

UNIVERSIDADE FEDERAL DE SANTA CATARINA
PÓS-GRADUAÇÃO EM LETRAS/INGLÊS E LITERATURA CORRESPONDENTE

ELIZABETH BISHOP AND 5 BRAZILIAN AUTHORS:
REFLECTING ON THE LENS

por

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Dissertação submetida à Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina em cumprimento
parcial dos requisitos para obtenção do grau de

MESTRE EM LETRAS

FLORIANÓPOLIS

Dezembro, 2005

Esta Dissertação de Guilherme de Oliveira Quandt, intitulada *Elizabeth Bishop and 5 Brazilian Authors: Reflecting on the Lens*, foi julgada adequada e aprovada em sua forma final pelo Programa de Pós-Graduação em Letras/Inglês e Literatura Correspondente, da Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina, para fins de obtenção do grau de

MESTRE EM LETRAS

Área de concentração: Inglês e Literatura Correspondente
Opção: Literaturas de Língua Inglesa

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Florianópolis, 14 de dezembro de 2005.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my advisor, Professor Maria Lúcia Milléo Martins, for suggesting what eventually became the idea for my project of research; Professor Eliana de Souza Ávila for her bibliographical suggestions; Professor Anelise Reich Corseuil for accepting the request to preside over the committee of the defense on behalf of my advisor; and CNPq (Conselho Nacional de Desenvolvimento Científico e Tecnológico) for the scholarship that has sponsored this research.

ABSTRACT

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2005

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This is an intertextual reading of texts by Elizabeth Bishop and texts by Carlos Drummond de Andrade, João Cabral de Melo Neto, Manuel Bandeira, Vinicius de Moraes, and Clarice Lispector, based on Mikhail M. Bakhtin's notion that juxtaposing texts may establish semantic dialogues between them, even if they are not apparently related. The first chapter shows that in some poems by Bishop and Drummond, encounters of the narrator with animals and paupers represent the act of becoming increasingly aware of the world and of the limits of one's own perception; then the first chapter moves to Bishop's translation of Cabral's poem "Morte e Vida Severina" and to her own ballad "The Burglar of Babylon," analyzing how these works are related in theme—the life of poor migrants—and how they differ. The second chapter deals with the perception of intimacy and private life in some texts by Bishop, Bandeira, Vinicius, and Clarice, showing that in the selected poems by Vinicius and Bandeira intimacy is associated to loneliness, while in Bishop and Clarice the presence of other people is taken in consideration but intimacy itself seems frail and unstable.

Number of pages: 72

Number of words: 22.389

RESUMO

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Esta é uma leitura intertextual de textos de Elizabeth Bishop e de textos de Carlos Drummond de Andrade, João Cabral de Melo Neto, Manuel Bandeira, Vinicius de Moraes e Clarice Lispector, baseado na idéia de Mikhail M. Bakhtin segundo a qual a justaposição de textos aparentemente sem relação uns com os outros pode estabelecer diálogos semânticos entre eles. O primeiro capítulo mostra que em determinados poemas de Bishop e Drummond, encontros do narrador com animais e com pobres representa uma evolução de sua percepção sobre o mundo e sobre os limites de sua própria consciência; em seguida o primeiro capítulo passa à tradução de Bishop para o poema "Morte e Vida Severina" de Cabral e à balada "The Burglar of Babylon", analisando como essas obras se relacionam quanto ao assunto (a vida de imigrantes miseráveis) e como diferem. O segundo capítulo trata do tema da intimidade em textos de Bishop, Bandeira, Vinicius e Clarice, apontando que os poemas selecionados de Vinicius e Bandeira mostram intimidade associada à solidão, ao passo que nos textos de Bishop e Clarice as demais pessoas são levadas em conta, mas a intimidade em si parece frágil e instável.

Número de páginas: 72

Número de palavras: 22.389

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	01
CHAPTER ONE: BISHOP, DRUMMOND, CABRAL	17
CHAPTER TWO: BISHOP, BANDEIRA, VINÍCIUS, AND CLARICE	42
CONCLUSION	64
WORKS CITED	70

INTRODUCTION

The mention of six authors in the title of a dissertation, five of them being Brazilian and one of them American, may suggest at first that the American one is an intruder within a study of Brazilian literature. Nonetheless, it is the work of the American one, Elizabeth Bishop (b. 1911 – d. 1979), that serves as the main thread leading this intertextual reading. Bishop is hardly a stranger when it comes to dealing with Brazilian writers. She spent more than two decades of her life in Brazil, from 1951 to 1974, with occasional sojourns in the United States in the meantime; in Brazil she met several writers, and translated the works of some of them into English. Her award-winning poetry has become the subject of many critical reviews, books, and essays since she first started to publish it, in her twenties, and those of her poems related to Brazil—first collected in her book *Questions of Travel*, which has a section named after the country—have received careful attention in books and essays tackling Bishop's work. Still, in that corpus of criticism little has been written that seeks to verify the existence of a *dialogue* of any kind between her work and modern Brazilian literature. Even though there have already been a few pioneering attempts to relate Bishop's work to Brazilian modern and contemporary writers, and although there have also been a few analyses of her translations of Brazilian poetry, readings seeking to find more of these correspondences seem (as far as I have been able to research) yet to be done both in Brazil and abroad. When dealing with Bishop's relationship with Brazil, critics tend to look for her views of the country as those were registered in her poetry, letters, and interviews, while they give less emphasis to possible artistic dialogues between Bishop and Brazilian writers, or to Brazilian culture as a whole. We can read as an example of this the following comment by Candace Slater that indicates a thematic connection

between Bishop and João Cabral de Melo Neto but rapidly moves back to the analysis of Bishop's poetry and does not undertake the task of exploring the dialogue in detail:

In her Brazilian pieces Bishop indicates a definite consciousness of injustices such as those described in her translation of João Cabral de Melo Neto's 'The Death and Life of a Severino' ... And yet, though there is no doubt that Bishop responds to wrongs, her poetry reveals more diffuse sympathy for the oppressed than definite anger for the oppressor. Stressing effects more than cause, the poet concentrates on manifestations rather than roots of social evils. (35)

In this dissertation I read the prose and poetry of Bishop from an intertextual perspective instead: I take into account some works from five Brazilian authors whose writings Bishop translated into English—namely, Manuel Bandeira (Bandeira¹), Carlos Drummond de Andrade (Drummond), João Cabral de Melo Neto (Cabral), Vinicius de Moraes (Vinicius), Clarice Lispector (Clarice)—and I establish some of the possible literary dialogues between her writings and those of the selected authors. My theoretical premise in this procedure is that no text can be read in itself, as if it were an isolated semantic unit. Mikhail M. Bakhtin has argued that in each text there is a complex of meanings and a "multifaceted system of relations," because every word and every utterance acquires meaning only through usage, that is, when it is put in context: "there are no voiceless words that belong to no one." Texts contain different connotations, different *voices*. Among these, there are voices which are "infinitely distant, unnamed, almost impersonal (voices of lexical shadings, of styles, and so forth), almost undetectable, and voices resounding nearby and simultaneously" (*Speech Genres* 124).

Therefore, a text can only have a meaning of its own within some context given through contact with other texts. Only "at the point of this contact between texts does a light flash, illuminating both the posterior and anterior, joining a given text to a dialogue" (*Speech Genres* 162). After this encounter, which allows for dialogue, comparison, agreement, disagreement and so forth, different cultures "are mutually enriched" (*Speech Genres* 7).

The dialogical relations here mentioned "cannot be reduced to logical, linguistic, psychological, mechanical, or any other natural relations," though. Those relations "constitute a special type of *semantic* relations" between utterances (*Speech Genres* 124). Dialogic relations deal with the *meanings* that different texts may reveal when confronted with one another, even if written in completely diverse circumstances, as long as they somehow converge. "Any two utterances, if juxtaposed on a semantic plane (not as things and not as linguistic examples), end up in a dialogic relationship" (*Speech Genres* 117). As Bakhtin explains,

Two juxtaposed utterances belonging to different people who know nothing about one another, if they only slightly converge on one and the same subject (idea), inevitably enter into dialogic relations with one another. They come into contact with one another on the territory of a common theme, a common idea. (*Speech Genres* 114-5)

Because of this possibility of finding dialogues between apparently unrelated texts, "there is neither a first nor a last word and there are no limits to the dialogic context:" this context obtained by the juxtaposition of different texts "extends into the boundless past and the boundless future" (*Speech Genres* 170). Through every new dialogue, meanings born in the dialogue of past centuries will always be renewed in the process of subsequent development of the dialogue:

At any moment in the development of the dialogue there are immense, boundless masses of forgotten contextual meanings, but at certain moments of the dialogue's subsequent development along the way they are recalled and invigorated in renewed form (in a new context). Nothing is absolutely dead: every meaning will have its homecoming festival. (*Speech Genres* 170)

Since contextual readings of utterances, and the meanings obtained through them, are "potentially infinite," Bakhtin argues that "[t]here cannot be a unified (single) contextual meaning for an utterance. Therefore, there can be neither a first nor a last meaning: it always exists among other meanings as a link in the chain of meaning." Throughout history, as different readings and different meanings come up, "this chain

continues infinitely, and therefore each individual link in it is renewed again and again, as though it were being reborn" (*Speech Genres* 145-6). Thus, according to Bakhtin, literary criticism should pay careful attention not only to the use of language within the strict frames of a given work, in terms of tone, style and so forth, but also to those dialogues that each work is always promoting with other works and other utterances in general, from the past and from the present.

If contextual readings are *potentially infinite*, then there are no cultural limits either to the possible dialogues to be established between different texts: the juxtaposition of different texts may extend not only "into the boundless past and the boundless future," but also into boundless *space*, from one country and one language to many others. As international communication and cultural exchange rapidly grow, those dialogues seem to establish themselves spontaneously, and the "voices resounding nearby and simultaneously" start to call our attention. In a newspaper article, Nelson Ascher has noted down a number of interesting coincidences in international modern literature showing that true dialogues can be found beyond mere "influence," between works whose authors had apparently never read each other's writings:

A história da moderna poesia ocidental ainda está por ser escrita, se bem que já disponhamos do mínimo distanciamento que a visão panorâmica requer. O período a ser coberto merece mais do que um rol cronológico de autores e obras, de uma enumeração de movimentos ou uma coleção de biografias. Essa história se assemelharia antes a uma intrincada rede pluri-dimensional que entremostrasse relações insuspeitadas e parentescos secretos ou a um diagrama que desvendasse como e porquê perguntas colocadas em um de seus pontos foram ecoadas e/ou respondidas em outro. ... Paralelos assim (e não são poucos os que existem) apontam para dinâmicas coerentes e compreensíveis, não para o acaso. Há poetas que, sem se conhecerem, vivendo à distância e escrevendo em idiomas diversos, produziram poemas cujas semelhanças vão além da mera coincidência. Anatol Roselinfeld, num ensaio chamado "A Costela de Prata de Augusto dos Anjos", mostrou que, se havia poetas que se assemelhavam a esse brasileiro de exceção, eram os expressionistas alemães e austríacos, como Georg Trakl e Gottfried Benn. Um exame parecido talvez esclarecesse como, partindo de Verlaine, Manuel Bandeira desenvolveu um estilo cujo paralelo mais próximo mais próximo se encontra nos poemas de Bertolt Brecht.

Perguntas, enigmas e mistérios não faltam, e é por um levantamento sensível e sistemático destes que a verdadeira história da poesia moderna deveria começar. (E 6)

Following that line of thought, this work contributes to this *survey* of coincidences and dialogues in modern and contemporary literature by showing points of contact between texts by Bishop and other writers. Critics such as David Kalstone have already explored her literary relationship with Marianne Moore and Robert Lowell, and the names of Bishop's favorite poets, George Herbert and Gerard Manley Hopkins, are also remembered in critical texts when there is an apparent influence of their style over Bishop's; but in both cases the critics seem to be looking for *influences*. I am not interested here in investigating *how* or *why* Bishop came to write the way she did. Instead, I am interested in exploring possible correspondences of her writings with the ones of Drummond, Cabral, Vinícius, Bandeira and Clarice.

Since Bakhtin's arguments justify my attempt to read Bishop and other poets in literary dialogue with each other, I must also face his objections to what he saw as limitations of poetic discourse. Bakhtin believed that poetry "in the narrow sense" produced unitary discourses, and did not reproduce the variety of discourses found in real human relationships. Bakhtin has pointed out that discourse in general is not unitary, static and stable, but diverse: different people from different places and classes use language differently, and even a single person is likely to speak in different ways when he or she is put in different social scenarios. Bakhtin's example of such discursive shifts within one's everyday life is simple but convincing:

Thus an illiterate peasant, miles away from any urban center, naively immersed in an unmoving and for him unshakable everyday world, nevertheless lived in several language systems: he prayed to God in one language (Church Slavonic), sang songs in another, spoke to his family in a third and, when he began to dictate petitions to the local authorities through a scribe, he tried speaking yet a fourth language (the official-literate language, "paper language"). All these are *different languages*, even from the point of view of abstract socio-dialectological markers. But these languages were not dialogically coordinated in the linguistic

consciousness of the peasant; he passed from one to the other without thinking, automatically: each was indisputably in its own place, and the place of each was indisputable. He was not yet able to regard one language (and the verbal world corresponding to it) through the eyes of another language (that is, the language of everyday life and the everyday world with the language of prayer or song, or vice-versa). (*Dialogic Imagination* 295-6)

This is Bakhtin's starting point to criticize not only the established parameters of stylistic analysis, but poetic discourse as well. He objected to the conceptual limitations he saw in the literary criticism of his time, arguing that the traditional poetic categories could not fully apprehend the *plurality and diversity of types of discourse*—the *heteroglossia*²—found in artistic prose, especially in the novel. He also believed that poetry "in the narrow sense" was bound to expression in unitary, centralizing discourse, that is to say, bound to the poet's *own personal voice and style*; and that a literary stylistics based only on the poetic tropes was unable to account for the "social life" of discourse, or to the use of different social discourses in novelistic prose.³

To be sure, Bakhtin's expression, "poetry in the narrow sense," is problematic. One could argue, for instance, that it is arbitrary to affirm that poems which employ unitary discourse are the most representative of poetry in general. Bakhtin himself admits when commenting on novels that some of them make great use of heteroglossia while others do it less, and he affirms that the latter are "unnovelistic" compared to the ones that fully explore the variety of discourse (*Dialogic Imagination* 327). One could object that he is arbitrarily defining what "novelistic" means in order to make the concept fit his own argumentation: he deliberately chooses novels that employ many different discourses to define what the word "novel" means, and chooses poetry that does not employ different discourses to define what "poetry in the narrow sense" is. Besides, Bakhtin also admits that some poets actually *have* made use of varied social discourses in their poetry—but only in the "lower" poetic genres: in satire and parody, and in comic and ironic poetry; but, paradoxically, when he deals with novels, the

authors he holds in highest esteem for their use of heteroglossia—that is, for their exploration of the varied kinds of discourse in the telling their stories—are precisely the comic and ironic novelists, the satirists and parodists, such as Rabelais, Cervantes, Sterne, Fielding, and Dickens. Paradoxically, by means of regarding comic, satiric, ironic, and parodic poetry as "lower" verse, Bakhtin is actually reproducing in his essay the old parameters of stylistic evaluation which he had set out to dethrone, putting the "serious" above the comic—a distinction he does not maintain when dealing with prose fiction.

And heteroglossia *is* present in Bishop's poetry. For instance, in the poem "12 O'clock News" *journalistic style* is used to describe an ordinary messy desk as if it were a report on a newfound land. Another example: at the end of "Questions of Travel" she starts quoting a notebook in order to answer to the questions and meditations that are posed in the beginning of the poem. In both cases, the variety of types of discourse used in society comes into play within the poems.

At any rate, the purpose of this work is neither to prove or disprove whether Bishop's work is "high" or "low" according to any preconceived standards, nor to specifically discuss the use of different kinds of discourse in her poetry compared to Bakhtin's observations on the same technique as employed in some novels. My goal is to investigate here some dialogues between a few of her writings and those of some Brazilian authors.

When it comes to Elizabeth Bishop's writings, the survey which, according to Ascher, the history of modern poetry is calling for has already had its pioneering works: connections between Bishop's and Carlos Drummond de Andrade's poetry have already been investigated by Maria Lúcia Milléo Martins, and a few other dialogues between Brazilian literature and Bishop's work have been pointed out by Regina Maria

Przybycien and Flora Süssekind. Some other steps have already been in the same direction of contextual reading by critics who have approached Bishop's poetry while commenting on her relationship with Brazil.

In terms of literary dialogues between Bishop and Brazilian literature, Victoria Harrison has noticed, for example, that "Clarice Lispector's story, 'The Smallest Woman in the World' [which Bishop translated], pushes [Bishop's poem] 'Brazil, January 1, 1502' beyond its end, as if they are in fact companion pieces" (174). They both deal with explorers discovering people (and women in particular) living in the jungle and with the reactions to such an encounter. Marilyn May Lombardi believes that in choosing to translate that story, "Bishop shows her willingness to accept cannibalism as an appropriate metaphor for her own activity as translator" of Brazilian literature and culture (144).

Bishop's situation as a translator, according to Süssekind, "é situação semelhante à de seu sujeito lírico." In her translations, "a tensão é entre uma interferência obrigatória no texto alheio e a consciência sempre presente da alteridade deste objeto e do seu próprio, permanente, 'alheamento'" (354). "Representing translations as a service [that] she performs," Harrison adds, "Bishop submerges her own engagement in these intimate relationships between the perspectives and voices of two writers;" but despite the distinctiveness of voices and the tension between poet and translator, Bishop included her renderings of Cabral and Drummond in her *Complete Poems*, as if admitting that those works were "intrinsic enough to her body of poetry" (174). In fact, Przybycien believes that Bishop found in Drummond "her perfect poetic double."

Traduzindo os poemas de Drummond sobre Itabira [his hometown], a família, a infância, [Bishop] encontrou a forma e o tom que lhe faltavam para encarar seus fantasmas, reconhecer suas sombras e poetizá-las. O poeta mineiro abriu-lhe o caminho para os poemas de *Geography III*, a obra mais pessoal de sua maturidade, mostrando-lhe que a poesia podia ser pessoal sem se tornar excessivamente lírica, romântica ou piegas. (270)

And Lombardi writes that Drummond's poems help Bishop "to recover the intimate interiors of her own past in poems like 'Manners,' 'Sestina,' 'First Death in Nova Scotia,' and the autobiographical story, 'In the Village'" (160).

Regarding Bishop and Drummond, Martins has shown that they had not only common literary traits from the beginning, such as their *gaucherie*, but followed parallel routes towards maturity, "from the isolation of islands" through "the experience of estrangement inland" to the "expansion to a larger world," with the "strange idea of family" running along their poetry all the way (246-247).

Bishop also shared some poetic strategies with Bandeira, as Süssekind argues when she writes on "Tragédia Brasileira," one of the two of his poems that Bishop translated:

Há no aproveitamento [de uma] história do cotidiano pelo poeta e na definição do poema como próximo às "coisas mais simples e menos intencionais" evidente proximidade aos "pequeninos nadas" em torno dos quais também Elizabeth Bishop construía seus poemas. . . . Bishop também 'desentranha' o poético do banal, de erros tipográficos – vide "The Man-Moth", figura imaginada a partir da grafia errada de "mammoth" num jornal –, da chuva, da mudança de estações, de uma cachorra sarnenta, sem pelos, no meio das fantasias e máscaras de um carnaval carioca – como em "Pink Dog" . . . (356)

All the analyses quoted above have in common the underlying idea that the texts which Bishop translated are in clear dialogue with her own writings, and that her translations reflect important aspects of her writings; that is, they imply that there is some coherence or consistency in her double activity of writer and translator. Nathan A. Scott Jr. affirms that her ability to *maintain the consistency of her work* is one of her distinguishing features, while no real change or progress in any direction can be noticed:

... as one moves from her first book *North & South* (1946) to *A Cold Spring* (1955), *Questions of Travel* (1965), *Geography III* (1976), and on to the last poems, one has no sense of any progress or growth, as one does in contemplating the whole career of [T. S.] Eliot or [W. H.] Auden or [Robert]

Lowell: poem after poem is recording utterly discrete perceptions, and though, taken poem by poem, her work is powerfully unified and cogent, the poems altogether seem to be an affair of "Everything only connected by 'and' and 'and'" ("Over 2,000 Illustrations ..."). (257)

As seen above, Martins argued that Bishop *did* make progresses in her poetry, and that they were analogous to those made by Drummond in his work. Thomas J. Travisano also understands that Bishop's career had an artistic development and divides her work in three phases—*prison*, *travel*, and *history*:

Her early phase shows her as a reluctant master of symbolist private world, a world that renounces history for the ambiguous pleasures of enclosure. Her middle phase reflected years of travel and observation, through which isolation might be at least temporarily bridged. It 'extends the Imagist instant,' combining the precision and conciseness of imagism with a liberating dimension of temporal development. Her last phase reverts the earliest, engaging with personal and private history. The yearning for enclosure is still powerful, but it is controlled by a calm and expansive vision. (7)

Travisano associates Bishop's early "yearning for enclosure" to symbolism and says that it remains, even if controlled, in her work until its last phase. But Bishop does not necessarily seek for deeper levels of consciousness within dreams as a surrealist might do. Howard Moss notices that "sleep and dream are mentioned often" in Bishop's poetry, but "as if they were opposing conditions from which it were necessary to be roused" (31). Besides, instead of associating the surreal and uncanny side of her poetry to *enclosure* or to *prison*, Richard Mullen makes a point in showing that it reveals her concern about the *otherness* of things:

Another link between Bishop's poetry and the surrealists' discoveries is her delineation of the 'otherness' of objects. Within her poems, one finds an awareness that, somehow, whatever seems recognizable to her calm, eclectic consciousness is only part of what is there. (64)

Bishop's early surrealism could, then, be read not merely as a phase of enclosure from which her poetry steadily—if never completely—moved away as it opened up to a broader world, but also as an initial sign of her recognition of the inscrutable otherness of the world: "[Bishop] has a ... sense of the natural world as an autonomous presence,

intricately varied and irreducible" (Mullen 68). In the poem "The Weed," from her initial phase, there is already seen a picture of the problematic nature both of self and of perception:

In line 15 [of 'The Weed'], the speaker 'wakes' into a second dream or dream within a dream, and the body, oneirically transformed into a landscape, becomes the foreign plane on which the dreaming subject meets the otherness of its heart. (Mullen 75)

By acknowledging the fact that Bishop had from her early poems a concern with the otherness of things and with the estrangement of one's own self, we may accept that her poetry did make a visible development, from poems of enclosure—or *prison*, as Travisano calls them—to poems about the broader world around, and simultaneously perceive that throughout this movement from the inside to the outside as her focus of attention she maintained the same interest in (or maybe suspicions about) the limitations of perception, and thus made the sensations of *estrangement* and *surprise*—which are embodied in the multitude of details of her descriptions and sometimes mitigated by her conversational tone—the trademark of her work. In other words, we may accept without contradiction that Bishop's art evolved in a certain direction, but consistently maintaining certain qualities from her early work until her last.

This overview of the criticism on Bishop gives us a general picture of these more relevant and lasting characteristics of her art. David Walker emphasizes the link between the detailed descriptions in Bishop's writings and her consistent interest in the very act of perception:

The details of Bishop's poems are always compelling, but they are never the whole point, even in those apparently most purely 'descriptive.' *The true subject of the travel poems is the mysterious act of perception* by means of which we learn to distinguish ourselves from the peculiar landscape and bizarre artifact, and also to discover what binds us to them.

Perhaps less often recognized is Bishop's interest in the plainly and even stubbornly banal, the universal emotion and the domestic scene, *and here the process of perception is equally crucial*: it is the fierce intelligence and affectionate accuracy with which such subjects are evoked that makes them

seem so fully worthy of our attention. In a poem like 'Filling Station' the ordinary becomes mysterious, revelatory, unique. (14 – my italics)

Bishop's "less often recognized" interest—the interest for what seems to be banal—and her ability to subvert the banality and discover the "mysterious, revelatory, unique" in the most commonplace, familiar things was the subject of an essay by Helen Vendler in which she identifies Bishop's tendency to keep uncertain the boundaries between the domestic and the strange:

Elizabeth Bishop's new poems [those from *Geography III*] put into relief the continuing vibration of her work between two frequencies—the domestic and the strange. In another poet the alternation might seem a debate, but Bishop drifts rather than divides, gazes rather than chooses ... (It is more exact to speak, with regard to Bishop, of the domestic rather than the familiar, because what is familiar is always named, in her poetry, in terms of a house, a family, someone beloved, home. And it is truer to speak of the strange rather than of the exotic, because the strange can occur even in the bosom of the familiar, even most unnervingly, at the domestic hearth.) (23)

Bishop, who in "The Weed" could, according to Mullen, find division and otherness within one's own heart—within one's own conscience—is equally able to recognize the same division and estrangement at the heart of households: "Of all the things that should not be inscrutable, one's house comes first. The fact that one's house always *is* inscrutable, that nothing is more enigmatic than the heart of the domestic scene, offers Bishop one of her recurrent subjects" (Vendler 23). This obscurity of the boundaries separating what is strange from what is familiar is stylistically represented in the ambiguous use of humor and metaphors, in which the literal and the metaphorical are hard to tell apart:

In the poetry of Elizabeth Bishop things waver between being what they are and being something distinct from what they are. This uncertainty is manifested at times as humor and at other times as metaphor. In both cases it is resolved, invariably, in leap that is a paradox: things become other things without ceasing to be what they are. (Octavio Paz 15)

Uncertainty, on the other hand, gives the attentive observer of reality the freedom to reject pre-established notions and to stay open to renewed impressions. For

instance, the discovery of a closed decaying house in the poem "The End of March" offers at the same time a picture of obscurity and mystery and of the manifold possibilities of reality:

Not a pretty landscape. What it is, is interesting, withholding more than more than it offers—inscrutable in spite of any human rush for meaning or loveliness. What it is, most of all, is possible. This sense of possibility—a lack of the inevitable, finally, of ego—is pure Bishop ... (Marianne Boruch 26)

Bishop embraces the "sense of possibility" and therefore appreciates what is elusive and perhaps double-faced. Ambiguity in human behavior and in human relationships become thus a subject of her poems. Bishop is also aware that the elusiveness of characters may be due to the incompetent eye of the beholder who is unable (or uninterested in trying) to look at things attentively. The poem "Over 2,000 Illustrations and a Complete Concordance" begins by saying that "our travels" should have been "serious, engravable" but recognizes, in the end, that we might not have recognized what is "engravable" if we had seen it: "Why couldn't we have seen/this old Nativity while we were at it?" (68-9). Bishop thus challenges the very the notion of definite and definitive, "serious, engravable."

From these characteristics of Bishop's writings, what interests me in this analysis is the repeated concern in her work with the act of perception, especially the renewed perceptions of the world triggered by the contact with other people or with animals, and the perception of the instability and uncertainty of love, linked to the self-inspection that reveals the same problems within one's own conscience. This is the standpoint from which I attempt to find dialogues of her work with some of the writings of the Brazilian authors she translated. This work does not by any means attempt to give a broad or "exhaustive" intertextual reading of Elizabeth Bishop and Brazilian literature. (Indeed, if intertextual readings are "potentially infinite," *exhaustion* of the subject is ruled out from the outset.) This work explores but a few possible dialogues—agreements and

disagreements, similitude and discrepancy—in some works by Elizabeth Bishop and by the selected Brazilian authors. This is not a study of influence, but it includes the analysis of correspondences between texts.

I begin most analyses exploring the texts by the Brazilian writers that Bishop translated and establishing connections to some of her texts that seemed to respond to those translations. The clear exception to this method of following Bishop's translations as a guide is the section on Carlos Drummond de Andrade, and this may sound paradoxical because Drummond was precisely the writer whose work Bishop translated the most. But, since a long and detailed comparative analysis of his poetry and Bishop's, including the study of the poems translated by her, has already been done by Martins, and since there were a couple of poems by Drummond ("Um Boi Vê os Homens" and "Episódio") that immediately reminded me of Bishop's "The Moose," I chose to explore this resemblance, which, as I will argue, goes beyond the mere depiction of rural life and the corresponding memories that authors might have, and touches the more subtle question of the perception of reality itself—actually, the question of the *perception of perception*. Moreover, the thematic coincidences in Bishop's and Drummond's poetry have also been explored by Przybyczen, Lombardi and Süssekind, as seen above. Finally, the association I make between those poems agrees with other discoveries I have made as my research progressed.

In the first section, the analyses of Bishop and Drummond observe how the contact between "self" and "other" illustrate the act of becoming more aware of the outer world. In the texts analyzed, there is an awareness of the differences that come to the foreground during this contact but also an awareness of the act of perception itself: the "lyric I" not only notices the "other," but his/her own perception *changing* while this acknowledgement takes place. Then, still dealing with the literary contact with the outer

world, the first chapter moves to social problems such as *poverty* and *migration* in Bishop and Cabral, showing that, in poems involving unprivileged people, Bishop pays careful attention to them but from a distance, while not trying to explain, justify or denounce their situations, while Cabral has a clear moral message to his poem "Morte e Vida Severina."

The second chapter deals with the perception of *intimacy*, seen under different angles: images of peaceful *retreats of privacy* are compared to images of the *instability of love* in poems by Vinícius, Bandeira, and Bishop. All three poets portray, in some of their poems, similar intimate retreats, and all of them show love as something frail and fugitive. Bishop mingles the sensation of *peace* provided by intimacy with the *anxiety* caused by the frailty of this same intimacy, while Vinícius and Bandeira deal with intimacy linking it not to other people (who might after all be lost) but to *loneliness*.

The final section on Clarice and Bishop discusses the intimacy of family life and the intimacy of consciousness, related to the sense of *estrangement*. The reactions of a girl to the discovery of the smallest woman in the world, in Clarice's short story, reveal existential doubts that are compared to similar doubts and inconsistencies in the girl from Bishop's "In the Waiting Room;" and the strange behavior by people in Bishop's "The Baptism" is compared to the sudden changes of behavior in Clarice's "A Hen" and "Marmosets." These analyses of Bishop and Clarice have in common the discovery of unfamiliarity within apparently familiar realms.

The main thesis in this work is that the writings of Bishop find correspondences in the works of the other authors discussed. What the two sections of the dissertation reveal, if considered together, is Bishop's recurring attention to the act of perception itself and to the transformations which it undergoes. Thoughts and impressions are frequently challenged: the narrator in "Manuelzinho" is confronted with the habits and manners of

a completely different person; "membership" in "Song for the Rainy Season" is threatened by the dreaded climatic change; the girl from "In the Waiting Room" is struck by questions about her identity—and these conflicts are not easily (if ever) resolved. Throughout the comparisons and juxtapositions, I focus mainly on the perception of the objects which Bishop's texts portray, and on the perception of perception itself: the mind doubly focused on what is seen, and on the process of seeing; the eye attentive both to the object under the lens and on its reflexes upon the lens.

¹ I chose to refer to these authors the way they are most commonly known in Brazil.

² From *hetero* = different, and *glossia* = languages. The concept is further explained below through Bakhtin's own example.

³ Bakhtin does not *expressly* say that this narrowness in stylistic analysis, which he objects to, derives from that narrowness which he sees in poetic discourse, or vice-versa; still, a connection between both phenomena seems to be suggested.

CHAPTER ONE: BISHOP, DRUMMOND, CABRAL

This chapter deals, first, with the images of animals from rural scenarios in a few of Elizabeth Bishop's and Carlos Drummond de Andrade's poems, namely, "The Moose" by Bishop, and "Episódio" and "Um Boi Vê os Homens" by Drummond. Basically, the analyses show that, besides being literary returns of their authors to the (very resembling) respective rural places where they grew up¹, these poems contrasting large, tranquil animals to human routine represents the recognition that there is more to the world and to reality than one's personal concerns—there are other people and creatures, for instance, living in completely different manner's than one's own; and there are more ways of looking at things than one's own outlook—and it shows how the acknowledgement of this *variety* within reality represents an openness to multiple possibilities of perspective on life and the world. In other words, I analyze how the description of the encounter of man with animal suggests, if not directly, a gain in consciousness, a new awareness of things. Then I analyze how texts by Bishop that portray people who live to different standards, different values, in different scenarios—even if not by their own choice, as is the case of paupers—may also question preconceived notions about these differences. For instance, in Bishop's "Manuelzinho," the title character behaves so differently from what the narrator expects that he seems as "otherworldly" as the unexpected animal in "The Moose." I analyze the portrayal of paupers in some of Bishop's texts, compared to João Cabral de Melo Neto's "Morte e Vida Severina," showing that Bishop, when writing about the poor, avoided conclusiveness or judgment. This position of portraying and not explaining, as I argue, is coherent with the recognition of the limits of one's own consciousness, which is, as said above, an important element of the poems "The Moose," "Episódio" and "Um Boi Vê os Homens."

Maria Lúcia Milléo Martins has carried out analyses showing Bishop's and Drummond's similar itinerary from a certain *isolation* in their early poems to literary strolls in the wider field of their respective social and historical surroundings. They have achieved the poetic conquest of their own memories of childhood while simultaneously opening up their lyrics to a larger world, reaching a stage of poetic maturity that is aware of both the poet as an individual and as an element in the social and historical environment, encompassing past and present. I will explore another feature of their poetics: the symbolic appearances of animals—a moose and oxen—in a few poems of theirs. If we consider the thesis of the poets' development in relation to these symbols, we can say that the moose and the oxen, appearing to the narrators of the poems as unanticipated "others", are tokens of the external world making way into their poetry.

As to using animals as subjects of poetry, Bishop writes that Marianne Moore's mother once confessed she was glad that in the poem "Nine Nectarines & Other Porcelain" Miss Moore gave "the inhabitants of the zoo... a rest" (*Collected Prose* 129). Bishop herself very often put animals of many kinds in her poems: "The Fish" and "The Armadillo" and "The Sand-piper"; real birds on the seashore in "The Bight," and "Florida" and drawings of them on paintings in "Poem" and "Large Bad Picture"; the imagined animals in "Crusoe in England" or metaphorical creatures such as "The Man-Moth" and the lion sun in "The End of March"; a friendly seal that (according to the poem) believes "in total immersion" in "At the Fishing Houses"; a long list of different small creatures in "Song for the Rainy Season"; and, of course, "The Moose," a creature that is shown as both strange and familiar, unreal and symbolic in some way but very real—perhaps *symbolically real*. As Octavio Paz has said, in Bishop's poetry "things

waver between being what they are and being something distinct from what they are" (15).

Instead of giving the animals a clearly allegorical signification from the outset, Bishop commonly "saves for last" the possibilities of symbolism of her poems—a rhetoric or dramatic strategy imitated from Edgar Allan Poe's "Philosophy of Composition"² and from Gerard Manley Hopkins' poetry, as Thomas J. Travisano points out (68-71). Although "she uses numerous similes throughout, she deliberately reserves *symbolic* overtones, which 'dispose the mind to seek a moral in all that has been previously narrated,' until the end" (Travisano 70 – italics in the original; Travisano's quote is from Poe's "The Philosophy of Composition"). And even then, at the end, those symbolic possibilities remain understated. For this very reason, she has been mistaken for a merely descriptive writer.³ In "The Fish," for example, the referred animal appears right in the very first line, but it really acquires subtler, deeper connotations near the ending, when the fishing hooks hanging from his mouth are likened to a veteran's medals:

I admired his sullen face,
 the mechanism of his jaw,
 and then I saw
 that from his lower lip
 —if you could call it a lip
 grim, wet, and weaponlike,
 hung five old pieces of fish-line,
 or four and a wire leader
 with the swivel still attached,
 with all their five big hooks
 grown firmly in his mouth.
 A green line, frayed at the end
 where he broke it, two heavier lines,
 and a fine black thread
 still crimped from the strain and snap
 when it broke and he got away.
 Like medals with their ribbons
 frayed and wavering,
 a five-haired beard of wisdom
 trailing from his aching jaw. (45-64)

Only then the fish's oldness that had already been expressed in the other associations—such as: "his brown skin hung in strips/ like ancient wallpaper"—turns into silent testimony of his long history of resistance to fishermen. This illuminating discovery irradiates inside the narrator's boat: the refraction of light on puddles of oil spreads out until everything is "rainbow, rainbow, rainbow," and the narrator then lets the fish go. But this particular connection of cause to consequence is, to be sure, an interpretative assumption: the poem does not *state* it.

In "The Moose," the animal itself comes in only at the final "act," preceded by a long introduction that comprises a colorful description of the surroundings, the weather and the atmosphere, and after an overview of conversations going on between people inside the bus that the narrator takes. At the point when the moose that had already been announced in the title actually shows up and crosses the path of the vehicle, it comes as a surprise, analogous to that of the passengers who actually meet the animal. The narration induces the reader to follow the route that leads away from the name of animal in the title into many other things, until the reader may even forget that the title mentioned a moose, and then it renews itself by introducing what it had promised from the beginning. From this movement of going through many diversions and leading the reader to reenact the surprise of the characters the poem draws its symbolic impact: when the moose is seen at last, both expected because of the title at beginning, and unexpected because of the many distractions in between, the contrast of the wild and uncalled-for to the routine, familiar scenario established in the preceding narration makes the creature seem unworldly, uncanny, almost supernatural:

Taking her time,
she looks the bus over,
grand, otherworldly.
Why, why do we feel
(we all fell) this sweet

sensation of joy? (151-6)

This encounter of the cow moose with the bus full of talkative passengers is one of Bishop's poetical instances of bewilderment provoked by the suddenly gained awareness of reality's many-faced opposites: first of all, it is a *natural* and *unplanned* event in the middle of a *planned* trip; it provokes, secondly, an alteration in the pace of the bus, disturbing the administration of time previously organized and contrasting the rhythm of human beings and the rhythm of that wild beast; and, thirdly, it forces a shift of attention from conversations about past events and "dreamy divagation" onto an immediate, present, visible subject. As Helen Vendler puts it,

If the occupants of the bus are bound, in their human vehicle, to the world of village catastrophe and pained acknowledgement, they feel a release of joy in glimpsing some large, grand solidity, even a vaguely grotesque one, which exists outside their tales and sighs, which is entirely "otherworldly" ... "The Moose" is such a purely linear poem, following as it does the journey of the bus, that an effort of will is required to gaze at it whole. The immediacy of each separate section—as we see the landscape, then the people, then the moose—blots out what has gone before. But the temptation—felt when the poem is contemplated entire—to say something global, something almost allegorical, suggests that something in the sequence is more than purely arbitrary. The poem passes from adult observation of a familiar landscape to the unending ritual, first glimpsed in childhood, of human sorrow and narration, to a final joy in the otherworldly, in whatever lies within the impenetrable wood and from time to time allows itself to be beheld. Beyond or behind the familiar, whether the visual or the human familiar, lies the perpetually strange and mysterious. (28)

The moose represents simultaneously a return to the natural environment pictured in the opening lines of the poem, and a continuation of the previous scene in which the passengers were talking among them. It is both a subject of its own action of looking over the bus, and an object for the passengers to look on and talk about. For this reason, the distinction between subject and object becomes blurry when the moose comes forth. It is hard to say whether it is the bus that is intruding in the natural world, or if it is the natural world that moves towards the bus.

Similar scenes with similar implications can be found in Carlos Drummond de Andrade's poetry. In the Brazilian environment he would never find a moose, to be sure, but in the country he could find in the ox a counterpoint to human life. Martins has already noticed that "[f]or Drummond, the figure of the ox in the country is an icon for the paralysis of life" in the countryside (81). In his poem "Boitempo," for instance, we read:

Entardece na roça
de modo diferente.
A sombra vem nos cascos,
no mugido da vaca
separada da cria.
O gado é que anoitece ... (1-6)

As Martins points out, "time is measured by the silent routine of the cattle" (80). More than that, the poem says that the cattle itself brings night, as if it were integrated to nature in a way that it could affect the passing of time. Even if that is not to be taken literally, and if the cattle is not to be assigned any kind of magical powers over night and day, it still metaphorically reintegrates the farm animals into the environment around them, making them part of nature again instead of mere property. The frontiers between possessed animals and nature at large are blurred.

In another poem, "Episódio," from *A Rosa do Povo*, an ox comes forward and meets the narrator, like Bishop's moose, as if out of nothing:

Manhã cedo passa
à minha porta um boi.
De onde vem ele
Se não há fazendas?

Vem cheirando o tempo
entre noite e rosa.
Pára à minha porta
sua lenta máquina. (1-8)

The lack of any other word to indicate time more specifically—*de manhã* or *numa manhã* or *toda manhã*—gives the line a strongly well-marked rhythm (three two-

syllable words, or: one iamb and two trochees) but also makes time elusive: "manhã" could mean *every morning* or *one morning* or *this morning*. The title stating that this is "an episode," vaguely indicating a one-time event, combined with this imprecise "manhã," sounds as timeless as the traditional "once upon a time." From an equally indeterminate place the ox comes smelling "o tempo / entre noite e rosa," and though this suggests the morning air at dawn, the poem literally says the ox smells "time" itself.

The animal comes nearer then pauses, stopping at the narrator's door for no apparent reason, moving slowly. Its great size and strength, plus its controlled, peculiar pace compose the likeness of some machine: "sua lenta máquina." The animal's place in human time and organization is ambiguously put:

Alheio à polícia
 anterior ao tráfego
 Ó boi, me conquistas
 para outro, teu reino. (9-12)

The ox has perhaps come so early in the morning that it precedes the traffic, in the same way that oxen as a species precede the human organization of traffic. Being, in either sense, a testimony of the possibility of life before the police and the traffic, the ox's placidity and quietness "conquer" the narrator for a different realm, taking him over and away to that place:

Seguro teus chifres:
 eis-me transportado
 sonho e compromisso
 ao País Profundo. (10-3)

Carried in "dream and commitment" to another realm or kingdom, the narrator finds himself in "the Deep Country," which could be merely the slow-paced countryside of Brazil, or maybe an ideal—or at least imaginary—land where life's clock is adjusted to the cadence of the oxen, those "slow machines." This ox may be a token for either sort of "Deep Country." The previous stanza, according to which the ox preceded the

traffic, suggests the idea of temporal inertia, oldness or timelessness. Thence, this Deep Country could be the place of a different sort of time or else the country that the memory of older mornings has frozen in a specific era: it could be the deep country of nostalgic remembrance.

This possible connection of the "once-upon-a-time" tone of the title and opening line to memory, and a connection of the Deep Country to previous times preserved in memory is not explicit in "The Moose" but now we could consider it, taking advantage of the parallelism that the intertextual reading allows. After all, the story of "The Moose" takes place in Nova Scotia, the scenario of most of Bishop's memoirs and short stories. Thus, the moose, the ancient animal, a token of the reappearance of the past, represents yet one more element of contrast and unsettled balance: when the modern bus and the moose—another animal of a species which (like oxen) precedes buses and traffic—face each other in an awkward interaction, the encounter emphasizes the opposition between past and present, ancient and modern, natural and artificial, and bring forth the fact these opposites occupy the same reality. Like ambassadors out of nearly forgotten eras, the moose and the ox come forth and reestablish a connection between categories that, though conceptually separate—man and nature, fast and slow, old and new, subject and object—are coexistent, and whose relationships with one another are not stable or definite.

The moose "sniffs the hood bus's hot hood" and the ox from "Episódio" is "unmindful" of the police. Their attitudes are of calm self-sufficiency; but another animal from another poem by Drummond is very conscious of human affairs, though it sees them from a distance. In "Um Boi Vê os Homens," from *Claro Enigma*, positions have been inverted: as the title goes, it is now an ox that observes mankind, and it does so in much more detail and with much more meditation than the human narrator of

"Episódio." This ox narrator is more pensive, the analysis it makes of humankind is broader and weightier than that one about the ox which is seen in the morning episode. Stylistically, its diction reflects this state of deep pondering. Instead of speaking through short lines like those we find in both "The Moose" and "Episódio," this ox resorts to long lines, unequal in length but constant in their solemn tone; the subject is the sad disquiet of mankind, the vocabulary is grave, and the syntax is intricate, especially in the final lines, with long sentences. The overall impression is of weighty seriousness, like the movements of an actual ox. The poem moves on as slow and heavily as an ox would. In addition to this "impressionist" quality—the stylistic imitating of the pace and grave air of the animal itself—this sort of diction, sober and reserved, demarcates a limit to any possibilities of mutual understanding between men and beasts. The animal may understand that they are anxious and sad but does identify with them.

The animal narrator explores the peculiarities of men: their haste, their continuous fidgeting, their nakedness, their frailty, their insensibility to nature—"não escutam / nem o canto do ar nem os segredos do feno" (6-7)—and also their graveness and sadness, their "melancholy gracefulness," qualities any person might associate to oxen and cows. The ironically inverted connections go further: the ox says that men need to "emit absurd and anguished sounds" (21 – my translation), and this is pretty much the way a cow's wailing cry will sound to human ears. The "absurd" human sounds could very well be songs that people sing or even poetry. In its calm, the ox might not understand the need for singing and making verse—thence the prosaic appearance of the ox's discourse.

Another difference between the human narrator and the ox is that the latter does not choose a word to name men. The title mentions "men" and that is the only

occurrence of the word in the poem. In the poem's body, men are referred to as "them" and animals as "us". We see that man poet gives the title and then lets the ox speak. From beginning to end, men are implied in the inflection of verbs and adjectives or in pronouns—*correm, esquecidos, falta-lhes, deles, neles*. In short, the ox does not *name*, even indirectly, the creatures he meditates about. Naming is a human occupation and a human preoccupation. In the Bible, for instance, Adam's first deed in the Garden of Eden is to assign names to animals, "and whatsoever Adam called every living creature, that was the name thereof. And Adam *gave names to all cattle*, and to the fowl of the air, and to every beast of the field" (*Genesis 2:19-20*; my italics). Names imply roles and definitions, it implies control over the function of things. The ox does not name men, but the title seems to suggest that a human hand *felt the need to describe and delimit* the poem giving it definition, a role, a name: "Um Boi Vê os Homens." This title is necessary for us humans to understand the poem, but not for the ox, that simply talks of *them* and *us*.

We cannot tell for sure who this implied *we* indicated by *ruminarmos* is. It can be read simply as "us oxen," but elsewhere there are indications that the fellowship reaches farther and includes other creatures with hoofs: in "Os Animais do Presépio," from *Claro Enigma*, the human narrator "incorporates" the qualities of different farm animals, which suggests that they may be considered a group:

Para tocar o extremo
de minha natureza,
limito-me: sou burro.

Para trazer ao feno
o senso da escultura,
concentro-me: sou boi. (21-6)

Bishop's moose is yet another animal with hoofs and a representative of that strangely big, slow, and calm kingdom.

The presence of the animals in the poems above, the ox and the moose—slow, heavy, patient, and seeming both curious about human beings and uninterested in them, or at least undisturbed by their presence—are described as being capable of slowing people down, even if just for a moment. Time flow felt by us in a certain rhythm is suddenly open to the possibility of flowing differently. We may then become aware of how human perception has made a fast pace seem necessary and cogent when it is not. This alteration in our perception of time, such a basic element of consciousness, allows the human beholder to feel for a moment a "sweet sensation of joy," perhaps of release of previous self-imposed or socially imposed constraints, and experience a nearly magical transportation onto some foreign place, the "Deep Country." In other words, the animals seem magical if compared to people because they live a different timing. They then become emblematic for other possibilities of cognition, for other mental frameworks or schemata. On the other hand, the animals are real: the other possibilities of perceiving things that their tranquility represents are not only imaginary or idealistic. They are true and visible, like the animals themselves. For this reason, interpreting the "Deep Country" of which Drummond speaks should not reduce it to a mere symbol of an ideal past or a distant dreamland where things could be calmer. As in Bishop, things here "waver between being what they are and being something distinct from what they are." Even if transported to another realm "in dream," the narrator is still before an actual animal, and actually becoming more aware of the real world where oxen do live slowly and do move quietly. The dream to which the narrator is transported is a response to the richness of reality.

Howard Moss says that the poem "'The Moose' ... restates and enriches several of Bishop's themes: a journey, a rediscovery, the magical appearance of an animal, the sudden awareness of a particular kind of consciousness" (29). He also notes that "it's

hard to think of another poet who could so consistently use servants as subjects or a squatter as the hero (or antihero) of a big poem without slipping into snobbishness or whimsy." (29) He is talking about the poem "Manuelzinho," and although Moss himself does not explicitly make the connection between what he says about "The Moose" and what he says about "Manuelzinho," in both poems this "sudden awareness of a particular kind of consciousness" is present.

In "Manuelzinho" this gained awareness results from the contrast between people rather than human and animal. To the narrator of the poem, Manuelzinho's way of living is so peculiar, his behavior is so distinct from what the narrator would find appropriate that Manuelzinho is imagined to be perhaps the prince of some fairy-tale realm:

And once I yelled at you
so loud to hurry up
and fetch me those potatoes
your holey hat flew off,
you jumped out of your clogs,
leaving three objects arranged
in a triangle at my feet,
as if you'd been a gardener
in a fairy tale all this time
and at the word "potatoes"
had vanished to take up your work
of fairy prince somewhere. (38-49)

The narrator here is as puzzled as the ox is in "Um Boi Vê os Homens." They are equally appalled by the behavior of the subjects they watch: by their different sense of timing, order, and priority, and by the uncomfortable feeling of having to accept the consequences of this weird, inexplicable behaviors they see. Unlike the ox, though, that seems gravely conformed with the disquiet and hurry it sees in "them," that is, in human beings, the narrator of "Manuelzinho" resists to the fact that the gardener will not act as the narrator thinks he should. The narrator in "Manuelzinho" sounds *sarcastic* and *annoyed* and *condescending* and *reconciling* and *sympathetic* and *compromising* and

astonished, all mixed up in uncertain proportions. Manuelzinho always does the unexpected, and because he does this, he somehow has things his own way:

The strangest things happen to you.
 Your cow eats a "poison grass"
 and drops dead on the spot.
 Nobody else's does.
 And then your father dies,
 a superior old man
 with a black plush hat, and a moustache
 like a white spread-eagled sea gull.
 The family gathers, but you,
 no, you "don't think he's dead!
 I look at him. He's cold.
 They're burying him today.
 But you know, I don't think he's dead."
 I give you money for the funeral
 and you go and hire a bus
 for the delighted mourners,
 so I have to hand over some more
 and then have to hear you tell me
 you pray for me every night! (50-64)

The predominant feeling in the account is that of *awe*, indicated by many words and expressions scattered throughout the poem. Thus, in the first stanza: "... you bring me / a *mystic* three-legged carrot" (18-9); in the third stanza: "as if you'd been a gardener / *in a fairy tale*" (45-6); in the fourth one: "The *strangest things* happen to you" (50); in the fifth: "Account books? They are *Dream Books*" (91); in the seventh: "You paint—*heaven knows why*— / the outside of the crown / and brim of your straw hat" (126-8; my italics). The ironically suggested aura of dream and mysticism are strategies with which the narrator implies that, if Manuelzinho does not do things in a certain way—the narrator's way—he must be from another world. It is indeed a strategy to naturalize the narrator's own expectations: if the narrator's outlook on reality is *right* or *normal* while Manuelzinho's outlook is *wrong* or *abnormal*, then this strange gardener must come from a mystical, fairy-tale dreamland. On the other hand, if neither outlook is absolutely right and normal, then one must go beyond the awe and

astonishment that differences initially provoke and accept the fact that reality is not simplistically one-sided. In this poem, as Moss says, behind the portrait of the squatter "all a set of moral standards is shifting gears" (31). Manuelzinho, like the oxen and the moose, represents the diversity of approaches to the organization of time and life. The poem shows that, because of people's idiosyncrasies, they can seem as uncanny—that is, as "homely" and still "otherworldly"—to one another.

This mixed sensation of estrangement and illumination aroused when new aspects of reality are uncovered might have been one of the things that moved Bishop to write about the peculiar ways in which paupers lived. In many of her writings, both in poetry and prose, Bishop mentions the poverty-stricken ones seen in Brazil: hospitable people, for instance, in the countryside of Pará, who received Bishop and her friends for a cup of coffee in a house without a floor, in "A Trip to Vigia"; people in Ouro Preto apparently living in century-old, decaying buildings described in "To the Botequim & Back"; the homeless ones, like the beggar in "Going to the Bakery," or those alluded to in "Ping Dog;" and people living in the *favelas* of Rio, like Micuçu, the bandit who runs from the police in "The Burglar of Babylon."

Among the ones in *favelas*, she refers to those who came from the even poorer Northeast region in order to make some kind of a living—or subsistence—in richer cities down south. As the narrator of the ballad puts it, they crowd the hills and grow into "a fearful stain" of poor families who "can't go home again." The stain is fearful mainly to those richer on-lookers who disapprove of the growing *favelas*. The idea that those people even *have* a home to go back to is deliberately and ironically naïve; and saying that they cannot "go home" suggests that they do not belong in Rio, and that the place where they have settled down in the hills is not rightfully *theirs*. From the works of the six Brazilian authors Bishop translates into English, she chooses one that is

connected to that matter of the growing *favelas*: a verse narrative by João Cabral de Melo Neto that describes the lives of those people, the migrating paupers or *retirantes*, and their journeys to escape drought and famine.

Besides this thematic connection, Bishop and Cabral had other literary points of convergence. A wider intertextual analysis of their works (which is not the scope of this text) could explore some common literary predilections. For instance: in Cabral's book *Agrestes* we find, for an epigraph, a couple of lines by Marianne Moore—who was not only a close friend of Bishop but (more importantly) an admitted literary preference and an acknowledged influence on her work—and inside the book, poems praising her. Randall Jarrell once declared that he felt "queer" to see all "over again" in English reviews of Moore's *Collected Poems* some sentences saying that "she isn't a poet at all," and criticism stating that Moore actually wrote *prose* (167-8), but this recurring critique to which Jarrell objected would be regarded as a compliment in Cabral's evaluation, since bringing verse nearer to prose was a great achievement according to his literary standards. He praised Auden, for example, for this alleged quality in the poem "A W. H. Auden":

... hoje só resta a conta aberta
de teus livros de onde sacar-se.

E de onde há muito que sacar:
como botar prosa no verso,
como transmudá-la em poesia,
como devolver-lhe o universo

de que falou; como livrá-la
de falar em poesia, língua
que se estreitou na cantilena
e é estreita demais de coisas e rimas. (7-16)

Auden, says Cabral, has left a heritage of showing writers how to "put prose into verse," how to "turn prose into poetry" and, furthermore, how to rid it from "speaking in poetry." The expression "falar em poesia" may be read either as "speaking about poetry"

or as "speaking *in* poetry," since poetry is declared to be a language: a language "narrowed down to singing." The word "cantilena" can mean either a soft song or a fastidious narrative, a similar kind of ambiguity found in the opening line of Marianne Moore's poem "Poetry": "I, too, dislike it: there are things that are important beyond all this fiddle" (1). The word "fiddle" is used not necessarily (or not only) as a synonym for *violin*, a musical instrument, and therefore as a reference to the *musicality* commonly associated with poetry, but as a synonym of *nonsensical* or *trifling matters* or of *fraud*. Cabral, for that matter, would himself strive to be an "anti-lyric" poet, as we read in "O Último Poema":

... peço: que meu último poema

mande-o ainda em poema perverso,
de antilira, feito antiverso. (10-12)

"Anti-lyre" is how he calls his book *A Educação pela Pedra* in its dedication to Manuel Bandeira (who has also written a poem about his own wishes for a last poem, which was translated by Bishop). In "A Augusto de Campos," Cabral calls his own lines "non-verse:"

Você aqui encontrará
as mesmas coisas e loisas
que me fazem escrever
tanto e de tão poucas coisas:
o não-verso de oito sílabas
(em linha vizinha à prosa)
que raro tem oito sílabas
pois metrifica à sua volta; (13-20)

If he would praise Auden for the ability to make verse more prosaic, and would endeavor to attain the same quality, it is no surprise to find similar compliments to "prosaic" Miss Moore. In his "Homenagem Renovada a Marianne Moore" we read:

Cruzando desertos de frio
que a pouca poesia não ousa,
chegou ao extremo da poesia
quem caminhou, no verso, em prosa. (1-4)

The other features he underlines in Moore's work are the same ones that he has usually praised in poetry that he admired: concentration on things and self-effacement in tone and subject. In the poem "Dúvidas Apócrifas de Marianne Moore" he writes: "Sempre evitei falar de mim, / falar-me. Quis falar de coisas" (1-2). Talking *about things*, even if not directly, is essential to Cabral. In "Falar com coisas" he writes:

As coisas, por detrás de nós,
 exigem: falemos com elas,
 mesmo quando nosso discurso
 não consiga ser falar delas.
 Dizem: falar sem coisas
 é comprar o que seja sem moeda:
 é sem fundos, falar com cheques,
 em líquida, informe diarréia. (1-8)

And finally, since this ability to write meticulously about *things* and avoid abstractions ("falar sem coisas") was dear to Cabral, thence his poem about Bishop, a practitioner of that art, called "Sobre Elizabeth Bishop":

Quem falar como ela falou
 levará lente especial:
 não agranda e nem diminui,
 essa lente que filtra o essencial

que todos vemos mas não vemos
 até o chegar a falar dele:
 o essencial que filtra está vivo
 e inquieto como qualquer peixe.

Não se sabe se é a sábia receita
 que faz sua palavra essencial
 conservar aceso num livro
 o aço do peixe inaugural. (1-12)

The hardness of his meters and the crudeness of his metaphors may differ substantially from Bishop's style, but still we find in these quotations much to help us see the common ground that brought Bishop to translate Cabral and, reciprocally, made him admire her as a poet. Both writers looked for the fresh and essential in things, and sometimes found it in what is deceitfully trivial; and both of them managed to express

in verse these elaborate observations in the lowest key, often in a conversational tone. Of course, this description might apply to Marianne Moore as well, whom both of them admired. Quoting Bakhtin, their poetical voices were "resounding nearby and simultaneously" (*Speech Genres* 124).

Cabral's intent of putting prose into verse and turning prose into poetry ("botar prosa no verso," "transmudá-la em poesia") does not make his verse sound as prose, though. His "Morte e Vida Severina," the poem that Bishop translated, takes up the meter of popular verse narratives from the Brazilian Northeast region. Lines do not have a constant number of syllables as they do in traditional poetry in Portuguese, but they are certainly not prosaic in rhythm either: stronger syllables set the pace very clearly. A marked diction is established also through the use of short lines (a trademark of Cabral's poetry) and through rhyme and assonance in *ia*, kept from start to finish.

Bishop herself shows interest in popular poetry in her "Songs for a Colored Singer" which emulates the lyrics of jazz songs. She has also translated some popular and anonymous Carnival songs, included in her *Complete Poems*. Among her unpublished material, one also finds lyrics of other popular Brazilian songs with handwritten annotations, and translations, meant for a presentation in 1977 about Brazilian culture at Bristol Community College in Fall River, MA.⁴ In the translation of "Morte e Vida Severina" she compensates for the loss of rhyme and assonance, whose repetition stresses the rhythm in the original, by steadily using three-foot lines.

Another adaptation that Bishop did regards the translation of the adjective "severina" from the original title of the poem. The word was apparently coined by Cabral out of the proper name Severino, which sounds akin to *severity*. Bishop did not translate this invented word: she kept the proper name Severino, with its capital S, and used it as an adjective. The word *severina* and the repeated name Severino, shared by

many people in the same conditions, depersonalizes the situation of each "brother of souls" that endures such a living. The shared dryness and hardness of their general situation is turned into a communal but impersonal quality, a mere adjective. Through that mechanism, Cabral emphasizes the loss of identity of the migrants, as is said in the poem:

E se somos Severinos
 iguais em tudo na vida,
 morremos de morte igual,
 mesma morte severina:
 que é a morte de que se morre
 de velhice antes dos trinta,
 de emboscada antes dos vinte,
 de fome um pouco por dia
 (de fraqueza e de doença
 é que a morte severina
 ataca em qualquer idade),
 a até gente não nascida).
 Somos muitos Severinos
 iguais em tudo e na sina:
 a de abrandar estas pedras
 suando-se muito em cima... (39-54)

Had Bishop tried to coin a new word like Cabral did, she would not obtain the same effect in English as he did in Brazilian Portuguese. "A Severino life" represents not just the severe, difficult way of living (or surviving) that many unfortunate people happen to share; it represents, first of all, as the title of Bishop's version goes, "the life of a Severino," replicated in many others more—a Severino is only one among many. In the stanza before the last in Cabral's poem ("O carpina fala com o retirante que esteve de fora..."), for instance, a man says to Severino:

— Severino retirante,
 deixe agora que lhe diga:
 eu não sei bem a resposta
 da pergunta que fazia,
 se não vale mais saltar
 fora da ponte da vida;
 nem conheço essa resposta,
 se quer mesmo que lhe diga;
 é difícil defender,

só com palavras, a vida,
 ainda mais quando ela é
 esta que se vê, severina... (1-12)

There is an implied generalization in this: by ironically turning a common Northeastern name into an impersonal adjective, Cabral depersonalizes even more deeply every Severino, as if indicating that they embody a dreary situation larger than any of them, and perhaps *too dreary* for any of them. Bishop keeps the proper name instead but uses it as an adjective as well, emulating the effect of the original text.

Her editing is more radical, though, and so are its consequences. She cuts out most of the poem: right after the scene of the funeral procession comes the one of the nativity, abruptly. "Morte e Vida Severina" is a Christmas play, but Bishop translated only a small part of it—the two first scenes and a fragment of the last one from a total of *fourteen* scenes, and the result is this: first, there is a presentation of Severino, then a burial scene, then a cheerful celebration over a sudden childbirth that is not situated at all in relation to the scenes that precede it. Those elements that most obviously made the original poem a *Christmas play* were cut out: for instance, the succession of gifts to the newly-born child in the final scene, an obvious counterpoint to the nativity of Christ—and also the final lines that give the poem a clear moral in the form of an answer to the question about the worth of life:

... mas se responder não pude
 à pergunta que fazia,
 ela, a vida, a respondeu
 com sua presença viva.

E não há melhor resposta
 que o espetáculo da vida:
 vê-la desfilar seu fio,
 que também se chama vida,
 ver a fábrica que ela mesma,
 teimosamente, se fabrica,
 vê-la brotar como há pouco
 em nova vida explodida;
 mesmo quando é assim pequena

a explosão, como a ocorrida;
 mesmo quando é uma explosão
 como a de há pouco, franzina;
 mesmo quando é a explosão
 de uma vida severina. ("O carpina fala com o retirante ..." 16-30)

The passage that comes at the end of the original poem, quoted earlier, where the value of life itself is questioned ("é difícil defender,/só com palavras, a vida") is significantly omitted by Bishop. But this does not really mean that the value of human life is *beyond question* in her translation. She simply *avoids* the explicit question. As Trivisano has said, "the essential goal of [Bishop's] technique" is to capture in her poems the moment in which truth is *still being imagined*, and not the resulting thought; to capture the moment when, "[a]fter a succession of details, truth is still being discovered ... She can embody moral insight in action, without sermonizing" (71). Much more to Bishop's own style, then, her translation is not conclusive. The funeral scene is immediately followed by that of the nativity, without indication of happened in between, and there it ends. If, on the one hand, she refrains from posing the question whether such a dreary life was worth living, on the other hand she (by means of the very same silence) avoids answering that *it was*. The brief, final section in her version begins like this:

—All the heaven and earth are
 are singing in his praise.
 It was for him the tide
 didn't go out tonight.
 — It was for him the tide
 made its motor stop... (1-6)

And it ends thus:

—And this river, always blind,
 opaque from eating dirt,
 that never reflects the sky,
 has adorned itself with stars. (XIV, 29-32)

Instead of a conclusion to the travels of Severino (already shortened down to initial and final scenes) this stanza sounds like a distant echo to the ending lines of her poem "Cootchie":

Searching the land and sea for someone else,
the lighthouse will discover Cootchie's grave
and dismiss all as trivial; the sea, desperate,
will proffer wave after wave. (15-18)

The imagery is similar, but symmetrically inverted: the sea would "proffer wave after wave" in despair over Cootchie's funeral, and "the tide/made its motor stop," the river "has adorned itself with stars" because of a child being born. There certainly is the hint of symbolic meaning in her rendering of the poem, but it is not as conclusive as Cabral's original assertion, quoted above, that life itself is an answer to questions about the worth of living.

The subject of death among the poor, or rather, of their familiarity with it, is recurrent in Bishop's texts about Brazil. In her short memoir "To the Botequim & Back," for instance, she hears this man talking about "the awful fight" the night before at the "bar-and-groceries-store":

"I hate fights, don't you?" he asks me. I say I do. "Someone might get killed," he says ...Yes, too much killing goes on, it is easy to kill someone. He ends his little sermon by saying, "It is stupid, it is great nonsense to kill a man. Imagine, the police would catch him, he'd spend a year in jail, and lose his job, and confound his life completely." Everyone nods in agreement. The cachaça drinker, in a thick voice, asks for another. (*Collected Prose* 76)

The reason why she finds it worth quoting is obvious: it sounds as if getting caught and spending *one year* in jail were the only tragic results of murder to be feared and avoided—not the death of a person. Killing a man is neither terrible nor frightening, it's just "nonsense." If we take this scene from the memoir in consideration, her keeping of the second part of Cabral's poem in her shortened-down translation turns out to be quite revealing. In that dialogue between Severino and two men who carried a dead

body, the action of gunning down a person is naturalized in their words by means of metaphorical association of bullets to birds, suggesting that shotguns are simply part of the grim environment. We read that the shots that killed that man were just "spreading their wings," widening their territory in order to secure further flying:

—And who was it ambushed him,
 brothers of souls,
 who let this bullet bird
 out, to harm him?

—That's hard to answer,
 brother of souls,
 there's always a bullet
 idle and flying. (II, 41-4)

(...)

—And was his farm big,
 brother of souls,
 was his farm so big
 that they coveted it?

—He had only two acres,
 brother of souls,
 on the mountain's shoulder,
 and neither one level.

—Then why did they kill him,
 brother of souls,
 why did they kill him
 with a shotgun?

—It wanted to spread itself,
 brother of souls,
 this bullet bird wanted
 to fly more freely. (II, 65-80)

Przybycien has related the event of Bishop's translation of Cabral to a ballad of her own, "The Burglar of Babylon." Both poems take their rhythm and form from folkloric traditions; both of them, being ballads, are narrative; and they are both related to the situation of paupers in Brazil, especially migrants, and to the ominous presence of death in their quotidian living.⁵ "The Burglar of Babylon" tells the story of a runaway

bandit, Micuçu, being tracked down in a large police operation as he tries to hide in a favela in Rio de Janeiro. At the end of the chase he is shot dead. Although he runs to escape, and threatens to take revenge on the by-passers if they dare tell the police his whereabouts, and shoots back at the soldiers as he struggles to get away, Micuçu seems paradoxically aware that his case is hopeless:

He did go straight to his auntie,
 And he drank a final beer.
 He told her, "The soldiers are coming,
 And I've got to disappear."

"Ninety years they gave me.
 Who wants to live that long?
 I'll settle for ninety hours,
 On the hill of Babylon.

"Don't tell anyone you saw me.
 I'll run as long as I can.
 You were good to me, and I love you,
 But I'm a doomed man." (33-44)

And when he sees a buzzard flying above he shouts: "Not yet, my son, not yet." Being aware of his meager chances makes him similar to the retirantes in "Life and Death of a Severino." After the episode is over and Micuçu is dead, one of the customers just outside the *botequim* that Micuçu's aunt kept downplays not only her nephew's death, but all his fame as a criminal: "He wasn't much of a burglar, / He got caught six times—or more" (170-1)—the kind of indifferent remark one might expect to hear at that other *botequim* in Ouro Preto. The final stanzas herald the beginning of yet another headhunt on the Babylon hills, and the repetition of the opening lines of the ballad indicates a cyclic pattern, endless repetition, like the continuity of the "*vida severina*" in Cabral's ballad. "The Burglar of Babylon" neither presents an evaluation of the growth of the "fearful stain" on the hills of Rio, nor does it try to pretend that the death of Micuçu will make life more bearable to the inhabitants of the *favela*.

All in all, besides their testimony of serious social problems, these poems present Bishop's permanent investigation of her own consciousness, the deliberate effort found in her poems to stay alert about the limits of one's outlook on things and people. In yet another poem, "To the Bakery," the presence of the beggar on the street is important as a social picture of Rio and of other Brazilian cities, but perhaps more important is the narrator questioning herself after the encounter, wondering if she could not have said anything more "apt" or "bright" than the usual "good night." What is usual and common becomes "mean" in the presence of a drunk, starving man. This self-checking stops the narrator from naturalizing the situation. This encounter, as the one with the moose or the contact with Manuelzinho, or Drummond's encounter with the oxen, or Cabral's description of the "vida severina," reveals not an ethnographer cataloguing discoveries, but permanent rediscoveries of the very act of discovering.

¹ As noted by Süssekind, Przybycyen, Martins, among others.

² Edgar Allan Poe published in 1846 his influential essay "The Philosophy of Composition" explaining how narrative tension was constructed in the composition of his most famous poem, "The Raven."

³ Travisano.

⁴ Unpublished material, Elizabeth Bishop Collection, Vassar College Library.

⁵ Przybycien 147-9.

CHAPTER TWO: BISHOP, BANDEIRA, VINÍCIUS, AND CLARICE

In this chapter I will deal with the theme of intimacy in two different forms—intimate companionship and intimate solitude—in some texts by Bishop, Manuel Bandeira, Vinicius de Moraes, and Clarice Lispector. I will show how their approaches, being obviously distinct from one another, delineate a rather coherent notion of the precariousness and frailty of love and intimacy. In the first chapter we saw that Bishop's double vision kept one eye on things or people, and the other on the perception (or reception) of these subjects by the mind; now we will see that in her texts, she represents familiarity coexisting with estrangement, and intimacy with anxiety.

Different critics who have touched the subject of Elizabeth Bishop's friendship with Manuel Bandeira—Maria Lúcia Milléo Martins, Regina Maria Przybycien, Flora Süssekind—have commented the exchange of verses between the poets, accompanying occasional gifts: Bishop gave Bandeira a pot of jelly with a short poem of hers, and Bandeira thanked her with a poem for another present, a book by e. e. cummings, *XAIPE*. The poem Bishop sent Bandeira with the pot of jelly (Süssekind 349-50) is full of comic and ironic references to Bandeira's public status as a major poet in Brazil:

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!"

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

Smiled on by Fame and Miss Brazil:
Is this the man to keep so still?
The gallant man who rendered in

more graceful language Elinor Glyn?

Gave lovely Latin things to utter
to Tarzan, 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...
I haven't; but accept and spread
these compliments upon your bread,

and, Manuel, may this silent jelly
speak sweetly to your Poet's belly
and once more let me say I am
devoted with a jar of jam. (1-40)

Still, Bishop's relationship with Manuel Bandeira's poetry was quite ambiguous:

Bishop did translate some of his poetry but she was not as much of an admirer of his verse as the lines above might suggest. Przybycien points this out:

Não ficaram registros, ao que se saiba, do que Bandeira realmente pensava de Bishop como poeta, mas ela o julga com bastante rigor em Cartas para amigos no exterior (aliás, não só a ele, mas à maioria dos poetas sul-americanos). (242)

In a letter from 1955 to her friend May Swenson, Bishop writes:

Fiz algumas traduções do "poeta maior" do Brasil, Manuel Bandeira (ele também me traduziu aqui), para um suplemento do *Atlantic Monthly*. [As traduções] estão horríveis — espero que você não as veja. Seus poemas rimados são simplesmente impossíveis de traduzir e aqueles em verso livre não lhe fazem justiça — e por alguma razão ele não gostou da tradução que fiz do seu poema mais famoso, meio rimado. Mas para falar a verdade, não aprecio a sua poesia,

mesmo sabendo que muito do charme da linguagem me escapa. Quando ele é bom, ele é como um Cummings muito simples e fraco. E agora que está velho e mimado — as pessoas deterioram rapidamente aqui por falta de competição — e receio que ache que qualquer fantasiuzinha que rabisca é um poema. (...) [Bandeira] é delicado e musical e tudo o mais — nada parece sólido ou realmente "criado" — é tudo pessoal e tendendo para o frívolo. (Przybycien 242 – her translation.)

Significantly, the poem that accompanied the jelly was not included by Bishop in her *Collected Poems*; Bandeira's poem to her, on the other hand, can be found in his collected work. They obviously had different ideas regarding what poetry should be like, as one can also realize by juxtaposing the remarks Bishop made on Bandeira's poetry, quoted above, and his poem "Meu Último Poema," which she translated:

Assim eu quereria o meu último poema

Que fosse terno dizendo as coisas mais simples e menos intencionais
 Que fosse ardente como um soluço sem lágrimas
 Que tivesse a beleza das flores quase sem perfume
 A pureza da chama em que se consomem os diamantes mais límpidos
 A paixão dos suicidas que se matam sem explicação. (1-6)

No wonder Bishop did not have the impression of finding anything really *created* in his verse: Bandeira wanted tenderness, ardor, and passion for his poetry. His interest, according to this text, was in the *feelings* the poem could convey and in the expression of the simplest and most *unintentional* things, as the first line says.

In spite of these divergences, which seemed not to interfere at all in their personal relationship, the two poets had shared an interest in what another poet, Charles Simic, has called the "history of 'unimportant' events" (126). As Thomas J. Travisano puts it, Bishop "was one of those startling individual lyric voices who vex the historian" (5). Bandeira's "Tragédia Brasileira" is, in a sense, a narrative dealing with such "unimportant" events. It depicts a married couple who moves from place to place, and even from town to town, because the wife, Maria Elvira, is unfaithful to her aged husband Misael wherever they try to settle down:

Misael, funcionário da Fazenda, com 63 anos de idade,
 Conheceu Maria Elvira na Lapa, - prostituída, com sífilis, dermite nos dedos,
 uma aliança empenhada e o dentes em petição de miséria.
 Misael tirou Maria Elvira da vida, instalou-a num sobrado no Estácio, pagou
 médico, dentista, manicura... Dava tudo quanto ela queria.
 Quando Maria Elvira se apanhou de boca bonita, arranhou logo um namorado.
 Misael não queria escândalo. Podia dar uma surra, um tiro, uma facada. Não fez
 nada disso: mudou de casa.
 Viveram três anos assim.
 Toda vez que Maria Elvira arranjava namorado, Misael mudava de casa.
 Os amantes moraram no Estácio, Rocha, Catete, Rua General Pedra, Olaria,
 Ramos, Bonsucesso, Vila Isabel, Rua Marquês de Sapucaí, Niterói, Encantado,
 Rua Clapp, outra vez no Estácio, Todos os Santos, Catumbi, Lavradio, Boca do
 Mato, Inválidos...
 Por fim na Rua da Constituição, onde Misael, privado de sentidos e de
 inteligência, matou-a com seis tiros, e a polícia foi encontrá-la caída em decúbito
 dorsal, vestida de organdi azul. (*Anthology* 8)

The fact of moving constantly before the murder should prove in cold logical reasoning that Misael, the husband, did not believe his wife would really *change*. They arguably moved off every time because he could only hope that she might not be tempted to adultery somewhere else. On the other hand, conflicting with that notion that she would not change, we know that Misael had indeed made Maria Elvira change in part: he had taken her out of "the life [of prostitution]." Thus, he could hope perhaps that, if she had changed from being a prostituted woman to being his wife, she might as well *behave* as the wife he wanted her to be.

Misael tried to "reform" her as if she were a decaying house, but Maria Elvira did not carry through this transformation he had planned for her—from prostitute to faithful spouse. Therefore, the whole relationship was born from a contradiction in Misael's mind, who knew that Maria Elvira was who she was, but at the same time expected that she might change. The murder is the explosion of the opposite expectations conflicting in his mind.

As Przybycien has observed, Bishop herself was fond of collecting such crime stories and similar *faits divers* from the police pages in newspapers (243). This is

illustrated, for example, in the second part of her "Songs for a Colored Singer" where she depicts a woman who leaves her lover because of his love affairs: "I'm sick of all your fussing anyway. / Now I'm pursuing my own way" (II, 17-18).

An intertextual reading could find in other of Bishop's poems a more subtle connection. "Tragédia Brasileira" could be considered a "travel narrative," since it portrays, besides the story of adultery, the very human tendency to change locations in order to escape conflicts that have absolutely nothing to do with the locations themselves. Bishop was very conscious of that kind of response to psychological dilemmas. In "Arrival at Santos" she writes:

. . . Oh, tourist,
is this how this country is going to answer you

and your immodest demands for a different world,
and a better life, and complete comprehension
of both at last, and immediately,
after eighteen days of suspension? (7-12)

No country would be able, of course, to answer by itself any "demands" for, and "complete comprehension" of "a better life" and "a different world," just as no city or neighborhood alone could make Maria Elvira act as Misael had expected her to. In another poem, "Questions of Travel," a few questionings are made concerning this urge to keep moving from one place to another:

Think of the long trip home.
Should we have stayed at home and thought of here?
Where should we be today?
Is it right to be watching strangers in a play
in this strangest of theatres?
What childishness is it that while there's a breath of life
in our bodies, we are determined to rush
to see the sun the other way around?
The tiniest green hummingbird in the world? (13-21)

The inner motor of travels seems to be curiosity, but the poem acknowledges the existence of something else, some *childishness* pushing us towards new sites and sights.

There are at least two distinct aspects to that curiosity: the sheer pleasure of novelty, and the secret ambition that there might be some redeeming secret in newfound places or things—or *people*.

One can easily read in Bandeira's poems the difficulty to accommodate not only to a place, but to a single lover. In "Belo Belo" we read:

Quero quero
 Quero a solidão dos píncaros
 A água da fonte escondida.
 A rosa que floresceu
 Sobre a escarpa inacessível
 A luz da primeira estrela
 Piscando no lusco-fusco
 Quero quero
 Quero dar a volta ao mundo
 Só num navio de vela
 Quero rever Pernambuco
 Quero ver Bagdad e Cusco
 Quero quero
 Quero o moreno de Estela
 Quero a brancura de Elisa
 Quero a saliva de Bela
 Quero as sardas de Adalgisa
 Quero quero tanta coisa (6-23)

Roughly comparing this passage to the one from "Questions of Travel" quoted above, we find some correspondence of the "hidden fountain, the rose on the inaccessible scarp," and "the light of the first star" to the "tiniest humming bird" mentioned in Bishop's poem: the secret and unique beauties. Seeing Baghdad and Cusco corresponds to "seeing the sun the other way around." But then come four additional elements, namely, Estela, Elisa, Bela, and Adalgisa—*women*. This plurality implies the need of going from one lover to another and is in itself a declaration of the precariousness of romantic love. The poem demands not one but several women. *Women* in the plural are also the final image of Bandeira's "Poema só para Jaime Ovalle":

Quando hoje acordei, ainda fazia escuro

(Embora a manhã já estivesse avançada).
 Chovia.
 Chovia uma triste chuva de resignação
 Como contraste e consolo ao calor tempestuoso da noite.
 Então me levantei,
 Bebi o café que eu mesmo preparei,
 Depois me deitei novamente, acendi um cigarro e fiquei pensando...
 — Humildemente pensando na vida e nas mulheres que amei. (1-9)

This private moment of lying down and drinking alone the coffee the poet had made himself in the morning invites the reminiscences of another kind of privacy, the memory of previous lovers. The dedication in the title reveals one more kind of intimacy: the poem is "for Jaime Ovalle *only*" (my italics). The women remembered are more than one, and anonymous; but this person to whom the poem is dedicated is only one, and named, and has the poem *just for him*. He, a friend perhaps, is allowed to share through that dedication this moment of solitude, to which those women loved are present only through remembrances that become diluted in their own plurality. Solitude is the ultimate and more lasting sort of intimacy.

A poem by Vinicius de Moraes, like this one by Bandeira, also depicts a moment of quiet isolation of the lyric I from other people—"Soneto de Intimidade," which Bishop translated:

Nas tardes da fazenda há muito azul demais.
 Eu saio às vezes, sigo pelo pasto agora
 Mastigando um capim, o peito nu de fora
 No pijama irreal de há três anos atrás.

Desço o rio no vau dos pequenos canais
 Para ir beber na fonte a água fria e sonora
 E se encontro no mato o rubro de uma aurora
 Vou cuspingo-lhe o sangue em torno dos currais.

Fico ali respirando o cheiro bom do estrume
 Entre as vacas e os bois que me olham sem ciúme
 E quando por acaso uma mijada ferve

Seguida de um olhar não sem malícia e verve
 Nós todos, animais, sem comoção nenhuma
 Mijamos em comum numa festa de espuma. (1-14)

Ashley Brown found her version more "graceful" than the original—at least comparing the respective concluding lines (Brown 237). In a rough, direct, pictorial manner, the narrator in Vinicius's poem mentions a festival (or party) of *foam* from urinating with the farm animals, while Bishop employs the less pictorial expression "pleasant piss," avoiding the explicit image of the puddle of urine. Like Drummond's "Boitempo," which begins, "Entardece na roça /de modo diferente," Vinicius declares there is something peculiar about afternoons in the countryside. Drummond referred to the passing of time, Vinicius to the "excess of blue". This first impression of slight estrangement at the farm is the only one: the rest of the sonnet portrays the feeling of complete easiness and of feeling at home. Bishop strives to make her reader feel at home as well: the unusual metaphor in the second stanza, the "red of a dawn" found in the bushes, whose "blood" is spat out by the narrator, is "explained" to the English-speaking reader as representing a fruit: "And if I spot in the brush a glow of red, / A raspberry, spit its blood at the corral"—although raspberries are not fruits one would probably find in Brazilian farms. In any case, the intimacy the sonnet deals with is not of that sort which a reader might expect from a poet who wrote numerous love poems and lyrics for love songs, as Vinicius did. Intimacy, here, is that of a man with nature, away from other people and from social restraints. This freedom is represented, to be sure, by the act of walking around in one's old pajamas, chewing some kind of weed (perhaps a stem and not the "blade of sticky grass" from Bishop's version), and carelessly urinating outdoors observed ("unemotionally" though "not without malice") by animals... but moreover, freedom comes in the use of an explicit and prosaic word such as "estrupe" and a vulgar one, "mijada." This movement of the narrator amongst animals, fresh waters, grass, and bushes resembles the image of that house in Bishop's "Song for the Rainy Season" and its particular kind of intimacy:

Hidden, oh hidden
 in the high fog
 the house we live in,
 beneath the magnetic rock,
 rain-, rainbow-ridden,
 where blood-black
 bromelias, lichens,
 owls, and the lint
 of the waterfalls cling,
 familiar, unbidden.

In a dim age
 of water
 the brook sings loud
 from a rib cage
 of giant fern; vapor
 climbs up the thick growth
 effortlessly, turns back,
 holding them both,
 house and rock,
 in a private cloud.

At night, on the roof,
 blind drops crawl
 and the ordinary brown
 owl gives us proof
 he can count:
 five times — always five —
 he stamps and takes off
 after the fat frogs that,
 shrilling for love,
 clamber and mount.

House, open house
 to the white dew
 and the milk-white sunrise
 kind to the eyes,
 to membership
 of silver fish, mouse,
 bookworms,
 big moths; with a wall
 for the mildew's
 ignorant map;

darkened and tarnished
 by the warm touch
 of the warm breath,
 maculate, cherished;
 rejoice! For a later
 era will differ. ... (1-46)

In this house upon the mountains, not unlike the place described by Bandeira in "Belo Belo" —"a solidão dos píncaros / A água da fonte escondida" (7-8)—representatives from all three kingdoms —animal, vegetable, mineral— are *familiar* and *unbidden*, and the house, though hidden, is *open to membership* of all sort of small creatures. The situation of distance from civilization and closeness to nature is similar to that of the sonnet. The surroundings change with the season, though:

... rejoice! For a later
era will differ.
(O difference that kills
or intimidates, much
of all our small shadowy
life!) Without water

the great rock will stare
unmagnetized, bare,
no longer wearing
rainbows or rain,
the forgiving air
and the high fog gone;
the owls will move on
and the several
waterfalls shrivel
in the steady sun. (45-60)

The reader cannot but imagine that this anxiety from external shift refers to—or at least reflects—the fears of the people in the house. We assume that this change which puts the narrator to lamentation, the unavoidable end to the intimacy with nature, foreshadows the time when all intimacy, including that between the people of the house ("we") may also come to its close. Just because the season will not last forever, one naturally feels that all intimacy is circumstantial and temporary. As the refrain in the *bossa nova* song "Felicidade", whose lyrics, written by Vinicius, Bishop translated for a conference with Ricardo Sternberg in 1977, goes: "Tristeza não tem fim, / Felicidade sim"¹.

This sensation of the inevitability of separation is clear in the "Soneto de Fidelidade" by Vinicius:

De tudo ao meu amor serei atento
 Antes, e com tal zelo, e sempre, e tanto
 Que mesmo em face do maior encanto
 Dele se encante mais meu pensamento.

Quero vivê-lo em cada vão momento
 E em seu louvor hei de espalhar meu canto
 E rir meu riso e derramar meu pranto
 Ao seu pesar ou seu contentamento.

E assim, quando mais tarde me procure
 Quem sabe a morte, angústia de quem vive
 Quem sabe a solidão, fim de quem ama

Eu possa me dizer do amor (que tive):
 Que não seja imortal, posto que é chama
 Mas que seja infinito enquanto dure. (1-14)

The sonnet begins using the future tense ("serei atento") and swears fidelity to love in the couple of quatrains; then, in the triplets, it suddenly turns to foretelling yet another future when this love will already be gone, declaring that solitude is "the end of that who loves" (my translation) and referring to this same love to which it had just pledged allegiance as "the love (I had)," as if it were gone already. Love is "a flame," and therefore it shall presently be extinguished. Commitment to love "for as long as it lasts" is all fidelity one can expect.

Love is presented as an evanescent, fugitive thing in also "Garota de Ipanema," Vinicius de Moraes' most famous song, which celebrates the beautiful, anonymous "girl who passes by" the poet at the beach. This attraction to the passing girl was immortalized in poems too, such as the "Balada das Meninas de Bicicleta," where he writes:

Meninas de bicicleta
 Que fagueiras pedalais
 Quero ser vosso poeta!
 Ó transitórias estátuas

Esfuziantes de azul
 Louras de peles mulatas
 Princesas da zona sul:
 As vossas jovens figuras
 Retesadas nos selins
 Me prendem, com serem puras
 Em redondilhas afins. (1-11)

The girls are "transitory statues," an oxymoron as image, but the question behind the adjective is, in what sense are they transitory? To be sure, they are riding bikes and therefore *in transit*; they will not be girls forever; and they only remain at poet's ken for an instant. Nevertheless, he urges them to stay:

Permaneçei! vós que sois
 O que o mundo não tem mais
 Juventude de maiôs
 Sobre máquinas da paz
 Enxames de namoradas
 Ao sol de Copacabana ... (25-30)

His request that they stay is as ambiguous as the observation that they are transitory: it could mean a request for them to stay *still*, or stay *young*, or stay *with him*. In any case, if they will not stay, the poet will:

No vosso rastro persiste
 O mesmo eterno poeta
 Um poeta — essa coisa triste
 Escravizada à beleza
 Que em vosso rastro persiste,
 Levando a sua tristeza
 No quadro da bicicleta. (46-52)

Twice it is said that the poet "persists" in the girls' "trail" ("rastro"). They go away and he remains, a slave to their beauty. The constancy of his attention towards them (or is it an attention towards their beauty alone?) contrasts with the girls' parting. In another poem of his, "A Mulher que Passa," we find the praise of "the passing woman." In the last three stanzas we learn that this particular woman (or kind of woman) is desperately desired but impossible to hold:

Meu Deus, eu quero a mulher que passa!

Eu quero-a agora, sem mais demora
A minha amada mulher que passa!

No santo nome do teu martírio
Do teu martírio que nunca cessa
Meu Deus, eu quero, quero depressa
A minha amada mulher que passa!

Que fica e passa, que pacífica
Que é tanto pura como devassa
Que bóia leve como a cortiça
E tem raízes como a fumaça. (28-38)

The passing woman "floats lightly like cork and has roots like smoke," which means to say that her presence is certainly temporary. The ambiguities of the verb "passar" in Portuguese make translation difficult: she could be the woman who passes *by* like the girl of Ipanema, or a woman who is part of one's life for a while, then goes away. This last interpretation would turn the whole poem into one large psychological contradiction: the poet would then be obsessed by the woman (or kind of woman) who is sure to leave him. Lovers would, in that case, be among those "many things" of which Bishop writes in "One Art:" things "filled with the intent to be lost."

The "Soneto de Intimidade," however, which does not deal with intimacy with other people, moves only from the initial impact of the excessive light in the first line—the "much too much blue" —to the "party of foam" in the "pleasant piss" partaken at the corral. It brings no such prophecy of separation as the "Song for the Rainy Season" or the "Soneto de Fidelidade," fears are not to be found in it: instead, there is an easier, *more comfortable* intimacy perhaps for being less risky, if compared to that of the moist house on the mountains. Being alone with animals at a farm seems here less prone to loss than being with other people. The farm animals do not remind the reader of the dangers and precariousness of relationships. The narrator of the sonnet simply chooses the animals as his company and goes in their direction. The words are crude and the narrator is reduced to the animal kingdom ("us animals") in order to join this

simple form of fellowship. Brown, quoted above, thought this was not as graceful or discreet as Bishop's rendering, but the reason seems to be that the narrator did not feel that the occasion called for gracefulness or discretion. Quite on the contrary, the simple crudeness of the scene makes us forget the subtleties of relationships.

We are reminded of Drummond's trip to the "Deep Country" of oxen but here, at the farm, the poet seems to be able to reach it by himself, and in his own "Deep Country" of too much blue, creatures act "unemotionally" and "with no jealousy" (or "unenviously"). Intimacy, thence, comes with the elimination of human emotions and with the resource to physiologic satisfaction.

Intimacy and isolation are broken down right in the beginning of Clarice Lispector's short story "A Menor Mulher do Mundo," translated by Bishop as "The Smallest Woman in the World," for the *Kenyon Review* magazine under the title "Three Stories by Clarice Lispector." It tells the tale of a French anthropologist who finds in Africa the smallest tribe of pygmies in the world, and among them, the smallest woman in the world, pregnant. In its first paragraphs we learn that this smallest tribe of pygmies lives running away and hiding from another people, the *Bantos* (Bahundes), who hunt them down and eat them. The pygmies keep moving back and further into the jungle, "retreating, always retreating" — the same sentence we read in Bishop's own poem "January 1, 1502" about the arrival of the Portuguese at Guanabara bay:

Directly after Mass, humming perhaps
L'Homme armé or some such tune,
they ripped away into the hanging fabric,
each out to catch an Indian for himself—
those maddening little women who kept calling,
calling to each other (or had the birds waked up?)
and retreating, always retreating, behind it. (47-53)

The coincidence of images—if it may be called a coincidence—has called the attention of Victoria Harrison: "Clarice Lispector's story, 'The Smallest Woman in the

World,' pushes 'Brazil, January 1, 1502' beyond its end, as if they are in fact companion pieces ... [t]he dialogues in which [these two pieces] participate are intimate" (174). In the poem, the narrator enjoys the sight of the discovered land and of colorful animals mating on the beach—a scene of intimacy—but thinks of the early invading colonizers' who wanted to "mate" as well, by using violence against the natives. In both pieces, moreover—and this is just as important as the image itself—the two scenes of invasion and persecution reveal the urge to possess the newfound people. The French explorer who found the smallest woman in the world, for him a great anthropological find, wanted to collect facts about her "in order to be able to classify her among the recognizable realities" ("Three Stories" 501). When he gave her a new name, "Little Flower", the woman "scratched herself where no one scratches" and the Frenchman, being embarrassed, looked away. (502) Her pregnancy reveals something about her intimate life, her sexual activity, and her impudent, carefree manners show that she is not really concerned with her nakedness or with being exposed to a stranger; but from the explorer's attitude we see that, when her scratching hand forces him to acknowledge her as a human being, a woman, and not as an object that he had found, he becomes uncomfortable. This is the first contradictory reaction from a series of them, which the find of Little Flower will trigger all over the world as soon as her picture is published "in the colored supplements of the Sunday papers, life-size," and the news of the discovery start to spread. Those reactions, not the small woman herself, take up most of the narrative.

A woman says the picture gives her "the creeps"; another lady feels a "perverse tenderness" for Little Flower (502). As a matter of fact, most reactions to the smallest woman in the world are somehow connected to love, or rather to the weirdness of love and its craving for possession: for example, there is a girl who would want Little Flower

as a toy, and her mother who "considered the cruel necessity of loving" (503); there is a family who would want her around and the father who thinks that her being there "would end in a fight" because "in [that] house everything ends in a fight" (504); and there is a little girl of five who experienced complex and sophisticated feelings at seeing the picture of the smallest woman:

In a houseful of adults, this little girl had been the smallest human being up until now. And, if this was the source of all caresses, it was also the source of the first fear of the tyranny of love. The existence of Little Flower made the little girl feel—with a deep uneasiness that only years and years later, and for very different reasons, would turn into thought—made her feel, in her first wisdom, that "sorrow is endless." ("Three Stories" 503)

This is not, by any means, a simple chain of reasoning. How does the existence of Little Flower threaten the girl? Maybe the girl fears that she only receives attention because she is small, and that someone smaller may rob her of that same attention. Maybe she realizes that her frailty as a human makes her dependent on love. She sees a glimpse of the risks and perils of intimacy. Her conclusion, besides, coincides perfectly with the refrain in the song "Felicidade," quoted earlier in this chapter: "tristeza não tem fim."

The girl's first moment of wisdom is also a first moment of self-consciousness, and it finds a clear parallel in Bishop's poem named "In the Waiting Room," in which a little girl ("Elizabeth") of about the same age suddenly becomes aware of her own individuality. Waiting for her Aunt Consuelo at the dentist's office, sitting in the waiting room, the girl reads a copy of *The National Geographic* magazine where she also finds pictures of people from African tribes:

Babies with pointed heads
wound round and round with string;
black, naked women with necks
wound round and round with wire
like the necks of light bulbs.
Their breasts were horrifying.
I read it right straight through.

I was too shy to stop. (26-33)

The girl, similarly to the French explorer in the short story who was embarrassed by Little Flower scratching herself, was "too shy to stop" reading the story about the distant tribe with its naked black women. Then, she heard a cry:

Suddenly, from inside,
 came an oh! of pain
 —Aunt Consuelo's voice—
 not very loud or long.
 I wasn't at all surprised;
 even then I knew she was
 a foolish, timid woman.
 I might have been embarrassed,
 but wasn't. What took me
 completely by surprise
 was that it was me:
 my voice, in my mouth.
 Without thinking at all
 I was my foolish aunt,
 I—we—were falling, falling,
 our eyes glued to the cover
 of the National Geographic,
 February, 1918.

I said to myself: three days
 and you'll be seven years old.
 I was saying it to stop
 the sensation of falling off
 the round, turning world.
 into cold, blue-black space.
 But I felt: you are an I,
 you are an Elizabeth,
 you are one of them.
 Why should you be one, too?
 I scarcely dared to look
 to see what it was I was. (35-64)

Suddenly, the origin of the cry becomes dubious—the cry comes from "inside," but inside *where*, inside *whom*?— and the girl finds out she "is" her aunt. Then comes an opposite questioning: she is not her aunt but an "I," she is "an Elizabeth" and "one of them," moving back and forth between the opposite sensations of being herself and of being one among many people (or many women):

Why should I be my aunt,
 or me, or anyone?
 What similarities—
 boots, hands, the family voice
 I felt in my throat, or even
 the National Geographic
 and those awful hanging breasts—
 held us all together
 or made us all just one?
 How—I didn't know any
 word for it—how "unlikely" . . .
 How had I come to be here,
 like them, and overhear
 a cry of pain that could have
 got loud and worse but hadn't? (74-88)

Finding the notion of "self" to be problematic, she immediately feels uncomfortable, "falling," and the idea of the passing of time comes to her mind, as if asking: "is one still *the same person* as one grows older—and *different*?" These several metaphysical questionings crowd her thoughts, some of them in a blur: the individuality of self, the relation of the individual to the collective and the multiple ("What similarities . . . held us together?") and the transience of time. Lee Edelman points out that the event of the cry is not as important as the reactions to it in the girl's mind:

Whether or not Bishop had a real aunt Consuelo, there can be no doubt, [critics] will argue . . . that, literally, within the poem, and as one of its crucial events, Aunt Consuelo cries out of pain from inside the dentist's office. And yet I intend not only to cast doubt upon that central event, but to suggest that the poem itself is less interested in the event than in the doubts about it, and that the critics' certainties [about the cry] distort the poem's insistence on confusion. . . . To gloss this passage as the young girl hearing 'her aunt cry out in pain' is surely to ignore the real problem that both the girl and the text experience: the problem of determining the place from which the voice originates. (185)

As with the girl of five in Clarice's story, the unpleasant feeling here is mostly inarticulate. Little "Elizabeth" did not know the word to describe the way she just felt things to be—"unlikely"—while the other could not "turn the uneasiness into thought" until many years later. In Bishop's poem, the discomfort is related to definitions of identity and selfhood: "Why should I be my aunt, / or me, or anyone? . . . What

similarities ... held us all together / or made us all just one?" In Clarice's story, the discomfort is linked to love, to the idea that maybe love and safety could not be taken for granted.

After describing the varied reactions of people to the news of the existence of Little Flower, the narration returns to the smallest woman herself. The narrator calls her "a coisa em si" which Bishop translates as "the thing itself." It could also have been translated as "the thing *in* itself," a philosophical expression from Immanuel Kant (in German, *Ding-an-sich*) used to make a distinction between objects and one's perception of those objects. The irony of the reference is patent: the smallest woman in the world, the actual thing, is not more important in the story than the perception of, and the reaction to, her existence as felt by different people, starting with her French "discoverer." Thus Clarice, like the Bishop of "In the Waiting Room," seems to relate the particular discomforts and impressions of her characters to broader philosophical matters.

When the narration does go back to the "thing (in) itself," Little Flower is laughing. She is happy because she has not been eaten yet and "happiness is not being eaten" ("Three Stories" 506). Happiness is also *owing*: Little Flower declares that "it is good to own, good to own." She loves the explorer's ring and boots and is unable to see the distinction between the love *for someone* and the love *for someone's possessions*. Little Flower is no idealistic *bon sauvage*. The desire for ownership can be seen in her just as other forms of it are seen in the explorer who finds her and wants to make her *his* find, or in the Portuguese in Bishop's "January 1, 1502" who were "each out to catch an Indian for himself."

Though "The Hen" and "Marmosets"² tell stories of minor events—facts without clear importance within the lives of simple, regular families—these ordinary plots

become almost surrealistic because of the strong and unexpected feelings and reactions of the characters, verging the chaotic. We leave the stories with the impression that love—family love, to be more specific—has no sure ground at all; that sentiments may come down in pieces with no previous warning. The plot of "A Hen" is very simple: a hen that is going to be killed and eaten the next day climbs the roof of the family house, as if expecting her fate or trying to avoid it, and the family grows sorry for her and treat her as a queen... "Until one day they [kill] her and [eat] her and the years [go] by" (509). "Marmosets" is equally simple: a family receives a marmoset as a gift; the mother does not like having the animal at home and a friend of her arranges things so that the monkey is stolen. Then, one day, walking on the street, the mother decides to buy from a vendor another marmoset, now a female one, which turns out to be sick and dies.

These three stories by Clarice Lispector which Bishop chose to translate, and these two in particular, upset the standard notion, not of family itself, but of family *love*. In all stories, a feeling of awkwardness overhangs the most trivial family settings: love seems troublesome, charged with insecurity and contradictory fears—the fear of the *oppression of love*, for example, and the fear of *dependence on love*. To be sure, troubles in families have been the subject of countless stories, but these three specimens touch a subtler point: the *strangeness* of this love, this sentiment which seems to be desirable but uncertain and also suffocating, and that keeps changing from one thing to another within the same relationships. People may love then change their minds: empathy towards the fowl in "A Hen," for instance, disappears unexplainably. The little girl in "The Smallest Woman in the World" realizes that "sorrow is endless" because (as we may assume from that hermetic passage) love cannot be taken for granted, and the narrator of "Marmosets" says with irony that "one must buy dependable monkeys, and know where they came from, to ensure at least five years of love" (511).

Elizabeth Bishop's prose is full of such impressions—that love is strange and frail and bound to suffer sudden transformations—both in the memoirs and in the fictional pieces. In "The Baptism," for instance, a girl converted to the Baptist Church gets ill from her own asceticism and does not resist being baptized (by her own demand) in an ice-cold lake. Besides the obvious aspect of critique to religious fanaticism, there is this overwhelming feeling of the uncanny: everything happens very quickly from the girl's conversion to her death; except for her sisters no one in town pays any mind to her very passionate conversion; and after she dies, life in the village apparently goes on as if nothing had happened:

The day she was buried was the first pleasant day in April, and the village turned out very well, in spite of the fact that the roads were deep with mud. Jed Leighton gave a beautiful plant he had sent from the city, a mass of white blooms. Everyone else had cut their geraniums, red, white, and pink. (*Collected Prose* 170)

The absence of stronger reactions to the whole episode is disturbing. Here, instead of the more ordinary subject of a community actively interfering in the life of an individual, Bishop presents a small town where a girl can simply make herself sick, wither, and die without provoking any commotion. The uncanny is treated as ordinary, and the peacefulness of that final sentence sounds paradoxically morbid. Clarice's technique in "A Hen" and "Marmosets" is the opposite one, that of *making the ordinary feel uncanny*, but the result is similar: in "The Baptism" as in "The Hen" and "Marmosets," Bishop and Clarice reveal the gloomy strangeness one may find in the most "innocent" or "familiar" scenarios and disturb the very notion of intimacy. They estrange the commonplace, or rather, they display the underlying weirdness of things that habit makes us take for commonplace.

As in Clarice's stories, mixed and contradictory feelings in Bishop's writings make them short studies of the workings of the mind. "Song for the Rainy Season" tells

us about the fauna and flora that flourish inside and around a house, but also about the complicated sensation of both rejoicing over them and lamenting their imminent disappearance. In "Arrival at Santos," the arrival and the landscape of Santos are no more important than the questions that the event bring about. As was the case with the texts analyzed in the previous chapter, we find in the Bishop a double concern with the *object* portrayed and with the *perception* of that object, and these concerns interact in the text: the describer becomes more aware of the object and more subtly aware of herself.

¹ Unpublished material, Vassar College Library.

² Also translated by Bishop for the *Kenyon Review*.

CONCLUSION

You know, about my first book one fairly admiring
friend wound up by saying, "But you have no
philosophy whatever."¹

Elizabeth Bishop

This work began by introducing the general premise that works of Elizabeth Bishop could be read alongside with those of Carlos Drummond de Andrade, João Cabral de Melo Neto, Manuel Bandeira, Vinícius de Moraes, and Clarice Lispector, not only because Bishop translated into English some writings of these Brazilian writers, but also because, as argued by M. M. Bakhtin, intertextual readings are *potentially infinite*. Reading different (and apparently unrelated) texts together may reveal rich unexpected dialogues between them, and perhaps some coincidences that, according to Nelson Ascher, should be patiently catalogued if we are to write a true history of modern and contemporary literature. This work of establishing dialogues between Bishop and Brazilian literature has already begun with Regina Przybycyen, Flora Süssekind, and, in a more detailed analysis concerning specifically Bishop and Drummond, Maria Lúcia Milléo Martins. I have taken some the associations made in these pioneering works and explored a few more correspondences.

The contribution of this work to the survey of those connections consisted in exploring a few of those infinite possible dialogues. It showed how a comparison between works by Bishop and the selected Brazilian authors stresses some of the characteristics of Bishop's work. (For instance: by comparing Bishop's translations of Vinícius "Soneto de Intimidade" and Cabral's "Morte e Vida Severina," her preference for *understatement* stands out.) Various critics commenting on different aspects of Elizabeth Bishop's poetry have found, as seen in the introduction, a number of particular features on which they agree, even when their exam of the texts follows completely different routes. They point out that Bishop's poems reveal great attention to the act of

perception; that they delve into the everyday and the ordinary, and into the extraordinary, blurring the distinctions between the two; and that Bishop extracts surrealist texts from commonplace things and objects, through the renewed estrangement derived from continuously rediscovering things. These are, in general terms, what these critics find to be the main characteristics of Bishop's writings. In the comparison of texts by Bishop and texts by other authors, these characteristics become even more noticeable.

In the first chapter on Bishop, Drummond, and Cabral, I explored in some texts the issue of development in perception occasioned by the acknowledgement of other creatures and other people. In the analysis of "The Moose," we saw attention shifting in the poem because of the intermission of the animal, and we saw that this shift represents the growth of the narrator's awareness of reality: an ordinary moose suddenly seems to be "otherworldly," making the passengers, like children, whisper in wonder. We found similar symbolic effects in two of Drummond's poems, "Um Episódio," in which a human narrator describes an encounter with an ox, that transports him to another realm; and "Um Boi Vê os Homens," where an ox observes, with pity, the strange disquiet of humankind. In these three poems, the contact between people and large, slow-moving animals implies a contrastive comparison between species, and in all of them the moment taken to observe the other species portrays the acquisition of a richer awareness of oneself and of the world.

I argued, next, that this gain of a broader consciousness occurs also in Bishop's poems that involve poor people. In "Manuelzinho," for instance, the title character, a squatter, is so strange to the narrator that he appears also to have come from another world, although he actually works as a gardener to the narrator and lives in the narrator's property. The narrator faces with astonishment and mild sarcasm a whole set

of different moral and practical standards which force onto her the notion that her own perspective and expectations are neither absolute nor universal.

Regarding Bishop's portrayal of paupers, we saw that she translated Cabral's poem "Morte e Vida Severina," which deals with situation of poor migrants from the Northeast of Brazil. Cabral, like Bishop, had much interest in the poetry of Marianne Moore, Bishop's close friend and initial literary patron; and he admired the poetry of Bishop as well for its exactness. The narrative form "Morte e Vida Severina" is based on the traditions of oral and popular poetry from Brazil's Northeast. Bishop also wrote a narrative poem that took up its form from popular verse, "The Burglar of Babylon," a ballad. Its theme is closely associated to that of Cabral's poem: "Morte e Vida Severina" deals with migration, and the story of "The Burglar of Babylon" takes place in the hills of Rio where migrants build their slums.

Bishop's translation of Cabral's poem shortens it down to less than one-fifth of the original text and makes it less conclusive: the final dialogue and its clear moral message are suppressed, and in her version the poem does not seem like a Christmas play anymore, since Severino's pilgrimage and the nativity scene are cut down to a minimum. The lack of a clear-cut moral to the story in her version of the poem brings it closer to Bishop's own work, which is full of understatement.

We saw, moreover, that in Bishop's texts where Brazilian paupers appear, she registers the little importance ascribed to death in their talks: death is a trivial matter. This observation, though denouncing the precariousness of their lives, is not accompanied by judgement of the reasons that induces them to think in that way. The register of the fact is left to speak by itself, and in "The Burglar of Babylon" the ending lines that repeat the initial ones let us know that these deaths are not isolated episodes, but a repeating cycle.

In the second chapter I dealt with the way the theme of intimacy is treated in some of Bishop's texts and in poems by Bandeira, Vinicius, and in some short-stories by Clarice Lispector. Beginning with Bandeira, who was a friend of Bishop's and exchanged private poems with her, I argued that his piece "Tragédia Brasileira," the story of a man who murders his wife, is a story of a person who seeks without success for solutions to his intimate life by moving from place to place, a problem that Bishop identifies in her poems "Arrival at Santos" and "Questions of Travel." Nonetheless, the narrator of Bandeira's "Belo Belo" expresses the need of going from place to place to see the rarest things, and the need of going from lover to lover. In "Poema Só Para Jaime Ovalle," Bandeira portrays a moment of tranquil intimacy spent in complete loneliness. Similarly, in Vinicius' "Soneto de Intimidade," translated by Bishop, the narrator describes a day spent alone with animals at a farm. In spite of the similarity with Bishop's "Song for the Rainy Season," intimacy in Vinicius's sonnet is apparently free of risk and involves no other person but the narrator alone in a farm, free of any concerns, whereas in Bishop's poem the intimacy and "membership" with other creatures is happily celebrated while simultaneously being haunted by the foreseen event of another season that "will differ" and take that membership away. In many of his texts that deal with women and love, though, Vinicius does emphasize their transience; but *intimacy* in his sonnet, as in Bandeira's "Poema Só para Jaime Ovalle," means being left alone in peace and quiet.

Going to intimacy in a few of Clarice's short-stories, I observed that her story "The Smallest Woman in the World" deals with the intrusion of a European explorer that discovers a hidden African community, that is, with invasion against intimacy, as does Bishop's poem "January 1, 1502;" and that the story, as Bishop's poem "In the Waiting Room," is more concerned with the *reactions to a fact* than with the fact

itself—in the short story, the narration moves from Africa, where the smallest woman is, to the homes of families who discuss the discovery of Little Flower, and in Bishop's poem a scream heard inside the dentist's office bring about a series of questionings inside a girl's mind. "The Smallest Woman in the World" shows the family not as a refuge made of tranquility, but as a setting full of doubts and insecurity. In Clarice's "The Hen" and "Marmosets," also translated by Bishop, people's feelings about other creatures—the animals in the titles—seem to change for no reason, and that the strangeness of people's reactions makes the story uncanny, as happens in some of Bishop's own short-stories, such as "The Baptism."

Thus, as the previous pages have demonstrated point by point, there are curious correspondences between poems and prose works by Bishop and Drummond, Cabral, Bandeira, Vinícius, and Clarice. The two chapters, viewed together, may seem to deal with opposite topics, but actually, when compared to texts here analyzed, Bishop's writings show what some critics had already underlined in criticism: a consistent focus of attention to *attention itself*—the concern with the permanent renovation of perception and awareness. Poems about getting in touch with others are also poems about the *intimate sensation* of surprise and wonder, and, conversely, texts about intimacy and private thoughts confront the observer with the existence of others. An early poem such as "The Gentleman of Shallott," describing a man fascinated either by his own image on a looking glass or by the symmetry of his own body, is not so distant from a poem like "Manuelzinho" or from one like "In the Waiting Room." All of them describe the estrangement provoked by what is ordinary—beginning with one's own thoughts: "I love you all I can," says the narrator in "Manuelzinho," but then comes the question: "or do I?"—perception is so ambiguous that the narrator can hardly identify her own feelings. Things become uncertain, uncanny, as Manuelzinho himself seems to

be. As Octavio Paz says of Bishop's poetry, the "juxtaposition of spaces and perspectives makes the poem a theatre where the oldest and most quotidian of mysteries is represented: realities and its riddles" (15).

This quality in Bishop's work is the justification to the epigraph of this concluding section. Bishop may not have a philosophy, if the word "philosophy" is understood as a particular body of doctrine, but she does have a philosophy understood as a personal approach to reality, a method. "Observation is a great joy," she says (qtd. in Monteiro 101), and this consists in the discovery of the thing being observed and in the self-discovery that results from acknowledging the very process of observing. Her strive for objectivity is so radical that it accepts the challenge of taking subjectivity as an object. For this reason her poems cannot sermonize. This method of hers, of portraying in the same texts the things of the world around and the mind handling the impressions of those things is what strikes me as outstanding in her poems after this research, and it deserves, in my opinion, to be better studied, not as a mere stylistic tool inherited from George Herbert or Gerard Manley Hopkins, but as a truly epistemological (and therefore philosophic) approach.

¹ Qtd. in *Conversations with Elizabeth Bishop*, ed. George Monteiro 86.

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