sure it would work that way for others as well. When her friend May Swenson praised her introduction to the book, she encouraged her to read *The Diary* itself: “I do think you’ll enjoy the rest of it. It will take you back to your early family life with a bang” (OA 353).

It is a well-known fact that after moving to Brazil, Bishop started writing and publishing works which went back to her childhood in Nova Scotia. The theme was not new to her – she had tried to write about it before – but she was never able to finish anything in a way that would satisfy her. However, in the first year of her Brazilian stay, when she started working on the translation of *The Diary*, she finished two autobiographical stories set in the Nova Scotia of her childhood, and published them in *The New Yorker* the following year, 1953. One of them was “Gwendolyn”, about the death of a childhood friend, and the other was “In the Village”, Bishop’s longest and perhaps best short story. “It is funny to come to Brazil to experience total recall about Nova Scotia – geography must be more mysterious than we realize, even” (OA 249), she commented in a letter to her friends. *The Diary of “Helena Morley”* corresponded perfectly with this mood. The translation came out several years after the above-mentioned stories, but Bishop probably wrote them before she started working on the translation: both stories were finished by July 1952 (she mentions sending them to *The New Yorker* in a letter to Pearl Kazin from July 8, 1952). It seems therefore far-fetched to suggest that her stories were written under the direct influence of the translation, as Thomas Travisano does in his book on Bishop, when he says: “Bishop learned much, during the long task of translation, about the art of achieving ‘absolute naturalness of

tone', the quality she most admired in Herbert, when adopting the voice of a child. What she learned went directly into the autobiographical stories of 1953" (167–68). But of course, Travisano is right in seeing a clear connection between Bishop's renewed interest in the childhood themes and her translation of *The Diary*. Although a direct comparison of her 1953 stories with the translation could lead to simplification and misinterpretation, it is perfectly legitimate to see the stories and the translation side by side, representing different aspects of the same preoccupations, such as the problems of writing about childhood and about the child's vision, but also the questions of authenticity, and spontaneity, and the ways of capturing them in language.

As a translator, Bishop was highly conscious of the style and the tone of *The Diary*, and of the problems of rendering them in a different language. In her comments on the book, she mentions the two qualities she appreciated the most – authenticity and fun. The fact, that the book was a "real diary" seemed very important to Bishop. In her introduction to the book she quotes Gerard Manley Hopkins' letter to Robert Bridges in which the poet speaks about Richard Henry Dana's *Two Years Before the Mast* saying: "*and it happened* – ah, that is the charm and the main point." And Bishop adds: "And that, I think, is 'the charm and the main point' of *Minha Vida de Menina*. [...] *it really happened*; everything did take place, day by day, minute by minute, once and only once, just the way Helena says it did" (*Diary* xxvi). This insistence on "truth" being the main quality of a work of literature might be surprising in another poet, but in Bishop less so. Speaking about her own works, she often stressed the fact that "it really happened" – as with "The Fish" or "The Moose". Her Vassar classmate, the writer Mary McCarthy remembered a discussion on poetry that took place at Hannah Arendt's apartment in New York during Bishop's visit in 1957:

We were discussing how to interpret a line of verse. There were several people in the discussion, and they developed more and more far-fetched and very abstract explanations. Elizabeth finally joined the conversation – she was the last to speak up – and in this quiet, little voice said, “Well, I would think that it was literally true.” Then she put forward her conviction that anything in a poem was true, that it was there because it had happened. The other reasons could be added. I was absolutely struck all in a heap by this. I had never seen poetry in that light. (Fountain and Brazeau 152-53)

Bishop was concerned with the ways poetry can (or cannot) tell the truth, describe a fact, convey an experience. For her, literature and poetry do not mean primarily making things up. If poetry wants to tell the truth, poetic imagination has to be focused on two things: finding the real-life experience – the “it really happened” – with a hidden poetic potential, and, perhaps more importantly, finding the words for this “truth” to turn it into a poem and keeping it true at the same time. This is, in fact, close to the principle of metaphor – a figure which for many poets and thinkers (including Bishop’s good friend Octavio Paz) is the essence of poetry: in metaphor, one word or image retains its “real”, literal meaning while it acquires a new meaning, which has been implicitly inactively present in it; poetry is not this “new” meaning, but the simultaneous presence of the two. For Bishop, poetry is a very careful putting of the “it happened” into words, making sure it does not get lost in the process – a task that may prove very difficult, if not ultimately impossible, not only because the very nature of language tends to manipulate and to blur the things it speaks about, but also because our very perception of the facts is problematic.

We will discuss this basic preoccupation of Bishop's in more detail later, but it seems useful to point it out in connection with "*Helena Morley*", where it can explain certain aspects of Bishop's fascination with the book.

Helena's unpretentious, spontaneous way of writing about the simplest things of everyday life, keeping them simple, yet giving them importance, must have resonated with Bishop's own effort at finding a voice for her memories and her experience. Translating the book, Bishop not only had a chance to examine Helena's style very closely, but she also had to "re-enact" it. She had to find an English equivalent for the style of the diary, keeping it natural and spontaneous without destroying its foreignness. It was, of course, a hard task, and Bishop often complained that the translation went slowly, and that it was an "endless finicky work for very easy-sounding results" (OA 325-26).

The Diary of "Helena Morley" is written from a child's point of view, a perspective Bishop would adopt in some of her works, both prose and poetry, dealing with her own childhood experience. Bishop's childhood poems and stories form an essential part of her works, although they are small in number. Apart from the two stories she wrote during her first year in Brazil, "In the Village," and "Gwendolyn", there are two other stories about her childhood, written in the early 1960's and unpublished in Bishop's lifetime: "Primer Class," a memory of her first year at school in Great Village, Nova Scotia, and "The Country Mouse," an account of her traumatic transfer from Nova Scotia to Massachusetts. Childhood memories figure also in "Memories of Uncle Neddy" published in 1977.¹³ Most of Bishop's childhood poems appear in her third book of poetry, *Questions of Travel* (1965), published when Bishop lived in Brazil. It is divided into two sections: *Brazil*, composed of poems based on Bishop's Brazilian experience, and *Elsewhere*, which starts with three poems dedicated

to Bishop's childhood in Nova Scotia – "First Death in Nova Scotia," "Manners," and "Sestina". (The two parts were divided by the autobiographical story "In the Village" in the original edition.) Bishop's last, and perhaps the best known poem about her childhood is "In the Waiting Room", the opening poem of her last book, *Geography III* (1976). The perspective and the style of Bishop's texts dealing with childhood is not always the same; it moves from what seems more an outside, distanced look as in "Sestina" (where the child is not identified as the speaker herself), to the direct adoption of the child's vision in present tense, which we find in "In the Village". Bishop was interested in the immediacy of a child's perspective, and she tried to reconstruct it in some of her texts. *The Diary of "Helena Morley"* showed her one way of capturing the authentic child's vision, and although Bishop would not directly imitate this way in her own works (it would be hardly possible to imitate), it certainly was a useful exercise and experience of writing from the point of view of a child.

The authentic record of child's vision also resonates with Bishop's fondness of primitive painting. One the prose pieces published during her lifetime was "Gregorio Valdes" (1939), a memoir of the primitive painter she met in the late 1930's in Key West and whom she commissioned to paint a picture of her Key West house. Although many of his paintings were bad, Bishop appreciated the simplicity and authenticity of his art, its "freshness, flatness and remoteness" (CPr 58), and even the fact that the quality of his painting was a matter of chance, and he himself seemed unable to control it. At the end of her memoir, she speaks about a mysterious state of "grace" which allows some people to create spontaneously:

... it seems that some people receive certain "gifts" merely by remaining unwittingly in an undemocratic state of grace. It is a supposition that leaves painting like Gregorio's a partial mystery. But surely anything

that is impossible for others to achieve by effort, that is dangerous to imitate, and yet, like natural virtue, must be both admired and imitated, always remains mysterious. (CPr 59)

The “mystery” of Gregorio Valdes’ painting reminds us of “the secret” of *The Diary* Bernanos spoke about in his letter to Alice Brant quoted above. Both Bernanos and Bishop, two artists who knew what a struggle artistic creation was, are fascinated by the mysterious existence of “natural art”, art that is produced by people who “do not know what they are doing”, and that is impossible to achieve by any conscious training or effort. Bishop was reminded of primitive artists when dealing with Alice Brant and her husband:

But the Brants haven’t the slightest idea of why the book is good – it’s like dealing with primitive painters. The only aspect of it that interests them at all is \$\$\$\$\$. It’s very interesting from the point of view of ART and its WHYS. (OA 355)

The style of *The Diary* could be called “primitive” in the sense that is naive, unschooled, and its main goal is to tell simply and directly what happened to the author that day. Helena rarely, if ever, reflects on the process of her writing; she occasionally complains about not having anything interesting to write about, or claims that she wants to write down an important event although she is tired, but she is not concerned with how to write about something. For her, writing things down as they are is natural and perfectly possible. She is not writing “literature”, she is recording what has happened, however commonplace that may be:

Today when we came home from School, Renato threw down his books and ran out to look for eggs from his two hens. Before he went to School he’d felt them and seen that they were going to lay; when he didn’t find

the eggs he came back and asked mama. She hadn't gathered them. Then, without another question, he picked up the broom and started up, saying, "I'm going to kill that miserable animal this minute!" and rushed after the cat. Smarter than he is, she ran away, with him after her like a lunatic. Then mama asked, "Who said it was the cat?" "Then who was it? Didn't she eat Helena's chickens?" Mama said, "A chicken isn't an egg. It might perfectly well have been a big lizard that's been around, that Siá Ritinha said had been sucking her eggs. Are the shells there?" Renato said, "No. That's why I think it was the cat. A lizard would have sucked the eggs and left the shells." Mama said, "Then go see if the gate is open. I think it's the doing of some boy off the street who came in here under the house, while I was indoors, and stole the eggs."

Renato went to see. The gate was open and he was inconsolable for the theft of the eggs he'd counted on eating fried, for dinner. He's like a lizard for eggs himself. (116)

Or just a simple immediate impression or feeling:

Now that I've just finished ironing it beautifully and hanging it on the hanger, I can't help writing down how fond I am of that white piqué dress of mine. (232)

It does not pretend to be art, it simply tells the truth – not some high eternal truth, but an ordinary truth of everyday life seen through the eyes of an intelligent and perceptive child. Modest and uninteresting as this ambition may sound, thanks to the "undemocratic state of grace" and the mysterious gift bestowed on the author, it leads to a result "impossible for others to achieve by effort", inimitable yet inspiring admiration and imitation.

If one of the main attractions of *The Diary of "Helena Morley"* for Bishop was authenticity, the other one was its humor. Whenever Bishop recommended the book to anyone – be it a friend or a publisher, she always stressed the fact that it was funny. Humor was vital for Bishop, and she appreciated this quality both in art and in people. In her letter to Anne Stevenson, she writes on the importance of wit and fun:

I have been very lucky in having had, most of my life, some witty friends, – and I mean real wit, quickness, wild fancies, remarks that make one cry with laughing. [...] I have a vague theory that one learns most – I have learned most – from having someone suddenly make fun of something one has taken seriously up till then. I mean about life, the world, and so on. (PPL 858)

She does not regard humor merely as an entertaining bonus added to the “real”, serious matters; it is a way of seeing things. Humor can educate us by making us see things differently and afresh. Apart from a source of learning, humor is also a source of consolation, it helps to cope with the world – “perhaps I need such people to cheer me up,” says Bishop about her “funny” friends (PPL 858); in her own poetry, humor often counterpoints the serious or melancholy tone, not to undermine it or lighten it, but rather to prevent it from getting out of control.

In Brazil, Bishop noted the peoples’ sense of humor and considered it a crucial part of life there:

The *poor* Brazilians’, the people’s sense of humor is really all that keeps this country bearable a lot of the time. They’re not “courageous,” however – far from it – but the constant political jokes, the words to the sambas, the nicknames etc. are brilliant and a consolation – unfortunately mostly untranslatable. (PPL 858)

In *The Diary* she found this humor which makes life bearable and tried to mediate it.

Unlike in Aristophanes, where humor is at the heart of the genre, the humor of *The Diary* is more or less unintentional, spontaneous. Its main source is the style – the directness and simplicity with which things are presented. Helena's comments are not naive in a cute childlike way; their tone is straightforward and innocent, but full of common sense and intelligence. Brought up in a strictly religious environment full of complex rituals and superstitions on her mother's side, but with a very sober and down-to-earth father of English descent, she can accept the supernatural as a potential part of everyday life, yet she learnt to look at it with certain suspicion, and from a very practical point of view. This makes many of her comments concerning religious practice funny, although they probably were not meant to be:

Mama says that one shouldn't be joyful in Holy Week because it's the week of Jesus' sufferings. I believe firmly in other religious things, but I don't believe that anyone should feel sad about Jesus' sufferings after so many years, and since He's already in heaven, resurrected and happy (*Diary* 202).

This tension between innocent sincerity and common sense detachment is typical of the diary. Helena is neither childishly naive, nor ironic. Her critical distance is always present, yet subtle. And although her observation of the life and people around her is very accurate and penetrating, she doesn't have the perspective of a cold, detached, ironic observer. She is a part of what she sees, and although she is perfectly capable of being critical, it is clear that she enjoys what she observes, and she often loves it, and loves writing about it. Often, the source of humor is simply her exact observations and descriptions of people. The old hunchbacked Siá Ritinha "hasn't a tooth in her head and her face looks like a *maracujá* forgotten in the drawer" (76). An unpleasant classmate

“looks thirty years old, all twisted and homely, with skin like fish scales, coarse hair like a horse’s tail, and teeth like big cloves of garlic” (188). Sometimes, the fun of the diary is not humor in the proper sense of the word, but rather a feeling of energy and joyful interest that beams from the entries: Helena’s enthusiasm about everything that is going on around, her happiness at a new dress, her anger at her teacher, her exclamations of delight and of sympathy, her general will to participate in the everyday life she’s writing about.

Border Genres – Letter, Travel Sketch, Memoir

Bishop’s largest translation project was not a work of poetry or fiction, but a diary, a work belonging to an old traditional genre on the border between literature and documentary, between art and fact. Much has been written on Bishop but, surprisingly, her obvious predilection for border genres has been largely neglected, although it can throw an interesting light on her perception of literature, and also on her poetry. She was intrigued by those literary genres that try to give an accurate (however personal) account of what the author has seen, experienced, felt or thought, such as diaries, letters, travel sketches or memoirs. These genres are characterized by their double nature – they are intrinsically connected to the extra-literary world, and at the same time they belong to the world of literature and art. We can read them as information on the extra-literary world, or we can read them purely as literature, but both these readings will be reductive, as these genres have to be seen in their complex double life. The main preoccupation in them is not the creation of autonomous self-contained work of art, but a faithful record of the author’s “real” experience. Usually, what is primary in them is the experience, not the text. They always have a certain documentary value, but they are not objective documentaries, because they present a very personal vision. The

artlessness, “true-to-lifeness”, genuineness and immediacy does not lead to a disinterested impersonal documentary giving objective information about the outside reality, but to a specific form of art attempting an accurate expression of the personal experience of this reality without the stylization and ambition of the main artistic genres. This is not a place for a detailed study of Bishop’s experience with border genres as a reader and author; our main concern here is Bishop’s translations. But it is worth taking a brief look at this area of her interest, as it connects both to translation and to Bishop’s approach to literary creation.

It seems that Bishop’s favorite genre is the letter. If quantity were the decisive criterion in judging an author, Bishop would not be considered a poet but a letter writer. She was certainly one of the most prolific letter writers of the 20th century. She often wrote several letters a day – she said that once she wrote forty letters a day (OA ix). Her archive contains thousands of pages of letters, and *One Art*, the six-hundred-and-fifty-page volume of her selected letters represents just a fragment of this vast epistolary production. Her letters were not meant for publication (in fact, in some them she explicitly asks the addressee to destroy the letter), as is sometimes the case with writers’ letters. She often speaks about poetry in them, be it her own or someone else’s, but poetry is not the dominant topic; she writes about her everyday life, about her travels, her friends, about places she lived in, about animals she had seen and the books she was reading. They are usually spontaneous, although sometimes it is clear that she composed them carefully. Apparently, their main aim is not to impress, to educate or to create; they want to tell things as they are. Bishop was not only a great letter writer, but an avid reader of letters. She read the published letters all her favorite authors: George Herbert, Gerard Manley Hopkins, Flannery O’Connor, S. T. Coleridge, John Keats and many others, and she often mentions and quotes them in her own letters. She wrote an

(unpublished) review of Emily Dickinson's letters, which she finds too sentimental and lacking "that abundance of detail – descriptions of daily life, clothes, food, travels, etc. – that is found in what are usually considered 'good letters'" (Goldensohn 60). But Emily Dickinson's letters were not the only letters Bishop was not quite happy with. In 1975 she agreed to write an introduction to Sylvia Plath's letters to her mother, but when she read the letters in proofs, she got so upset by their bad quality that she ended up in the hospital, and never wrote the commissioned introduction. She considered the letters "insipid and stupid and superficial", and felt she was not able to introduce letters this bad (Fountain and Brazeau 276). In 1971–72 she taught a seminar at Harvard on letter writing; she wrote about her planning the course to her friends:

Just letters – as an art form or something. I'm hoping to select a nicely incongruous assortment of people – Mrs. Carlyle, Chekhov, my Aunt Grace, Keats, a letter found in the street, etc. etc. But I need some ideas from you both – just on the subject of letters, the dying "form of communication". (OA 544-45)

Letters are a specific "art form or something" which is not primarily intended as art. The "art" of letter writing is in its interconnection with the daily life, in its interest in "clothes, food, travels, etc.", details that often tend to escape the attention of "serious art", which uses them as stage decorations, but not as its main theme.

Bishop's interest in border genres is manifest in her prose works. Most of the texts in the posthumously published volume of *The Collected Prose* (1984) are not traditional stories; the first part of the book, aptly called by the editors "Memory: Persons & Places," consists of memoirs of Bishop's childhood and youth ("Primer Class", "The Country Mouse", "The U.S.A. School of Writing") and of people she knew ("Gregorio Valdes", "Efforts of Affection: A Memoir of Marianne Moore), and

travel sketches (“A Trip to Vigia”, “To the Botequim & Back”, even “Mercedes Hospital”, and “*The Diary of ‘Helena Morley’: The Book & Its Author*”, the introduction to *The Diary*, which is largely a travel sketch of Bishop’s trip to Diamantina). But even the texts included in the second part of the volume, called “Stories”, are sometimes very close to memoirs (particularly “Gwendolyn”, “Memories of Uncle Neddy” and “In the Village”). Bishop never concealed the fact that these stories are autobiographical; on the contrary – she stressed this aspect and pointed it out to other people: “‘In the Village’ is *entirely*, not partly, autobiographical. I’ve just compressed the time a little and perhaps put two summers together, or put things a bit out of sequence – but it’s all straight fact,” she wrote in a letter to Joseph Summers in reaction to his essay on her work (OA 477). The story “is *entirely* autobiographical,” she says; again, we have Bishop insisting on telling “the truth” in her works, on the “it really happened” quality.

For Bishop, letters which try to capture and communicate the immediate experience of everyday events very often are a kind of travel sketches, which in turn try to grasp and express the experience of a foreign place. Bishop’s obsession with travel is notorious, travels figure prominently in her works and in her life. She planned to publish a book of her Brazilian travel sketches under the title of *Black Beans and Diamonds*, which, as I noted earlier, was the name she originally meant for the “Helena Morley” book. She received the Rockefeller Foundation grant for this project in 1967–1969, but the book never materialized. Though some of her texts on travel appeared in *The Collected Prose*, they represent just a part of what she wrote or planned to write. Her project of the book of stories was supposed to contain a sketch on Mexico, based on Bishop’s stay there in the 1940’s; travel notes and impressions appear throughout her notebooks and in many of her letters. The main challenge of a travel sketch is to provide

an accurate account of a foreign place the author visited; but again, it is not a documentary, it's an account of the author's experience of that place, the author's personal vision of the outside world. Unlike a diary or some kinds of letters, the travel sketch does not deal with familiar daily routine, but with quite the opposite: an experience with a place and culture other than our own. It tries to capture the other, to open oneself to the other, but it never abandons the self, through which the other is perceived. This brings it close to translation which attempts to capture the original as faithfully as possible but can never become the original, can neither escape the language and culture it is translating into, nor the personal mind set of the translator.

"The other" of the memoir is of a different kind. Memoirs attempt to give an account of things past, not in the sense a history book does, but through the prism of the author's memory. Like in a travel sketch, the author's present self cannot be abandoned, on the contrary: the only way to approach the experience of the past is through the present mind. As we will see later in the study of Bishop's works, she was very conscious of the complex relationship between the memory of things and the things themselves. Again, the memoir has certain common features with translation, namely the struggle to capture and express "the other" combined with the inability to abandon the self. Susan McCabe sees *The Diary of "Helena Morley"* as referring to this aspect of memory: "As inaugurating Bishop's serious work in translation, it also has special attractions – in highlighting the making of experience in memory as a kind of translation itself" (16).

Translating *The Diary*

In her translation of *The Diary of "Helena Morley"* Bishop had to take into account all the aspects discussed above. She wanted to keep the charm of the book, and allow her

friends and other readers, who had no Portuguese and knew next to nothing about the life in Brazil, to enjoy the book the way she did. She struggled with one of the essential translator's dilemmas: on the one hand, she was trying to remain invisible, to leave the original untouched; on the other hand, she felt she had to explain things, comment on the context, enter the translation in order to achieve the desired effect, she wanted it to have. Bishop wrote a long introduction, in which she explains the background of the diary, introduces the real "Helena", tells about her own experience with her and with the town where the diary is set, gives a detailed description of Brazilian food, again, based on her personal experience with it. She speaks about the text of the diary itself as well, but it seems that the main aim of the introduction is to give the context which would help the foreign reader to appreciate the book. She consciously avoided directing the reader too much, although she admitted it was not easy:

I was so afraid that "Helena" would go unappreciated that I had a hard time in the introduction not to keep saying, "See what she says on page **," and "Isn't that a wonderful remark on page **?" and "Didn't you, dear reader, feel exactly the same way when you were thirteen, as on page ***?" All the effects seemed so slight to me that I was afraid they'd be overlooked. (OA 357)

Bishop managed to limit herself to quoting only one of the anecdotes from the diary in her introduction, adding a personal impression of this story – it's the story about Helena's mother waking her two daughters for the morning mass after the rooster's crow, taking them through the town's empty streets, and being sent home by a soldier who informs them it is only midnight. Bishop comments:

I like to think of the two tall, thin little girls hanging onto their mother's arms, the three figures stumbling up the steep streets of the rocky,

lightless little town beneath the cold bright moon and stars; and I can hear the surprised young soldier's voice, mama's polite reply, and then three pairs of footsteps scuttling home again over the cobblestones.

(*Diary xxx*)

The tone of the introduction is personal, although the text is mostly informative – it is clear that it is based on Bishop's immediate and intimate experience both with the book and the culture.

In the translation itself, Bishop tries to keep the authenticity and spontaneity of the diary by working carefully with the language. She uses colloquial English, short, simple sentences, keeping the unrefined childlike style and making the diary sound natural in English. However, she does not attempt to give the impression that the diary was (or could have been) written in English, in America, which some translators tend to do. Bishop's translation does not attenuate the exoticism of the text. The translator does not try to suppress the foreignness of the text by consistently substituting the foreign by the familiar: when she feels there is no possible English equivalent for a typically Brazilian phenomenon, she prefers to keep the original word and put a footnote explaining it, instead of using an inaccurate expression. Perhaps the most obvious example is *chácara*, the word Helena uses for her grandmother's house, which Bishop leaves in Portuguese and explains in the "Introduction":

A *chácara* is a little hard to define. It means a house with extensive gardens, or even a small farm, but not necessarily in the country. The grandmother's *chácara*, mentioned constantly in *Minha Vida de Menina*, is at the edge of the town. Since "farm," "garden," or "country house," would all give false pictures, I have left that one word untranslated throughout. (xxxv)

She would also often use the Portuguese words used for addressing people, even though they are not proper names, like *Seu*, *Dona* or *Inhá* for Mr. and Mrs. One of the Portuguese expressions used very often in the diary, is the word *coitado* and its diminutive *coitadinho*, which means “poor thing”, “poor dear” in English, but Bishop frequently leaves it untranslated. Bishop’s friend Pearl Kazin, who read the manuscript of the translation, complained about there being too many *coitados*, and Bishop told her to cut them if she wanted (OA 313). It seems the word sounded so typically Brazilian to Bishop that the English translation would not work. She would even use the word in her personal correspondence quite often, as an expression not only of pity but of tender affection, which suggests that the English equivalent didn’t have the same effect for her. Other cases of untranslated words include names of food and tropical fruits, where Bishop usually puts an explanatory footnote, apart from the general discussion of food in the introduction. Some footnotes offer explanations of local customs, games, superstitions or simple household practices, like ironing with a heavy charcoal iron. Sometimes, Bishop could not resist giving the original Portuguese idiom or expression in the footnote, even though she translated it into English in the text of *The Diary*. For: “We went in. My heart stopped beating,” there is a footnote: “Literally: ‘I had a heart as small as a nut,’” (195) for: “She leads a life of luxury,” the footnote gives: “Literally: ‘A little life of gold’” (38), with a diminutive so typical of Brazilian Portuguese. Here, it seems, the translator felt that she couldn’t translate the original literally, as it would sound too strange in English, yet the ordinary English expression was *too* ordinary, compared to the Portuguese, therefore she used the footnote to let the reader experience the strangeness of the original anyway. The Portuguese expressions would probably sound quite natural to the native Portuguese reader of the original, but for Bishop, as a foreigner, they had a special charm, because she felt their literal meaning more strongly.

For a native speaker, their language is conventional and “natural” to a much greater extent, than it is for someone who does not speak the language perfectly, or who learns to speak it, and notices the etymologies, literal meanings of idioms, sources of metaphors that have become clichés in the language.

This perceptiveness is obvious in Bishop’s dealing with proper names in *The Diary*. Bishop was fully aware of the literal meaning of Brazilian proper names, which often work as common nouns as well. She had to decide whether to leave the name in the original (which is the common translating practice) and lose its meaning for the English reader, or whether to translate it, which would give the literal meaning, but it would suppress the fact that we’re reading about real people in Brazil (and it would often sound ridiculous in English). She usually leaves the name in the original, but she often gives its literal meaning in English in brackets: in this way we have Maria Pequena [Little Mary], Aunt Neném [Baby], Seu Rodrigo Pimenta [Pepper] or Lauro Coelho [Rabbit]. Occasionally, the literal translations appear in the footnote, or – particularly with nicknames, when the meaning of the name is important for understanding the text – she uses the English name in the text. She is inconsistent in her dealing with names (as she admits in the introduction), and it seems that she always chose the solution *ad hoc*, according to what seemed the best in the particular situation.

Bishop’s extensive use of footnotes and brackets giving literal meanings, putting the English side by side with the Portuguese, is not standard practice in modern literary translation into English (it can be found in the older practice of the treatment of exoticism). What she seems to be trying to do is to reconstruct the effect the reading of the diary had on her (she wants the reader to be able to see the Portuguese in the text, and to know what she knew when she was translating it). Her notes also keep pointing out the fact that what we are reading is not the original, but a translation from a different

language and a different culture. This practice of Bishop's runs counter to the tradition (strong in the English translation practice in the 20th century) which wants the translator to be invisible, to create a text which flows as naturally as if it were an original.¹⁴ This approach requires the translator not to draw the readers' attention to the fact that they are not reading an original book, not to point out the foreignness of the translated text. The French translator and theorist of translation Antoine Berman calls this approach to translation "ethnocentric", or simply "bad": "A bad translation I call the translation which, generally under the guise of transmissibility, carries out a systematic negation of the strangeness of the foreign work" (5). Bishop certainly does not want to produce an ethnocentric translation. She is fully conscious of the foreignness of the book she is translating, and although she produces a perfectly correct and fluent English translation, she does not try to keep the illusion that this is the original. She constantly breaks the illusion by her footnotes, explanations and references to the original, because she does not want the exotic, the other, to be lost in translation.¹⁵

Clarice Lispector

A few years after finishing the translation of *The Diary of "Helena Morley"*, Bishop went on to translate more Brazilian literature. This time she chose three short stories by another Brazilian woman author, Clarice Lispector (1920–1977), whom she also met during her time in Brazil. Lispector, whose first novel was published in 1944, is considered one of greatest 20th century Brazilian writers. She was born in the Ukraine to Jewish parents, but the family moved to Brazil shortly after her birth. She was fluent in several languages, including Yiddish, and did translations from English and French into Portuguese.

Bishop said in a letter to Robert Lowell that she had translated five stories by Lispector in the winter of 1962–63 (qtd. in Harrison 181), but only three of them were published in the *Kenyon Review* in the summer of 1964, the other two seem to have been lost. The three extant translations, "The Smallest Woman in the World", "Marmosets" and "A Hen", come from Lispector's book *Laços de Família* (Family Ties, 1960). The first two of the stories later appeared in the anthology *The Eye of the Heart. Short Stories from Latin America*, edited by Barbara Howes (who was one of the translators for *An Anthology of the Twentieth-Century Brazilian Poetry*) and published in 1973. The Library of America edition of Bishop's *Poems, Prose, and Letters* (2008) includes all the three translations which appeared in the *Kenyon Review*.

The longest, and perhaps the most interesting, of the three stories is "The Smallest Woman in the World". It has been discussed by some Bishop critics, most notably Marilyn May Lombardi (*The Body and the Song* 142–44, 157–58), M. Sheila McAvey, Lorrie Goldensohn (*Biography* 204–05) and Victoria Harrison (181–82).

The six-page story is about a French explorer in Africa who discovers the tribe of the smallest people in the world, and among them the smallest woman in the world, who is, moreover, pregnant. Faithful to his role of the representative of the rational European culture, he names her, and studies her:

Feeling an immediate necessity for order and for giving names to what exists, he called her Little Flower. And in order to be able to classify her among the recognizable realities, he immediately began to collect facts about her. (“The Smallest Woman” 320)

After a summary of the facts he has found out (the tribe is facing extinction, it is threatened by beasts and by a cannibal tribe, the little people live in the trees, they do not have a fully developed language, etc.), the story moves to civilization and watches people’s (mostly women’s and children’s) reactions to the life-size picture of Little Flower published in the Sunday newspaper. It is a series of vignettes in which we are offered brief momentary insights into the anonymous people’s lives in the moment of their confrontation with “the smallest existing human thing” (321). Then the focus turns back to Africa and to the confrontation of the explorer with Little Flower – the explorer is baffled at the woman’s unclassifiable laughter:

She was laughing warm, warm – Little Flower was enjoying life. The rare thing itself was experiencing the ineffable sensation of not having been eaten yet [...] It was a laugh such as only one who does not speak laughs. It was a laugh that the explorer, constrained, couldn’t classify. [...] Not to be devoured is the most perfect feeling. Not to be devoured is the secret goal of a whole life. While she was not being eaten, her bestial laughter was as delicate as joy is delicate. The explorer was baffled (324).

We learn that Little Flower – who cannot speak – fell in love with the explorer, with his boots and his ring, because she is not affected by our cultured prejudice “that it be me! me! that is loved”, not the material things: “in the humidity of the forest these cruel refinements do not exist, and love is not to be eaten, love is to find a boot pretty, love is to like the strange color of a man who isn’t black, love is to laugh for love of a shiny ring” (325). The explorer is saved from his embarrassment by adjusting his explorer’s hat, and by taking notes. He learns the tribe’s language of signs and the few words they use, and Little Flower tells him that it is good to have a tree of her own to live in “because – and she didn’t say this but her eyes became so dark that they said it – because it is good to own, good to own, good to own” (325). The very last sentence suddenly takes us back to civilization, to “those who didn’t take notes” and “had to manage as best they could”: “Well,” suddenly declared one old lady, folding up the newspaper decisively, “well, as I always say: God knows what He’s doing” (325).

Short as the story is, it is rich in meanings and themes. Clearly, the main theme, and one that was of interest for Bishop, is the confrontation of the members of the European/Western culture with the newly discovered “primitive” tribe represented by the smallest woman. At first sight, this confrontation might be seen simply as a critical illustration of the pressure of the imperialistic “cultured” Western civilization on the wild natural “uncultured” tribe. This pressure can be seen in the scientific approach of the explorer, who immediately names and classifies in order to make the new and unknown a part of his known rational universe (the effort which is later symbolized by the frantic note-taking), but also in the reactions of the people who read about the discovery, and respond with a variety of feelings, from disgust, through “perverse tenderness” and pity, to the desire to own the smallest woman and have her for a servant. This interpretation has been advanced, for example, by Lorrie Goldensohn, who

compares the story to Bishop's poem "Brazil, January 1, 1502", and points out the fact that Bishop used exactly the same words to describe the movement of the Indian women in her poem and of the tribe in Lispector's story: "retreating, always retreating."

The direct influence of the story on Bishop's poems is not easy to establish. "Brazil, January 1, 1502" first appeared in *The New Yorker* of January 2, 1960, which is before the translation of "The Smallest Woman in the World" first came out in 1964, but also before *Family Ties*, the book which contained the Portuguese original of the story, appeared in 1960. However, Lispector's story was published already in 1959 in the first issue of the new cultural magazine *Senhor*, and it is possible that Lota de Macedo Soares and Bishop saw and read the magazine, because it was targeted at the cultured aristocratic class which Lota belonged to, and, moreover, it featured literature, design, and architecture, the main fields of interest of the two women. It is therefore possible to assume that Bishop knew the story and found the words "sempre a recuar e a recuar" used in the story so accurate that she used the same words (in English) to convey the image in her own poem. Or perhaps the whole image of the women hiding in the jungle to escape the conquistadors in the poem, their calls easily confused with the calls of the birds, could have been inspired by the image of the little people hiding from the cannibal tribe, using "gestures and animal noises" to communicate. Victoria Harrison also finds similarities between the poem and the story, although she does not mention the verbal repetition of "retreating, always retreating". But rather than seeing Bishop's poem being inspired by the story, she reverses the chronology and interprets the story as "an unwitting sequel to [Bishop's] own poem" (Harrison 181). However, if Bishop was working on her poem in the last months of 1959¹⁶, that is, after the publication of the original of Lispector's story in the *Senhor* magazine, it is possible that

the inspiration came from the original of the story, was “translated” into the poem, and then returned to the story in the translation.

In any case, when Bishop translated the story some three years after the publication of “Brazil, January 1, 1502”, she used exactly the same words to describe a very similar situation, a fact that does not seem to be a coincidence in a poet so particular about her words. It is more likely that it was a conscious decision on Bishop’s part acknowledging the connection between the two texts.

In her brief comparison of “The Smallest Woman in the World” and “Brazil, January 1, 1502,” Lorrie Goldensohn stresses the wildness and femininity of the smallest woman (and of the women in Bishop’s poem), and considers them clearly endangered by the colonizing culture: “That vibrant female principle of wild, untrammled native passion is in both texts shrunken and endangered” (205). But both the position of the smallest woman and the people’s response to the tiny black human creature are more complex. Behind the people’s patronizing or controlling attitude, there is no certainty of their superiority, no unshaken belief in the validity and power of their culture; rather their reaction reveals a lack of confidence. They feel a necessity to confirm the status of their civilization because it is shaken by the confrontation. “The smallest existing human thing” presents a threat to them, it challenges their position, not so much because she presents a completely alien other, but precisely because she is not enough of an “other”. Despite her minute size and her lack of many human attributes, including language, she is human; despite the scientific language describing her tribe as if it was an animal species (“Her race will soon be exterminated. Few examples are left of this species”), she belongs to the same species as the people reading the newspapers. And it is the combination of otherness and familiarity that is disturbing for them: she is almost an animal, she is on the very border of humanity (“the smallest existing human

thing”), yet the people who see her are conscious of a deep affinity between them and her.

The smallest woman is compared to animals – she is “black as a monkey”, she looks “like a dog”, her tribe names things by “animal noises”, her sadness is “the sadness of an animal,” not “human sadness,” according to one of the newspaper readers. She is even called a thing repeatedly, “the smallest human thing”, “tiny and indomitable thing” or “the rare thing herself”. But she is not an animal or a thing, she is a woman, a human being, and she makes people feel the fragility of their own “humanity”. This is perhaps most obvious in the longest of the vignettes showing the reactions of the people, where a “clever little boy” suggests to his mother that Little Flower could be their toy:

[The mother] looked at him attentively and with uncomfortable pride, that child who had already lost two front teeth, evolution evolving itself, teeth falling out to give place to those that could bite better. “I’m going to buy him a new suit,” she decided, looking at him, absorbed. Obstinate, she adorned her gap-toothed son with fine clothes; obstinate, she wanted him very clean, as if his cleanliness could emphasize a soothing superficiality, obstinate perfecting the polite side of beauty. Obstinate drawing away from, and drawing him away from, something that ought to be “black as a monkey.” Then, looking in the bathroom mirror, the mother gave a deliberately refined and social smile, placing a distance of insuperable milleniums between the abstract lines of her features and the crude face of Little Flower. But, with years of practice, she knew that this was going to be a Sunday on which she

would have to hide from herself anxiety, dreams, and lost milleniums.

(“The Smallest Woman” 323)

Here, it is clear that civilization is not something given, but something that has to be confirmed again and again, and that we are much closer to Little Flower than we would like to think. All the effort at naming, classifying, controlling, patronizing is a way of asserting the distance between us and the tiny black human being, a way to protect ourselves, rather than attack the other.

All this becomes clear in the last part of the story, where we return to the forest, and to the explorer studying the smallest woman. But this time we do not see Little Flower through the scientific factual description offered by the explorer at the beginning, but through the voice of the narrator, which enables us to get closer to her, and we are even allowed an insight into her mind. The confrontation of the two cultures continues, but Little Flower is no longer a passive object in it, but actively participates in it. And if the first two parts of the story may have given the impression that the smallest woman in the world is a victim of civilized society, the last part seems to undermine this impression. Lombardi points out that Little Flower is definitely not a noble savage (*The Body and the Song* 158): her values and needs are simple and primitive, without the “cruel refinements” added by culture, but in their essence uncomfortably similar to the values and needs of the “civilized” people. And towards the end of the passage she basically echoes what was expressed by the people reading the newspaper – the desire to own, to control. This last passage brings Little Flower dangerously close to “civilized” people, and by this time it is clear that the scientific efforts of the French explorer are basically self-protective, they no longer serve to control her, but “to get control of himself” (“The Smallest Woman” 325). Civilization feels threatened by barbarism, not only because barbarism is different and does not

comply with the laws of civilization, but because it is at points dangerously close to civilization reminding it of their inherent, though hidden, similarity. In this situation, it is rather difficult for the explorer's culture to open itself and enter in the dialog with the culture of the wild tribe, as this could lead to finding more similarities, and eventually, civilization would yield to the barbarism potentially lurking in it.

Marilyn May Lombardi sees this story as "the story of colonialism" in miniature, but also as "the story of [Bishop's] own love affair with her new homeland" (*The Body and the Song* 144). She mentions Bishop's fear of becoming an over-simplifying mediator of the Brazilian culture, a violating colonizer in her own right, a version of the French discoverer of Little Flower, who describes her and mediates her to his culture. Lombardi points out that Bishop as a translator "decided to work with material that mirrored the ethical dilemmas of her own position as a cultural go-between packaging Brazilian landscape and culture for foreign consumption" (141), Lispector's story being the most obvious example. The theme of "assimilating or appropriating the literature, the landscape, and the culture of other people" (141) – which is also the theme of the ability to see and say (or write) things without necessarily interpreting them and adapting them to one's vision – is definitely one Bishop was deeply concerned with, not only in relationship with her own situation in Brazil.

Bishop's translation of *The Diary of "Helena Morley"* showed that she tried to keep the foreignness of the text; she did not want to be like the colonizing explorer who gives things his own names. Yet at the same time, she was fully conscious of the difficulty, or even impossibility of not being like him, the virtual impossibility of confronting a foreign culture as a traveler, someone else's text as a translator, or landscape as a poet, and yielding to it completely without bringing in one's own cultural notions, interpretations or simply one's own vision.

An Anthology of Twentieth-Century Brazilian Poetry

After Bishop moved to Brazil, she began, as was natural, to be interested in the contemporary Brazilian poetry scene. She started reading and meeting some of the great Brazilian poets of the time; and eventually translating them as well. She did not start translating Brazilian poetry with an anthology in mind. She didn't want to be considered a mediator of Brazilian culture to Americans, and she was occasionally worried about becoming too connected with South America. In a letter to Anne Stevenson from May 20, 1965 regarding the book on Bishop Stevenson was working on, she even asked her not to speak about her translations because she didn't want too much importance to be attached to them:

I wish you'd skip the translations. They amount to next to nothing, no real work, and no real interest. Or just say I have translated some prose & some poetry, from the Portuguese. I can't be considered a cultural go-between, *nor do I want to be*. The fact that I live in Brazil seems almost entirely a matter of chance... (WU 1.2)

Bishop wrote this after she had translated the *Diary of "Helena Morley,"* Clarice Lispector's stories, several poems by Carlos Drummond de Andrade, and three fragments from a long poem by João Cabral de Melo Neto, that is, most of her translations from Portuguese. She was clearly uncomfortable with the idea that the role of a translator and herald of Brazilian poetry in the US should be imposed on her. On the other hand, she did send her translations to American magazines for publication

throughout the 1960's and hinted at the possibility of a book publication as early as in 1963 (in a letter to Carlos Drummond, PPL 851). In 1966 she apparently asked João Cabral for approval to publish her translations of his poems in an "Anthology," which he very politely conceded.

However, the project of the anthology did not crystallize until her Brazilian time was practically over, and it materialized only thanks to the enthusiasm of Emanuel Brasil, a young Brazilian living in New York and working as a translator for the United Nations, whom Bishop met through her friend Ashley Brown. In March 1967, Brasil asked Bishop (who was then still in Brazil) to co-edit the anthology with him, and he also sent the tentative contents for the book. In her reply, Bishop is quite reluctant about her participation in the project, saying that she only has the few translations of João Cabral and Carlos Drummond which had appeared in American literary magazines. She agrees with the contents Brasil suggested, but says she has far too much work to take part in the anthology. However, not long after that (July 1967) Bishop sent a postcard to Brasil saying she is in New York and offering that they could meet, which seems to suggest that she was already less opposed to the project.

The next letter to Brasil concerning the anthology was sent on January 6, 1968 from San Francisco, where Bishop moved after Lota de Macedo Soares's suicide in September 1967. Lota's death symbolically marks the end of Bishop's life in Brazil (although she kept returning to her Ouro Preto house for several years, before she finally sold it), and it seems that it was at this point, when her connection to Brazil was loosened and she was returning to the US, that she felt she could (or even should) take part in the preparation of the anthology. In a letter to Ashley Brown, one of the translators for the anthology, she presents her participation in the project as a kind of inescapable fate: "I never wanted to get involved in *any* anthology, but couldn't seem to

avoid this one” (OA 494). She soon started discussing the selection of the poems with Brasil, and recommending American poets who could do the translations. She offered to do literal prose translations of some of the texts to be used by those translators who had little or no Portuguese, and who would only turn the prose into verse. Among the sixteen translators she and Brasil got interested in the anthology were James Merrill, Richard Wilbur, Mark Strand, W. S. Merwin, Richard Eberhart, Ashley Brown and others. Bishop herself translated thirteen poems by five poets (Manuel Bandeira, Joaquim Cardozo, Vinícius de Moraes, Carlos Drummond de Andrade, and João Cabral de Melo Neto).

The anthology project was sponsored by The Academy of American Poets, and the publication was undertaken by the Wesleyan University Press. From the very beginning, the editors wanted a bilingual Portuguese-English edition; the first volume, covering basically the two generations of Brazilian Modernism, was originally supposed to be followed by a second one, dedicated to the younger generation of Brazilian poets, which, however, did not materialize in Bishop’s lifetime.¹⁷ *An Anthology of Twentieth-Century Brazilian Poetry* was published four years after it was begun, in April 1972, and its publication was accompanied by a party for some four hundred guests, which took place in New York on April 13.

As a co-editor, Bishop was responsible for the selection of the poems for the anthology, and could also influence the final versions of the translations, although this was not always easy, as most of the translators were well-known poets who in some cases weren’t quite happy with editorial changes in their texts (for example, Bishop complained to Ashley Brown about having a bad time with Richard Eberhart in whose translation of a poem by Mário de Andrade Bishop wanted to make some changes).

In the introduction, which Bishop co-wrote with Brasil, the editors admit that the selection is “more representative of the editors’ personal tastes than all-inclusive” (*Anthology* xv). This is a piece of information more important than it might at first seem. Although the anthology includes many great names of 20th century Brazilian poetry, it is far from representative or canonical.¹⁸ Even from a brief glance at the contents page it is obvious that two poets dominate the anthology. While most of the fourteen authors are represented by one to four short poems, Carlos Drummond de Andrade has seven poems (one of them very long, all of them translated by Bishop), and João Cabral de Melo Neto twenty (three of them, all parts of a longer Christmas play, translated by Bishop). Bishop always mentioned these two poets, and particularly Drummond, as her favorites. It is not surprising as their poetics is characterized by features we know from Bishop’s own poetry – reticence, concreteness of detail, lack of ornament, sense of humor. The main figures of Brazilian modernism, Oswald de Andrade, Mário de Andrade and Manuel Bandeira, are acknowledged in the introduction as important and extremely influential, but their work is represented only by very few poems, and not necessarily the most typical or famous ones. Bandeira has four poems, so does Oswald de Andrade, and only one poem by Mário de Andrade is included. More attention seems to be paid to the poets who move from the avant-garde experiment of the early modernism (most clearly seen in the “anthropophagist” poetry of Oswald de Andrade). There is Jorge de Lima, a regionalist poet, whose poetry has a strong spiritual dimension, which does not appear in most other poets of his generation; Joaquim Cardozo, a poet from the Northeast (Recife), who started to publish only when the modernist period was basically over; Cecília Meireles (who has five poems in the anthology, all of them translated by James Merrill from Bishop’s prose translations), who is now one of the favorite modernist poets (Stegagno Picchio 487), but differs from

the main modernist canon by her use of traditional forms and the influence of Portuguese tradition in her poetry (as opposed to the rest of the modernists who proclaimed the creative independence of Brazil); Murilo Mendes, who lived in Europe and was far better known there than in Brazil (where his importance was acknowledged only long after his death in 1974); the most prominent representative of this “generation” in the anthology is, quite appropriately, Carlos Drummond de Andrade, who is considered one of the greatest Brazilian poets of the 20th century. The poets of the generation coming after modernism in Brazil, the so-called Generation 45, generally characterized by the return to formal and technical precision in poetry, traditional rhyme and classical meter, is not represented by its main program voices (Lêdo Ivo, Domingos Carvalho or Péricles Eugênio da Silva Ramos) in the anthology: there is Mauro Mota and Marcos Konder Reis, neither of whom is a typical representative of the group’s poetics, and João Cabral de Melo Neto, another of the great names of modern Brazilian poetry (and another of Bishop’s favorites), who is connected to Generation 45 rather in terms of time, than aesthetics. The anthology does not include the poets representing the Concretist movement of the 1950’s, who later appeared in the second volume of the anthology edited by Emanuel Brasil. From the selection of the poets, it seems obvious that the editors did not aim at a panorama introducing the whole range of the Brazilian poetry of the 20th century with its movements and tendencies, but rather wanted to present individual voices they considered interesting. Bishop’s original idea was that the poets included in the anthology would be invited to the US to give readings, which also could have influenced the selection, and the project was more ambitious at the beginning (in a letter Bishop speaks about 300 pages, whereas the final book has about 180 pages).

The selection of the individual poems seems to depend even more on the editors' tastes and biases. The fact that many poets are represented only by one or two poems makes it impossible to offer an overall picture of their works. Moreover, in many cases the poems included are not necessarily illustrative of the characteristic personal poetics of the poets or of the movement they represent. It seems that one of the criteria Bishop applied when selecting poems for translation was the extent to which they yield to or defy translation. In one of her longest letters to Anne Stevenson she wrote:

I don't think much of poetry translations and rarely attempt them, – just when I see a poem by someone I like that I think will go into English with less loss than usual. That means it isn't necessarily the poet's best poem. (PPL 857)

The poems included are not "easy" to translate – for example, many of them follow strict formal patterns (and these are often kept more or less faithfully in English) – but the anthology does not contain poems experimenting with language or texts rooted too much in local color. The poems are thematically varied, but there seems to be a propensity towards the elegiac tone in the selection. A number of the poems deals with death, separation or loss, and the motifs of death, suicide, cemeteries, funeral processions, lamenting, etc. are conspicuous, figuring even in poems by the generally playful poets like Oswald de Andrade. We have seen that Bishop started working steadily on the anthology only when she was back in the US after Lota's death. In this context, the bias towards the elegiac note, however subtle, turns the anthology itself into an elegy – an elegy for Brazil Bishop was leaving, and for a friend who died. In the context of Bishop's works, the anthology forms a necessary step between the enchanted discoverer and settler of the first poems of the *Questions of Travel* (1965) and the nostalgic Crusoe of *Geography III* (1976).

Bishop is not considered primarily an elegiac poet, but elegy does have an unquestionable place in her works, especially in the later years. In the years following Lota's suicide, Bishop wanted to write an elegy for her. A very sketchy draft of it, called "Aubade and Elegy", has been preserved among her papers. It is rather remarkable that apart from Bishop's own notes and lines, this draft contains several lines from an elegy by the Spanish poet Miguel Hernández – in the Spanish original and Bishop's English translation. Clearly, Bishop was interested in the elegy genre in her own work at the time she was preparing the anthology, and also that she was looking for inspiration and support in elegiac texts by other poets. The dating of the elegy draft is not quite certain, but it seems it was not started too long after Lota's death. In her edition of Bishop's unpublished works, Alice Quinn places it at the beginning of the section starting with the year 1968 (149), which is the year the anthology started to be put together. And elegiac genre and tone kept preoccupying her years later, when she wrote poems like "Crusoe in England", "One Art" and "North Haven", and when, in 1977, she applied for a Guggenheim Fellowship with a project for a book-length poem titled *Elegy*. In this context, it is hardly surprising that Bishop would feel drawn towards texts which reflected her own preoccupations, and in which she may have even looked for guidance in the search for her own expression, rather than texts that would necessarily represent the given author or movement.

In the following passages, I focus on the poets and poems she actually translated for the anthology, with particular attention to her favorites, Carlos Drummond de Andrade and João Cabral de Melo Neto.

Manuel Bandeira

The anthology is dedicated to the memory of the author whose poems open it, to Manuel Bandeira (1886–1968). When Bishop moved to Brazil, she met Bandeira, who was in his sixties then and was very highly regarded in Brazil. He was the author of the groundbreaking book of poems *Cinza das Horas* (Ash of the Hours, 1917) which had a decisive influence on the Brazilian Modernist movement of the 1920's, and by 1950's he was considered the greatest Brazilian poet. The introduction to the anthology tells an anecdote about Bandeira being given a permanent parking space in Rio with an enamelled sign "Poeta", although he didn't have a car and couldn't drive; one of the many examples of the esteem he was held in by his countrymen. Bandeira was also a translator – mostly of French poetry, but he also translated e. e. cummings, Emily Dickinson, and Bishop herself. The two poets were on friendly terms, and it was Bandeira who introduced Bishop to the author of *The Diary of "Helena Morley"*. Although they both had a very good passive knowledge of each other's language, neither of them felt at ease when they were supposed to speak it. In a letter-poem Bishop sent to Bandeira with a present of a jar of jam in 1955, she mocks the fact that the two poets and translators were virtually incapable of conversation:¹⁹

To Manuel Bandeira, with Jam and Jelly

Your books are here; their pages cut.

Of course I want to thank you, but

how can I possibly forget

that we have scarcely spoken yet?

Two mighty poets at a loss,
unable to exchange a word,
– to quote McCarthy, “It’s the most
unheard-of thing I’ve ever heard!” (1)

Translators of each other’s tongue!
(I think that I may make this claim.)
The greater, relatively young,
sculptured in bronze (2) and known to Fame!

Smiled on by Fame and Miss Brazil: (3)
Is this the man to keep so still?
The gallant man who rendered in
more graceful language Elinor Glyn? (4)

Gave lovely Latin things to utter
to Tarzan (5), who could barely mutter,
and polished Edgar Burrough’s brute?
Should such a man as this be mute?

And I, I am no *raconteur*,
my repartee is often weak,
but English-speaking friends, I fear,
would tell you I can speak,

and speak, and speak, sometimes for days,
not giving any indication
of stopping or of feeling the need
of substitutes for conversation.

O conversations gone to pot!
– But please believe I've never thought
“Your book is fine; I like it lots,”
is best expressed by apricots;

“You put all rivals in the shade,”
is well-implied in marmalade...
Nevertheless, accept and spread
these compliments upon your bread,

and, Manuel, may this silent jelly
speak sweetly to your poet's belly (6)
and once more let me say I am
devoted with a jar of jam.

1 Recent remark of Senator McCarthy to the press.

2 O GLOBO, January 5th, 1955.

3 MANCHETE, August, 1954.

4 ITINERÁRIO DE PASÁRGADA, p. 100, n.

5 Idem.

6 If I may be allowed the expression.

(EAP 105–06)

Typically, Bishop seems to have seen this message in verse as a joke and a private letter, and never considered publishing it. Unlike Bandeira, who (typically, as well) included his response to the gift (which, apparently, constituted not only of jelly but also of a book of poems by e. e. cummings) in an enlarged second edition of his occasional poems *Mafuá do malungo* (1955). Bandeira sent his reply-poem together with a hammock – a gift Bishop liked very much. His reply, an imitation of cummings, is not in Portuguese, but surprisingly in English, a language he would never write poems in, and contains lines from Bishop’s earlier poem “Songs for a Colored Singer”:

Thank you for the exquisite jam

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An

d now -
get into this brazilian hammock and
let me sing for you:
"Lullaby
"Sleep on and on..."

Xaire, Elisabeth. (Süssekind 331-365)

Clearly, Bandeira found Bishop's jams impressive and inspirational. In an interview, Bishop mentions another English "poem" of Bandeira's praising her jams and jellies: "I wish I had two bellies / because of your good jellies", and she adds: "He told me that those two lines were so good that he could think of nothing that could follow them" (Monteiro 79).

Bishop translated only two short poems by Bandeira: "My Last Poem" and "Brazilian Tragedy", both included in the anthology and in *The Complete Poems 1927–1979*. "My Last Poem" is a five line poem in free verse, a kind of artistic credo of the poet:

I would like my last poem thus

That it be gentle saying the simplest and least intended things
That it be ardent like a tearless sob
That it have the beauty of almost scentless flowers
The purity of the flame in which the most limpid diamonds are
consumed

The passion of suicides who kill themselves without explanation.

(*Anthology* 3)

That this definition of an ideal poem appealed to Bishop is clear not only from the fact that she decided to translate it and publish it in the anthology, but also from the brief poet's profile at the beginning of the anthology, which quotes this poem. It may be worth noticing that there is an error in the quote which does not occur in the translation itself: "Manuel Carneiro de Souza Bandeira Filho (1886-1968) wanted his poems 'to be eternal, saying the simplest and least intentional things'" (*Anthology* vii). "Eternal" here seems to be a wrong reading of "eterno" for the Portuguese "terno" (soft, gentle) in the second line of the poem. One may assume that the mistake was corrected in the text of the poem, but escaped the attention of the editors in the profiles of the poets. However that may have been, "gentle" and "eternal" seem not to make so much difference to Bishop, who was clearly intrigued by the definition of a perfect poem as "saying the simplest and least intentional [or 'intended'] things". The idea of simplicity and unintentionality which fascinated her in connection with *The Diary of "Helena Morley"* comes up again. The goal of the poet's effort and toil is not anything complex and elaborate, but quite the contrary – it is the endless effort at simplicity and spontaneity. "A line will take us hours maybe; / Yet if it does not seem a moment's thought, / Our stitching and unstitching has been naught," famously wrote W. B. Yeats. Bishop admired the simplicity and spontaneity mysteriously present in some works of primitive artists, but she knew that in them it was a "gift" or a chance. What preoccupied her was the difficulty of achieving them by craft and effort. Bandeira's poem "saying the simplest and least intended things" would be his last; that is, a poem after which he wouldn't have to write any more poems, a perfect ultimate poem, the last one. The poem "My Last Poem" itself suggests the author's doubts about the possibility of such

poem – it is not *the* poem, it is *about* the poem; and it is all in subjunctive. The poem is a wish, an (most likely unattainable) ideal. The poet's last poem will probably not be the last poem he wished for, but a yet another attempt at it – it will be the last one because the poet will die after writing it, not because it is the ultimate ideal poem after which no other poem is necessary.

The other poem by Bandeira Bishop decided to translate is very different. If "My Last Poem" expresses the personal poetic credo of the poet, in the prose poem called "Brazilian Tragedy" the personal tone completely disappears, and gives way to a cold statement:

Misael, civil servant in the Ministry of Labor, 63 years old.

Knew Maria Elvira of the Grotto: prostitute, syphilitic, with ulcerated fingers, a pawned wedding ring and teeth in the last stages of decay.

Misael took Maria out of "the life," installed her in a two-storey house in Junction City, paid for the doctor, dentist, manicurist. . . . He gave her everything she wanted.

When Maria Elvira discovered she had a pretty mouth, she immediately took a boy-friend.

Misael didn't want a scandal. He could have beaten her, shot her, or stabbed her. He did none of these: they moved.

They lived like that for three years.

Each time Maria Elvira took a new boy-friend, they moved.

The lovers lived in Junction City. Boulder. On General Pedra Street, The Sties. The Brickyards. Glendale. Pay Dirt. On Marquês de Sapucaí Street in Villa Isabel. Niterói. Euphoria. In Junction City again,

on Clapp Street. All Saints. Carousel. Edgewood. The Mines. Soldiers Home . . .

Finally, in Constitution Street, where Misael, bereft of sense and reason, killed her with six shots, and the police found her stretched out, supine, dressed in blue organdy. (*Anthology* 9)

Rather than a poem, this sounds like a police report. It is a disinterested, seemingly objective list of facts, told bluntly in chronological order. The title “Brazilian Tragedy” ironically clashes with the tone of the poem which is laconic and disinterested, and it does not present a reader with a tragedy in the noble theatrical sense, but with an ordinary court-room report in a local newspaper. In fact, the story is a lot like the stories about the locals from the town of Diamantina told by Helena Morley in her diary. Choosing this prose poem for translation again betrays Bishop’s interest in genres that move on the edge of literature.

Yet there is a tragedy behind the matter-of-fact prose text. The laconic tone of the poem draws the reader’s attention to the emotion, passion and tragedy it fails to convey explicitly. The very fact that only the names and the factual unemotional descriptions of the two characters is given, paradoxically stresses the presence of real persons behind the words. The catalogue of the place names is just a series of words, but we know that for the people in the poem, these words were real places, they were the settings of their tragedy. Bishop translated the names from the Portuguese, like she would sometimes do in *The Diary of “Helena Morley”*, but in some cases she gave an American place name equivalent rather than a literal translation from Portuguese. It is a method different from her method in *The Diary*, where she either gives the literal translation of the Portuguese name, or leaves the place names in the original, which seems to stress the exotic or foreign quality of the text, as many of these names sound

strange in English. In the *Bandeira* poem she used a different strategy – replacing the names with English place names seems more appropriate in this text because it stresses the parochial quality, the local character of the story. The translation of the text makes it clear that the story takes place in Brazil, without losing the effect the catalogue of the place names has in the original.²⁰

When Bishop refused to translate the political elegy for the dead militia woman in the Spanish Civil War, she said that a simple obituary would be more touching than the wordy elegy. *Bandeira* may have felt the same when he chose the form of a court-room report for his poem. He is ironical about the tragedy, and about Brazil; yet the tragedy is there, and it is in a way more tragic for the fact it is so ordinary, so local, so limited, that it doesn't even deserve a high literary expression. This use of irony that doesn't diminish, but rather heightens is something we can find in Bishop as well – "Filling Station" could serve as a good example. The names and rough facts given for "real" people and their story of passion are strangely counterpointed by the detail which seems out of place in a police report – the blue organdy of the last line. This one detail suddenly enables the reader to create a picture: a dead body of a woman pierced with six shots covered with sheer fine blue fabric.

Joaquim Cardozo

It seems that Bishop felt Joaquim Cardozo (1897–1978), who was not only a poet but also an engineer doing structural calculus for Oswald Niemeyer's projects, could not be left out of the anthology, although she was happy neither with his poems nor with her translations of them. She changed the original selection because she could not make herself translate some of the poems she originally had in mind. In a letter to her co-editor, Emanuel Brasil, she complains about a poem by Cardozo she was working on:

“[I] think I dislike Ventos so much that I’ll give up on it – possibly do another Cardozo one. It sounds AWFUL in English” (VC 29.1).

The poem mentioned in the letter does not appear in the anthology. In the end, Bishop seems to have decided to replace it by the “Elegy for Maria Alves”, which figures in the anthology together with “Cemetery of Childhood”, a poem which was supposed to be there from the beginning, and the translation of which was first published in *The New Yorker* in 1971. It is obvious that Bishop did not consider Cardozo a great poet, and she had her reservations even about the poems she chose for the anthology. When talking about Brazilian poetry, she rarely mentions Cardozo at all, and he certainly does not figure among her favorite Brazilian poets.

Although Bishop generally believed that a translation should be faithful to the form of the original, she had to abandon the metrical and rhyming pattern of this poem. She was conscious of her license and she comments on it in a letter to her co-editor: “the Cemetery one isn’t too good, either, but by being a bit free I’ve made it rhyme here & there and it will have to do... But it is not a good poem” (VC 29.1) The two poems Bishop chose to include in the anthology despite her reservations show clear thematic similarities. Both deal with death, more particularly with cemeteries, graves. Alice Quinn connects the translation of the “Cemetery of Childhood” indirectly with a manuscript poem “For M.B.S., buried in Nova Scotia” and with the short story “Gwendolyn” (EAP 308). These texts are connected by the motif of a cemetery, in case of “Gwendolyn” it is even a cemetery where children are buried in small graves, just like in the Brazilian poem. But the connection seems to end here, on the level of the motif. The cemetery in Cardozo’s poem is more abstract and metaphorical, whereas Bishop’s cemetery (in both cases the same cemetery in Great Village, Nova Scotia) is a very real and concrete place, described with all the accuracy and attention to detail we

know from Bishop's writings. By comparing Bishop's own cemetery images with Cardozo's we can see why she didn't consider his poem a good cemetery poem – it lacks concreteness, and stresses the metaphorical meaning. Cardozo's "Elegy for Maria Alves" is written in a much looser form which allowed Bishop to be more faithful to the original. The poem is dedicated to a particular person which makes it less abstract than the "Cemetery of Childhood", and this effect is stressed by lists of very concrete objects (different kinds of flowers, fruits, earth and water) the speaker brings to the dead Maria. The list of flowers – "Flowers from old hedgerows, flowers from bramble bushes, / Verbenas and everlastings, jasmines and mignonettes;" – remind us of "Buttercups, Red Clover, Purple Vetch, / Hawkweed still burning, Daisies Pied, Eyebright, / the Fragrant Bedstraw's incandescent stars," from the only elegy Bishop ever finished, "North Haven" dedicated to the memory of Robert Lowell. But they also bring to mind the "sweet williams" from "Aubade and Elegy", a fragmentary, incomplete draft of an elegy for Lota de Macedo Soares, which Bishop was probably working on at the same time when she was preparing the anthology. Although no direct connection exists between the two texts, it is clear that Bishop was interested in the genre of elegy in the years following her partner's death, and this may have led her to translating Cardozo's "Elegy for Maria Alves".

Carlos Drummond de Andrade

Unlike Joaquim Cardozo, Carlos Drummond de Andrade (1902–1987) was one of Bishop's favorite poets. It is not surprising – Drummond is considered one of the greatest 20th century Brazilian poets, and his poetics and Bishop's have some common features. Bishop was not friends with him in the same way she was, for example, with Bandeira. She met him in person only once. Otherwise, they only exchanged very polite

letters about Bishop's translations of Drummond's poems. In an interview with George Starbuck from 1977 Bishop talks about Drummond and her only personal encounter with him:

The one [Brazilian poet] I admire most of the older generation is Carlos Drummond de Andrade, I've translated him. I didn't know him at all. He's supposed to be very shy. I'm supposed to be very shy. We've met once – on the sidewalk at night. We had just come out of the same restaurant, and he kissed my hand politely when we were introduced.
(Monteiro 96)

Bishop translated some of Drummond's poems when she lived in Brazil, long before Brasil came up with the idea of an anthology. The correspondence with Drummond about the translations took place in 1963, four poems in Bishop's translation ("The Table", "Don't Kill Yourself", "Seven-Sided Poem" and "Travelling in the Family") appeared in the 1969 edition of her *Complete Poems*. The anthology of Brazilian poetry contains seven poems by Drummond, all of them translated by Bishop, which marks him clearly as her favorite. Apart from the four poems mentioned above, there is probably the most famous of Drummond's poems "In the Middle of the Road", a short poem "Infancy", and a longer "Family Portrait". All the seven poems appear in *The Complete Poems* published by Farrar, Straus & Giroux in 1983.

In 1963 Bishop sent Drummond her translations asking for his comments and his approval of some minor differences between the translation and the original. Drummond's replies (in Portuguese) are very polite and full of respect for Bishop's skills both as a poet and a translator. In his first letter, he says his English is not good enough to correct the translations, and that he believes his poems can only be improved in the hands of such a master as Bishop. When he actually received the translations, his

reaction was enthusiastic: “I felt very well dressed in the English clothes you prepared for me with such skill and so fine perception of values!” (VC 1.5). He agrees with Bishop’s suggestions of the changes she consulted with him, and he concludes with a commentary on her general attitude as a translator and poet: “What shows in your doubts and clarifications is, for me, a lesson in poetry: the constant minute scruples, the highly delicate sense of nuances, the tender respect for the translated work, which characterize your work. Thank you very, very much, dear Elizabeth” (VC 1.5). Here, in one sentence, the Brazilian poet summarized Bishop’s principles as a translator and perhaps as a poet as well. It is true that her doubts betray an anxious care for the original work: one of her questions was whether she could repeat the verb “forbidden” in the lines “pelo tempo e pelo lugares / defendidos” (into the forbidden time and places) to make “into the forbidden / time, forbidden places” in English, another one concerned canceling a repetition of the adjective “small” in the original lines “na pequena área do quarto.// A pequena área da vida”, and supplanting one of them with “narrow”: “in the little space of the room.// The narrow space of life”. It is clear that she considered repetition an important poetic means, and it is also clear that she paid close attention to every word of the poem and was highly conscious of every little change she made.

Four of the seven poems by Drummond in the anthology (all the longer ones) deal with memory, the past, family, childhood – themes that were extremely important for Bishop throughout her life, but that started to acquire a clear shape only in the first decade of her stay in Brazil, when she was slowly working on her third book, *Questions of Travel*. The first of Drummond’s poems in the anthology (and most probably the first one Bishop translated) is “Travelling in the Family”, a poem about the poet’s father and childhood memories. The translation was done in 1963, two years before she published

Questions of Travel, a book which contained her first finished poems and prose about her own childhood. The translation first appeared in *Poetry* 106.3 (June 1965).

From the beginning of her stay in Brazil, Bishop was working on texts dealing with her memories of Nova Scotia – both stories and poems. Her interest in particular texts of Brazilian literature, like *The Diary of “Helena Morley”* or the childhood poems of Carlos Drummond de Andrade, shows the preoccupation with childhood, family and the memory of it, the same preoccupation that manifested itself in stories like “In the Village” or “Gwendolyn”, and poems like “Sestina” or “First Death in Nova Scotia”. *The Diary of “Helena Morley”* presented an authentic, unmediated expression of childhood experience, something Bishop tried to recover in some of her texts, but found very difficult, because the original experience was filtered through the memory. Drummond’s childhood poems, on the other hand, have a similar perspective as Bishop’s: the perspective of an adult returning to his childhood, fully conscious of the distance that divides him from the original experience. In “Travelling in the Family” the speaker travels back to his childhood house, through his memory, through his family, he has to cross the distance both in time and space. He is accompanied by the silent shadow of his father, the trip through memory being also a quest for reconciliation with him, reconciliation that was not possible in the time when they lived in the old house together, and happens only now, through memory:

The narrow space of life
crowds me up against you,
and in this ghostly embrace
it’s as if I were being burned
completely, with poignant love.
Only now do we know each other! (*Anthology* 61)

Travelling through memory and through the family is painful, almost unwanted, yet necessary, unavoidable:

What cruel, obscure instinct
moved his pallid hand
subtly pushing us
into the forbidden
time, forbidden places? (*Anthology* 59)

The last two lines of this stanza are those Bishop discussed with Drummond – her translation very slightly changes the structure of the original lines “pelo tempo e pelos lugares / defendidos”, which would translate literally as “into the forbidden time and space”. Bishop decided to stress the adjective “forbidden” by means of repetition and of the enjambent which moves the word “time” on the following line (the original stresses it by making it a single line, the last line of the stanza, which would be rather difficult in English where the adjective precedes the noun). She also leaves out the conjunction “and” using a mere juxtaposition of the two noun phrases, which creates an even clearer analogy between time and space in the poem. There is another place in the poem where Bishop repeats an adjective which is not repeated in the original, and also in this case it is in the lines where space and time are brought together: “Now the waters won’t let me / make out your distant face, / distant by seventy years...” (*Anthology* 61). Spatial perception of memory – memory as a space which exists next to our space here and now, and into which and through which we can travel, and return changed – is certainly not original either with Bishop or with Drummond, but it seems to be a point the two poets have in common. And Bishop not only saw it in Drummond, but even stressed it, however slightly, by very small changes in word order and repetitions.

But there are affinities between the two poets on more obvious levels than the perception of memory. Reading the fifth stanza of Drummond's poem:

Stepping on books and letters
we travel in the family.
Marriages; mortgages;
the consumptive cousins;
the mad aunt; my grandmother
betrayed among the slave-girls,
rustling silks in the bedroom. (*Anthology* 59)

the reader immediately thinks of one of the most famous poems by Bishop, "The Moose", with its long passage about the old couple talking in the darkened bus:

deaths, deaths and sicknesses;
the year he remarried;
the year (something) happened.
She died in childbirth.
That was the son lost
when the schooner foundered.

He took to drink. Yes.
She went to the bad.
When Amos began to pray
even in the store and
finally the family had
to put him away.

The style of these two passages is very similar, the two poems are also formally close with their short lines divided into short stanzas (mostly of eight lines in Drummond, six lines in Bishop).²¹ “The Moose” was finished almost a decade after Bishop translated “Travelling in the Family”; it was first read as the Phi Beta Kappa poem at Harvard on June 13, 1972, exactly two months after the launch of the Brazilian anthology. But it was begun much earlier: Bishop mentions her working on it in a letter to her Aunt Grace from 1956, which puts “The Moose” among the poems that took Bishop the longest to write. The translation of “Travelling in the Family” happened at some point of the process of writing “The Moose”, and it does not seem far fetched to see certain parallels between the two poems.

On the other hand, it is very difficult to talk about any direct influence or inspiration here, as it can hardly be proved. And it is not the point to prove it. It seems more appropriate to show that the two poets shared their aesthetic approach towards the themes of family, childhood, and memory.

That is probably also the reason why Bishop’s translations of Drummond are much more successful than her translations of, for example, Cardozo, whose poetry she did not like very much. She was particularly happy with her translation of “Travelling in the Family”, which she mentions in an interview many years later:

[It] came out very well, I think. The meter is almost exactly the same. Nothing had to be changed. Even the word order. Of course word order will naturally have to come out different, but this one happened to come out well. I wrote and asked Dr. Drummond if I could repeat one word instead of writing the line the way he had it, and he wrote back yes that would be fine. Portuguese has a very different metrical system, very like

French. But every once in a while a poem does go into English.

(Monteiro 85)

In his letter to Bishop from April 29, 1969, Drummond expresses his emotion over her translation of the long poem “The Table”, which appeared in *The New York Review of Books* on January 16, and later in *The Complete Poems*. It is another of Drummond’s family poems Bishop translated, and it is similar in theme and tone to “Travelling in the Family” – it also deals with family memories and belated reconciliation with the father. This time, the situation is an imagined family reunion at a big dinner table, where the living and the long dead members of the family meet at a party for the father (also dead). It seems interesting that Bishop does not translate the names of dishes and drinks, but leaves them in Portuguese and gives footnotes explaining what the words mean, in the same way she would do in her translation of *The Diary of “Helena Morley”*. In poetry, this is rather unusual. The effect is distracting, it breaks the illusion that the poem is a poem in English, and it turns the reader’s attention to the fact that he is reading a Brazilian poem translated into English, and he is forced to realize the presence of the translator between himself and the poem.²² Bishop’s form is a bit looser than the original which seems to be in rather regular heptasyllabic lines – very common in Portuguese poetry. It is clear that she did not try to keep the meter blindly, but rather wanted to stick to the tone and the exact meaning. In a letter to Brasil, she asks for help with four difficult lines “tenho todos os defeitos / que não farejei em ti / e nem os tenho que tinhas, / quanto mais as qualidades”, where she was not sure about the meaning. Apart from other doubts, she is not happy with her suggested translation of “farejei” as “discovered”, and mention the suggestion made by her then partner and secretary, “smoke out”, which she actually used in the final version of the poem.

“Family Portrait” is an interesting poem in the context of Bishop’s own work, as it bears a resemblance to her short story “Memories of Uncle Neddy”, first published in 1977. In both texts the speaker is observing a portrait of his or her relatives and contemplating the strange relationship between the painted portrait and the real person – now dead or changed. The story is, of course, much longer, and with much more biographical detail than the poem, but as far as theme and tone go, the two texts are rather close.

In this case, unlike with the dishes in “The Table”, Bishop decided to translate the names of the children in the picture – Pedro and João are Peter and John in her version of the poem. In this way, the poem is taken out of the Brazilian context, or of the personal context of the Brazilian author’s life, and made more general, more universal. Perhaps even with New Testament echoes silently resonating in the two names.

The last of the family/childhood poems by Drummond included in the anthology is called “Infancy”, and it is a brief memory of the speaker’s childhood. Not a memory of an important childhood event or moment, but rather an image of an everyday scene, a mixture of idyll and nostalgia.

My father got on his horse and went to the field.

My mother stayed sitting and sewing.

My little brother slept.

A small boy alone under the mango trees,

I read the story of Robinson Crusoe,

the long story that never comes to an end.

At noon, white with light, a voice that had learned

lullabies long ago in the slave-quarters – and never forgot –
called us for coffee.

Coffee blacker than the black old woman
delicious coffee
good coffee.

My mother stayed sitting and sewing
watching me:

Shh – don't wake the boy.

She stopped the cradle when a mosquito had lit
and gave a sigh... how deep!

Away off there my father went riding
through the farm's endless wastes.

And I didn't know that my story
was prettier than that of Robinson Crusoe. (*Anthology* 87)

The idyll may not be perfectly happy – the mother sighs, the father is absent; but still it is a story “prettier than that of Robinson Crusoe”, a story the prettiness of which the boy does not realize while he is living it. And although the boy's story is “prettier”, there is a parallel between the boy and Robinson, the model of a lonely man. Later, it was Robinson, whom Bishop chose as the speaker of her nostalgic poem about a lost life and a lost friend, her elegy for Brazil and Lota. The prettiness of the boy's story is not in its adventurousness or eventfulness; on the contrary, it is in its ordinariness, in the everyday which might remind us of the everyday of Helena Morley and her parents. An everyday which is more poetic than poetry, prettier than literature.

The ordinary and the everyday is the main theme of the most famous poem by Drummond: “In the Middle of the Road”. Starting with the first line of Dante’s *Inferno*, the poem which was first published in *Revista de Antropofagia*, the important Brazilian Modernist magazine, in 1928, is rather close to some of the tendencies of Anglo-American Modernism, as we know from some texts by Gertrude Stein or by William Carlos Williams:

In the middle of the road there was a stone
there was a stone in the middle of the road
there was a stone
in the middle of the road there was a stone.

Never should I forget this event
in the life of my fatigued retinas.
Never should I forget that in the middle of the road there was a stone
there was a stone in the middle of the road
in the middle of the road there was a stone. (*Anthology* 89)

In a way, the use of Dante here is ironic – Drummond changes the allegorical “road of my life” in a prosaic, ordinary road with a stone in the middle. On the other hand, knowing Dante, the reader knows it is the road of life where the stone lies, which gives an extra importance to the stone. The ordinary becomes important; a stone in the road is an unforgettable event. Or rather: seeing the stone is an unforgettable event “in the life of my fatigued retinas”. Although the playful repetitive poetics is not Bishop’s, the idea behind it – that seeing something quite common and ordinary can be an event – is.

That Bishop’s and Drummond’s creative minds were close to each other shows not only in the poems she choose to translate. It is a beautiful literary coincidence that

the last poem Carlos Drummond de Andrade ever wrote is called “Elegy for a Dead Toucan”; in this way, he achieved what Bishop never did: her elegy for her dead toucan Uncle Sam was never finished. She could not read his poem, which was written years after her death, and shortly before Drummond’s own in 1987, and we may only wonder if she would have translated it, if she had had the opportunity.

Vinícius de Moraes

Only one of the seven poems by Vinícius de Moraes (1913–1980) which appear in the anthology was translated by Bishop. Vinícius was one of Bishop’s close friends in Brazil. He achieved his long-standing fame mostly through his contribution to Brazilian popular music – as a song-writer, lyricist and interpreter of his own songs. Among his most famous creations are the lyrics for the bossa-nova “The Girl from Ipanema.” He also wrote a play that was made into the script for Marcel Camus’ film *Black Orfeus* (1959). The anthology shows him as a poet, author of lyrical poetry, often in regular forms: there are four sonnets, one of which – “Sonnet of Intimacy” – Bishop chose to translate. She finished the translation at the beginning of 1970, and she sent it in a letter to Robert Lowell with the following commentary: “Having nothing of my own to send, I’ll send a sonnet of Vinícius de Moraes that I did for this bloody anthology. It is almost exactly like the Portuguese and rather funny, I think” (OA 517).

The pastoral “Sonnet of Intimacy” was first published in *The New Yorker* in 1971. Unlike her friend Ashley Brown, who translated the other three sonnets by Vinícius giving up the rhyme almost completely, Bishop tried to keep the sonnet form as closely as possible. She changes the rather difficult rhyme scheme of the “Sonnet of Intimacy” from abba abba ccd dee to a different sonnet pattern abba cdcd efg efg, but she certainly keeps the basic sonnet form. Keeping the rhymes is important in this poem

– its traditional pastoral theme together with a high lyrical form is in a sharp contrast with the vocabulary and tone of the poem. Abandoning the rhyme would loosen the form and weaken the contrast considerably, and it would destroy the poem. It is the kind of poem where it is necessary to preserve the basic tension form/tone, rather than to give a word by word translation. However, Bishop manages to be relatively literal while keeping the principal contrast. Part of the translator’s job here is to keep the surprising vulgar expression, where the contrast reaches its climax. The sestet of the sonnet goes as follows:

The smell of cow manure is delicious.

The cattle look at me unenviously

And when there comes a sudden stream and hiss

Accompanied by a look not unmalicious,

All of us, animals, unemotionally

Partake together of a pleasant piss. (*Anthology* 103)

The very last word of the poem in translation certainly surprises in a text by Elizabeth Bishop, and it attracted the attention of Bishop scholars. Bishop’s biographer explains its appearance by the influence of Bishop’s young American friend (Millier 423) – who certainly had a say in the translations (she was the one responsible for the already mentioned expression “smoke out” in the translation of Drummond’s poem “The Table”); Lorrie Goldensohn sees it as an inappropriately free colloquialism (taking it not as a translation of a similarly strong verb “mijar” but of the rather poetic “festa de espuma” or “feast of foam” 225). But Bishop remains faithful to the original here by keeping the strong colloquial expression. Such a strong word is unusual for Vinícius’s poetry as well, and it is quite difficult to imagine a different way to translate it into

English. It is true that Bishop loses the image of the “feast of foam” in the last line, but it seems to be the kind of sacrifice any translator of poetry who decides to keep the form has to make, and a sacrifice which, in the end, seems to be less harmful than losing the vulgar word or the form. What is questionable is her decision to place this word at the end of the line – in the rhyming position and as the last word of the poem. This puts more stress on the word than the original. (In the original, the word opens the line, which is also a strong position, but definitely less so than the end of the line.) On the other hand, the original stresses the word by repeating it in both the last lines of the final tercets of the sonnets, whereas the translation uses it only once. In this sense, the stressed position of the colloquial expression can be seen as compensation, common in translation. Also, rhyming a vulgar word in a poem usually has a comical effect, which is perfectly appropriate here, and perhaps makes for the loss of the tension between the vulgar “mijar” and the poetical “festa de espuma” of the original, as does the use of the adjective “pleasant”, which mitigates the strength of the vulgar noun.

I mentioned the importance of the elegiac genre for Bishop earlier in this chapter. Speaking about this particular poem, the pastoral and the idyllic genre should be mentioned as well. Bishop is clearly neither a pastoral nor an idyllic poet (the same is true of Vinícius), but both the pastoral and the idyllic have their place in her poetry – often in some kind of contrast or tension with destructive forces. Reading “Sonnet of Intimacy” we think of “In the Village” and the girl taking the cow to pasture or about other passages on Nova Scotia. Vinícius’s pastoral spiked with vulgarisms is different from Bishop’s idyllic scenes tinged with danger or tragedy, yet it can be seen as a – perhaps “lower” – version of it.

João Cabral de Melo Neto

The poet who clearly dominates the anthology, and whom Bishop often mentions among her favorites together with Drummond, is João Cabral de Melo Neto (1920-1999), one of the greatest Brazilian poets of the 20th century. He is represented by twenty poems in the book, which seems almost disproportionate – Drummond has seven, the other poets even less. Eight different translators worked on the English translations of his poems; Bishop translated three longer texts for the anthology – parts of a long Christmas play called *The Death and Life of a Severino* (Morte e Vida Severina). Presumably, she also did the rough translations for those of the poets-translators of the anthology who did not speak Portuguese, as she offered in one of the first letters to Emanuel Brasil concerning the anthology. As with Drummond, Bishop translated Cabral long before the anthology project started. Her translation of the parts of *The Death and Life of a Severino* first appeared in *Poetry* in October 1963. Later, she sent the magazine to the author, who thanked her in a letter and praised her translations.

João Cabral de Melo Neto is younger than the poets of the Modernist generation, and his poetics is different. His earlier works were influenced by surrealism, but gradually he turned to a more simple style, to the concrete world, and to social themes. His growing interest in the local and the popular is reflected in his style in such texts as *The Death and Life of a Severino*, Cabral's most famous work, first published in 1956. It is a long dramatic poem about a contemporary poor Brazilian Everyman, Severino, who emigrates from the Northeast in search of a better life on the coast. It draws from the old popular genres of "auto de natal" (a Christmas play) and that of the "literatura de cordel," a genre of narrative poetry typical of the Northeast region where Cabral was from. Cabral uses the simple language and regular forms of folk poetry and the naive, straightforward style of a Christmas play, which he combines with modern poetic

imagery, and creates a powerful style, not unlike that of Lorca in his plays. The play was successfully performed not only in Brazil, but also in Portugal and in France, and became very popular.

The genre of a play enables the author to present the character and his story directly, through monologues and dialogues, with no need of reflection or commentary. Moreover, the choice of the medieval form of a Christmas play (in combination with the style of popular poetry) adds a certain anti-illusive quality to the text, the reader is put in the role of passive audience watching a play, the action is presented before him and for him, but is never invited to identify with the character speaking. Each part is introduced by a lemma which briefly summarizes what is going to happen: “The “retirante” explains to the reader who he is and what he does” (*Anthology* 127). This compositional feature, reminiscent of the prologue in medieval morality plays or of the chapter headings in medieval romance, emphasizes the anti-illusive effect by adding a metatextual dimension to the text.²³ The readers read about what they are going to read about, which makes them realize the literariness of the text; it draws the attention to the fact that they are reading a work of literature rather than witnessing a real situation. The opening monologue of the main character achieves a similar effect by drawing the attention to the theatricality of the play: Severino introduces himself, addresses the audience (“Vossas Senhorias,” “Your Excellencies”), and makes a clear distinction between the space of the audience and the space of the play. He reminds the audience that they are shown a play:

But, so that Your Excellencies
can recognize me better
and be able to follow better
the story of my life,

I'll be the Severino

you'll now see emigrate. (*Anthology* 129)

Cabral's use of anti-illusive poetic means in this poem is not accidental. His theme of social misery, poverty and helplessness could easily tend to the rhetoric of ideological propaganda on the one hand, or to sentimentality and kitsch on the other. The anti-illusive elements, creating a distance between the text and the reader, prevent both these tendencies, and they – seemingly paradoxically – add to the power of the play. Together with the regular repetitive form, the laconic tone, the simple language, these elements help to engage the reader in a very subtle way. The emotional and social appeal of the text is not achieved through direct emotive outbursts, eloquent argumentation, or by luring the reader into identification with the characters, but rather indirectly, by toning the emotion and the illusion down, by leaving the readers their independence and freedom of judgment. Cabral's way of dealing with pressing social themes in art, creating a work of high aesthetic and poetic value, and avoiding both cheap sentimentality and schematic propaganda, must have appealed to Bishop, who was preoccupied with the possibilities of artistic handling of emotion in general, and whose interest in social themes had grown stronger in Brazil.

Bishop translated three parts of the poem, parts I, II and XIV, some 220 lines altogether. In part I, Severino introduces himself to the readers/audience, or rather tries to introduce himself, which proves to be a difficult task as his name does not identify him well enough.

– My name is Severino,

I have no Christian name.

There are lots of Severinos

(a saint of pilgrimages)

so they began to call me
Maria's Severino.
There are lots of Severinos
with mothers called Maria,
so I became Maria's
of Zacarias, deceased.
But still this doesn't tell much:
there are many in the parish
because of a certain colonel
whose name was Zacarias
who was the very earliest
senhor of this region. (*Anthology* 127)

Later we learn that neither the names of the places where he lives can help, because there are still people of the same name living in the same place, and Severino becomes a kind of Everyman, a universal Severino, one of many Severinos, who are all the same, they live the same lives, and die the same deaths. A name, something that should identify us, single us out, does not work here; instead it makes Severino one of the crowd – identifying him, it blurs his identity. He is “a Severino”, one of them, a bit like the speaker of “In the Waiting Room” is “an *Elizabeth*”, she is also “one of *them*”. Bishop was fond of names, and she was highly conscious of their significance and presence. Although they are not a strikingly conspicuous theme in her works, they keep appearing insistently – names of people, places, brand-names, names of animals, etc. – as I shall discuss later. And with Bishop's predilection for catalogues, we can easily see the attraction of this poem with its repetitive list of names opening it.

The form used in the first part of Cabral's poem is "redondilha maior", an old Portuguese line of seven-syllables which dates back to medieval times and is often used in popular poetry. There are no rhymes, but the even lines are connected by the assonance in "i-a" throughout the first part. The regular but simple form goes well with the natural tone and concrete everyday language, which all together create the final effect of authenticity and unpretentiousness. Far from being decorative, it helps to make the speaker's voice sound laconic, unsentimental, and matter-of-fact; he is not urging the reader to pity him, he is simply presenting facts. This apparent lack of emotion, which is stressed by the form used, does not weaken the appeal of the poem; on the contrary, the very fact that the poem does not beg for sympathy, and creates a certain distance between the reader and the speaker, the reader is able to realize fully what is being presented to him – the misery and hopelessness of the life of the people represented by Severino.

Bishop does not stick to the original form; she abandons the assonance and does not keep a strictly regular metrical pattern. However, her form is not completely unmetrical: in the first part she uses short unrhymed lines with three stressed syllables, turning into quite regular iambic trimeters:

to soften up these stones
by sweating over them,
to try to bring to life
a dead and deader land,
to try to wrest a farm
out of burnt-over land (*Anthology* 129)

but growing looser again, preferring to keep the simple, natural style and the sense of the original rather than imposing a form mechanically and at all costs. This is quite

consistent with Bishop's treatment of form in her own writing, where regular form is often present but only rarely kept strictly; instead Bishop works with variations of regular forms, loosens the strict metrical and rhyming patterns, even abandons them and returns to them in the space of one poem. As Penelope Laurans says about Bishop's formal variations in her essay on Bishop's prosody: "form always yields to the exigency of what she is trying to say. Her patterns are a result of her insistence that formal structures adapt to the developing progression of the poem, rather than predetermine that progression" (76). Similarly, she would not force the translation into a given form, although she is fully conscious of the formal pattern behind it; she works with the form freely, without ever abandoning it for good.

The unrhymed three-stressed lines Bishop used for her translation of the first part of *The Death and Life of a Severino* are not an imitation of the form of the original; sticking to the regular heptasyllabic line with assonances in English would not only require some changes of the original sense and word order, but the result would also quite probably sound much less natural than the original, as this form is not used in English. Substituting the original formal pattern with a corresponding native English form would be similarly problematic: again, modifications of the original meaning would be necessary, and moreover, the poem would be put in the context of a different tradition. Bishop opted for a solution that gives the reader an idea of the form, keeps the rhythm and the flow of the original, and does not appropriate it too much by imposing a perfect English form on it. Clearly, her aim was primarily to maintain the tone, the rhythm and the sense of the poem, and would not sacrifice the original voice to metrical patterns and outer "poetic" qualities (although she never disregards these completely).

Bishop used the kind of form she chose for Severino in her own poetry. The best example of an unrhymed line with three stressed syllables and no strophic pattern is

again “In the Waiting Room”, the poem in which we have already seen a similarity to the opening of the Severino poem in the treatment of a proper name. The theme of the two poems is very different, but the form is used to achieve a similar effect. According to Penelope Laurans, the short line which varies metrically yet keeps a rough three stress pattern helps the poet to avoid sentimentality and tone down the lyric intensity given by the subject matter.

The reader, then, is made to follow this dramatic moment [of sudden awareness of one’s existence] in a kind of flattened verse that leaves him reflecting on, rather than immediately engaging in, the experience with the poet. It is not that the poem does not contain deep feeling or that it does not have emotional impact; but the feeling is tightly controlled by the formal configuration of the words, which keep it from being either cheap or easy, and the impact is deflected to give it subtler resonance.

(89)

In the Severino poem, the effect seems to be analogous: the form does not give space to sentimentality, it adds to the laconic tone of the poem, which does not engage the reader by a direct emotional appeal, but in a much subtler way, by an apparent lack of emotion. As we have seen earlier, this is also what the form does in the original. By using different formal means Bishop achieves the same goal. Clearly, she considered this powerful tension between what is being said and the way it is said crucial for the poem, and therefore worth keeping, while other things could be lost (e. g. the assonance). And not only did she find an appropriate form to keep this tension, but later used the same form in her own poetry when she wanted to achieve a similar effect.

In the second part of the poem, a different formal structure is used both in the original and the translation. This part is a dialog between Severino and a group of men,

called “brothers of souls,” carrying a dead body. Severino asks questions about the dead man, and they give answers, each question and each answer consists of four lines, but the quatrains are not graphically divided into stanzas. In the original, the first and the third line of each quatrain are heptasyllabic, the second and the fourth tetrasyllabic, the second one being the chorus “irmão/s das almas,” “brother/s of souls.” The two shorter lines are connected by assonance in a–a:

– A quem estais carregando,
irmãos das almas,
embrulhado nessa rêde?
dizei que eu saiba.
– A um defunto de nada,
irmão das almas,
que há muitas horas viaja
à sua morada. (*Anthology* 130)

Bishop retains the basic pattern of quatrains with alternating longer and shorter lines, which brings the form close to the English ballad stanza:

– Whom are you carrying,
brothers of souls,
wrapped in that hammock?
kindly inform me.
– A defunct nobody,
brother of souls,
travelling long hours to
his resting place.
– Do you know who he was,

brothers of souls?
Do you know what his name is,
or what it was?
– Severino Farmer,
brother of souls,
Severino Farmer,
farming no more. (*Anthology* 131)

Although the form is suggestive of the English ballad, Bishop does not impose a form preexistent in the English literary tradition on the original poem, she does not “domesticate”, to use Lawrence Venuti’s term, the Brazilian poem by forcing it into a familiar pattern alien to the context of the original, which seems to be what Araújo de Oliveira suggests in his criticism of this translation (63-64). First, the form used in the English version of the poem is not a perfect old English ballad stanza: all the lines are shorter (mostly trimeters alternating with dimeters), there is no rhyme (she abandons the assonance). Secondly, the features of the form which connect it to the English ballad are those that are also present in the Portuguese original: the alternation of long and short lines, the chorus, the monotonous dialog form. As in the previous part, Bishop neither slavishly imitates the original form, nor does she replace it with an existing native formal pattern, but creates a form that keeps the features of the original she considered crucial: its folk aspect, simplicity, repetitiveness, unemotional, laconic tone.

Victoria Harrison makes a connection between the rhythm of this poem and the fourth of the “Songs for a Colored Singer”, and sees the line “this bullet bird wanted / to fly more freely” echoed in “Sonnet” (Harrison 180), where the image of a freed bird appears. However, this one correspondence of motifs does not seem enough to connect

these two texts on a deeper level. According to Harrison, the parallels between Cabral's poem and Bishop's own works do not go beyond these rather superficial echoes:

Except in the resonances of words and rhythms, however, Bishop would not have written this poem. She did not, on her own, have access to the voices of a village of poor farmers. Nor would she have been able, or have chosen, in her own poetry, to utter their anger at social and economic oppression and their awareness of their disempowerment in the face of "Your Excellencies" or their bullet birds. In choosing to translate these sections of the work, however, she extended her own reach into the political and social concerns of a speaker otherwise wholly removed from her. (180-81)

It is true that Bishop does not write overtly socially critical poetry, but that does not mean that social themes are completely absent from her works. Neither is it accurate to say that she would not try to express the concerns of a speaker "wholly removed from her" (Harrison 181) in her own poems – it is enough to read the first of the "Songs for a Colored Singer" ("A washing hangs upon the line, / but it's not mine. / None of the things that I can see / belong to me") to see that she was capable of speaking in a voice representing a social group very different from her own. Bishop certainly never was a politically engaged poet, who would use her poetry to comment critically on social issues or to call for change. Her interest was not political or ideological, but poetic – poverty is not purely and necessarily seen in terms of suffering and anger, it can be seen in terms of beauty, or in terms of "otherness." Social motifs appear already in Bishop's earlier texts, particularly those inspired by her experience of the poor Cubans and black servants in Key West in the 1940's, such as "Jerónimo's House," "Cootchie," or the prose pieces "Gregorio Valdes" and "Mercedes Hospital." During her stay in Brazil,

which involved the experience of marked class differences and extreme poverty, she viewed social themes with renewed interest. In 1966, she said in an interview with Ashley Brown: "I'm much more interested in social problems and politics now than I was in the '30's" (Monteiro 22). Bishop writes about what she sees, and the social aspect of the Brazilian experience was hard to overlook, and it figures among the themes Bishop tried to deal with in her Brazilian texts, as we can see from poems like "Squatter's Children," "Manuelzinho," "Going to Bakery," "Pink Dog" (finished years later) or the prose text "To the Botequim & Back." Her translations of *The Death and Life of a Severino* coincide with this interest, and Cabral's poetry, which finds a way to address social problems without becoming offensively didactic or ideological by turning to traditional folk forms and recreating them into modern poetry, must have been a welcome source of inspiration for her. The poem which is closest to Cabral's way of treating these themes was published in *The New Yorker* in November 1964, a year after the translation of the Cabral poem first came out. It is one of Bishop's longest poems, the ballad "The Burglar of Babylon," which Bishop later included at the end of the Brazilian part of *Questions of Travel* and then published as a separate volume in 1968. Although Bishop considered the poem important enough to deserve a volume and an introduction of its own, and although she said Marianne Moore thought it her best poem (OA 431), the ballad has been rarely discussed by critics in greater detail. It is usually mentioned in passing in connection to her other Brazilian poems, often considered less successful than these. C. K. Doreski comments:

"The Burglar of Babylon" fails to win sympathy because of a lack of antecedent material (perhaps the folk ballad itself subverts the poem's intensity by subjecting the psychological tension to overly linear narrative strategies). The poem generates neither sympathy nor guilt; the

central figure remains too distanced for pity or even the enlightenment of the reader. (130)

Doreski sees the poem as a failure and blames the form chosen for destroying the potential of the material because it distances the reader from the “hero” of the ballad. Jonathan Ellis also mentions the “distancing techniques” used in “The Burglar of Babylon”, seeing them as measures to protect the speaker (*Art and Memory* 86). However, one of the few in-depth analyses of the poem, Jacqueline Vaught Brogan’s essay “Naming the Thief in ‘Babylon’: Elizabeth Bishop and ‘the Moral of the Story,’” points out that the distance is key to the understanding of the poem: “it is precisely the distancing created by the dominant and reductive language used to describe Micuçu that points to the real ‘moral of the story’ in this poem” (Brogan 525–26). What could be (and was) seen as Bishop’s failure to convey strong emotions, should be, in fact, seen as her success and intention – she chose the regular repetitive folk form and the laconic, indifferent tone in order not to fall in the trap of cheap sympathy or easy moralizing. The poem is, despite all the nice rhythm and musicality, deeply disturbing precisely because it does not allow us to identify with the main character, to make a hero of him, neither does it accuse or call for action. It leaves the reader feeling uncomfortable, which is exactly what it is meant to do.

Putting Bishop’s own ballad and the techniques she used in it next to her translation of *The Death and Life of a Severino* can be revealing in the sense that it can show more clearly what she wanted to achieve and what she did to achieve it. We have seen that in her translation, she tried to keep the tone, the distancing function of form, the unemotionality in order to avoid sentimentality and ideology. We can observe similar efforts in her own ballad, which can help us to appreciate it as an achievement in

the treatment of a difficult social theme, a theme which could seem very un-Bishop-like at first sight.

An Anthology of Twentieth-Century Brazilian Poetry was Bishop's second largest translation project, after *The Diary of "Helena Morley"*. The anthology was not the kind of labor of love *The Diary* was; the driving force here seems to have been rather a sense of obligation. However, looking at the texts by Brazilian poets Bishop chose to translate, we can see that her choice was deeply personal, and that it was led primarily by her search for a kindred poetic vision, not so much by an effort to give an "objective" picture of the poets and the period. Seen in the context of Bishop's own work, published and unpublished, finished and only intended, the Brazilian poems she translated offer a kind of commentary on her own work, and can even serve as a way to approach her own texts, realizing what was important to her or what she was interested in. The anthology can also be placed among Bishop's books, as a step between *Questions of Travel* and *Geography III*, a step in which the voices of other poets helped her to form and develop her own way of seeing some things and speaking about them.

Sambas and Popular Songs

During her time in Brazil, Bishop was interested not only in the works of major contemporary Brazilian poets, but was, to no lesser extent, fascinated by the popular culture of the carnival and the sambas. She mentions them repeatedly and enthusiastically in her letters, and she did English translations of several samba lyrics. Her first translations of sambas are from the early 1960's, the same period when she worked on her translations of Drummond and Cabral. These are the short texts which appear as "Four Sambas" in the translations section of *The Complete Poems* (1983) and of *Poems, Prose, and Letters* (2008). However, Bishop did not publish these as separate poems, but as a part of a longer essay "On the Railroad Named Delight" written for *New York Times* on the occasion of the 400th anniversary of Rio de Janeiro, published on May 7, 1965.²⁴ This text contains a passage on the sambas and the translations are given as examples of samba lyrics:

The sambas, *marchas* and other Carnival songs are the living poetry of poor Cariocans. [...] Their songs have always been made from whatever happened to be on their minds: obsessions, fads, fancies and grievances; love, poverty, drink and politics; their love for Rio, but also Rio's three perennial problems: water, light, and transportation. As an old samba says:

Rio de Janeiro,

My joy and my delight!

By day I have no water,

By night I have no light. (PPL 442-43)

The four lines are a fairly literal translation of the first stanza of the successful *marchinha* “Vagalume” (Firefly, 1954) by Vitor Simon and Fernando Martins (the original goes: “Rio de Janeiro/ Cidade que me seduz/ De dia falta água/ E de noite falta luz”). There are two more examples of samba lyrics reflecting the current social and political situation in Rio, one commenting on the coup which happened the year before, the other complaining about transportation (accompanied by a footnote explaining the topography referred to by the local place names). Later in the essay, Bishop comments:

The words of sambas are nothing without the music, and some of the longest-lived and musically most beautiful have the most hackneyed lyrics. Love – light love and serious love – infidelity, prostitution, police raids and line-ups (the subject of a very pretty one this year), moonlight, beaches, kisses, heartbreak, and love again:

Come, my mulatta,
Take me back.
You’re the joker
In my pack,
The prune in my pudding,
Pepper in my pie,
My package of peanuts,
The moon in my sky. (PPL 444)

Although she clearly did not mean these translations as independent poems, but rather as illustrations to give American readers an idea of samba lyrics, she produced very good texts, not only reproducing the basic meaning, but keeping the form, the rhythm, the energy of the original songs – particularly in the two examples quoted above.

Bishop returned to sambas and their translations once again, much later, when she no longer lived in Brazil. In April 1977 she and her friend Ricardo Sternberg, a young Harvard student of Brazilian origin, prepared a program for Bristol Community College in Fall River, MA, which offered “a brief survey of [Brazilian] popular music and some verse from 1930–1970” (VC 71.4). She mentioned the project in an interview with Beatriz Schiller for *Jornal do Brazil*: “Ricardo plays the guitar. We are going to read and sing Brazilian poetry, in the original and in English translation” (Monteiro 79). There is a typescript containing a list of songs proposed for the performance, and drafted translations of some of them. None of these translations was published in Bishop’s lifetime, and only one appeared in print posthumously, in *Poems, Prose, and Letters* (2008). It is “A Banda” by Chico Buarque de Hollanda (1944), a song which was a hit in 1966 and made its author famous.

Unlike the sambas in “On the Railroad Named Delight”, these translations – including “A Banda” – were obviously intended as informative, offering a more or less literal rendering of the contents, with little effort to reflect the formal features, such as rhymes or rhythm. They are drafts, rather than finished translations, which is obvious already in the first line of “A Banda” containing a variant translation in the brackets: “I was at loose ends (doing nothing), my love called me”; similarly, the translation of the repeated line (Pra ver a banda passar / Cantando coisas de amor”) varies between “To see the band go by, singing about love” and “To see the band go by, singing of love”. The original is rhymed and fairly regular, but the translation does not attempt to keep these patterns. The same is true of the other drafts made for this occasion: the 1930’s samba by Noel Rosa “The Yellow Ribbon”: “If I die / I don’t want weeping or candles / I want a yellow ribbon / Embroidered with her name...” (VC 71.4), or “The Duck” – listed as one of the “two silly songs”: “Cheerfully the duck comes singing – quack

quack / when the duck (?) gull (?) asks him smiling / to join in the samba, too, the samba” (VC 71.4).

Bishop’s attraction to these popular genres in Brazil, which found its immediate expression in the translations of the sambas and also of the parts of *The Death and Life of a Severino* by João Cabral de Melo Neto, was far from an ephemeral whim. On the contrary, it betrays a consistent, albeit inconspicuous, line of interest present in her poetry from the outset. There is a recurrent preoccupation with the popular voice, with unschooled, authentic expression, and spontaneity, as we have seen in her translation of *The Diary of “Helena Morley”*, and in her stories – particularly “Gregorio Valdes”, which I have discussed in this connection above, but also, for example, in her other Key West story, “Mercedes Hospital”; it can be also noticed in the voices sounding in some of her poems (“Under the Window: Ouro Preto”, “The Moose”). In the sambas, this line of interest combines with another one, one we have already mentioned in connection with Aristophanes and Max Jacob, and which also appeared in some of the translations for the anthology, and which comes up in her letters and comments: the interest in the carnivalesque, the grotesque, wild and playful.

The interest in the popular genres is explicitly stated in a letter to Anne Stevenson from March 20, 1963, in which Bishop expresses the ambition to write a popular song herself:

I have always wanted – like many other poets, I think – to write some really “popular” songs, not “art” songs. One thing I like very much in Brazil is the popular music – the yearly sambas are, or were (too much US influence now, I’m afraid), often superb spontaneous folk-music, and I want very much to write a piece about them – the collecting is very difficult here, however. There is also a living tradition, in the interior, of

ballads – new events, old tales, etc. – not such good poetry as the sambas
but rather wonderful all the same. (PPL 845)

The poem which, at least partly, resulted from this ambition was published in *The New Yorker* one year later: the ballad of “The Burglar of Babylon”. The ballad was inspired by Bishop’s fascination with the popular songs of Brazil, and also by the works of João Cabral de Melo Neto, the poet who worked with the popular tradition and transformed it into original modern poetry (the connection between Bishop’s poem and Cabral’s *The Death and Life of a Severino* was discussed in the chapter on her translations of Cabral). The fact that she published the poem in a separate volume in 1968 (after it also appeared in *Questions of Travel* in 1965) gives it a privileged position among her works and suggests that she gave it a special attention. She mentions the success of “The Burglar of Babylon” in another letter to Anne Stevenson (February 7, 1965), manifested in a number of translations of it into different languages:

You might be interested in knowing that the “Ballad” has had quite a success in Rio – I’ve received three different translations in Portuguese of it, & one in Czech (?), also German & Italian versions... (not very good). (WU 1.2)

“The Burglar of Babylon” nearly the “popular song” Bishop “always wanted to write”, and although it never did, it seems that it came close in 1968 when Bishop was in San Francisco and according to Fountain and Brazeau’s *Oral Biography*, the British singer Donovan expressed interest in putting “The Burglar of Babylon” to music, and Bishop mentioned to her friend Helen Muchnic that “she hoped this poem might become a hit song (246).

The poem, which did not become a song, was not Bishop’s first attempt of this kind. The set of four “Songs for a Colored Singer” from her first book, which precedes

the ballad of “The Burglar of Babylon” and the attraction to the sambas and popular songs of Brazil by a couple of decades, seem to stem from the same ambition. Bishop wrote the songs for Billie Holiday, and, according to Lloyd Schwartz, “she’d always hoped someone would set the poem to music so that Billie Holiday would record it” (Fountain and Brazeau 328). And neither was “The Burglar of Babylon” the only ballad Bishop ever wrote – one of her first published poems is “The Ballad of the Subway Trains”, which came out in *The Owl*, the school magazine at the North Shore Country Day School she attended in 1926–27.

Bishop’s interest in popular songs was present in her works from very early on, and the Brazilian sambas and other popular genres refreshed it and gave it a new inspiration, which did not disappear even after Bishop left Brazil. In fact, the last poem Bishop finished is one which made carnival and sambas its topic: the disturbingly grotesque and playful “Pink Dog”, which she started in Brazil in the early 1960’s (during the carnival season of 1963, according to Brett C. Millier, 343), but did not finish until the year of her death, 1979.

Octavio Paz

The last author Elizabeth Bishop translated in her lifetime was the Mexican poet and essayist Octavio Paz (1914–1998), whom she knew in Boston in the 1970's. Paz was already a distinguished figure both in his native Mexico and internationally, with many of his best-known books published, although the most important literary awards – the Cervantes Award, the Neustadt Prize and the Nobel Prize for Literature – were still ahead of him. In 1971–72, Paz delivered the Charles Eliot Norton lectures at Harvard, and he taught other classes there in the following years. He and his second wife, Marie-José (or Marie Jo), lived in Cambridge and they soon became a part of Elizabeth Bishop's circle of friends. They met early in 1972 and Bishop, who also taught at Harvard at that time, was immediately charmed by the couple. In a letter to Selden Rodman, on February 11, 1972, she wrote: "I have just got to know Octavio Paz and I enjoy him & his wife both very much. They're amusing and unpretentious and nice. I went to his first lecture – a course in Spanish American Poetry – yesterday, and to my surprise understood every word. I'd thought my Spanish hopelessly drowned in Portuguese by now" (OA 558). In the years to follow, the Pazes formed an important part of Bishop's social life during their stays in Boston, and were among her correspondents when they were back in Mexico. Bishop praised their friendliness and open "Latin temperament", calling them "the only people, or almost, with whom one can have 'fun' here [in Boston]" (OA 586). She gave parties for them, including an Easter breakfast party where Paz got introduced to the Easter egg-hunt tradition ("Octavio madly searching my bedroom and bathroom for eggs" [OA 565]), took them for a trip to see the New England winter in January 1974, and later that year she visited them briefly in Mexico, where she and Paz participated in a TV debate on poetry

together with Joseph Brodsky and Vasco Popa (“I felt I really wasn’t up to the three gentlemen poets, who had *said* they weren’t going to argue or discuss ‘theories’ and then did, vehemently – for 2 hours” [OA 598]).

Shortly after they met, Bishop agreed to translate some of Paz’s poems. Paz had been translated into English before: there were three different translations of his long poem *Sun Stone* (*Piedra del Sol*, 1957) published in the 1960’s (one of the translators was Muriel Rukeyser, Bishop’s classmate at Vassar for a brief period), from 1970 on, the main translator and editor of Paz’s poetry was Eliot Weinberger, whose close collaboration with Paz eventually led to the publication of *The Collected Poems of Octavio Paz 1957–1987* in 1987 which also contained some of Bishop’s translations.

In a letter sent from Cambridge on March 13, 1972, Paz thanks Bishop enthusiastically (both in English and in Spanish) for having decided to translate his poems, and he sends her the texts he has chosen: four poems from his last published book of the moment *Ladera Este* (*Eastern Slope*, 1969) and some more recent ones. Among the Bishop papers, there are translations of ten poems by Octavio Paz, only five of which have been published. Three of these, “The Key of Water” (*La llave de agua*), “Along Galeana Street” (*Por la calle de Galeana*), “The Grove” (*La arboleda*), appeared in the *Harvard Advocate* of Summer 1972, which means that Bishop must have translated them almost immediately after she had received them. In 1979, these three translations were included in *A Draft of Shadows and Other Poems*, a bilingual edition of Paz’s selected poems prepared by Eliot Weinberger and published by New Directions, together with other two translations done by Bishop, “Objects & Apparitions” (*Objetos y apariciones*) and “January First” (*Primero de enero*). All these five published translations also appear in Bishop’s *Complete Poems 1927–1979*, published by Farrar, Straus and Giroux in 1983, and also in the *Library of America*

edition of Bishop's *Poems, Prose and Letters* (2008) prepared by Robert Giroux and Lloyd Schwartz.

However, there is an editorial problem with the published versions of some of the texts, particularly "The Grove" and "The Key of Water." At the moment of the magazine publication of the English translation, the Spanish original of "The Grove" had not been published in a book yet. Bishop translated it from a manuscript Paz had sent her in 1972. But later, Paz revised the poem considerably for the book publication, and, quite naturally, wanted the revised version to appear in the English edition of his selected poems. He sent Bishop the revised version of the poem in Spanish with a literal English translation, asking her to revise her translation, which she did. In a long letter from February 8, 1979 she praises Paz's literal translation, explains some of her suggested changes and asks questions about some details of the poem.

The final revised version of the translation appeared in *A Draft of Shadows and Other Poems* and also in all the later editions of Paz's poems in English which include this poem (including *The Collected Poems of Octavio Paz 1957–1987*, and also some anthologies of Latin American poetry). However, all the editions of Bishop's poetry use the unrevised version, as it originally appeared in the magazine. Apart from revising "The Grove," Bishop also accepted Paz's suggestion to change the verb in the last line of the short poem "The Key of Water", "Esa noche mojé mis manos en tus pechos," which in Bishop's original translation (also reprinted in the *Complete Poems* and *Poems, Prose, and Letters*) reads: "That night I laved my hands in your breasts" (CP 269, PPL 313). In his letter from January 21, 1979, Paz asks: "could it not be better, in the last line of *La llave de agua*, instead of *laved* to put *dipped*?" (VC 17.5), and Bishop answers: "Yes – I think 'dipped' is better than 'laved' in *La llave de agua*. Lave is an awful word and I can't remember now why I felt I had to use it" (VC 17.5). The

corrected version of the poem with the last line reading “That night I dipped my hands in your breasts,” (*A Draft of Shadows* 21) appears in all the English editions of Paz, but unfortunately, the editors of Bishop’s poetry keep including the first versions of her translations, instead of publishing her last authorized versions.

In the case of “The Key of Water,” the difference between the two versions is not too striking, although it seems unfortunate that all editions of Bishop’s poetry should include the version with the word “lave” she considered “awful,” while all the editions of Paz have the “dipped” she considered better.²⁵ With “The Grove,” the problem is more serious because the version published in Bishop’s collected poems is the one based on the unrevised version of the original, and therefore it differs noticeably from the poem Paz eventually published – some of the lines were radically changed, others were added or left out, and the translation the reader finds in Bishop simply seems not to correspond to the original at all, unlike the revised translation which appears in the editions of Paz.

The unpublished translations of Paz include five texts: “Tomb of Amir Khusrú” (Tumba de Amir Khusrú), “Near Cape Comorín” (Cerca del Cabo Comorín), “Maithuna”, “Words in the form of a dust cloud” (Palabras en forma de tolvana; originally called “The Page”), and the untitled poem starting with the line “It moves aerial,” which was later called “Paisaje inmemorial” in Spanish. Some of these exist in one draft only (“Tomb of Amir Khursu,” “Maithuna,” “It moves aerial”), but the other two were revised, especially “Near Cape Comorín,” in which Bishop clearly tried hard to keep the irregular rhyme as the four drafts of the translation show. (Eliot Weinberger’s translation which appears in Paz’s *Collected Poems* abandons any attempt at rhyme). The reason why these five translations were never published is not certain, but it can be assumed that Bishop was not happy with them, and did not consider it

appropriate to offer them for magazine publication, and they did not appear in the books of Paz's poems. (The English edition of Paz's *Collected Poems* does include these texts, but not in Bishop's translations.)

Compared to her previous translations, Bishop's work on Paz's poems was specific in several aspects. For the first time she worked in close collaboration with the author, and an author whose English was very good. Sometimes Paz offered literal English translations, and he was also capable of noticing mistakes or suggesting changes in Bishop's translations. Bishop clearly realized the importance of his role in the translations, and she presented her translations as a collaboration with Paz. It seems she did not choose any of the poems for translation herself; they were all picked for her by Paz, and it is doubtful whether she would ever have decided to translate his poetry at all if she had not made friends with him. (According to Brett C. Millier, Bishop even "claimed at first not to like his poems" [457].) It is therefore difficult to attempt to analyze the aesthetic motivations which led to the choice of the particular texts.

Paz was also the only poet Bishop translated who translated her poetry in turn. In 1974, he included his versions of "The Monument," "A Summer's Dream" and "Visits to St. Elizabeths" in a book of his translations *Versiones y Diversiones*; later he translated "The End of March" and at least worked on "North Haven." Bishop revised his translations and offered explanations and suggestions. The two poets' comments on each other's translations and texts, albeit scarce, form a dialog full of mutual respect and admiration, but more than that, they reveal their respect for language and detail. Every word deserves to be discussed, described, weighed and compared to others, as when Bishop writes: "The word 'dazzling' is correct – but somehow 'dazzling' has taken on a slightly different meaning, I think – to me it suggests a *surface* dazzling or scintillation – which I don't think is what you mean exactly. 'Brilliant' is probably too vague..." (VC

17.5), their two languages are seen against each other, in perfectly physical terms, as in Paz's letter about the "End of March": "your language is made of small elastic blocks of syllables, but Spanish breaks its spine in these coiling constructions"²⁶ (VC 17.5).

One particular poem by Paz has a special position in the context of Bishop's published poetry: "Objects & Apparitions" is the only translation that she ever decided to include in her own book of poetry (she did include some of her translations of Brazilian poetry in her *Complete Poems* in 1969, but never made them part of any of her separate books of poems). It appeared in her last book, *Geography III* (1976), not separately and marked clearly as a translation, but as an organic part of her own poetry. It is the last but one poem in the book, following after "The End of March", and followed by "Five Flights Up". Paz's name does not appear at the beginning of the poem, but only at the end, in a note "Translated from the Spanish of Octavio Paz" (PPL 170). The 1983 edition of Bishop's *Complete Poems 1927–1979* changed the original arrangement, and took the translation out of *Geography III* and put it in the section of translations, but the recent Library of America edition prints "Objects & Apparitions" as a part of *Geography III* again.

The unrhymed poem, consisting of thirteen tercets and a final couplet, is dedicated to Joseph Cornell (1903-1972), the American artist famous for his collages and assemblages made of found objects put into small, glass-front boxes. The poem does not describe any particular object by Cornell, but refers to the details of many of them, and captures the basic features of Cornell's poetics:

Hexahedrons of wood and glass,
scarcely bigger than a shoebox,
with room in them for night and all its lights.

Monuments to every moment,
refuse of every moment, used:
cages of infinity.

[...]

boxes where things hurry away from their names.

Slot machines of visions,
condensation flask for conversations,
hotel of crickets and constellations.

Minimal, incoherent fragments:
the opposite of History, creator of ruins,
out of your ruins you have made creations.

Cornell finds creative potential in details, fragments of everydayness; he takes litter, and without altering it, simply by picking it and putting it into his box, turns it into art. His boxes allow “things hurry away from their names” – things stop being what we know them to be, they gain a new sense, but it is not through some fundamental change or transformation happening to them; rather, the artist makes them reveal their hidden potential.

The poem is not only a confession of admiration of the poet towards the artist; the long description and definition of Cornell’s work ends with two lines in which the poet identifies his poetics with that of the artist: “Joseph Cornell: inside your boxes / my words became visible for a moment.” Quite suddenly and explicitly, the poet enters the poem as a fellow creator, one who regards his work as analogous, only expressed

through a different medium. Cornell's works make his words visible, he sees his own poetics in Cornell's visual objects. The poem is no longer merely a description of the plastic artist's work, but a dialogue between the two artists.

Bishop was an admirer of Cornell's work long before she met Paz and translated his poem. She even made objects inspired by his "boxes". Her translation of "Objects & Apparitions", and particularly the fact that she decided to make it a part of a collection of her own poetry, adds another dimension to the text. She does not only translate the original dialogue between the poet and the artist into English, but she enters it and turns it into a triologue. Paz relates his own poetics to that of Joseph Cornell; by translating his poem and including it into her works, Bishop joins in this relation. By this gesture she connects both Cornell and Paz to her poetics, acknowledging a complex affinity between the works of the three creators.

Apart from capturing general poetic features Bishop can relate to, Paz's poem about Cornell offers more particular parallels to Bishop's works: it is a poem describing a work of art (or works of art), which reminds us of Bishop's poems of the same genre ("Large Bad Picture", "Poem", "Monument"); it raises the question of the relationship between art and its object (the found objects turned into art), a question touched on by Bishop quite often, more or less explicitly (we can think of "The Map" or, for example of "Brazil, January 1, 1502", where issue of landscape seen as art appears); the lines contrasting Cornell's art with "History" resonates with "The Map" and its opposition between the art of the map-maker and that of the historian.

The last line of Paz's poem would probably not appear in a poem by Bishop – it would be too much for her modesty and restraint. Here, the translation may have served her in a similar way we have seen in the discussions of her earlier translations: it allowed her to write a poem she would have trouble writing herself for some reason.

Such an explicit and self-confident identification of her own art with that of an artist she admires would have been difficult for her in her own original poem, but she could do it in the costume and through the voice of another great poet, Octavio Paz.

II.

Translation as Poetics

The main argument of my dissertation is that translation can be seen not only as a creative process but as a creative principle. Translation is usually discussed and thought of in terms of the art or craft of translating from one language to another and mediating between two cultures. I will try to demonstrate that we can also see translation in broader terms as a general aesthetic approach, as a way of aesthetic perception. It can be considered as a creative principle lying not only (and not always) behind the process of translating literature from one language to another, but behind the “original” work as well. By this I am not trying to develop the argument that all poetry (or, in fact, all writing) is translation because the very process of using language, of conceptualizing the world and of finding words to express thoughts or describe things, can be seen as a process of translation. This has been suggested by poets and thinkers (Baudelaire, Paz, Steiner) and it is an attractive and inspiring idea, but one that belongs rather to the area of the philosophy of language rather than aesthetics or poetics. My point here is not that all writing, regardless of what is written, how it is written and by whom, is translation. I would like to argue that a certain type of poetic imagination can be seen and discussed in terms of translation. Translation as a creative principle is a way of seeing things and understanding poetry which has features that are characteristic of the translator’s approach towards her art. This is not saying that the work based on this principle is similar to translation or that the author necessarily sees her poetry as translation. Rather I argue that there is a type of poetics, not universal but not limited to just one poet, which could be characterized as translation.

Distinguishing this poetic type and tracing its characteristics can serve as a prism through which many poems can be seen and read. It can serve as a key to interpretation of the works of the authors who share this poetic principle although their poetry can differ considerably. I will try to comment on this type of poetics using the example of Elizabeth Bishop, who is one of its representatives, but it could be similarly applied to the works of others. Seeing Bishop's poetics in terms of translation can provide new and inspiring insights into her poetry, and allow us to notice features of her poetry which may remain neglected in the readings based on other principles. It can also let us make connections between aspects of her poetry that have been discussed separately by critics, and see them as different manifestations of a particular poetics.

Using the term "translation poetics" is certainly not the only possible way to speak about this type of poetics. However, there seem to be parallels and connections between it and translation, and having translation and some of its principles in mind can help us in distinguishing and analyzing this type of poetics. I do not argue that poets of this type necessarily have to be translators (although it seems natural that their conception of language and creation might also involve an inclination towards translation) or that all poets who do translations represent this type of poetics (one could put together a long list of poets-translators whose poetics, both in their original poetry and in their translations, is radically different). However, intimate experience with a foreign language (or foreign languages) seems to play an important role in the formation of the poet's poetics and will be often connected with this poetic type. Living between two languages – speaking one's own language in a foreign country, for example, – can have a huge creative potential for someone who works with language and is particularly sensitive about it. Again, this does not mean that every poet who has a strong experience with a foreign language will necessarily turn into a "translator type" of poet;

rather we might argue that a poet with a “translator’s mind” would naturally tend to meeting other languages and other cultures.

In my attempt to define and characterize this poetic type, I use the term translation not so much in order to compare particular methods used by the poet to those of a translator (although that could be done in many cases), but rather to point out a certain affinity between their approaches to their creation, which manifests itself on different levels of their work. The basic gesture or principle underlying this type of creation is the openness towards and the awareness of “the other” the poet-translator is meeting. The focus moves out of the creator’s self towards the other; the goal of the creation is neither to dominate and appropriate the other nor to identify with it and yield to it, but to understand it, and to get as close to it as possible. The meeting of the other requires the translator-poet’s stepping out towards the other, moving on the border between two worlds – his own and the other. With the translator, the distinction between the self and the other is quite obvious: there is the other – the foreign text, its language, its context, the culture and the world it comes from and brings with it – on the one hand, and the self – the translator’s world and cultural context, his own language and the final translation – on the other. With the poet, where there is no foreign text, the question of what “the other” is might seem problematic. However, what is central to the “translation poetics” is not the identity of “the other”. The key moment is the constant awareness of “the other”, and the openness towards it. It is not so important what the other is – it can be many things: objects, landscapes, people, different cultures (Brazil is the obvious example in Bishop), animals, words and names, other viewpoints or interpretations, other texts, etc. What matters is that the centre of attention is directed towards the other, not towards the self; that the self is open to and respectful of something that is not the self. The creation reflects this openness and the stepping out of

the self: the poem does not happen within the self, but in the space between the self and the other, where the search for the other happens.

The slightly uncertain border space of search is typical for Elizabeth Bishop's poetry: we can think, for example, of her self-corrections, epanorthoses, doubts and specifications (all the brackets, maybe's, or's, and question marks), which do not present us with the result of a search (as we could expect from a finished poem), but which betray the process of search itself. On a more explicit thematic level, we can consider the large number of poems which actually take place on the physical border (most often the border between the land and the sea: "The Map," "The Bight," "At the Fishhouses," "The Sandpiper," "The End of March" and many others), and also the many poems which feature a meeting with a different world, which can be represented by another country (e.g. "Arrival at Santos", "Brazil, January 1, 1502"), by a different person (e.g. "Manuelzinho," "House Guest") or, rather often in Bishop's case, by an animal (e.g. the seal in "At the Fishhouses," the moose in "The Moose"). Searching for the other is also connected with losing, and the attempt at meeting the other can often end in failure; the inevitable loss, and the constant threat of the failure to find the way to meet the other are at the heart of every translator's experience, and not surprisingly, they are a recurrent theme in Bishop's poetry. Other characteristic aspects of Bishop's poetry that have been noted and discussed by readers and critics can be seen as different manifestations of translation poetics: her position of a more or less distanced observer, her shifts of perspective, her perfectionism (and her skepticism), her modesty, or her effort at precision and her concern with detail.

It should be stressed that the affinity of this type of poetics to translation is not limited to the thematic level – the principle of the meeting of the other is not reduced to writing about such meeting. These meetings happen in the poems; or rather the poems –

not only through their themes, but through their language, form, structure, rhetoric – create these meetings. Of course, language is crucial here, as everything in poetry ultimately happens through and in language. On a very general level, we could say that the work of the “translator type” of poet with language is close to that of the translator. A translator has to move constantly on the border between two different languages, and in every single word she is faced with the necessity to reflect on the word, on the possible analogues in her own language, and on the differences between them. Translation is characterized (and conditioned) by an extreme sensitivity towards language and a permanent conscious reflection on it. A similar sensitivity and reflection concerning language can be found in original poetry, where the presence of another language is possible but certainly not necessary. One might, of course, argue that language and the sensitivity to it stand in the centre of all poetry, which is an undisputable fact although a surprising number of critics seem to have the tendency to relegate language from its central and dominant position in poetry to a minor role of a necessary means through which the “important” things (such as the poet’s experience or opinion) are communicated; some critics almost ignore language in poetry. My argument is not that it is mere language awareness which distinguishes this poetic type from others; however, I consider it important to stress its presence, as it stands at the basis of the aspects which are peculiar to what I call “translation poetics”.

Bishop’s awareness of the possibilities and the limits of language and of expression, and of the plurality of language can be seen throughout her works. As a translator from several foreign languages, she had a rich and long experience with languages and with different cultures, and her writings, letters and notes betray a continuous interest in language and translation. Even though translation does not figure as an explicit theme in her poetry (it does occasionally appear in her autobiographical

prose, as in “A Trip to Vigia,” where the narrator unsuccessfully tries to entertain her Brazilian hosts with literary anecdotes which prove untranslatable in the end), the way she deals with language in her poems often betrays the hidden presence of translation, or rather that of the consciousness of translation and of the multilingual world, of the parallel existence of many languages, dialects and idiolects, and of the visions they represent. There is a fascination with and a respect for other tongues, other voices, different perspectives. The poet invites them in her poems without trying to unify them, synthesize them or overcome them with her own voice, her own vision.

The experience of the plurality of languages, the consciousness of the fact that no language can be universal, that there are many languages, each of them unique, is, of course, a translator’s experience: the realization that no language can fully and adequately substitute another language, that there is nothing like a perfect translation because no two languages are identical. In translation, this realization is obvious as it is based on work with two different language systems. In original poetry, however, the experience is not necessarily limited to the level of different tongues. Although in many poems this perception of plurality can, of course, show through the work with more than one language, through the play with the actual plurality of languages, this aspect of the poetics of the “translation type” can be seen in much broader terms. A plurality, similar to the one of different languages, can be perceived within the framework of one language system only. A poet with a “translator’s” way of perceiving language sees and hears the different voices and different tongues present in her language, and does not feel the necessity to unify them in one universal voice, but is open to them and is willing to let them speak in her poem. Such a poet is not the holder of the one Voice, but rather someone who invites other voices to sound next to hers, and is able to enter into a dialogue with them, and even to lend her own voice to the other. This type of

poetics is characterized by its openness to different languages, various speakers, dialects, styles, tones, even sounds, it uses quotations, there's always more than one voice, more than one perspective present. Bakhtin's concept of heteroglossia (with the necessary broadening of it to include poetry) can be usefully applied here.²⁷ There are many ways heteroglossia, the plurality of voices, can be realized within and in relation to the voice of the speaker of the poem; but there seem to be two possible tendencies of the speaker's voice in the interaction with the other voices: it can either try to overcome them, unify them under its own domination, or it can try to lend itself to them, let them sound next to itself, without attempting to harmonize them or overpower them. It does not mean that the presence of the speaker's voice is weakened, but that the strength of its presence is established through the reflection of the heteroglossia, and through the ability of the speaker's voice to adopt the other voices (without overcoming them).

We have seen Bishop's tendency to betray the presence of the other language in her translations, particularly those from Portuguese, using two different basic strategies: keeping the original word untranslated (often accompanied by an explanatory footnote or commentary), and offering a literal translation, which sounds surprising or unnatural in English (typically in the case of personal names, nicknames and place names). She does not let the English dominate the translated text fully, the language of the original keeps seeping through the language of the translation, in a palimpsest-like way. Seeing these strategies in her translations we become more attentive to the similar means she uses in her own poetry: using foreign words and expressions (e.g. the Portuguese *Graças a Deus* in "Santarém", the Spanish *coñac* in "Faustina, or Rock Roses", the French titles of some of her earlier poems, the footnoted carnival *fantasía* in "Pink Dog", etc.), or literal translations ("one leaf yes and one leaf no" in "Brazil, January 1, 1502" or the names of the hills in "The Burglar of Babylon"). More often, she works

with the plurality of her own language, English – using various speakers, inserting dialogues and quotes, repeating sounds of animals and things, etc. Bishop's use of personae, or her adoption of another person's voice for the whole of a poem can be seen in these terms, too. It is a device which offers parallels with translation: speaking in someone else's voice enables the poet to explore issues and views which may be for some reason difficult to deal with in her own voice, in a way translations also served her, as we suggested earlier. It allows her to assume the insider's position where her own position is that of an outsider ("Jerónimo's House", "Songs for a Colored Singer", "The Riverman"), but also the other way round – she can adopt the outsider's perspective ("From Trollope's Journal"), and other times, the mask allows her to be more personal than she would in her own voice ("Crusoe in England").

There is a paradox hidden in the nature of this device (and of the use of different voices, in general) a paradox which is impossible to solve or overcome, and which is characteristic of translation and of translation poetics. Adopting another voice means yielding one's own voice to it, but at the same time, it means a full and perfect control of that voice, its appropriation. There is a constant inherent tension between domination and submission, between appropriation and yielding, a tension which is typical of the work of the translator, whose voice and language are controlled by the original, but dominate it at the same time, balancing constantly on the thin border between the two tendencies.

This tension is accompanied by another: the position of the insider versus that of the outsider. Like the translator, the translator type of the poet constantly moves between these two positions; the difference is not overcome, but pointed out. The translator has much deeper insider knowledge of "the other", the original she approaches and mediates, than those she mediates it to; at the same time, she keeps the

distance of the outsider, she sees the original from the outside, and knows well she will always remain an outsider, who can never get fully inside. The same is true about the translator poet, whose meeting with “the other” is characterized by this tension, and the reflection of it. In Bishop’s case, this is most obvious in her translations of Brazilian poetry a prose, and comes up most conspicuously again in her Brazilian poems.

The “translator type” of the poet is conscious of the richness and the potential of language, and is fascinated by the many voices which sound in the language, and at the same time she realizes that this richness is not limited to the variation of sound, that each tongue and voice can say different things. And although the same thing can be said in different ways, it is rarely identical when said differently. Again, we speak about an experience every translator knows: even when something in one language is perfectly translatable into another language, the mere shift from one language to another often changes it considerably. In this sense, a way of saying things is also a way of seeing them, a different language means a different perspective. The openness to the plurality of languages is also openness to the plurality of perspectives these voices represent.

The constant awareness of the plurality of possible perspectives implies another feature of this type of poetics: its tentativeness and its tendency to search for the best or the most precise way to say and to see things. Similarly to a translator, the poet picks words and phrases, weighs them, tries them, and often discards them to continue her search for an expression which would be most adequate and appropriate. Sometimes, this search happens more or less explicitly in the poems – we can think of Bishop’s changes and corrections in her texts: “it’s hard to tell them from the stars – / planets, that is – the tinted ones” (“The Armadillo”); “In front of the church, the Cathedral, rather” (“Santarém”); “How – I didn’t know any / word for it – how ‘unlikely’...” (“In the Waiting Room”); “and stands there, looms, rather” (“The Moose”); “Our visions

coincided – ‘visions’ is / too serious a word – our looks, two looks” (“Poem”).²⁸

Precision is one of the utmost goals of both the translator and the translator-poet, a goal which always remains one step away.

There is another quality the translator-poet and the translator share: the skepticism, the awareness that perfection is hardly possible. In his essay “The Misery and Splendor of Translation” José Ortega y Gasset speaks about the skepticism of the good utopian, who knows that the utopian perfection is beyond his reach, yet still considers it necessary to aspire to it. Ortega sees this skepticism as the fundamental characteristic of translation, and the same is true of this poetic type. The poet never loses the ideal, precise word from her sight, although she knows at the same time that words and their meanings are elusive, and that to always find the perfect word to say something (and the perfect way to see it) is a utopian task. Yet there seems to be a difference between translation and poetry: the translator usually makes this search before the final translation happens; it is a hidden process which leads to the final (imperfect) result. With the “translator type” of the poet, the poem does not necessarily follow as a definitive outcome of the search, but the search itself is poetry. Translation poetics tends to see a poem not as an answer, a result, a perfect artifact, but rather as a space of dialogue, interaction and search, as a process, an attempt. In the case of Elizabeth Bishop, this tendency manifests itself in various ways some of which have already been mentioned in connection with other aspects of translations poetics: self-corrections, shifts of perspective, the use of different voices, questions (very often unanswered), explanatory brackets, etc. Another means which adds to the stress on process, search, and inconclusiveness is the endings. Bishop often ends her poems in a way which instead of bringing the text to a conclusion and turning the poem into a nicely closed, self-contained artifact, leaves it open, suggesting a possible continuation,

implying a process which might continue after the poem ends, opening a space where the poem could develop further, where a dialogue could occur, an answer could be found. She uses various means to achieve this effect: very often the rhetoric of the last lines suggest a potential conversation – there are questions (“Paris, 7 A.M.,” “Faustina, or Rock Roses”, “Questions of Travel”, “First Death in Nova Scotia”, “House Guest”, “Going to the Bakery”), commands (“The Monument”, “Little Exercise”, “The Shampoo”, “Pink Dog”), direct speech (“Quai d’Orléans”, “Cirque d’Hiver”), the last lines are spoken in someone else’s voice (“Gentleman of Shalott”, “From the Country to the City”, “The Weed”, “The Unbeliever”, “Twelfth Morning; or What You Will” , “From Trollope’s Journal”, “Santarém”); sometimes the effect of possible continuation is achieved by a list, a catalogue at the end of the poem (“Electrical Storm”, “Sandpiper”, “Poem”), or a feeling of hesitation, lack of conclusiveness is added by brackets (“The Colder the Air”, “Trouvée”, “Night City”, “Five Flights Up”), in other cases an activity which continues after the end of the poem is suggested by the contents of the last lines (“The Bight”, “Cape Breton”, “Arrival at Santos”, “Brazil, January 1, 1502”). Bishop’s endings provide valuable material for detailed analysis, however, in the following chapters, I will focus on the endings of the poems chosen for close-reading.

All aspects of translation poetics can be found throughout Elizabeth Bishop’s works from her first book on, but their presence becomes clearer and more conspicuous in her later poetry. In the following passages, I will offer a close-reading of some of her poems with respect to the principles of translation poetics. When choosing the poems for interpretation I was faced with the decision whether to deal briefly with many texts, covering most of the corpus of Bishop’s poetry, but limit the analysis only to selected aspects, or to make a limited selection of texts and analyze them closely and in full. I

opted for the latter method, which sees the poem as the basic unit of analysis, and permits a focused view of the text as a whole and gives space to a minute in-depth close reading. The number of the texts selected is small, but it covers the whole range of Bishop's works, from "The Map" (*North & South*, 1946) to "Santarém" published in the last years, and comprises texts which vary in style, form and theme. The main focus is on poems, but I refer to Bishop's prose pieces, too, to show that her "translation poetics" pervades and informs all her writings. The selection is, to a large extent, random, as virtually any of Bishop's poems could be read and analyzed in terms of translation poetics, and the examples chosen are not necessarily more illustrative of Bishop's poetics than any other poem she wrote and published. However, the close-readings involve only texts Bishop published in her lifetime. Her unpublished texts and drafts could certainly provide interesting insights into the genesis of her poems and in the process of her work, but the poems she herself did not consider finished and suitable for publication are not the subject of this thesis, which wants to focus on the final shape the poet's poetic principals led to. This is particularly important considering the fact that one of the features of her poetics is, as I have suggested, the stress on process – the search, rather than the result – a feature which can only be appropriately discussed in the final artifact, not in a draft, which is in process by definition.

The Map

The first poem which offers itself to this kind of analysis is the one which opens Bishop's first book, as well as her collected poems. "The Map" (1935) is considered her first mature poem. It was first published in *Trial Balances*, the anthology of young poets in which Bishop had five poems introduced by Marianne Moore. "The Map" was the only one of the five (the others being "Three Valentines" and "The Reprimand") which made it into her first book *North & South* (1946), where it appears as the opening poem. It also stands at the beginning of Bishop's *Complete Poems*, published in 1969, as well as of the later volumes of her collected poems, which gives it a privileged position in the context of her works. Being the opening text which leads the way into Bishop's works, the poem acquires extra importance and invites a reading of it as a kind of *ars poetica*.

As such, it illustrates and develops the basic principles of translation poetics discussed in the previous chapter: the poem creates a space for various meetings, dialogues and interactions (land and sea, land and map, man and map, representation and the represented...); it examines the issues of control and domination seen as a dynamic process, not a fixed relationship; it offers a plurality of perspectives and interpretations without necessarily favoring one over the others; it touches the possibilities of language in naming and representing. The following close-reading of the text will focus on these aspects and show that they can be seen as the core of this poem, which in this way introduces and foreshadows many of the issues developed throughout Bishop's works.

As with most Bishop poems, the title clearly states what the poem is going to be about. It is primarily a description of a map, a graphic representation of the physical world. The description focuses particularly on the parts of the map where land meets

water. The irregular and slightly dubious border between land and water moves to the centre of attention throughout the poem, but it is explored in most detail in the first stanza:

Land lies in water; it is shadowed green.
Shadows, or are they shallows, at its edges
showing the line of long sea-weeded ledges
where weeds hang to the simple blue from green.
Or does the land lean down to lift the sea from under,
drawing it unperturbed around itself?
Along the fine tan sandy shelf
is the land tugging at the sea from under?

The border space comes up basically in every line: there's the opposition between land and water/sea, blue and green, it appears in the words *edge* and *ledge* (in rhyming position), *line*, *shelf*. The border is not as clear-cut as one might expect from a map of a shore. We learn immediately that there's a shadow there, but even the shadow, obscure in itself, is not a straightforward shadow – the second line doubts it: “Shadows, or are they shallows, at its edges [...]”. The shadow may be a shallow, or rather the shadow *is* a shallow at the same time: the shadowy part on the map represents a shallow area along the coast. The shadow turns into a shallow both on the map and in the language; just a small word play, a minor change in spelling, and the representation (a shadow) can turn into the thing it represents (a shallow). But typically for Bishop the change is not stated directly, she does not say the shadows are actually shallows, but tentatively, as a question (which remains unanswered): the shadows do not stop being shadows, they may be shadows, but they may be also shallows, they may be either or both, or they might be neither. The word play continues inconspicuously in the next line, where the

distinctions between shadows and shallows merge in the verb they share, both syntactically and in terms of spelling – the shadows/shallows show. The dubiousness of the land/water border is stressed by the slight ambiguity of the pronouns it/its in the first two lines: “Land lies in water; it is shadowed green. / Shadows, or are they shallows, at its edges / showing the line of long sea-weeded ledges [...]” It is not quite clear whether the pronouns refer to the land or the water, the edge is blurred by the shadowy shallows and the sea weed, but also by the pronouns.

The relationship of the two elements meeting is uncertain. The simple, straightforward affirmation of the first line (“Land lies in water”) is soon put into doubt in the second half of the first stanza: “Or does the land lean down to lift the sea from under, / drawing it unperturbed around itself?” The passive mapped land lying in water turns active, the relationship changes, the land may be actively lifting the sea and drawing it around itself, like a woman might draw a shawl around her shoulders. However, the original claim is not denied, the active land is only suggested as an alternative, it appears in the form of a question, an unanswered question. It is followed by another question, which brings a small change to the gesture the land may be making: “Along the fine tan sandy shelf / is the land tugging at the sea from under?” The active role and the position of the land reaching under the sea remains; the smooth and elegant drawing turns into a jerky tugging (with the sea possibly resisting), but the change is again presented as a possibility, an alternative. The border on which the poem focuses is not a clear-cut line between two distinctly separated worlds, but rather a space where one world meets the other and communicates with it. Different perspectives of the relationship are offered, but none of them is accepted as the definitive one, there is no answer to the questions.

The first and the last of the three stanzas of the poem have the same regular pattern of eight lines rhymed *a b b a c d d c*, where the *a* and *c* rhyming words are always identical: “green/green” and “under/under” in the first stanza, “land is/land is” and “colors/colors” in the last stanza. Using identical rhymes is not very common, and it is worth examining the effect this unusual type of repetition has in the poem. The repeated words do not change their meaning, nor do they appear in a different context; rather than exploring and expanding the potential of the word, the repetition seems to fix the word in one place, keeping it in its original meaning. Instead of acquiring a metaphorical quality, as is often the case with repeated words in poetry, the repeated rhyming words here are trying to keep its most basic meaning. (We also note that the words themselves are very basic and simple, they refer to colors and places: *green, under, land is, colors*.) The identical rhymes do not move the poem on, but keep returning it back; they add a cyclical effect, or they strengthen the cyclical effect, which is present already in the rhyme scheme *abba* and also in the composition of the whole poem, where the two regularly patterned stanzas symmetrically surround the irregular middle stanza. The slightly obsessive rhyming words work as fixed points around the doubts and questions, they do not let the doubts take completely over, but keep them turning back to the limited space of the border the poem focuses on.

The poem is about a map, which should be a fixed, static representation. However, the poem turns it into a dynamic space, where only few things are fixed and straightforward. The structure of the poem, the rhymes, the word-play, the unanswered questions about the character of the relationship between land and water, the doubts and options – all these add to the overall feeling of a dynamic process going on in the border space the poem focuses on. Although dynamic, the process is not diachronic, it does not move on towards a final solution, point, or interpretation. The dynamic communication

between the land and the sea (and between the representation and the represented) does not develop in time, but – with the help of the repetitions and identical rhymes – keeps coming back, is fixed in space and time, does not lead anywhere, itself seems to be the goal. The stress on process and on dynamic interaction, one of the features of “translation poetics”, is ubiquitous in Bishop’s works, and it comes forth most clearly in those poems whose topic is, as in the case of “The Map”, primarily fixed, static and silent: Bishop writes about a map, about paintings, landscapes, a monument, as if they were dynamic conversations and interactions.

The second stanza is freer, both in its structure and its imagination, but its eleven lines of free verse do not move away from the space established in the first stanza: we are still looking at a map of a shore. The shore is specified as the Eastern Canadian shore, the “land” from the first stanza is identified as Newfoundland and Labrador:²⁹

The shadow of Newfoundland lies flat and still.
Labrador’s yellow, where the moony Eskimo
has oiled it. We can stroke these lovely bays,
under a glass as it they were expected to blossom,
or as if to provide a clean cage for invisible fish.

The shadow reappears here, it does not turn into a shallow this time, it is the land, Newfoundland in particular, and it is as static as the land in the first line of the poem: it lies flat and still. Another color appears in the second stanza, yellow. With the yellow color of Labrador, the relationship between the representation (the map) and the represented (the land) acquires a new dimension: the mapped land is yellow because it has been oiled by the inhabitant of the land, the physical world and the mapped world meet and merge here. The scale seems to be changing, too: the previous stanza was concerned with the level of the land and the sea, mapped or physical, the scale was

balanced, there was nothing unusual about it. Here, the Eskimo oiling the land (mapped or physical), seems disproportionately large, looming over the map/land in the way he would on an illustrated map for children (with pictures of local people, animals or monuments standing on the map).

The land and its inhabitants are named in this stanza. Bishop often uses proper names in her poems – names of people and places, brand names – and we have seen her interest in proper names and their meanings in her translations where she often considered it necessary to offer literal translations so that the meaning of the name does not get lost. The meanings or contexts of the names in “The Map” are not explicitly brought up and may pass unnoticed, however, they are present and they add new dimensions to the themes explored by the poem. Having studied Bishop’s translations and seeing her preoccupation with the meanings of proper names we are more attentive to the treatment of these in her original poetry, and we can appreciate the presence and the function of proper names in her text more deeply. The literal meaning of Newfoundland is pointed out indirectly by the repetition of the word “land” – the word appeared three times in the first stanza, and reappears in the obsessive rhyming position in the last stanza, which makes the reader more alert to this word in the compound name of the island, and consequently to the meaning of the whole name as the “newly found land”. Briefly, implicitly, the name offers a glimpse of the history behind the map, of the first discoverers who “came and found it all”, like the “Christians” arriving to Brazil in “Brazil, January 1, 1502”. They found the new land, named it (in a very straightforward manner), made the first maps of it, colonized it. Their meeting with the land is at the root of the map we can now observe. The case of Labrador is more oblique, but it works on the same principle. The place is supposed to be named after a Portuguese explorer João Fernandes Lavrador, who discovered these lands in the late

15th century. He found the new land and appropriated it by giving it his name, which, quite aptly, means a farmer, the one who works (labors) the land, in Portuguese. The meaning and the bearer of the name have been forgotten, but the name remains as a hint of naming and mapping as a device of discovering and of control.

The last of the three proper names does not refer to a place, but to a people – a people different from the explorers, who give names and make maps. The Eskimo is the native inhabitant of the lands, before they were named by Europeans. He is the one who oils the land to give it its yellow color, who chooses the color for the land, not those who have named it and who are responsible for the mapmaking. The original people are present in the map, in the color of the land; however, as we see later in the stanza, the names (related to the conquering outsiders) cover the land, they run all over the place, conquering it, in a way. If the interactions of the first stanza were limited to the land and the sea (and their mapped representations), now the people appear – the implicit colonizers, the native inhabitants, the inhabitants of the towns and cities on the shore, the printer.

Among the people who enter into the web of relationships suggested by the map, “we” appear. The third line of the second stanza keeps a shift in scale suggested by the image of a giant Eskimo oiling the land; this time it is “we” who is looming over the mapped bays, raising our giant hand to stroke them. The pronoun “we” introduces another relationship and a new space of communication. “We” are the observers, those who look at the map, the poet, and also the reader. The map turns into an artifact, an object of observation, but also of emotion and appreciation: the bays are “lovely” and our first impulse is to stroke them, a gesture rather unusual with a map. The interaction between the land and the sea from the first stanza is now supplanted with the interaction between the map and the observers. In the next line the readers learn that the map is

under a glass, which adds a new border space. Nevertheless, the glass border is not an impenetrable barrier: we *can* stroke the bays under the glass, the glass does not prevent contact, not even contact as physical as stroking. The glass protecting the map leads to two parallel “as if” clauses, which drift away from the map in a slightly surreal way, comparing it first to a kind of glasshouse “as if they [the bays] were expected to blossom”, and then to an aquarium: “as if to provide a clean cage for invisible fish”. In both cases the map is seen a potentially alive – it might bloom as a flower or there might be fish living in it.

The second half of the second stanza returns to the mapped shoreline:

The names of seashore towns run out to sea,
the names of cities cross the neighboring mountains
– the printer here experiencing the same excitement
as when emotion too far exceeds its cause.
These peninsulas take the water between thumb and finger
like women feeling for the smoothness of yard-goods.

The names of towns, which are part of the map, appear here almost as if they were a part of the landscape – they run out from the land to the sea like capes or promontories, they cross the mountains, they seem to be the land’s (the inhabited land’s) way of penetrating into the uninhabited space surrounding it. The names are a part of map, but a different part than the lines and colors, which represent the landscape. The map is basically a picture of a landscape, a scaled-down man-made representation of what is in the landscape; the inscribed place names are an added text, a kind of commentary on the painted representation, man’s way to control and colonize the landscape, make it habitable. However, in this case, the names running out to the sea and crossing the mountains interact with the landscape and can be seen as turning into a part of it;

instead of names appropriating landscape, we have the landscape potentially appropriating the names. Not only the mapped land and the physical land are merging in the poem, but also those parts of the map which should be excluded from the physical landscape merge with it. Another character interacting with the map/landscape comes up in the next line: the printer. The printer is not the map-maker, he is a creator of a lower order, not the one responsible for the conception of the map, not the one who turns the landscape into a map, but the one responsible for the printing of the map, the one who turns the concept into the final artifact. He is the one who actually, physically, prints the names of the towns on the map, letting them be incorporated into the landscape. And just as the observer feels emotion looking at the “lovely bays”, the printer does not carry out his craft routinely here; he feels excitement when he puts the names over the border of the land and water or over the mountains. His emotion seems to copy the map he prints: it exceeds its cause in an analogy to the printed names overgrowing the places they designate. The relationship between the printer and the map is not a straightforward one-way relationship of a maker and a made object. Rather than controlling the map, the printer is controlled, or at least inspired, by it. And the active role of the mapped landscape, which we have encountered in the first stanza, where the female-like land was drawing the sea around itself, is clearly resumed at the end of the second stanza: the peninsulas surrounding the bays are compared to fingers of women testing yard-goods. Here, more explicitly than in the first stanza, the land and its gestures are clearly feminine; the sea (which was treated as a kind of shawl by the land in the first stanza) can be touched (we could stroke it earlier) and would feel smooth like fabric. Of course, the simile first and foremost describes the shape and the appearance of the peninsulas and the bays, but it does more than that. It creates a

completely new type of relationship between the land and the sea which is far from geographical: it is domestic, secure; the land can be seen as a woman dressed in the sea.

We return to a more geographical, or cartographical, level in the last stanza, which takes again the regular rhyming pattern we have seen in the first stanza, with the identical rhymes:

Mapped waters are more quiet than the land is,
lending the land their waves' own conformation:
and Norway's hare runs south in agitation,
profiles investigate the sea, where land is.
Are they assigned, or can the countries pick their colors?
– What suits the character or the native waters best.
Topography displays no favorites; North's as near as West.
More delicate than the historians' are the map-makers' colors.

The relationship land-water is brought up again. This time these two are compared, and the difference between the mapped and the physical world is hinted at: the waters, naturally flowing, moving, dynamic, are quiet on the map, whereas the usually fixed, static land is active and dynamic here. The waves of the sea do not appear on the map, but the mapped mountains and rivers may make the land look like a stormy sea. The poem interprets it in terms of the relationship between the land and the sea: the sea lends the land the shape of its waves; an exchange can happen between the two. And symmetrically to the first stanza, there is a sound play here, with the shifting from *land* to *lend* and back to *land*: “land is / lending the land”, the playful sound reminiscent perhaps of the waves flapping on the shore. The land is alive and wild, mapped Norway looks like a running hare (the map, which should be a representation of a country can be easily misread as a picture of an animal), the outlines of the shores are seen as profiles

investigating the sea. The mapped land, which is, in a way, the outcome of investigation, turns into an investigator on the border between itself and the sea. There's no longer the domestic gesture of a woman, but a scientific approach of a scientist, however the woman picking the appropriate fabric for her dress has not disappeared for good, as her presence can be sensed in the lines which follow.

The second part of the last stanza begins another unanswered question: "Are they assigned, or can the countries pick their colors?" For the first time the concern about the principles of the creation of the map arises. Are the colors of the representation assigned from the outside, or do they arise from the countries' own preferences – can they be chosen as the color of a dress can? The country is personified once again, it is suggested that it could pick the color according to what suits it best – like the woman choosing the fabric for her clothes. The land is presented as actively participating in the creation of the map, which might represent other aspects, apart from the physical appearance: it could reflect "the character" or it could be based on aesthetic criteria ("what suits the native waters best"). However, all this is suggested only as a possibility, in the form of a question again. The question is playfully naive but it touches issues which are more serious than the tone would suggest, and which remain implicit throughout the poem: where is the source of control over representation? Does it come from the outside or from the inside? Who decides about the map? Is it the mapped land itself, or is the map-maker? Or is the map a result of an interaction between the two?

The naive, childlike perspective voiced in this important question is evident throughout the poem. It is certainly not the only one or the dominant tone and view, but it is a voice unmistakably present: the questions about the nature of the relationship between the land and the sea in the first stanza are of this kind, so is the implied image

of the giant Eskimo oiling the land, the gesture of stroking the map, and also the tendency to assign different meanings to the shapes representing the land – peninsulas as fingers, Norway as a running hare. The childlike vision is connected to the domestic and feminine imagery used in the poem (the land drawing the sea around itself as a kind of shawl, the women feeling the yard-goods, the countries picking the colors which suit them), which seems natural as a child's way of seeing things is often shaped by the domestic experience. One of the effects of this slightly naive tone is that it allows the speaker to step into the position of an outsider, not knowing, not understanding quite well what she sees, asking almost silly questions, which reach towards the essential better than a deeply knowledgeable analysis of the situation would. Assuming the position of a naive, uninformed observer who does not know too well what a map is and how it works helps the speaker to see it afresh, and – paradoxically perhaps – to touch the essential problems hidden in it and behind it. The questions asked in "The Map" foreshadow the elementary, but gradually disquieting questions asked in the long epigraph to Bishop's last book of poems *Geography III* (1976), quoted from an old geography textbook: "*What is the Earth?* The planet or body on which we live. *What is the shape of the Earth?* Round, like a ball. *Of what is the Earth's surface composed?* Land and water. [...] *What is a Map?* A picture of the whole, or a part, of the Earth's surface". The naive way of seeing the map present in this poem also appears (more explicitly) in the autobiographical prose piece "Primer Class" (c. 1960) about Bishop's first year in school in Nova Scotia:

Only the third and fourth grades studied geography. On their side of the room, over the blackboard, were two rolled-up maps, one of Canada and one of the whole world. [...] They were on cloth, very limp, with a shiny surface, and in pale colors – tan, pink, yellow, and green – surrounded by

the blue that was the ocean [...] On the world map, all of Canada was pink; on the Canadian, the provinces were different colors. I was so taken with the pull-down maps that I wanted to snap them up, and pull them down again, and touch all the countries with my own hands [...] I got the general impression that Canada was the same size as the world, which somehow or other fitted into it, or the other way around, and that in the world and Canada the sun was always shining and everything was dry and glittering. At the same time, I knew perfectly well that this was not true. (CPr 10–11)

The use of a child's perspective and its attractions for Bishop have been discussed in the chapter on her translation of *The Diary of "Helena Morley"*, where I also outlined the connection between the translation of the diary written by a young girl, and Bishop's own childhood poems and stories, most of which were written in Brazil at the time she discovered the *Diary*. "The Map" shows that her interest in the potential of a child's voice and vision started decades earlier, in the first poems she published, but it is still implicit and undeveloped here. Only later, did she fully explore it in the voice of the child narrator of *The Diary of "Helena Morley"*, and the childhood poems of her third book *Questions of Travel* (1965) and in the opening poem of *Geography III* (1976) "In the Waiting Room".

The childlike voice emerges now and then in the poem, as one of the voices present in it. The poem does not feature various speakers, neither does it use quotations like many of Bishop's poems. Yet its voice and tone are not homogenous, there are different voices sounding within the voice of the one speaker of the poem: the childlike voice, the domestic one, scientific, playful... The individual voices are not clearly

distinguished as in Bishop's later poems, but it is obvious that even here, in an apparently monologic text, various voices and potential dialogues are present.

In the last stanza of "The Map" the "naive" question about the choice of colors, which implies so many other questions is not followed by a direct answer, but by a short and definitive statement of objectivity of topography, which displays no favorites. Whatever the motivations and principles of map-making are, they are the same for everyone. On the map, North is as near as West, and actually, everything is near on a map we hold in our hands or watch – that is where the representation does not correspond to the physical world where all is far.

The last stanza grows more and more general, and turns more and more from the actual map to map-making and its principles. The relationship between land and water is abandoned, and so is the relationship between the land and the map, and between the observer or printer and the map. The map-maker, the creator of the map, does not appear until the very last line. The word is in plural, which makes the map-maker more general, not an individual responsible for the particular map (unlike the printer in the previous stanza), but a type of creator. Map-makers are opposed to historians in the last line, praised over historians as those whose colors are "more delicate". The line can be read in connection to the previous one: unlike the historians who do display favorites, who always have to interpret, or at least select, map-makers are "delicate", or they use delicate colors for their craft, they can stay more open and "objective" in relationship to their subject. The map-makers' task is not to explain, interpret and select, but to show, to represent, and to include as much as possible. Unlike to history, map-making is inclusive; it does not have to choose one perspective from which to tell the story; it covers everything in the same way, "North's as near as West" on a map. History

excludes and unifies, whereas geography and map-making include and allow the co-existence of differences.

However, the inherent tension between domination and submission mentioned in the discussion of translation poetics is present here, too. The map-maker cannot select or change, he has to put everything in his map, but at the same time the map is his creation, it is not the landscape. He does choose, and he does transform, but the poem suggests – wishes perhaps – that he does it with his eye and mind always intent on the landscape he reproduces. In the line “Are they assigned, or can the countries pick their colors?” we know that the colors are chosen by the map-maker, but at the same time the poet suggests the possibility that the countries could pick their colors, and supports it by making the mapped lands active and alive throughout the poem. The map could, and perhaps should, arise from the cooperation between the map-maker and the landscape; the mere authoritative assigning of colors does not seem satisfactory enough – and the adjective “delicate” modifying the map-makers colors in the last line suggests that the map-maker is able to avoid such inconsiderate authoritativeness, he uses the colors with delicacy and with attention to the requirements of the landscape.

The poem that always opens Bishop’s published poetry, which chooses the map-maker’s art over the art of the historian, can be read as a declaration of the poet’s poetic principles, which correspond with the principles of translation poetics. Its creative strategy is marked by openness towards “the other” and a constant search for it, not actively working on passive material, controlling and dominating it, but engaging in a creative dialogue with it. The dialogical, interactive quality keeps appearing throughout the poem on various levels – the space (border between the land and sea), the themes (the relationship between the map and the land, between the observer and the map, between the map-maker and the map, between the land and the sea), the rhetoric (the

questions, the shifts in the voice), the shifts in perspective (with none of them favored), the imagery and individual motifs (the active land in a dynamic relationship with the sea, the stroking of the bays, the names crossings the mountains, etc.), the language (the play on words). The map is not seen as a final, fixed artifact, but as a dynamic process – the process is not limited to the creating of the map, which precedes the final result, but the “result” itself is presented as a process, which is not finished. Similarly, the poem is not a static object, a result of a creative search, an artifact, but it is the process of search itself. In this sense, “The Map” embodies the basic principles of translation poetics and foreshadows their use and their development in all of Bishop’s works to come.

The Bight

Among the encounters “The Map” introduces is the meeting between the land and the sea, which Bishop famously treats in many of her texts. The edge of water, the area where the land and sea meet each other and interact, the place where the inhabitants of one element watch the inhabitants of the other is Bishop’s favorite location. Sometimes, the sea is seen as “the other”, but it is not always so – in some of her poems, the speaker approaches “the other”, the land, from the sea, as in the case of, for example, “Arrival at Santos”. And often, neither of the two is presented as “this” as opposed to “the other”, but they are shown as different, divided, but communicating, never merging, but in permanent dialogue and interaction. Depending on the perspective, which often shifts in the course of one poem, either of the two can be seen as “the other”, the strange world viewed from the outside, inviting and forbidding at the same time. Either the land or the sea can be watched, touched, approached, but the basic otherness can never be overcome. Moreover, the shore is not only the place of meeting of the sea and the land, but it is the space where other meetings and relations happen, it is essentially a space of dialogue. In this sense, the border space between the land and the sea exemplifies one of the basic aspects of translation poetics, and it is not surprising that it is attractive to the translator type of poet.

Bishop’s second book of poems, *A Cold Spring* (1955), contained four famous “littoral poems” where the land meets the sea: “The Bight”, “At the Fishhouses”, and “Cape Breton”, all written in the late 1940’s (“At the Fishhouses” was first published in *The New Yorker* in 1947, “The Bight” and “Cape Breton” in 1949), and “Arrival at Santos” written in the early 1950’s, after her arrival to Brazil, and later placed (with some changes) as the opening poem of her third collection *Questions of Travel* (1965).³⁰

“The Bight” takes place at the edge of water where different worlds and things meet and interact, become one another, and yet remain different and distant. The water in the bight is a protean element, difficult to grasp – it is sheer in the first line, letting the observer see through it, but it is almost dangerously present at the same time. It absorbs instead of being absorbed, it seems to be dry, and it looks like gas flame and smells like gas, in fact, it is “turning into gas”. In connection with the dry boats and pilings potentially turning into matches, the feeling of imminent danger grows stronger. The sea is similar to that of Bishop’s earlier short story “The Sea and Its Shore” where it is “of gasoline, terribly dangerous, [...] brilliant, oily, and explosive” and Mr. Boomer prefers to build his fire far from it, thinking “it might ignite and destroy his only means of living” (CPr 174). The sea potentially turning into fire is also present in “At the Fishhouses” where it burns “as if the water were a transmutation of fire / that feeds on stones and burns with a dark grey flame”. However, the danger of the water turned into gas disappears, or at least weakens, when the speaker, who smells the water turning into gas, remarks that “if one were Baudelaire / one could probably hear it turning to marimba music”. The dangerous image of gas is supplanted by the much more benign image of marimba music (even though it remains a possibility only), but that is not the only effect of these lines. The mention of Baudelaire is one of the very few explicit references to a particular author in Bishop’s poetic works (another being Blake mentioned in “Sandpiper”, or Coleridge quoted in “Crusoe in England”). The water turning into gas, first through color, then through smell, that is a visual and an olfactory perception which mingle, leads to Baudelaire and an auricular perception, the sound of music, and implicitly brings in Baudelaire’s famous sonnet “Correspondences”, where “perfumes, colors and sounds correspond” (“les parfums, les couleurs et les sons se répondent”). In this poem, Baudelaire presents his symbolist concept of a general

analogy and unity underlying all things in nature; the passing reference in “The Bight” opens another dimension of the poem: that of an implicit dialogue with Baudelaire and his text. There is no longer just the interaction between the water and the shore, the observer and the observed, but also the interaction of two different poetics. Bishop is mildly ironic about Baudelaire in these lines, but – as often is the case in Bishop – the irony is double-edged and points towards herself as well. The clumsy triple repetition of the impersonal “one” in the two lines – “One can smell it turning to gas; if one were Baudelaire / one could probably hear it turning to marimba music” – the improbable conditional clause “if one were Baudelaire”, the uncertain “probably”, the specification of the music as marimba music, these all add to the slight tongue-in-cheek effect of the passage. Both smelling the water turning to gas and hearing it turning to marimba music are not seen as obvious, natural and absolute; the lines suggest that the impressions the water creates come much more from the observer, the poet, rather than the water itself. The poet is trying to grasp the water by describing it, but the water keeps escaping – first, it turns into gas (even more elusive than water), and then even this turn is seen as taking place more in the poet’s mind, than in the water. Baudelaire’s belief in the essential inherent analogy of things is put into doubt – the water is not absorbed, it “doesn’t wet anything”, it evades the poet’s attempt at description, it does not seem to want to communicate and share itself, it retains its difference, its otherness.

After the mention of marimba music, the speaker notices that some kind of marimba music is actually present in the scene, but not as a synesthetic version of water, but in a much more down-to-earth way, in the actual sound of a very prosaic dredge: “the little ochre dredge at work off the end of the dock / already plays the dry perfectly off-beat claves”. With the dredge at work the focus moves from the water and we suddenly see that the bight is far from quiet, there are many more actions and

interactions taking place. The dredge makes its clicking sound and the birds appear. There is something inappropriate or out-of-place in both the dredge and the birds – the dredge sounds “off-beat”, the birds are “outsize” and they crash “unnecessarily hard” into the water (“this peculiar gas”). Neither the dredge, nor the pelicans seem to be very much in harmony with the sea they explore, and their search is not seen as exactly successful: despite their unnecessarily hard attack the pelicans are “rarely coming up with anything to show for it”, and later in the poem, the dredge brings up an ugly and unpleasantly sounding “dripping jawful of marl”. The sponge boats are “frowsy” and they are “decorated with bobbles of sponges”, not a very decorative catch they bring in from the sea. Harmony, sublimity, and beauty do not seem to be part of the bight and the activities going on in it.

The sharing and communication between different things and different worlds remains problematic throughout the poem. Things seem to protect themselves against the other, and are rather violent towards the other – this impression is stressed by the many similes, which almost exclusively involve hard, sharp, industrial tools: the pelicans are “like pickaxes”, the tails of the man-of-war birds “like scissors”, the shark tails “like little plowshares”. The dock is surrounded and divided from the rest of the bight (and probably from the observer) by a fence of chicken wire made even more forbidding by the hanging shark tails compared to plowshares. The boats are stove in, they look like torn-open (not just delicately open) letters. Baudelaire’s deep unity and analogy of all things is difficult to imagine in this world of hard sharp objects, fences, and implicit violence.

At the same time, these images which seem to deny the Baudelairean analogy are expressions of a different kind of analogies. Here, as in other texts by Bishop, analogies between animals and man-made objects are found. The natural and the

artificial meet and blend, one becomes the other. The analogy is not only one-way – animals being compared to various tools –, but it works in the opposite direction as well: the returning sponge boats have the “obliging air of retrievers”, a man-made object is like an animal. The same is true, only less directly, about the dredge, which is not seen as a machine operated by a human driver, but rather as a living creature, a strange animal (it is at work, it plays the claves, it has a voice saying “Click. Click”...). This meeting and merging of the world of man and the world of animals through analogies, similes and metaphors is not uncommon in Bishop: we can think of, for example, the moose in “The Moose” compared to a house or a church, the churches compared to clamshells in the same poem, the cans of gasoline talking in soothing tones to the nervous cars as if these were horses, etc. These analogies are not based on Baudelaire’s principle of universal underlying unity of all natural creation. They involve the meeting of the natural world with that of civilization, where parallels and similarities between things can be found, but where an essential difference is always inescapably present. Bishop puts two very concrete phenomena of each of the worlds into a relationship (a pelican and a pickaxe, a boat and a retriever, a moose and a church...), she creates a space for a dialogue where both partners meet and communicate while keeping their basic distinction. Paradoxically, Bishop’s saying that one thing is like another often stresses the difference rather than overcoming it.

The abandoned boats look not only like brutally torn-open, but also unanswered letters, creating an image *par excellence* of failed communication. The boats were destroyed by the sea in the “last bad storm” and they will probably never be salvaged, their main function as the means of communication between the land and the sea has failed, the letters have not been answered, the correspondence has been cut short.

“The bight is littered with old correspondences” is the line which carries the heaviest stress in the poem – the effect is achieved mainly by structural means: but for the first line, it is the only line in the poem which corresponds to one full sentence, and it follows after a long series of descriptions – pelicans, man-of-war birds, sponge boats, the fence with the shark tails, the damaged white boats – which all consist of four lines (five in the case of the first one, the pelicans). It could almost be the last line, it concludes the poem describing a bight in Key West; what follows is a kind of epilogue (a crucial one, nevertheless). The line is most immediately connected to the image of the piled-up boats resembling torn-open letters, and at first it seems to simply summarize and repeat the image: the damaged boats lying here and there look like disordered letters, therefore the bight looks as if it was full of scattered letters. However, the word “correspondences” is used instead of letters, and the plural makes it quite clear that it does not refer only to the letters anymore. The mutual correspondences between things implied by the Baudelairean reference earlier, and developed through the following similes, are named here, but the correspondences, seen as something amazing, eternal and transcendental in Baudelaire are “old” and the bight is “littered” with them as it is littered with the broken boats or torn letters. The correspondences are useless rubbish, the analogy underlying all things is not denied, but it is far from fulfilling and satisfactory, the letters remain unanswered and by a small change of one vowel they turn into litter, the correspondence fails.

At this point a sound is heard: “Click. Click.” It is the voice of the dredge, which looks and behaves more like an animal than a machine. It interrupts the poet’s voice and the image of the littered bight full of useless correspondences with its energetic clicking, and it “brings up a dripping jawful of marl”. After the poet has summed up what she finds in the bight as old litter, and it seems that the attempt at entering into a

dialogue (or correspondence) with the bight has failed, the dredge keeps searching in the water and comes up with a result. What it brings up does not look like much – it is a big chunk of wet mud, but the dredge grasps it eagerly, it keeps working, and it does not seem to care about the apparently unsatisfactory result of the effort, just like the pelicans did not make much of their lack of some impressive catch. It makes the poet conclude with the famous final lines, the last of which eventually became her epitaph: “All the untidy activity continues, / awful, but cheerful.” Most directly, this line refers to the dredge at work, but it is not just the activity of the dredge, but very generally “all the untidy activity”, suggesting all the activity explicitly discussed in the poem: the pelicans crashing into the gas-like water, sponge-boats bringing bobbles of sponges in, water turning into gas, marl protruding through the water, all the interactions of different things and elements in the poem. The activity is “untidy”, disharmonious, the different elements in the bight do not correspond to each other smoothly; it is awful, ugly, unsuccessful in a way, and yet it does continue, and it is, after all, cheerful.

But the final lines inevitably invite not only the connection to the outer activities of the bight, but to the poet herself and her own efforts. The reader is led to this connection mainly by the subtitle “On my birthday”, which is by far the most personal moment of the poem (it refers to Bishop’s 37th birthday in Key West, and was published a year later). In fact, the speaker is hardly present in the poem itself – her immediate presence at the scene is suggested by the “like this” in the first line (“at low tide like this” implies that she is describing a scene right there in front of her eyes), and later by the qualifying “it seems to me” when she describes the unnecessarily hard movement of the pelicans. These scarce references to the speaker in a poem with such a strongly personal subtitle as this do not satisfy the reader’s expectations. From the very start, the reader is prepared to read a birthday poem, a poem which somehow connects to the fact

that it takes place on the speaker's birthday. What we get instead is a description of a not exactly pretty bight, and we are anxiously waiting to find some correspondence between the bight and the speaker, we are ready to seek metaphors, but the poem seems to be quite resistant to metaphorical reading. It seems that the poet is in a similar position as the reader – she is also looking for the correspondence, the whole poem can be seen as an anxious search for an analogy, a symbol, a metaphor, but the bight keeps insisting on being a bight, instead of analogies and correspondences, it offers clashes, sharp edges and differences. Old unanswered letters at best.

However, it is in this resistance of the bight to yield to easy analogies and metaphors where an analogy may be found; there is the analogy of this unsuccessful search – on the one hand, the pelicans whose effort does not yield an adequate result, the dredge which explores the bottom of the bight to bring up just dripping marl, the boats looking like dead letters, and the poet's (and the reader's) search for correspondences, on the other. The results are not harmonious and satisfactory, as Baudelaire would have them, but like the untidy and seemingly cheerless activity going on in the bight, the poet's search and effort may not be crowned by immediate glaring success, but it goes steadily on, it does not (cannot, perhaps) give up, despite its awfulness, and in the end, there is something intrinsically cheerful and satisfactory about it.

The personal subtitle – which appears in all the drafts of the poem (and was typographically more conspicuous in the original publication in *The New Yorker* than, for example, in *The Complete Poems 1927–1979*) – makes us relate the last lines to the speaker. The fact that Bishop chose the last lines of “The Bight” for her epitaph makes this relationship even stronger and connects the lines (and the rest of the poem) to the whole life of the poet and her poetic effort. Her activity is not harmonious creation of

beauty yielding a perfect finished result, it is an untidy, awful search which often does not yield much, but keeps continuing nevertheless – and its cheerfulness and beauty does not go counter the awfulness, but rather springs from it. The continuous, seemingly unsuccessful search is where poetry lies; again, we find the stress on the search, the process, not the result, as the source of poetry.

“The Bight” is perhaps the most famous descriptive poem Bishop wrote; it offers a detailed description of the bight, its main focus is on the bight, turned away from the speaker, but on closer examination, we realize that it is very much about the interaction between the speaker and the bight. The bight remains a very literal bight, which resists the poet’s search for analogies, correspondences and metaphors, but at the same time – thanks to the occasional stepping out of the monolithic description in the subtitle, in the non-native and intertextual elements (Baudelaire, marimba, correspondences), in the qualification “it seems to me” and in the last lines used as the epitaph – it becomes a metaphor of the poet’s search, which may not achieve a satisfactory result, but turns out to be cheerful, satisfactory, in itself.

The poem explores many of the typical issues of translation poetics which we have already seen in “The Map”, such as the complex set of various meetings and interactions going on in the border space of the shore, or the tension between domination and submission, between control and resistance to it. However, the interactions are more problematic here than in “The Map”, the situation of the poet/observer is much more difficult. The bight doesn’t cooperate in the way the map did; it does not enter into dialogue easily; it does not open itself to the plurality of views; it is hard to imagine that it could be stroked like the map under the glass. At the same time, we notice a similar resistance on the part of the speaker, whose voice is very much unified and insistent. This poem does not give much space to other voices and

other perspectives (with the exception of the reference to Baudelaire, and perhaps of the mechanical voice of the dredge), we have the speaker's voice trying to approach the bight, on the one hand, and the bight not quite yielding to her efforts, on the other.

Taking all this into account, the poem can be seen not so much as a straightforward description of a landscape, but as an exploration of the domination/submission paradox typical of translation poetics. We have touched on the presence of the tension of domination vs. submission in translation, in the poems spoken in the voice of a persona, and in the use of other voices in general. In this poem, there is no persona, no other voice, but the issue comes up in a description, which is very much like a dialogue in Bishop, with a strong accent on the autonomy of the object described – as if the object of the description represented another voice, implicitly interacting with that of the speaker. But rather than two different voices it is one voice balancing between two tendencies: a tendency towards description of the landscape and the withdrawal of the subjective observer, and a tendency towards metaphorical readings, subjective correspondences and pathetic fallacies. This interaction is very subtle and does not lead to any solution, compromise, or to the domination of either the observer or the bight. “The Bight” is an example of a text where the dialogue, the interaction and the paradox happens within one seemingly unified voice of the speaker.

The Sea & Its Shore

This reading of “The Bight” brings another, much earlier text set on the coast to mind: Bishop’s story “The Sea & Its Shore” (1937). Its main (and only) character, Mr. Boomer, is a cleaner on a public beach; every night he collects papers that litter the beach and burns them. Before doing so, however, he studies and reads the scraps of paper carefully, and creates his own system of categorization based on the meanings he believes to find:

His studies could be divided into three groups, and he himself classified them mentally in this way.

First, and most numerous: everything that seemed to be about himself, his occupation in life, and any instructions or warnings that referred to it.

Second: the stories about other people that caught his fancy, whose carriers he followed from day to day in newspapers and fragments of books and letters; and whose further adventures he was always watching out for.

Third: the items he could not understand at all, that bewildered him completely but at the same time interested him so much that he saved them to read. These he tried, almost frantically, to fit into first one, then the other, of the two categories. (CPr 175)

He applies this interpretation to all kinds of disparate fragments; he tries to find connections between them and correspondences with his own life; he looks for continuations of stories or pieces of advice; but the success of his search is dubious. Eventually, he tends to see printed letters even where they should not be, everything

turns into text in front of his eyes, “either because of the insect armies of type so constantly besieging his eyes, or because it was really so”:

[the sandpiper] looked, to his strained eyes, like a point of punctuation against the “rounded, rolling waves.” It left fine prints with its feet. Its feathers were speckled; and especially on the narrow hems of the wings appeared marks that looked as if they might be letters, if only he could get close enough to read them. [...] The sand itself, if he picked it up and held it close to one eye, looked a little like printed paper, ground up or chewed. (CPr 178-9)

Mr. Boomer’s endless search for the answer to the question, “But what did these things mean?” (CPr 179), can never be fully successful, as he always finds fragments of meaning which he’s never quite sure of. Thus he keeps searching for more, never finding the answers he is looking for: “The more papers he picked up and the more he read, the less he felt he understood” (CPr 177). And whatever he finds, fragmentary and unsatisfactory as it is, has to be burnt anyway: “But the point was that everything had to be burnt at last. All, all had to be burned, even bewildering scraps that he had carried with him for weeks or months” (CPr 179). Still, his awful search through litter can be seen as cheerful, there is beauty and satisfaction in the search, not in the problematic achievement it brings. The fire itself is beautiful and creative, even though it actually means an end to Mr. Boomer’s effort at finding meaning in the torn papers:

The flame walked up a stretch of paper evenly, not hurriedly, and after a second, the black paper turned under or over. It fell twisting into shapes that sometimes resembled beautiful wrought-iron work, but afterwards they dropped apart at a breath. (CPr 179)

The effort he puts in his search and study does not yield a final satisfactory result, everything he does is inevitably destined to fire, but the seemingly prosaic job of cleaning a beach and burning the litter turns into poetry in this story. Apart from the visual reasons – “a picturesque sight, in some ways like a Rembrandt” (CPr 172) – there is also Mr. Boomer’s eagerness, or simply openness towards the texts he meets, his willingness to study them and look for meanings in them, even though he cannot achieve much doing so. Just like in “The Bight”, his “untidy activity continues, awful but cheerful”.

In “The Sea & Its Shore” we leave Mr. Boomer at work, the final stress is not on the result of his work – which is dubious and problematic, as we have seen –, but on the process. It has been said that one of the key aspects of Bishop’s translation poetics is precisely this focus on poetry as a process, rather than a creation of a final absolute artifact. This preoccupation is echoed in the themes and motifs of her poems, where activities tend to go on rather than result. “The Bight” with the untidy activity continuing in the last lines, “The Sea & Its Shore” with Mr. Boomer sitting down to his endless and hopeless work at the end of the story without having achieved much before are two of the instances, and if we look closer at Bishop’s works we notice that they often end in the course of some action rather than bring it to a result.

Bishop’s inconclusive endings have been mentioned in the introduction to her translation poetics as one of its typical manifestations. Apart from stressing the process, as opposed to the result, the fact that the activities do not finish in the poem but continue has another effect: it suggests that there is always something more, something the poem does not cover. The things the poem is about are not limited to the space of the poem but go beyond it, continue after it. It connects to the problem of search and capturing of “the other” (typical of translation poetics)– the poem does not contain and

keep the whole of the object it deals with, “the other” does not yield fully to the poem but keeps going on even after the poem ends. Sometimes, the final escape of the other is explicit, as in, for example, “Brazil, January 1, 1502”, where the native women keep “retreating, always retreating”, or “At the Fishhouses” with the final words “flowing, and flown” concerning knowledge compared to sea water. In some cases, there is something hidden still waiting ahead to be found, as in “Arrival at Santos”, which ends with the speaker leaving the harbor and heading to the as yet unexplored interior (with many things, such as the coins and paper money, which “remain to be seen”); in other cases, the speaker (and the reader) cannot stay, they have to leave “the other”, which remains without being fully known and explored – that is the case of “The Moose”, where the bus leaves, but “for a moment longer, / by craning backward, / the moose can be seen / on the moonlit macadam”, or of “Santarém”, where the speaker-tourist has to hurry back to her ship and leave the intriguing town.

Cape Breton

Another example of a poem which leaves the scene with its activities going on, and another poem exploring the meeting with the other, represented by the landscape, is “Cape Breton”. The poem takes place on the coast again, the Canadian coast this time (which appeared already in “The Map”, and again in “At the Fishhouses”). It describes the landscape in Cape Breton, a large island in Nova Scotia. It starts with the view of two “bird islands” of Ciboux and Hertford, two tiny stony islands near Cape Breton, and then the focus moves across the water, through the all-covering mist, to the mainland (the mainland of the main island, Cape Breton, that is). Like “The Bight” and other poems by Bishop, “Cape Breton” introduces various meetings, one of them being the meeting of the natural world and civilization. The first encounter of this type in the poem happens in the first stanza, and it is not a happy one. The pastoral image of sheep pasturing on the edge of the cliff, going “Baaa, baaa”, is interrupted by the ominous brackets: “(Sometimes, frightened by aeroplanes, they stampede / and fall over into the sea or onto the rocks.)” But the horror is immediately abandoned and replaced by the lulling “silken water [...] weaving and weaving, / disappearing under the mist”. Civilization (of which the speaker is implicitly a part) approaches the idyllic landscape suddenly and brutally, the brackets open and close mimicking the sudden attack of the aeroplane, which appears and disappears, and the sea and the mist cover the destruction it has caused. The human world puts the world of the animals in danger, but it does not even enter it; the islands remain “bird islands”. The sound of a passing motorboat can be heard in the mist, but the boat does not appear, let alone land.

The mainland, too, first appears uncivilized, uninhabited – by people or by animals. The description in the second stanza creates an impressive image of an ancient, prehistoric landscape coming out of the mist:

The same mist hangs in thin layers
among the valleys and gorges of the mainland
like rotting snow-ice sucked away
almost to spirit; the ghosts of glaciers drift
among those folds and folds of fir: spruce and hackmatack –
dull, dead, deep peacock-colors,
each riser distinguished from the next
by an irregular nervous saw-tooth edge,
alike, but certain as a stereoscopic view.

The landscape is seen from the outside, and from a distance, it looks like a painting, grand and timeless, quiet and unwelcoming. The solemnity and certain artificiality (or artifact-like quality) is stressed by the rhythm and conspicuous alliterations of the description (“snow-ice, sucked, spirit”, “ghosts of glaciers”, “folds and folds of fir”, “dull, dead, deep”). As in “The Bight”, a natural phenomenon (trees, in this case, not animals) is compared to a sharp tool, a saw, modified by a very human adjective “nervous”. However, the actual human presence can be found only in the next stanza, where we notice that the distant, primordial landscape is in fact marked with civilization all over:

The wild road clambers along the brink of the coast.
On it stand occasional small yellow bulldozers,
but without their drivers, because today is Sunday.
The little white churches have been dropped into the matted hills
like lost quartz arrowheads.

There is a road and bulldozers, there are churches. They are not presented as foreign or inappropriate, but almost as a part of the landscape. The bulldozers are silent, there are

no men to operate them, they are “small” and “occasional”, not dangerous destructive machines whose task is to dominate the landscape and change it to serve man better.

It is only here, in the third stanza of the poem, that the reader gradually notices that the seemingly objective, omniscient, absolute description is not really such. The first clear hint of that is the explanation that “today is Sunday”, which suddenly takes the atemporal, fixed quality from the scene, and sets it into a very concrete temporal frame. We realize that what we are offered is not a universal picture of an eternal landscape, but a momentary view of a limited observer. In fact, this is the first time we become aware of the existence of the observer and her limits, we realize that what has been offered as facts so far, are actually observations of a particular person at a particular time, a Sunday.

The mention of Sunday brings the churches into the view. The churches have not been built by people, but “have been dropped into the matted hills”, as if by a giant hand, reminding us of the fingernail flicking the “lightning rod on top of the church steeple” in “In the Village”. They come as a kind of later addition to the original creation, dropped by God from above, rather than raised by people from below. Yet, they are connected to men, they do not look like natural objects, but “like lost quartz arrowheads”, like human tools, weapons, in fact. The comparison stresses their primeval quality – quartz arrowheads evoke a primitive, prehistoric culture, whose scattered remains we occasionally find here and there; there are just arrowheads, not the whole arrows, fragments of the original weapons, and they are “lost”. We do not have functional weapons or tools which are actually used by men, but lost fragments of an ancient primitive people.

With the presence of the observer another meeting emerges, a crucial one not only for this poem, but for most of Bishop’s poetry – that between the observer and the

landscape observed. Both nature and culture observed in this passage are distanced from the observer; they are clearly seen but remain evasive, they do not interact with the observer, do not let her enter and become a part of themselves. The landscape does not answer the observer, it does not speak to her:

The road appears to have been abandoned.

Whatever the landscape had of meaning appears to have been
abandoned,

unless the road is holding it back, in the interior,

where we cannot see,

where deep lakes are reputed to be,

and disused trails and mountains of rock

and miles of burnt forests standing in gray scratches

like the admirable scriptures made on stones by stones – [...]

The twice repeated assertion of abandonment (“appears to have been abandoned”) starts as a mere observation of the actual situation in the landscape – it refers simply to “the road” –, but it immediately acquires a much more general and deeper meaning – it refers to “whatever the landscape had of meaning”. There was some meaning in the landscape, but it does not seem to be there any more. Again, an original, primeval landscape is implied, a meaningful landscape which no longer can be seen, whose meaning is lost. The observer’s presence and her attempt at getting closer to the evasive landscape she sees become obvious in this passage. She moves from the mere visual observation of the landscape to its semantics, to the meaning of the landscape. She does not look at the landscape only to see it and describe it, but to find out what it means; the landscape is expected to communicate some message. This is, of course, one of the traditional ways of perceiving landscape and nature in art and thought – in America this tradition goes

back to the Transcendentalists and, earlier, to the Puritans, but can be also found, for example, in the poetry of Marianne Moore, who tends to see moral meanings in natural phenomena she “objectively” describes. In Bishop, the search for such message is problematic: she does not seem to be able to see it, and suggests that it is either because it is simply not there or is hidden.

The landscape does not offer its message to us readily and happily as Emerson’s nature, where “all things with which we deal, preach to us” (*Nature* 39), and even the tiniest creature or process “shall hint or thunder to man the laws of right and wrong, and echo the Ten Commandments” (*Nature* 38). Bishop’s landscape keeps its meaning for itself, it “is holding it back”, hiding it from the observer’s eyes “in the interior, / where we cannot see”. Here, the observer’s (and, by implication, the reader’s) limitations are made explicit: from where we are we cannot see the interior; the poet is not the god-like omniscient owner of the landscape she writes about, she is not a Walt Whitman seeing and encompassing the whole of the land, intimately connected with every little part of it. She keeps her translator-like position from which she approaches “the other”, trying to understand it, but realizing its unbreachable otherness. She cannot see into the landscape in front of her, yet she tentatively enters in it by suggesting what might be there, what is “reputed to be” there: deep lakes, disused trails, mountains of rock, miles of burnt forests. All these images only strengthen the impression that the meaning, the potential message, is hidden and elusive: these are not locations which would yield their secrets to man freely and generously; on the contrary, they imply inaccessibility and unfriendliness towards people. The “deep lakes” and the “mountains of rock” connect back to the earlier images of ancient primeval landscape, while the “disused trails” continue the line of the images of abandonment and of the lost traces of civilization (the silent bulldozers, the lost quartz arrowheads, the abandoned meaning...). The fact that

they are not directly seen, but they are “reputed to be” there makes these places even more elusive, they are uncertain and legendary, rather than actual locations.

The search for a message leads to the comparison of the burnt forests to “the admirable scriptures made on stones by stones”. The possibility of reading the landscape as a holy text appears here, but we are still far from Emerson’s nature thundering the Ten Commandments (although the stone tablets on which these were carved may come to mind). The comparison seems to be inspired mostly by the visual quality of the landscape – the burnt trees look like “grey scratches” resembling ancient inscriptions. Together with the lost arrowheads and disused trails, they suggest the presence of an ancient lost culture which we can never approach. In fact, we cannot even see them; they are part of the hidden interior landscape we know only by repute. Rather than communicating a message, these potential inscriptions hide it, they defy deciphering and their meaning remains unknown – if there actually is any. Here, the observer gets dangerously close to Mr. Boomer from “The Sea & Its Shore”, who tries to read everything, and eventually believes he sees letters in the sand on the beach and in the patterns of birds’ wings, which he could read “if only he could get close enough”. The observer in “Cape Breton” imagines there might be meaning hidden in the interior of the island, where she cannot see, perhaps it could be written in the grey scratches of the burnt forests – but all this might as well be illusory.

The excursus into the unseen interior ends with a dash, without revealing the meaning potentially hidden there: in the following line we learn that “these regions now have little to say for themselves”. The idea of the abandoned meaning of the landscape is reasserted, the adverb “now” implies once more that the meaning used to be there, these regions used to have something to say, but not any more. The only way the landscape speaks is not through symbols or writings, but “in thousands of light song-

sparrow songs”, of which we are suddenly aware in the scene we have perceived as basically silent so far. The solemn ancient writings on stone are replaced by common bird songs (thousands of them, not just one, clearly distinguished), which do not seem to convey a message or unfold the meaning of the landscape, but rather to form a part of the landscape. They are dispassionate (not jubilantly announcing something), they penetrate the mist, but they stay meshed in the fish-nets – whatever the landscape has to say for itself remains in the landscape, it does not quite reach the observer/translator and make her understand.

The sound of the birds singing marks a break in the poem. It concludes the description of the uninhabited, quiet landscape; the next stanza brings in people and activity. A bus packed with people appears on the seemingly abandoned road; the sublime images of mountains and lakes and trees are replaced by the mundane “groceries, spare automobile parts, and pump parts” (which we could see on a weekday, but not today) and the mildly comic “two preachers extra, one carrying his frock coat on a hanger”. We can perceive a shift in the speaker’s position – she is not looking at the landscape from the outside and from a distance any more, but she has moved closer, and seems to be on the bus now, watching the scene passing behind its windows. Still, she is caught on the bus, divided from the landscape she sees – symptomatically, she does not get off the bus to enter the landscape, she just watches someone else doing so and disappearing out of her sight.

The “civilized” landscape of human activities does contrast with the “abandoned” natural landscape of the previous stanzas, but even though it might appear more accessible and welcoming, it does not open much to the observer – everything is closed because it is Sunday, the everyday activities do not really happen, they can only be imagined (like the things people carry on weekdays or the flag flying from the pole).

A man with a baby gets off the bus and enters the landscape – he climbs over the stile, easily overcoming the barrier between the road and the landscape, and enters a meadow, goes through it to “his invisible house beside the water”. The house remains invisible, imagined, like the lakes and burnt forests in the previous stanza, and the speaker cannot follow the man. An observer removed and divided from the scene observed, can be found elsewhere in Bishop’s poems: the speaker of the poem often finds herself tied to a means of transport taking her somewhere (e.g. another bus in “The Moose”, a car as in “A Trip to Vigia” or a boat as in “Santarém”), other times she simply sees the scene from far off (e.g. “Squatter’s Children”, “The Burglar of Babylon”) or from a window (“Under the Window: Ouro Preto”, “Five Flights Up”), sometimes she observes a painting (“Large Bad Picture”, “Poem”) or a map (“The Map”).

The short last stanza does not offer a solution or a conclusion; it lets everything continue:

The birds keep on singing, a calf bawls, the bus starts.

The thin mist follows

the white mutations of its dream;

an ancient chill is rippling the dark brooks.

The birds keep on singing and will keep on singing after the poem ends. The calf is introduced only now suggesting the presence of other animals and things we have not really met in the poem but who are there in the landscape. The bus starts just before the poem stops; it will keep going on but we won’t follow it. The mist which was ubiquitous in the first stanzas reappears here, as if to cover the landscape and its “meaning” and hide it from our eyes; the last line leaves us in the ancient mysterious landscape of the first half of the poem with the ancient chill and dark brooks, impossible to reach and to understand. The landscape is not solved, it is not understood by the

speaker or the reader, and their interaction with it does not lead to a conclusion or an answer, the landscape remains “the other” throughout the poem. At the same time, the exploration of the other which keeps its otherness is valuable: it shows, among other things, that some interaction with the other is, after all, possible without the absolute necessity to overcome the otherness; and perhaps more importantly, the search for the other creates a space for beauty and for poetry.

Brazil, January 1, 1502

The poem which perhaps most explicitly and famously deals with the meeting of another world is “Brazil, January 1, 1502”, first published in January, 1960. The meeting takes place on several different levels. The poem compares two historically distant encounters: “ours” and “theirs”, that of the contemporary traveler or tourist, and that of the 16th-century conquistadors. The date in the title of the poem refers to the discovery of the Guanabara Bay by the Portuguese, who, thinking erroneously that it was a river, called it Rio de Janeiro (January River), and later founded a city of the same name here. January appears in the plural in the first line of the poem, connecting the original January of the discovery with the contemporary January when “we” arrive to Brazil. The stress on January – figuring in the title and as the opening word of the poem – also has the effect of creating a cultural contrast: the arrivals (both the original and the modern ones) come from cultures where January is the dead of winter, while the world they arrive to presents them with a January of welcoming warmth, lushness and greenery. Through its reference to the name of the later capital of Brazil, the word January also implies the act of naming the new world and founding cities there, i.e. colonizing it. The colonizers appropriate the newly discovered place by naming it (a gesture we have already seen implicitly present in “The Map”, where the name of Labrador refers to another Portuguese conqueror). Ironically, in this particular case, the naming is wrong – it calls a bay a river (and later a city a river), the newcomers misread and misunderstand the first thing they encounter, they appropriate it under a false name, and the truth remains hidden and forgotten.

Both encounters – the old one and the new one – are compared and seen as analogous at first: “Nature greets our eyes / *exactly as* she must have greeted theirs”, “*Just so* the Christians [...] came and found it all” (italics mine). The epigraph of the

poem brings up yet another kind of meeting – the meeting of nature and art. The poem tries to capture the landscape seen with its own means, in this case with a description as detailed as possible, through a search for the most precise words (“big leaves, little leaves, and giant leaves, / blue, blue-green and olive”, “yellow, two yellows” and the most precise vision (“up in the air – up, rather, in the leaves”). However, there is a danger lurking at the end of the highly visual and descriptive first stanza: the poem as a work of art tends to see nature in its own terms of an artifact: “fresh as if just finished / and taken off the frame” concludes the stanza which has just painted the picture of the sumptuous tropical scenery seen for the first time. Yet the “as if” is quite important and it points toward the falsity of this image: the landscape seems brand new, freshly made to the newcomers (both the old and the modern ones), but it is neither new, nor a work of art. It is so only in relationship to those who approach it for the first time, and appropriate it for the first time.

As if to move away from one kind of distortion, the language and vision suggestive of plastic arts dwindles in the second stanza and yields to a way of seeing no less dangerous: the symbolic or allegorical vision. Nature is interpreted as a sign, and the language implies the categories of Christian morals, work and struggle (“symbolic birds”, “in the foreground there is Sin”, “the rocks are worked with lichens”, “threatened from underneath by moss”, “hell-green flames”, “attacked above / by scaling-ladder vines”...). Nature is captured in a way similar to how the original colonizers tried to capture it – these are referred to not only in the tendency toward the allegorical way of seeing things, but also in the literal translation of a Portuguese expression describing a vine: “‘one leaf yes and one leaf no’ (in Portuguese)”.

Here, the English speaking newcomer does not use her own language to describe what she sees, but creates an expression which is a literal translation from Portuguese.

She stresses its foreignness even more by putting into inverted commas and explaining in the brackets that it is a Portuguese phrase. In order to speak about the newly discovered world, she abandons her own language and resorts to a rather clumsy word-by-word translation of a foreign language, pointing out its non-Englishness. One of the immediate apparent effects of this is the impression of authenticity. The fact that the speaker uses the Portuguese expression suggests that she can get closer to the Brazilian landscape by naming it in the local language. However, the language she uses is not the native language of the landscape, it is the language of the Portuguese, the earlier conquistadors she compares herself to. The landscape she approaches may look “fresh as if just finished” to her, but the words she uses to speak about it betray the history of a conquest – a conquest so overwhelming that the conquerors’ tongue and their culture have become a part of “the native”, “the authentic” for the modern newcomer. The world the newcomer arrives to is presented as “exactly” the same as the world the conquerors saw, but it is far from it – it is already the world colonized and transformed by the first colonizers, it is not what they found, it is what they have made it.

Another important effect of the use of the literal translation is that it stresses the presence of translation in the description of the landscape – a translation going on between languages and between cultures. On a more general level, it draws attention to the presence of language as such in the process of approaching another world, thus developing the less explicit hint at the naming of the place at the beginning of the poem. The role of language as a tool of colonization is brought up again, but she also suggests that language is an inevitable tool in approaching an unknown world; an unanswered question arises whether it is possible to separate the role of the language as a tool of understanding and the tool of control. Once again the paradoxical relationship between

domination and submission, control and yielding, characteristic of Bishop's translation poetics, appears, and once again the tension remains unresolved.

The eyes which see the scenery of the first two stanzas are "our eyes" from the first line, the eyes of the modern (North-American) newcomer, although the imagery and even the words refer implicitly to the original conquerors. These, however, do not appear until the last stanza; they are "Christians, hard as nails", but immediately – seen on the background of the enormous nature – "tiny as nails". The New World is not brand new to them, it appears "not unfamiliar": there are no Old-World courtly-love commonplaces to be found ("no lovers' walks, no bowers, / no cherries to be picked, no lute music"), but what they find does correspond "to an old dream of wealth and luxury / already out of style when they left home". The newly discovered world may be very different from the reality of the world they come from, yet it reminds them of dream worlds, imagined worlds they know from their own culture. For the 16th century conquistadors it was common to see the New World in terms of the Edenic place, the *locus amoenus*, or of the fiction popular at that time (e.g. the Spanish conquistador in Mexico Bernal Díaz del Castillo compares the Aztec buildings to those from the romances of Amadís; *Historia verdadera* 308). The new world is seen in the context of their own world as a kind of addition or variation, it is not perceived as "other", but as a potential part of their culture. After appropriating the newly found world by seeing it in their own cultural term and by importing their culture (their mass, their songs), they turn to the violent physical appropriation of it: they penetrate through the picture (the tapestry) which offered itself to their eyes at first in search of the fleeing native women they want to possess. Symptomatically, the meeting never happens, the women disappear in uncertainty – their voices may be the voices of birds – and they keep retreating behind the curtain spread before the eyes of the newcomers.

We have said that the poem presents two meetings with the New World – that of the colonizers, and that of the modern visitor represented by the speaker’s voice – as analogous. This similarity is, however, far from absolute, and a third level of meeting arises in the course of the poem – the meeting of these two approaches, which reveals substantial differences between them. The conquistadors’ perspective is unable to step out of itself, it is not capable of the self-reflection which appears in the poet’s voice, even though this voice is seemingly neutral and impersonal. The conquerors (in this poem, at least) consider their way of seeing the only possible one, they are blind to other perspectives, and they regard the other world as inferior, they grasp it, but they do not enter into dialogue with it. On the other hand, the perspective of the poem, often outwardly blended with the view of the conquerors, draws attention to the limitations of its (and the conquerors’) way of seeing, and also the limitations of various different ways of seeing: nature as an artifact, nature as a sign, nature as an object of pleasure – none of these views is complete and true and can approach the seen fully.

At the same time, this self-reflection and the criticism of the conquistadors does not and cannot save the speaker fully from complicity. The conquistadors approach the New World through the prism of their own culture, reading their own cultural schemes into the unknown landscape, which they perceive as familiar, unable to see it without these preconceptions, and unable to grasp it without colonizing it. The “we” of the poem also seek to approach and to grasp the newly seen world, but despite the awareness of the dangers of the colonizing approach, “we” are even farther away of the “fresh”, original world. The speaker of the poem pretends to see the new world as the first colonizers saw it (with the bonus of the critical reflection of her and of their approach), but what she actually sees is the already colonized world, the named world, as we can see from her use of the literal translation of the Portuguese expression

describing the leaves. There are many more layers standing between her and the “original” than there were for the Portuguese: there are more languages, more history, more cultural layers intervening. Even though she perceives her own limits and dangers, the ultimate impossibility of a perfect meeting with the other remains, and while its first gesture seems to be “greeting”, in the end it turns out to be “retreating, always retreating”.

“Brazil, January 1, 1502” offers some interesting intertextual relationship. Apart from the abovementioned epigraph from Sir Kenneth Clark, there are hidden dialogues with other texts, as I have already pointed out in the discussion of Bishop’s translation of Clarice Lispector’s story “The Smallest Woman in the World”, which revealed that the words “retreating, always retreating” are a translation of Lispector’s description of the movement of the endangered jungle people of her story, and also in the comparison of the poem with Max Jacob’s “Etablissement d’une communauté au Brésil”, a poem which exists in an unpublished translation by Bishop. Both the translations, which clearly connect to “Brazil, January 1, 1502”, feature the colonizing approach of the “civilized” outsiders coming to a new “barbaric” country (the monks starting a community in Jacob, and the rational, educated explorer in Lispector), and critics (Lombardi, Henneberg) have stressed that it is this colonizing, controlling, superior attitude Bishop is aware of and tries to avoid in her own approach. Yet we have seen that – unlike Bishop’s own poem – these two texts also offer a rather problematic image of the “native” (the violent “Negroes” in Jacob, Little Flower desiring “to own” and to control in Lispector). Reading the poem in the context of the translations suggests that the dominating colonizers, old and new ones, may not be the only problematic part of the relationship with the other world; they appear so in the poem, because the encounter with the other is limited to their domination, and the other is not given a voice. The

poem leaves the voices of the maddening little women, which are the authentic part of the original world, untranslated (they sound like the voices of the birds) and retreating, allowing us to perceive them as noble victims. However, this interpretation (not openly supported by the text of the poem, but common in the readings of it) is based on another cultural preconception typical for us, modern readers. If given voice, the maddening little women might prove as disconcertingly kindred to the colonizers as Little Flower of the story Bishop translated using the same words she used in her own poem.

Santarém

The problem of the encounter with another world and of seeing the other, which is so prominent and explicit in “Brazil, January 1, 1502”, is one of the main recurrent concerns of Bishop’s poems. In a much later Brazilian poem, “Santarém” (1978), one of Bishop’s last published poems, the meeting is not as dramatic as the first meeting of the colonizers with the New World, but seeing a new, exotic place for the first time is made more problematic here by the disfiguring powers of memory. In “Brazil, January 1, 1502” we had the confrontation of the original meeting of the conquistadors and the modern meeting of the contemporary traveler; in “Santarém”, there is the actual meeting – the tourist’s trip to the Amazon – and the memory of it. Again, the space of the encounter with the other is full of questions concerning the speaker’s cultural preconceptions which she approaches the place with, and the whole perception is made more complicated because it is not presented as direct but as remembered, with the memory adding new layers of imagination on the original picture. The poet is looking for a way to name and grasp not only the place she saw, but the place she remembers seeing – she is trying to mediate not just the place itself, but also her own impression of it. She speaks about the place in several different ways and styles, as if testing them, trying different approaches, she corrects herself, she paraphrases pieces of information from other sources, and she ends with leaving the last line to someone else’s voice. The language and style are rich, ranging from personal and colloquial, even confessional, through geographical, intellectual, decorative, descriptive, to anecdotal. And again, the power of the poet’s voice and point of view is not based on its certainty and persuasiveness, but on the ability to reflect on its own limitations and to lend itself to different voices and ways of seeing.

The poem's title "Santarém" gives the name of the place described in the poem, a town on the Amazon the speaker visited and now remembers. But the very beginning of the poem, the two lines which form a separate stanza, make it clear right away that the memory is not an unproblematic one:

Of course I may be remembering it all wrong
after, after – how many years.

Even before we are told anything we are offered a doubt – the speaker casts a doubt over all her memory, it may be all wrong. But the affirmation is not harrowing; it is introduced by a natural, colloquial "of course." Of course, my memory is not reliable, no one's is when remembering something that happened long time ago. It is natural, there is no reason to complain about it or to try to change it. It is a premise we have to accept and start with; whatever is going to follow will be seen through the prism of this opening claim. The poet says that what she is offering is not an absolute truth that cannot be challenged. She is offering her doubtful memory, her view of the place. And the second line not only explains why it is natural that the poet's memory cannot be trusted, but it exemplifies and confirms it: she does not even remember how many years ago the thing happened. Of course, the poet could have counted the years for the poem's sake, had she thought it would work better in the text; but she chose not to. (The poem dates back to Bishop's actual trip to the Amazon in 1960, eighteen years before the final publication of the poem. Comparing the existing drafts of the poem, Brett C. Millier shows the development of this line over the year from the original draft's "Of course I may be remembering it all wrong / after two years" to "after five years" to "after eight years" to the final uncertain question: "after – how many years?" [534].) The first two lines also add a conversational and spontaneous quality to the opening: the "of course", the repetition of "after" followed by a pause and then the question – suggesting that the

process of trying to remember and giving up is happening right now, in front of our eyes. In an ironic gesture, Bishop stylizes her voice into that of an elderly lady whose memory does not work too well any more, and who seems to present an authentic process of remembering. Strangely, she stresses the authenticity of the text by undermining it with an essential doubt.

Yet another effect of this unusual, unassertive opening works on a meta-textual level. It draws our attention to the memory as a memory, to representation as representation. From the very first line, the reader is not allowed the illusion that there is no intermediary between him and the scenes presented. These two lines, graphically divided from the following text, are, in fact, a commentary on this text, and as such, they point out the fact that it is “just” a text, representation, one version of what may have happened.

The rest of the poem is the unreliable remembrance itself. From the start, the place is presented from the speaker’s point of view; the first part makes it immediately clear that she liked the place and felt good in it:

That golden evening I really wanted to go no farther;
more than anything else I wanted to stay awhile
in that conflux of two great rivers, Tapajós, Amazon,
grandly, silently flowing, flowing east.
Suddenly there’d been houses, people and a lot of mongrel
riverboats skittering back and forth
under a sky of gorgeous, under-lit clouds,
with everything gilded, burnished along one side,
and everything bright, cheerful, casual – or so it looked.

The first two lines do not only say that the traveler likes the place and wants to stay there, but also suggest that she was not supposed to stay there awhile, she was meant to go farther. The beginning of the poem introduces one of its basic themes: the speaker's wish and effort to meet "the other", which is the place in this case (it very often is in Bishop). It is the effort to grasp it, describe it, to be in it, which is, however, impossible because the speaker will always remain an outsider, a visitor, one condemned to the moving ship and the unreliable memory which is left. It refers back to what has been said about translation poetics and the translator's experience of the openness towards the other combined with the awareness of the impossibility of a perfect meeting with the other. The introductory two-line stanza has established the speaker's distance in time, and now we learn that a certain distance was already there at the moment the remembered situation happened. She did not belong to the scene, she could not stay and become a part of it, although she wished to. Such complex distance is also known to a translator, who approaches the foreign text across the unsurpassable borders of languages, cultures, and often times, too. The poem deals with the longing to overcome the distance, the border between the speaker and "the other" – be it physically, by means of staying, not leaving the place, or metaphorically, by means of describing the place as exactly as possible, by expressing the place in words.

The time of the day – evening – is modified by the adjective "golden", which sets the color for the whole following scene, a warm and rich color suffusing the memory. The place is defined – the exotic names of the rivers are given (the less known one first), with their soothing assonance, "Tapajós", "Amazon," and their situation given in exact geographical terms: it is their conflux, and they are flowing east. What started as a personal narrative ("That evening I really wanted to go no farther"), quickly becomes a description of the place. There are houses, people, boats, all under the dome

of a baroque “sky of gorgeous, under-lit clouds, / with everything gilded, burnished along one side, / and everything bright, cheerful, casual – or so it looked”. The fast accumulation of adjectives, the baroque imagery, and the rhythm of these lines is reminiscent of Bishop’s lifelong favorite poet, Gerard Manley Hopkins, and of lines like these, from “Pied Beauty”:

All things counter, original, spare, strange;

Whatever is fickle, freckled (who knows how?). (Hopkins 31)

The seemingly neutral, objective description of the exotic Amazonian landscape brings in a series of implicit European cultural references; the language itself is heavy with them. The adjectives continue to suggest the style of a baroque altar: “gilded,” “burnished”, but the baroque heaviness is lightened and made more accessible by the more sober “bright, cheerful, casual”, which pile up in a whirl of enthusiasm for the place, only to be followed by a pause and a laconic anticlimax: “ – or so it looked.” The speaker seems to be carried away by the beauty and attraction of the place, but immediately she checks herself, stops short and qualifies all she has just said: maybe it was not really like that, it only appeared so. She reminds both herself and the reader that these are her impressions (so it looked – to me), chiefly visual, and that an impression of the thing does not necessarily reflect its reality. However, this qualification or warning does not result in her rejection of the impression and in her search for the “reality” behind the appearances. Neither does it diminish her delight in the place, as the following line proves: “I liked the place; I liked the idea of the place.” Another qualification, another distinction. If what she sees is not necessarily the real thing but her impression (her idea of it), then, of course, what she likes is not necessarily the place as such, but rather her idea of the place. And again, the qualification is not automatically negative – after all, the reader must think, do we ever like anything else

but our ideas of things rather than the things themselves? Is it humanly possible to ever achieve more than an idea of a thing, anyway? In the end, to say “I liked the place” is only a more common – and less exact – way to say “I liked the idea of the place.”

The word “idea” invites the shift from the physical, visual description of the place to a more abstract and intellectual reflection:

Two rivers. Hadn't two rivers sprung
from the Garden of Eden? No, that was four
and they'd diverged. Here only two
and coming together. Even if one were tempted
to literary interpretations
such as: life / death, right / wrong, male / female
– such notions would have resolved, dissolved, straight off
in that watery, dazzling dialectic.

In a romantic move, we have turned from the speaker's observation of the landscape (townscape, in this case) to her thought. The movement of the poem slows down as the speaker ponders over the image of the two rivers, which seems to be asking for an intellectual or cultural interpretation, and at the same time avoiding it. Tentatively, she tries a biblical interpretation: the two rivers could actually mean that this place is like Paradise.³¹ But she immediately checks herself: however attractive the interpretation might seem, it does not fit the biblical description of the Garden of Eden (Gen 2.10-14). The following lines reject the possibility of a cultural (literary) interpretation of the scene altogether. Although the observer may be “tempted” to see the two rivers in terms of traditional Western dualism, with each of them representing one of the opposing aspects, the rivers defy such explanation, even before it can be developed. The abstract dualistic oppositions melt in the physical waters of the two rivers which become one;

the rivers unite the opposites and dissolve the intellectual attempt at their metaphorical explication. Yet, at the same time, seeing the conflux of the rivers as a dialectical solution to dualism is only another metaphorical interpretation, and just as intellectual as the previous dualistic approach. Dualism is resolved by dialectics, in accordance with European tradition of thought: philosophical meanings are read into the landscape, even when the observer acknowledges the landscape's resistance to interpretation. Paradoxically, the assertion of the impossibility of interpretation turns into the confirmation of its inescapability. Even when we are only observing, we cannot avoid interpreting; anything we see is immediately filled with meaning in our minds. We cannot observe but through the prism of our mind and thought, interpretation is a burden we have to carry all the time, and there is no escaping it. Even when we are fully conscious of the fact that we are interpreting something that does not comply with our interpretation, even when we think we resist the "temptation" to interpret, another interpretation enters, pure vision cannot be achieved. The water of the rivers dissolves our "literary" notions, but is straight away imbued with another notion coming from the observers mind, not from the rivers themselves.

As if scared by the combined impossibility and inevitability of interpretation, in the following part of the poem the poet moves back to the apparently safer ground of the description of the town:

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

But already the first line suggests that the description is not as safe and simple as might have been expected; the very first thing observed, the church, is followed by an immediate correction, or specification: it is not a church, in fact, it is a cathedral. The mere observation – seeing a church – is modified by an extra piece of knowledge; the speaker knows that the church is a cathedral, the seat of the bishop of Santarém. The fact that the church is actually a cathedral can hardly be inferred from observation only, the observer must have been told or must have read the information. Here again, knowledge and “pure” observation clash, or rather modify each other; the observation is promptly followed and qualified by knowledge coming not from the observation itself, but from the observer’s erudition and culture.

The speaker’s failure to call the church a cathedral can be also read as a hint at the cultural distance between the speaker and the place she’s visiting. For someone from a Protestant (non-episcopal) background, every church is simply a church, there are no cathedrals. The word cathedral does not come automatically to her because it is not a part of her own culture. By correcting herself and by stressing that in this case the church is not just a church, but a cathedral, the speaker suggests that what she sees and describes belongs to a world different from her own, and the words for it have to be looked for. As Adrienne Rich noted in her review of Bishop’s *Complete Poems 1927–1979*, Bishop’s speakers often approach the world from the position of the outsider; this position can be seen not only in the personas and perspectives she adopts, but also in the way she constructs her images. What she sees and describes does not offer itself naturally and directly to her, she is not one with the scene described, although she is clearly present in it (unlike, for example, Marianne Moore, whose observers do not enter the scenes observed). There is always a distance between her and the objects of her attention, a distance she is trying to overcome, knowing at the same time that it will

always be there, that the objects will never yield fully to her observation. The focus of many of her poems, “Santarém” among them, lies in this space between the observer and the observed, and in the observer’s struggle to approach the observed. The words, the metaphors and the diction she chooses, her self-corrections, inserted commentaries and ironies, all subtly draw the attention to the unbridgeable distance between the poet and her theme, and to her constant effort to reach over it.

The promenade and the belvedere – two very “European” words, French and Italian – in the following line bring in the idea of cultured leisure, something brought from the Western culture into the jungle, to the shore of the huge Amazon, which threatens to swallow it at any moment: the belvedere is about to fall into it. The confrontation of the suave European culture and the Brazilian nature appears elsewhere in Bishop’s poetry; we have seen it perhaps most remarkably in “Brazil, January 1, 1502,” in which the conquistadors find Brazilian landscape

not unfamiliar:
no lovers’ walks, no bowers,
no cherries to be picked, no lute music,
but corresponding, nevertheless,
to an old dream of wealth and luxury
already out of style when they left home –
wealth, plus a brand-new pleasure.

There is a fascination with the meeting of the two worlds, which seem to be so radically different, yet strangely “corresponding” to each other. The in-coming culture finds the familiar in the new landscape, it is able to interpret the exotic landscape in its own terms. But as we have seen, it also maybe that such interpretation is inescapable, the conquistadors cannot but see the new world in their own cultural terms, just like the

poet/tourist in Santarém feels the temptation to “literary interpretations” and finds it hard to achieve “pure” observation because her culture and education seems to interfere constantly. The original conquistadors did not find lovers’ walks and bowers they knew from home, but Santarém already has its lovers’ walk and its bower, the promenade and the belvedere, brought by the colonizers, but still slightly out of place here.

Two colors dominate the scenery (if we do not count the red of the flamboyants) – the blue and the yellow of the stucco (another Italian word) houses. Both colors are strangely combined in the house with buttercup yellow “*azulejos*”: Bishop does not translate the Portuguese word for tile, which is derived from the word *azul*, blue, even though the particular *azulejos* here are yellow. It is as if the blue color was hidden in the yellow tiles, present in the name, even though the name refers to a different color here. The word is in italics to show that it is a foreign word, but the italics also make a visual connection between this word and the word “*blue*” three lines lower, which is also in italics because it is stressed. The blue quality of the *azulejos* seems to be underlined by these inconspicuous means. The blue and yellow color pattern is not limited to the stucco and tile houses, but seems to spread to the rest of the scenery, through the gold sand and the blue zebus:

The street was deep in dark-gold river sand
damp from the ritual afternoon rain,
and teams of zebus plodded, gentle, proud,
and *blue*, with down-curved horns and hanging ears,
pulling carts with solid wheels.
The zebus’ hooves, the people’s feet
waded in golden sand,
dampered by golden sand,

so that almost the only sounds
were creaks and *shush, shush, shush*.

The rhythm and the sound pattern becomes more prominent in the course of the third stanza, never reaching regularity, but clearly present. The last ten lines of the stanza are permeated with sand. The word “sand” appears three times, always at the end of the line, connected through consonance to “sound” and “proud”, and entering into the pattern of d-sounds (“**d**eep in **d**ark-gold river sand / **d**amp,” “plodded [...] proud,” “**d**own-curved,” “waded in golden sand / **d**ampere**d** by golden sand”), which evokes the muffled sound of the feet in the wet sand. The zebus are *blue*, an adjective which refers back to the blue stucco houses and the *azulejos* earlier in the stanza, but more than a color it seems to describe the mood here. The zebus look blue, sad, with their horns and ears drooping down. The golden sand also points back – to the golden evening and the gilded scenery from the previous stanza, although this time the golden color moves from the general atmosphere to the more physical and down-to-earth sand. However, both the golden sand and the blue zebus retain a certain solemn quality, no longer mystical or metaphorical perhaps, but still with traces of grandeur, stressed by the sound pattern, the repetitions, the choice of words (deep, ritual, gentle, proud).

The scene is quiet, the main sound is the hushing “*shush, shush, shush*” of the feet wading in the sand, like a call for even more silence, bringing to mind the “ESSO-SO-SO-SO” uttered by the cans in the “Filling Station” to calm the nervous cars down.

The calming effect of the end of this stanza is soon broken by the next scene, which moves from the street to the river:

Two rivers full of crazy shipping – people
all apparently changing their minds, embarking,
disembarking, rowing clumsy dories.

(After the Civil War some Southern families
came here; here they could still own slaves.
They left the occasional blue eyes, English names,
and *oars*. No other place, no one
on all the Amazon's four thousand miles
does anything but paddle.)

The quietness of the street is replaced by the chaotic bustle of the boats and the people. And once more the qualifying adverb “apparently” underlines the fact that what we see is not necessarily the truth: the shipping seems to be “crazy”, the people seem to be changing their minds about whether they want to get on the ships or off them, but we may assume that there are some motivations behind their apparently chaotic behavior. However, these motivations are hidden from the observer who perceives only the chaos and confusion. The chaos of the river scene is not modified only by the “apparently” in the second line, but also by the six lines in the brackets, which add another level of commentary. Just as in the case of the Cathedral, the observer introduces a piece of knowledge which cannot be derived from pure observation, but comes from another source, a tourist guide, perhaps, or an educated Brazilian friend. The introduction of the brackets is motivated by the mention of rowing: seeing the rowboats makes the speaker remember the origin of oars in the area, which leads to a brief excursus into the cultural history. A completely new horizon opens in the brackets here. The vision turns from the particular evening in a small exotic town lost in the middle of the jungle and shows the long history behind it, a history which is not exotic at all, but connects to the history familiar to the speaker: the Civil War, slavery, blue eyes, English names, oars. Again, we see a meeting of two cultures, one entering the other and becoming a part of it, still perceptible, but more as a trace than a distinguishable culture of its own. The oars

(together with the blue eyes and names) serve as a reminder of this cultural exchange, and perhaps also of the fact that this place is not the paradisiacal place out of time and space or a metaphorical place giving itself to the observer's interpretations. It is not the place tentatively suggested in the second stanza of the poem, but a real historical and geographical space with its history, a place that offered itself to other people arriving in the past. The bracket closes and the vision turns back to the here and now of the town on the rivers:

A dozen or so young nuns, white-habited,
waved gaily from an old stern-wheeler
getting up steam, already hung with hammocks
– off to their mission, days and days away
up God knows what lost tributary.
Side-wheelers, countless wobbling dugouts...
A cow stood up in one, quite calm,
chewing her cud while being ferried,
tipping, wobbling, somewhere, to be married.

The general bustle of the first three lines gets more focused, as the observer notices the crew of the particular ships, but the over-all effect is even more carnivalesque than the general description of the chaos on the rivers. The view first focuses on a group of joyful nuns going to a mission, then moves back to the general chaos of “side-wheelers, countless wobbling dugouts,” then focuses again on another boat, this time a dugout carrying a placid cow for mating. The comical apposition of nuns on their religious mission and a specifically female cow (“chewing *her* cud”) on her way to mating is presented as coincidental – both ships simply come into sight –, yet the decision to choose these two particular vignettes and to strike a comical note is purely the

observer's. In a very inconspicuous way she has moved from the golden baroque splendor and the allegorical vision of the place in the second stanza, through the quiet and solemn blue zebus in the golden sand, and through the Breughelian confusion of the shipping, to the almost burlesque pair of images, the merry nuns and the serene cow, with the comical effect strengthened by the sudden rhyme ferried/married. This shift in tone and mood is quite consistent with the self-deprecating attitude present in the poem from its beginning: the noble beauty and the metaphorical potential of the place are one of the ways of seeing it and presenting it, but the self-critical observer knows that she herself is capable of a different vision and different interpretation of the place. If she only slightly shifts her focus and her choice of words, the whole image changes, every vision can be followed by a revision or by a series of revisions. There are many ways of talking about the place and many ways of seeing the place, while the place itself remains elusive. The changing diction, rhythm and the occasional rhyme keep reminding us of the power of the words, sounds and images to shape whatever is seen and remembered, the place, "the other" cannot be approached directly, but has to be searched for through language, knowledge and culture. The rich visual adjectives of the baroque image at the beginning – "gorgeous," "under-lit," "gilded," "burnished" – are soon supplanted by the intellectual nouns – "idea," "interpretation," "notion," "dialectics" – in the second half of the second stanza, and these in their turn give way to the rhythmical, alliterative phrases – "deep in dark-gold river sand / damp from the ritual afternoon rain," "zebus plodded, gentle, proud" – and rhymes in the following stanza, which adds the auditory dimension to the visual description. The next stanza starts with a fast series of -ing forms: "shipping," "changing," "embarking," "disembarking," "rowing" (no finite verb in the past tense is used here), which introduce the frantic activity of the harbor presenting it as a picture happening in front

of our eyes, rather than a sequence of events in the past. This scene is immediately interrupted by the simple, matter-of-fact tone of the explanatory sentences in the brackets discussing the origin of oars in the area. After the brackets the description of the river scene returns, but this time we already get hints of particular stories behind the images. The passage still uses many non-finite verb forms (white-habited, getting up, hung, chewing, being ferried, tipping, wobbling, to be married...), but each of the vignettes of the nuns and the cow also has one active verb in the past tense – “waved” and “stood up” –, which move the image from a general atemporal colorful painting to specific individual stories. This move to a story and a tongue-in-cheek tone is taken even further in the next stanza, which in its eight lines gives a fully-fledged anecdote about the cathedral struck by lightning.

In her inspiring article “Elizabeth Bishop: The Art of Changing Your Mind,” written shortly after the first publication of “Santarém,” Jane Shore discusses Bishop’s use of metaphors which present “two, often conflicting, views of the same things at the same time”, and she regards this issue as central for “Santarém”: “In ‘Santarém’, Bishop deals directly with, and resolves, these two ways of apprehending reality”. The ways of apprehending reality, or of approaching “the other”, certainly are a crucial theme of the poem; however, there seems to be more than just two, and the resolving dialectic of the rivers in the second stanza is not really the overall and ultimate solution, but rather a yet another (doubtful) way of seeing and naming things (it is surely not a coincidence that the dazzling dialectical solution appears quite early in the poem, and not at the end). Rather than overcoming two opposing approaches through dialectics, the poem (as well as other works by Bishop) shows that there are many, not just two, approaches, and suggests that they can co-exist, without excluding each other and without being dialectically overcome. In a translator-like way, the poet opens to “the other”, listens to

it, and keeps searching for different ways to approach it, never imposing herself on it, but always trying to let “the other” sound and speak in her poem, knowing at the same time that in the end it is always her words and her text and that “the other” will always remain distant and unreachable. Bishop does not present the different ways of seeing, remembering and interpreting Santarém distinctly or in stark contrast. She does it subtly, her shifts in style and diction discussed above (from baroque, through intellectual, rhythmical, explanatory, to humorous) are not too dramatic, they flow into each other so smoothly that they never threaten to disrupt the consistency of the poem, yet they are clearly present, and form a necessary part of the argument of the poem. If the vision and the memory of it are changeable, the expression of them in words is doubly so. The place changes according to the style and tone, and the “real” place remains evasive, like the original text, which always defies translation. The poem can only try to approach it from different angles and in different ways. None of these angles and ways is definitive, all of them are attempts to reach an impossible goal: to reproduce the place as it is in itself. The poet, like Ortega’s “good utopian” translator, who knows a perfect translation is impossible, is conscious of the unattainability of her goal, but tries approaching it nevertheless.

The last lines of the fourth stanza bring in another ship, the clumsy manoeuvre of which turns our attention back to the land and the church:

A river schooner with raked masts
and violet-colored sails tacked in so close
her bowsprit seemed to touch the church.

(Cathedral, rather!). A week or so before
there’d been a thunderstorm and the Cathedral’d

been struck by lightning. One tower had
a widening zigzag crack all the way down.
It was a miracle. The priest's house right next door
had been struck, too, and his brass bed
(the only one in town) galvanized black.
Graças a deus – he'd been in Belém.

Once again the speaker calls the cathedral a church and immediately corrects herself. This time the correction, expressed by exactly the same words “Cathedral, rather”, is made even more conspicuous as it comes after a stanza break, at the beginning of the line, placed in the brackets and followed by an exclamation mark. Here, like elsewhere in Bishop's poetry, the brackets have an anti-illusory effect: after the stanza which has drawn us into the bustle of the harbor, we are again reminded of the voice which speaks to us. The “I” so clearly present at the beginning of the poem (both in the introductory lines and in the opening description of the town) has long since disappeared, giving way to a more “objective” description in the third and fourth stanza. Although it does not reappear here, its presence is brought to the reader's attention by the correction in the brackets. The description of the ships on the river is interrupted, the focus shifts back to the land, and the voice of the observer can be distinctly heard in this self-correction. The exclamation may be slightly annoyed, because the speaker has just failed to call the church its right name for the second time. There could also be a hint of irony in it – the church is not impressive enough to be intuitively called a cathedral –, but the most important function of the brackets is to bring in the speaker again, and to stress the distance between the speaker and the scene. If the correction of “church” to “cathedral” earlier in the poem suggested that the speaker is approaching a culture not her own, the same effect is even stronger here. The fact that she makes the mistake for a second time

implies that the word she uses naturally is “church”; it is so well fixed in her mind that even though she has already corrected herself once before, it comes to her mind again the next time she focuses on the building. The word “church” in the last line of the fourth stanza does not strike the reader as inappropriate at all, which is also due to the fact that the word fits perfectly the meter and the sound pattern (iambic tetrameter, inner rhyme *touch/church*). The “cathedral” would destroy the regular line so beautifully crafted by the poet. Even the sound of the words illustrates the destruction: the soft three *ch*’s in the two rhyming words “touch”, “church” are replaced by the harsh *r*’s of “Cathedral, rather!” This disruption comes at the moment when the dense description seemingly started to take over the speaker, whose presence was getting less and less conspicuous. The reader (and perhaps the speaker as well) feels very much drawn into the scene, and gets the illusion that she sees the harbor, when suddenly she realizes with a jolt that it really has been an illusion created by the poet. The church fitted the illusion perfectly, but the church is the poet’s word. In fact, it is a cathedral and it does not fit the poem, it does not comply with the poetic requirements the poet has established, and it immediately breaks the illusion.

In the next line the word “cathedral” is used properly for the first time. But it only seems to support the impression created by the correction: that the word does not go well with the poet’s effort to talk about the place, that it defies her attempts to tame it into verse. In order to fit the line and the rhyme, the cathedral appears in a rather strained construction with a contracted auxiliary and the line break dividing a compound verb form: “and the Cathedral’d / been struck by lightning. One tower had / [...]” It seems as if the poet was saying: “Alright, let’s see if I can fit the bloody cathedral into the poem to get it right at last. But you’ll see that the church worked much better!” In all its three appearances in the poem, the word cathedral is an alien

element, but rather than suggesting that the building is somehow inappropriate in the place, it underlines the alienation of the poet from the place and her struggle to grasp the place in words – the most appropriate word for the phenomenon, “cathedral”, keeps escaping her and does not yield to her effort. The situation the poet faces here is analogous to the situation of the translator in search of the most appropriate word in her own language, where it often happens that the most exact word, the perfect equivalent does exist, but for some reasons (those of sound, style, rhythm, etc.) it cannot be used without sounding forced.

The view of the cathedral shows the crack caused by lightning during a thunderstorm which had happened before the speaker’s visit. The observation and description lead to an anecdote, a story she must have heard told by someone in the town. The story is introduced as a story of a miracle, and we may assume that this is the way it was presented. The miracle is wonderfully naive, and, in fact, no miracle at all from the reader’s (and the speaker’s) point of view: the priest was not killed or hurt by the lightning because he was not there at all. The voice we hear behind the story is not purely the poet’s; the Portuguese “*Graças a deus*” (thanks God) suggests that she reproduces what she originally heard from a local person. What we have here is free indirect speech, a stylistic device found in prose rather than poetry (but present elsewhere in Bishop’s verse – think of the old couple’s conversation in “The Moose”) and used to create a subtle ironic distance between the narrator and the narration. The irony is obvious here: the inhabitants of Santarém interpret the disaster (which could be easily seen as God’s punishment in a different culture), as an act of miraculous grace because it could have been much worse – the lightning could have not only damaged the cathedral, but also killed the priest. The fact that the priest’s bed is the only brass bed in town only adds to the irony: this relatively luxurious bed is the only one in Santarém

that could be damaged by lightning, which would do no harm to the other people's hammocks or wooden beds. The speaker pokes fun at the locals' naive belief in miracles, but she does not do it by mocking or dismissing it directly, but by giving space to the local voice, without identifying with it. She keeps her ironic distance and shows that there are people in this place who see and interpret it in a way different from hers. Although the tone of this passage implies that the speaker does not share the belief that the priest's absence was a miracle (after all, in the struggle with the word "cathedral" we have noticed that the speaker does not belong to the South American Catholic culture, which is so fond of miracles), the main aim here is not to criticize, but to approach the place from yet a different angle, through a story told by the local people. She sees and tells the story with irony, which is double-edged: on the one hand, it protects her from yielding to a comfortable but false illusion that she belongs to the place, but at the same time, it deepens the chasm between her and the place. The language, the views and beliefs of the place are not hers, and the distance will always be there.

The last stanza brings in the person of the speaker and her own story again:

In the blue pharmacy the pharmacist
had hung an empty wasps' nest from a shelf:
small, exquisite, clean matte white,
and hard as stucco. I admired it
so much he gave it to me.
Then – my ship's whistle blew. I couldn't stay.
Back on board, a fellow-passenger, Mr. Swan,
Dutch, the retiring head of Philips Electric,
really a very nice old man,

who wanted to see the Amazon before he died,
asked, “What’s that ugly thing?”

The pharmacy is one of the blue stucco houses in front of the church/cathedral described in the third stanza. But the “stucco” here does not refer to the house, but to an object the poet admires and receives as a souvenir just before she leaves: “an empty wasps’ nest [...]: / small, exquisite, clean matte white, / and hard as stucco.” Through the word “stucco”, the nest is directly connected to the buildings in the town, it is a kind of a house, an abandoned home (although a problematic one, as it used to house the dangerous wasps). Bonnie Costello notices the echo of a much earlier poem about a house, “Jerónimo’s House” from *North & South* (Jerónimo calls his house “my gray wasps’ nest / of chewed-up paper / glued with spit”), here and sees both “houses” as potential figures for poetry (*Planets* 91, 105). And one could also see a link between this wasps’ nest and another souvenir that turned into a poem: the paper nautilus given to Marianne Moore, which became a subject of “The Paper Nautilus”, described as the

perishable
souvenir of hope, a dull
white outside and smooth-
edged inner surface. (121)

and also compared to a wasps’ nest: “its wasp-nest flaws / of white on white” (122). These are the lines Bishop quotes in her “Efforts of Affection: A Memoir of Marianne Moore”. The wasps’ nest found in the pharmacy is a perfect object, “exquisite”, beautiful, worthy of admiration and desire. These qualities, together with its stucco house-like appearance turn it into an emblem of the place, where the poet wanted to stay. She cannot stay in the place, but she can keep the nest as a souvenir. She can hold it and have it, which is something she could not achieve with the place. But having the

nest does not mean belonging to the place. The moment she receives it, she is called back by the ship's whistle, and says explicitly what was already implied at the beginning of the poem: "I couldn't stay". She goes back on board, with her wasps' nest and her memory of the town, but the poem does not end here. The fellow-passenger Mr. Swan appears with his voice and his views. He is an elderly, well-off European, a practically oriented business person ("the retiring head of Philips Electric"), who takes the trip because he wants to see the Amazon before he dies. It is obvious that he is there to appreciate grand tropical scenery, not wasps' nests, which he not only considers ugly, but even fails to identify: "What's that ugly thing?"

After all the poet's attempts to approach and grasp the scene, the poem closes with someone else's perspective, this time the perspective of another outsider/tourist, but one who sees things in radically different terms. There is another ironic turn in this passage, but this time the irony is aimed more at the poet herself: what she has achieved is so relative that other people fail to recognize it. She is bringing her booty, an object she has salvaged from the town she has to leave, something she wants to keep as a part of her memory of the place, and as a token of her experience with the place. But the first person she meets, her peer, in fact (after all, he's a "fellow-passenger", a white rich tourist and an outsider just like her), reduces the perfect object, which is potentially full of meanings for the poet, to "that ugly thing". The poet does not give herself space to answer and it is obvious that there is no answer to this question, there is no way to explain the nest to Mr. Swan. The poet was an outsider in the town, but she is an outsider on the ship as well. All the effort of getting closer to the place, of grasping it and keeping it, so problematic and difficult, does not seem to have meaning for anyone else, it is impossible to share.

Conclusion

I have based my thesis on the assumption that translation can be seen as a creative principle not limited to translating from one language to another, but at work in a certain type of original creation. I proposed the term “translation poetics” to speak about this type of creation, and I examined the works of Elizabeth Bishop as a representative of this poetic type.

The starting point for the analysis of Bishop’s translation and her own poems was the idea that they both arise from the same creative mind and embody the same poetic principles and betray analogous tendencies, and that these principles and tendencies often come out more clearly if poetry is seen in the context of translation and vice versa. One of the main goals of the thesis was to discover and to describe these principles, and to show that together they can be seen as forming a general framework of a specific type of poetics, not necessarily limited to the works of one particular author. Hence the threefold contribution mentioned at the beginning of the thesis: the examination of Bishop’s translation efforts, a fresh perspective on Bishop’s original poetry, and a general outline of a particular type of poetics.

The study of Bishop’s translations revealed that although her work as a translator remains outside the main critical interest, it was not merely an episodic or marginal concern on Bishop’s part, but played a constant and significant role in her creative efforts. However, it is clear from her choice of the texts for translation, her method and also her explicit declarations, that her interest in translation was not that of a professional translator. She refused to assume the role of a cultural mediator (particularly of Brazilian culture). At the same time, her attitude is not that of a dominating creator who adapts the original text to her own poetic aims. She approached

translation as a way to explore another territory without subduing it, as a way to adopt a different voice and examine its possibilities in treating issues which concerned her in her own poetry, too.

The fact that her position was not that of a professional translator is also evident in her translating method, which manifests obvious inconsistencies. She uses two different strategies, which would normally be considered mutually exclusive: on the one hand, a domesticating translation technique that stresses the “Englishness” of the translated text and suppresses its foreignness (e.g. the use of native English forms and meters, the use of idiomatic expressions and of contemporary colloquial language), and on the other an “anti-illusive” translation technique that points out the foreignness of the original, and stresses the fact that the translated text is a translation (e.g. the use of explanatory footnotes, literal translations which sound unnatural in English, leaving certain expressions untranslated). This discrepancy betrays tensions which figure among the key features of Bishop’s poetics and of translation poetics in general: the tension between domination and submission, and the tension between the position of the outsider and that of the insider.

Using translations as the context for Bishop’s poetry emphasizes certain tendencies that are present in the original poetry, but might seem insignificant if perceived on their own. The context provided by the translations reveals that these are not minor isolated elements, but key aspects of her poetics. These include particular strategies used in her poems (e.g. literal translations, foreign expressions, her treatment of proper names), but also genre and thematic features (e.g. the carnivalesque, the grotesque, the religious, the social). She often chose texts for translation that seem alien to her own poetics at first sight (Aristophanes, Max Jacob, the sambas), but on closer examination it becomes apparent that they explore issues that she was preoccupied with

and use means she employed in her own texts. Seen side by side, as a creation of one mind and an outcome of one poetics, Bishop's translations and her original poetry reveal preoccupations which do not come and go, but form continuous lines throughout her works.

However, the role of translation in Elizabeth Bishop's work cannot be simplified and reduced to that of a direct one-way influence. Through a study of the genesis and the editorial history of the translations, and their comparison with those of the original poetry, we often discover that it is hard to establish a simple line of influence of one on the other. Rather we see the translations and the original poems emerge from the same set of poetic concerns, as different ways to explore the same creative issues.

The features brought up by the examination of Bishop's translations served as the basis for the formulation of the characteristics of Bishop's "translation poetics", and, consequently, for the reading of her texts. A set of characteristics which form the core of Bishop's poetics was discussed both on a general level, and on the level of individual poems where the general principles can be traced in the particular realizations within the poem.

The key features of Bishop's translation poetics all stem from the principle of the encounter with the other and the openness towards the other, which stand at the basis of her poetic creation. Among the mutually interconnected features growing out of this basis is an interest in meetings and borders; the unresolvable tensions between domination and submission, and between the insider and the outsider position; sensitivity towards the plurality of voices and of perspectives; a stress on dialogue and interaction; constant doubt and tentativeness that springs from the knowledge that it is impossible to achieve perfection; and last but not least, the stress on search, on the process, not on the outcome, the idea that poetry is the search, not its result. All these

features can be found operating on various levels in individual poems, from the thematic level and the level of the space, through particular motifs and imagery, to language, rhetoric, and form.

The readings of individual poems examine the various ways Bishop's translation poetics shapes the particular texts. I work with a limited number of texts, which allows me to offer detailed, in-depth close-reading, not focusing only on selected aspects of a particular poem, but reading it as an organic whole, and to show that the characteristics I point out are not merely isolated motifs and means, but that they stem from a general poetics which pervades the whole text, shaping all its levels. In this way, aspects which might seem coincidental actually proved to be different manifestations of the same set of inherent principles.

The close-readings showed that translation poetics operates in the poems in a complex, multilayered way, and demonstrated that it is a shaping force underlying Bishop's poetic creation. It is not limited to individual themes (meeting a foreign culture), motifs (non-native elements, exoticism) or to mere analogies (the poet being like a translator, a particular method resembling translation), although all these are a part of it, but it is a set of constitutive principles at work even where the direct parallels to translation are not striking or obvious.

The themes explored in the thesis open a space for further development in several directions. Basically any of Bishop's poems could be analyzed in terms of her translation poetics; the close-readings of other poems would reveal the presence of the same creative principles, operating through a broad range of means. Not only individual poems, but also certain recurrent themes, motifs and strategies used by Bishop (most of them mentioned in the discussions above) could be examined in detail as manifestations of translation poetics principles: we could mention, for example, the many encounters

and interactions with animals in her poems, Bishop's use of proper names and brand names, her use of sounds, of other people's voices, of personae, her self-corrections etc.

The thesis claimed that translation can be seen as an aesthetic stance not limited to translating from one language to another, but standing behind original poetic creation, too. I studied the works of Elizabeth Bishop as an example of a poet whose poetics, for which I offer the term "translation poetics", can be seen as sharing certain principles with translation. However, I suggested that translation poetics is not a personal poetics limited to one poet's works, but it could be considered a more general type of poetics, shared by other authors as well. Exploring this level of translation poetics is beyond the scope of this thesis, the main focus of which were the translations and the poetry of Elizabeth Bishop, but one of the directions in which a further study could develop is the examination of the presence of this type of poetics in the works of other modern poets (not necessarily or exclusively American, or even writing in English).

Lastly, a discussion developing the general outline of translation poetics could follow, studying its principles on a theoretical and typological level. This would, among other things, take into account the literary-historical connections, arguing that Bishop's literary generation was the first one to develop this type of poetics. While modernists still worked primarily with the romantic idea of the dominant poet-creator, the post-modernist generation brings voices which put this concept of the poet into doubt. Translation poetics, in this context, can be seen as one of its alternatives, and Elizabeth Bishop as one of its pioneers, which would also account for the fact that so many poets of subsequent generations regard her as an important influence.

Notes

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- ¹ The marginal status of translation in the Anglo-American culture has been noted repeatedly by poets and translators. Most notably it has been explored by Lawrence Venuti in *The Scandals of Translation: Towards an Ethics of Difference* (1998).
- ² The status of literary translation in Czech culture can be illustrated by the fact that the most prestigious Czech literary award, the State Award for Literature has its translation counterpart, the State Award for Translation; they are awarded together at an annual ceremony at the Prague Castle. It is quite significant that there is no Pulitzer or Booker Prize for Translation.
- ³ “a tradição literária do sistema receptor”.
- ⁴ Candace W. MacMahon’s bibliography contains bibliographical information on Bishop’s published translations, but her unpublished translation works have not been put together.
- ⁵ This controversy is discussed in detail by David Kalstone (203-07), and also by Lorrie Goldensohn (223-25).
- ⁶ The main source of the biographical information on Elizabeth Bishop are these two biographies: Gary Fountain and Peter Brazeau, *Remembering Elizabeth Bishop. An Oral Biography*, and Brett C. Millier, *Elizabeth Bishop. Life and the Memory of It*.
- ⁷ “Mr. Eliot’s vituperous attack on Mr. Murray still rankles in Miss McCurdy’s breast,” wrote Bishop in a letter to Frani Blough (OA 15).
- ⁸ For a more detailed discussion of this relation see Jonathan Ellis’s study, “‘A Curious Cat’: Elizabeth Bishop and the Spanish Civil War.”
- ⁹ For other discussions of the surrealist connections in Bishop’s works see e. g. Travisano, *Her Artistic Development* 42-46; Costello, *Questions of Mastery* 26-28; Goldensohn, *The Biography of a Poetry* 118-30; Ford, “*Mont d’Espoir or Mount Despair*: Early Bishop, Early Ashbery and the French”.

¹⁰ For an analysis of the relation of this poem to Max Ernst's plates see Costello, *Elizabeth Bishop. Questions of Mastery*, 220-22, and Mullen, 67-71.

¹¹ VC 56.13 is a set of typed translations of Jacob which includes all the four published text and three more prose poems: "Urgency", "Story Without a Moral", "Ravignan Street", and four verse poems: "Rotsoge", "Purgatory", "Rain", "Antibes and Antibes Way"; it seems, however, that the translations were done in different periods as the typewriting is not the same in all of them. In VC 64.11 there is a manuscript translation of "Establishment of a Community in Brazil" dated 1949-50.

¹² All quotations of Bishop's published poems and translations are from *The Complete Poems 1927-1979* unless stated otherwise.

¹³ All the stories mentioned here are included in *The Collected Prose*.

¹⁴ For an interesting discussion and criticism of this tendency in translation into English, see Venuti: *The Translator's Invisibility* (1-42).

¹⁵ Before Bishop finished the translation of the *The Diary*, she had to interrupt her work on it in order to translate another book. This time it was not a book of literature, but a technical book on modern Brazilian architecture. *Arquitetura Moderna no Brasil* (Modern Architecture in Brazil) was written in Portuguese by Henrique Ephim Mindlin, a Brazilian architect and a good friend of Lota de Macedo Soares'. It covers Brazilian architecture from 1937 to 1955 offering descriptions of important buildings accompanied by pictures and layouts. The book contained a passage on Fazenda Samambaia, the house in Petrópolis where Bishop and Soares lived, and Bishop felt obliged to help with the translation, which had to be done very quickly because Mindlin wanted the book out before a similar book on the same subject was published. Bishop was working on the 250 pages of technical descriptions of modern buildings frantically throughout December 1955 and January 1956, closely collaborating with the author and complaining about her insufficient knowledge of both architecture and Portuguese:

Have to do it to help out a friend and because I live in one of the examples of it, so feel somehow involved, but since my knowledge of architecture is probably a little less than my knowledge of Portuguese, if that's possible, it is rather hard going [...] I could and should and would like to go on, but my cantilevers and reinforced concrete are hanging over my head and I'd better get back to them.

(OA 311)

Despite her alleged inefficiency, Bishop managed to translate the book in time; it was published in 1956 by Reinhold Publishing Corporation, the same year the Portuguese original appeared in Brazil. Not being a literary translation, *Modern Architecture in Brazil* does not belong to the area of the interest of the present study, it does, however, form part of Bishop's work as a translator, and shows that although she never considered herself a translator, she was perfectly capable of coping with a hard translating job against a deadline.

¹⁶ Brett C. Millier mentions Bishop was still working on the poem in November 1959 (301–2), which would have made the direct influence of Lispector's story possible.

¹⁷ The "second volume," *Brazilian Poetry (1950–1980)*, edited by Emanuel Brasil and William Jay Smith was published in 1983 by Wesleyan University Press, and it is dedicated "To the memory of Elizabeth Bishop".

¹⁸ This passage was consulted with Šárka Grauová, a Brazilian literature scholar from Charles University, Prague, to whom I am indebted for her insightful comments on the selection of the authors and poems in the anthology. Another source for this passage were Chapters XII and XIV of Luciana Stegagno Picchio's *History of Brazilian Literature* (Storia della letteratura brasiliana) in the Czech translation.

¹⁹ For a detailed discussion of this poem and Bandeira's poem in reply see Sússekind, "A geléia & o engenho. Em torno de uma carta-poema de Elizabeth Bishop a Manuel Bandeira."

²⁰ Here, Bishop confirms Octavio Paz's argument about the translability of place names in his essay "Translation: Literature and Letters" (155–56).

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- ²¹ The metrical similarity between Drummond's poems and "The Moose" has been noticed by Brett C. Millier (338).
- ²² On the other hand, as Marilyn May Lombardi points out in her discussion of this translation, the foreign words referring to local dishes do not prevent our understanding: "These are the sacraments of family life, and though their piquancy is untranslatable, they are universal in their meaning" (*The Body and the Song* 161).
- ²³ For a discussion of the "epic lemma" in literature see Hodrová 382-85.
- ²⁴ The essay also appears in *Poems, Prose, and Letters* 438-48.
- ²⁵ To make the matter even more confused, the note on "Key of Water" in *Poems, Prose, and Letters* claims that it is the version included in *The Collected Poems of Octavio Paz 1957–1987* (PPL 940), but it is not the case – the PPL version has "laved" in the last line, not the "dipped" of *The Collected Poems of Octavio Paz*.
- ²⁶ "La lengua de ustedes está hecha de pequeños bloques elásticos de sílabas pero el español se rompe el espinazo en esas construcciones enroscadas."
- ²⁷ Bakhtin famously limited the idea of heteroglossia and of the dialogical dimension of language to novel, as opposed to lyrical poetry, which he considered essentially monolingual. However, this limitation has been criticized as unfounded, and the presence of heteroglossia in lyrical poetry has been successfully defended (cf. e. g. Červenka 184, Wolosky 1).
- ²⁸ Dozens of similar examples of self-corrections and suggestions of better, or more precise words directly in the text could be added. See Jane Shore's essay "Elizabeth Bishop: The Art of Changing Your Mind" for an analysis of this method.
- ²⁹ According to Brett C. Millier, Bishop was describing "a framed and glassed map of the North Atlantic" she had in her New York apartment (75-76).
- ³⁰ In the posthumously published *The Complete Poems 1927–1979* "Arrival at Santos" appears only as a part of *Question of Travel*. The Library of America edition *Poems, Prose and Letters* includes the poem in both collections in which it originally appeared.

³¹ Bishop would have probably known about the attempts of the early colonizers to locate the Biblical Garden of Eden in America. Most notably, in the mid 17th century, the historian Antonio de León Pinelo argued that Paradise was situated in Brazil; according to him, the Amazon was one of the four rivers flowing out of the Garden (the other three being the Orinoco, Paraná and Magdalena).

Summary

The dissertation thesis is based on the concept of translation as an aesthetic stance not limited to translating from one language to another, but informing a certain type of original creation. In order to speak about this aesthetic stance which shares some of its features, methods and values with those often found in the work of a translator the term “translation poetics” is proposed. The American poet Elizabeth Bishop (1911–1979) is presented and examined as a representative of this poetic type. A study of her life’s work as a translator creates context and background for the formulation of the basic characteristics of Bishop’s “translation poetics”, and, consequently, for the reading of her poems. Detailed chronological examination of all her translations is followed by an outline of the main poetic principles which lie both behind translation and original creation, and these are exemplified by close-readings of a selection of Bishop’s poems. The key features of Bishop’s “translation poetics” (the interest meetings and borders; tensions between domination and submission, and between the insider and the outsider position; sensitivity towards the plurality of voices and of perspectives; a stress on dialogue and interaction; constant doubt and tentativeness that springs from the knowledge that it is impossible to achieve perfection; the stress on search, on the process, not on the outcome) all stem from the principle of the encounter with the other and openness towards the other, and can be found operating on various levels in individual poems, from the thematic level and the level of the space, through particular motifs and imagery, to the language, rhetoric, and form. The proposed contribution of the thesis is threefold: firstly, to present an overall view of Bishop’s life work as a translator; secondly, to suggest a new perspective of Bishop’s poetry by seeing it in terms of translation; and thirdly, on a more general level, to outline a type of poetics, “translation poetics”.

Resumé

Disertační práce vychází z pojetí překladu jakožto estetického postoje, jenž se neomezuje na překládání z jednoho jazyka do druhého, nýbrž stojí také v základu určitého typu původní tvorby. Pro tento typ estetického postoje, jenž sdílí některé základní rysy, postupy a hodnoty s překladem, zavádíme označení „překladatelská poetika“. Práce sleduje tento typ poetiky v básnickém a překladatelském díle americké básnířky Elizabeth Bishopové (1911–1979). Zkoumání její celoživotní překladatelské práce tvoří východisko a kontext pro formulaci základních principů „překladatelské poetiky“ v díle Elizabeth Bishopové a následně pak pro interpretaci jejích básnických textů. Po podrobné chronologické analýze všech jejích překladů (ze staré řečtiny, francouzštiny, portugalského a španělštiny) následuje nástin hlavních poetických principů, jež lze nalézt jak v jejích překladech, tak v původní tvorbě, a podrobný rozbor (close-reading) vybraných básní Bishopové, který se zaměřuje na uplatnění těchto principů v konkrétních textech. Hlavní rysy „překladatelské poetiky“ Elizabeth Bishopové (zájem o setkávání a o prostor hranice; napětí mezi dominancí a submisí a mezi postavením vně a uvnitř; citlivost vůči pluralitě hlasů a perspektiv; důraz na dialog a interakci; neustálá pochybnost a váhavost daná vědomím nemožnosti dosáhnout dokonalosti; důraz na hledání, na proces, nikoli na výsledek) pramení z principu setkávání s druhým a otevřenosti vůči druhému, a lze je nalézt v různých rovinách jednotlivých textů, od roviny tematické a roviny prostoru, přes konkrétní motivy a obrazy, až po jazyk, rétoriku a formu. Zamýšlený přínos práce je trojí: za prvé představit komplexní pohled na Bishopové celoživotní překladatelské dílo, za druhé nabídnout nový pohled na poezii Elizabeth Bishopové jejím zasazením do kontextu překladu, a za třetí, na obecnější rovině, nastínit typ „překladatelské poetiky“.

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