

GILL, DIANE BATCHELET, M.A. *The Country-House Poems of Lanyer, Jonson, Carew, and Marvell: Emblems of Social Change in the Seventeenth Century*. (2012)
Directed by Dr. Christopher T. Hodgkins. 31 pp.

Often emphasizing the ancient practice of hospitality, country-house poems originate in medieval ideals. However, the country-house poetic genre possesses a malleability that belies these conservative origins. Poems by Aemilia Lanyer, Ben Jonson, Thomas Carew, and Andrew Marvell adapt to change by accommodating the societal pressures of seventeenth-century England, both public and private. In the hands of these poets, it became evident that country-house poetry could serve personal friendships (Lanyer), aristocratic entitlement (Jonson), and political change (Marvell), as well as record the dissolution of hospitality during the cultural changes of the seventeenth century (Carew).

GILL, DIANE BATCHELET, M.A. *Both/And: Elizabeth Bishop's Poetic Identity*. (2012)
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Elizabeth Bishop's accurate eye for detailed observation led to immersion in her natural subjects, but her poetic identity exists both in the observed moment and in creative vision. Her poems are both formal and free in structure, direct and reticent in voice, observational and metaphorical in theme. Her characters exist in "both/and" worlds, not "either/or" worlds. Bishop's dual focus re-figures the pastoral expression of the human and the natural by uniting them on equal terms.

THE COUNTRY-HOUSE POEMS OF LANYER, JONSON, CAREW, AND
MARVELL: EMBLEMS OF SOCIAL CHANGE IN THE
SEVENTEENTH CENTURY AND
BOTH/AND: ELIZABETH
BISHOP'S POETIC
IDENTITY

by

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THE COUNTRY-HOUSE POEMS OF LANYER, JONSON, CAREW, AND
MARVELL: EMBLEMS OF SOCIAL CHANGE IN THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY

Country-house poems are one expression of a wide variety of essentially seventeenth-century works examining “the right use of land and the social relationships that land engenders.” Often emphasizing the ancient practice of hospitality, country-house poems invoke “a utopia of medieval nostalgia that stood as a rebuke to all that was new while, paradoxically, accommodating the very change it excoriated” (McBride 2).

These poems written by men reinforced an idealized view of lordly hospitality in early seventeenth-century England, but at a time when society was rapidly changing due to increased gentrification and political instability. However, “The Description of Cooke-ham,” by Aemilia Lanyer, published four years before Ben Jonson’s “To Penshurst” in 1616, and arguably the first country-house poem, appropriates masculine pastoral conventions by its manipulation of the standard tropes of classical allusions, its use of pathetic fallacy, and its justification for female property ownership. “The Description of Cooke-ham” explores the possibilities in pastoral discourse to praise her patroness, Lady Margaret Clifford and her daughter Anne, and their rightful claim to the land. The estate itself, and not the manor house as in the later examples by men, exists symbiotically with the three women: the flora and fauna, the invocation of the pastoral *locus amoenus*, the classical allusions and use of pathetic fallacy, replace the male

prerogatives of land ownership.¹ Lanyer's subtle manipulation of pastoral conventions connects them to an emerging country-house genre in poetry and shows her appropriation of the pastoral to justify female authorship.

Lanyer's motives are far different from those of Ben Jonson, Thomas Carew, and Andrew Marvell, whose country-house poems have other goals. As anachronistic as the genre appears to be due to its very conservative claims of feudal hierarchy and land control, these poems are evidence of contemporary authorial purposes. From Lanyer's Edenic landscape without males to Marvell's Edenic landscape without females, the country-house poetic genre possesses a malleability that belies its conservative conventions. In the hands of Lanyer, Jonson, Carew, and Marvell, it became evident that country-house poetry could serve personal friendships (Lanyer), aristocratic entitlement (Jonson), and political change (Marvell), as well as record the dissolution of hospitality during the cultural changes of the seventeenth century (Carew). I will show not only how the country house poem reflects the tensions and pressures in seventeenth-century England bearing on property and relationships between the manor lord and his tenants, but also how Lanyer appropriates pastoral conventions for her country-house poem in order to advance female authorship and community. Carew's "To Saxham" records the way in which manor hospitality eroded during the seventeenth century. The country-house poems of Jonson, Carew, and Marvell use classical models of the pastoral and *locus amoenus* to justify property ownership in terms of social responsibility while Lanyer's "Description of Cooke-ham" advances a private, exclusive female community.

¹ Christine Coch references recent scholarship by Richard Prior who contends that there was no "royal house or royal palace anywhere near Cookham Dean or Cookham Village."

Country-house poems record the social and political de-stabilization of property and entitlement, as well as the subversive and revolutionary nature of female authorship in the seventeenth century.

Aemilia Lanyer's "The Description of Cooke-ham" (1611) offers an interior, feminine, and personal interpretation of the manor house that devalues the male justification for exclusive ownership and entitlement. Lanyer's poem serves not to reinforce male-only property ownership but rather to question its legitimacy. Amelia Lanyer's poem is something of an anomaly, in the sense that it views the country-house as a female refuge from male-dominated discourse and trade, which is central to Jonson's "To Penshurst" and implied in Carew's "To Saxham," as well as Marvell's "Upon Appleton House." However, in Lanyer's poem, it appears that there must be a withdrawal from socially mixed groupings in favor of only feminine connections. Although the publication of her poem predates Jonson's "To Penshurst," Lanyer's originality in using the country-house genre for her feminist interpretation underscores the prevalent themes of the authors examined here. Lanyer's poem challenges the masculine values of the country house, emblematic of the lord's influence, by internalizing its real virtues in her heart, rather than proving its value through the manor's relationship to a community outside its doors:

When I am dead thy name in this may live,
Wherein I have performed her noble hest
Whose virtues lodge in my unworthy breast,
And ever shall, so long as life remains,
Tying my life to her by those rich chains. (Lanyer, ll. 206-210)

In contrast to male authors of seventeenth-century country-house poems, Lanyer asserts individual creativity over public responsibility and the ascendancy of female authorship (and patronage) over the male-controlled oeuvre.

“To Cooke-ham,” published at the end of *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum*” (1611)² has a “prose dedication to the Countess of Cumberland, and a prose dedication ‘To the Vertuous Reader,’ which is a vigorous apologia for women’s equality or superiority to men in spiritual and moral matters” (Lewalski, *Writing Women* 219). It would have been highly unlikely that Ben Jonson would not have been aware of Lanyer’s poem; however, it would also have been unlikely for it to have influenced him in writing the contemporary “To Penshurst.” “Cooke-ham,” a paradise “inhabited solely by women . . . portrays the destruction of this Edenic place when its lady departs—presumably to her widow’s dower residences” (Lewalski, *Writing Women* 235). In contrast with Jonson’s “To Penshurst,” which enshrines the permanence of the lord’s residence on the estate with his wife, the epitome of hospitality and virtue, “Cooke-ham” focuses on the widowed Margaret Clifford who does not own Cooke-ham, as it was leased to her brother by the king. By writing a poem to its mistress, Lady Margaret and her daughter, Anne, Lanyer elevates her lady’s circumstances, perhaps ameliorating [as it were] some of Margaret Clifford’s grief. A tone of sympathy and solidarity between the women and nature emerges from the poem, through Lanyer’s pathetic fallacy that nature too mourns for Lady Clifford:

² “The volume concludes with a country-house poem, ‘The Description of Cooke-ham,’ celebrating an estate that was occupied on occasion by Margaret Clifford, as a lost female paradise. This poem may or may not have been written before Jonson’s ‘To Penshurst’ (commonly thought to have inaugurated the genre in English literature), but it can certainly claim priority in publication” (Lewalski, *Writing Women*, 219).

While all the rest with this most beauteous tree,
Made their sad consort sorrow's harmony.
The flowers that on the banks and walks did grow,
Crept in the ground, the grass did weep for woe.
The winds and waters seemed to chide together,
Because you went away they know not whither:
And those sweet brooks that ran so fair and clear,
With grief and trouble wrinkled did appear.
Those pretty birds that wonted were to sing,
Now neither sing, nor chirp, nor use their wing;
But with their tender feet on some bare spray,
Warble forth sorrow, and their own dismay. (ll. 177-188)

Flowers, winds, waters, and birds express their sympathetic sorrow.

Bronwen Price sees Lanyer's "Explicitly revisionist feminist perspective" part of "her construction of a female interpretive community, unusual in women's writing of her time" (292). However, even if it was unusual in women's poetry of the time, other avenues of communication, which are part of the country-house discourse field, were avidly pursued by this female interpretive community. Margaret P. Hannay notes the alternative avenues of discourse available to literary Renaissance women: "manuscript circulation was a social, rather than a commercial, activity . . . forms such as letters and diaries were not private, but were important public genres for men and women" (Hannay 574). In "A Description of Cooke-ham," Lanyer offers up her pastoral elegy to reinforce the bonds of friendship and devotion between women. So in a sense the loss of the estate by Lady Clifford could not destroy those bonds, whereas in "To Penshurst" the physical occupancy of the manor house was the primary connection and validation for its ownership.

Another important departure from the country house theme seen in Lanyer's "Description of Cooke-ham" that differs from Jonson, Carew, and Marvell's aims is the close relationship of the outdoor flora and fauna to the intensely personal relationships of the women rather than to the interior space of the manor house. The country house offered one place where women could be free, the garden. Christine Coch's "An Arbor of One's Own? Aemilia Lanyer and the Early Modern Garden" chronicles poems by a handful of English women poets who refer to a garden: "By the early 1620s, Rachel Speght and Mary Wroth are able to reimagine the garden as a site where a female poet can work toward reconciling her art with social expectations." This archetypal garden "is a temporary retreat from patriarchal pressures that readies her for engaging her worldly antagonists in her writing" (97-98). Coch examines Aemilia Lanyer as first to "reclaim the figure of the woman in the garden in order to address at length her own vexed relationships to aesthetic pleasure and art." She finds that "the garden at Cooke-ham is a sanctuary for her and her patron" (98). And "unlike a closet, whose constricted space obliged the solitary woman to withdraw into her thoughts, a garden invited her to look inward and outward at once, contemplating her relation to her surrounding" (103). What Lanyer does with this freedom is to make a correlation between nature's sympathetic response to Lady Clifford and Anne's impending departure and their passionate emotions (ll. 177-188).

In contrast with Jonson's use of classical allusion to reinforce patriarchal, feudal claims to land ownership, Lanyer adapts the pastoral to assert authority for feminine

preeminence. Renato Poggioli, in *The Oaten Flute*, examines the implications of the pastoral, which he says

implies a new ethos, which however is primarily negative. Its code prescribes few virtues, but proscribes many vices. Foremost among the passions that the pastoral opposes and exposes are those related to the misuse, or merely to the possession, of worldly goods. They are the passions of greed: cupidity and avarice, the yearning after property and prosperity, the desire for affluence and opulence, for money and precious things. The bucolic considers the pursuit of wealth—*auri sacra fames*—as an error as well as a crime, since it makes impossible “the pursuit of happiness.” (4)

In relation to “Cooke-ham,” the pastoral connects the women to a right relationship to the garden and environs rather than to the “pursuit of wealth.” The flora and fauna mourn their departure; their memories, not the estate, will remain: “Therefore sweet Memory do thou retain/ Those pleasures past, which will not turn again” (ll. 117-18). Also Lanyer invokes allusions to Philomela, the Phoenix, and Phoebus, personalizing them in service to the mistress. Philomena’s job is to “entertain both you [the Mistress] with her sundry lays” (l.31). The Phoenix symbolizes rebirth and continuity (ironically no more now that the females will depart) where in ancient times “the swelling banks delivered all their pride,/ When such a *Phoenix* once they had espied” (l. 43-44). Lanyer’s feminization of the Cooke-ham grounds is based upon personal emotion, close female friendship, and a desire to validate the feminine authorial voice:

Drawing on the classical pastoral tradition, “Cook-ham” offers a transient, self-contained paradise, embodying feminine goodness and inhabited by three women: Clifford, her daughter Anne and the speaker. . . . The volume, then, is bound together by a sense of female community and feminized patronage. (Price 292)

Lanyer's poem praises a feminized oak tree in contrast with Jonson's patriarchal and venerable oak at Penshurst. For Lanyer it is the most poignant and intimate moment in her poem. Lady Clifford embraces the tree and kisses it; then Lanyer takes the kiss for herself: "And with a chaste, yet loving kiss took leave,/ Of which sweet kiss I did it soon bereave" (ll. 165-166).³ Lanyer's alludes to Phoebus, as is found in Ovid's legend of Phoebus and Daphne, where the tree is a laurel not an oak, "Whose fair green leaves much like a comely veil,/ Defended *Phoebus* when he would assail" (ll. 63-64). Lanyer's oak (laurel) has been feminized, resembling Daphne's transformation into the laurel to defend herself against Phoebus's pursuit and capture. Lanyer's allusion to Ovid's tale of Phoebus and Daphne allows the speaker to incorporate the yearning of Phoebus (Lanyer) for Daphne (Clifford) once she has been changed into a laurel tree:

Even as a tree, Phoebus loved her. He placed his hand against the trunk, and felt her heart still beating under the new bark. Embracing the branches as if they were limbs he kissed the wood: but, even as a tree, she shrank from his kisses. Then the god said: "Since you cannot be my bride, surely you will at least be my tree. My hair, my lyre, my quivers will always display the laurel." (Ovid 43-44)

The laurel, a classical symbol for greatness in poetry and literature, subtly allows Lanyer to weave the myth into her authorial purposes for patronage.

Philomela, from Ovid's *Metamorphosis*, is another tale of sexual violation which Lanyer uses to draw a connection to patronage. Tereus, husband of Philomena's sister, Procne, falls passionately in love with Philomena and eventually rapes her, then cuts out her tongue to silence her (Ovid 146-153). Amy Greenstadt sees a correlation between

³ Amy Greenstadt discusses the meaning of these kisses in the idyllic landscape of Cooke-ham as having "disturbing aspects," and an "odd tone" (Endnote 6).

Philomela and Clifford's withholding of patronage: "'Cooke-ham' suggests the destructive potential of Clifford's indifference by alluding to stories about female victims of sexual violence who lost the power of speech" (83). And if Clifford refuses to be Lanyer's patron after the outpouring of her poem's adoration, "Clifford may participate in Tereus's act of silencing: withdrawing herself as an audience, she deprives Lanyer of the power to achieve a public voice" (Greenstadt 83). Lanyer's application of Ovid's *Metamorphosis* brings emotional passion to her plea for patronage.

It is clear then, that the country-house poem is fundamentally grounded on pastoral conventions:

Virgil and after him many others have followed Theocritus' example in the pastoral, not only in conformity with the tradition of literary imitation, but also as a means to moral relaxation and emotional release. (Poggioli 3-4)

Pathetic fallacy, emotional catharsis, and domestic economy, which are the basis of the pastoral mode, provide the pattern of Lanyer's poem. Pathetic fallacy as found in Virgil's *Eclogue X* combines Nature's sympathy for a spurned lover, and is well-suited for Lanyer's invocation of the pastoral landscape at Cooke-ham, which visibly mourns for Lady Clifford's departure. In this Eclogue, a sad landscape mourns for its lost mistress:

Lycidas: By your pleas you put off my longing. Now the whole sea-plain lies still and silent, and lo! Every breath of the murmuring breeze is dead. . . . Here, where husbandmen are lopping the thick leaves. (Virgil 71)

Lanyer adopts the pastoral pathetic fallacy in lines 127-156:

The trees that were so glorious in our view,
Forsooke both flowers and fruit, when once they knew
Of your depart, their very leaves did wither,
Changing their colours as they grewe together.
But when they saw this had no power to stay you,
They often wept, though speechlesse, could not pray you. (ll. 133-138)

Immediately after that substantial section based on nature mourning for human loss, Lanyer begins the allusions to Ovid's myths of Philomela and Phoebus Apollo/Daphne, forming the passionate oak-tree section.

As a means to emotional release, the pastoral's transference of human emotion onto the natural landscape helps make a catharsis for the pent-up emotions of grief in Lanyer and Lady Clifford. By invoking the pastoral conventions as well as aptly chosen classical myths, Lanyer creates a sub-text of emotional pressure upon her patroness not to abandon her when she has to abandon Cooke-ham. The emotions expressed outside in the gardens of Cooke-ham, seemingly given response by nature, heighten the urgent tone of loss. Her lament parallels Virgil's "We sing to no deaf ears; the woods echo every note" (*Eclogue X*, 71). Aemilia Lanyer attempts to put the memories of her visit and her love of Margaret Clifford into a kind of poetic ambergris, hoping that they will be preserved and also hoping that she will continue to be able to write poetry. Accordingly, after the emotional intensity of the oak-tree embrace, Lanyer returns to the pastoral trope of nature mourning their departure:

Each arbor, bank, each seat, each stately tree,
Looks bare and desolate now for want of thee;

Turning green tresses into frosty gray,
While in cold grief they wither all away. (ll. 191-194)

Lanyer clings to her patroness in every possible way. Reading closely one sees Lanyer is not willing to quit the relationship. She states that the poem was written at Clifford's "noble hest," implying obligation on her part to Lanyer:

This last farewell to *Cooke-ham* here I give
When I am dead thy name in this may live,
Wherein I have performed her noble hest,
Whose virtues lodge in my unworthy breast,
And ever shall, so long as life remains,
Tying my heart to her by those rich chains. (ll. 205-210)

Her final reference to "rich chains" implies the hope of continuing patronage as well as friendship.

Aemilia Lanyer's poem "To Cooke-ham" succeeds in reshaping the "discourse field" of the country house to empower women authors and their female audience. Displaying her understanding of the pastoral and the classics, she wrote a poem with every bit as much complexity as the poems by later poets, especially Ben Jonson. These later poems divert from personal themes to social and political themes. Jonson, Thomas Carew, and Andrew Marvell justify patriarchal land ownership by standards of social hospitality, thereby reinforcing feudal concepts of the relationship between the manor lord and his tenants: aristocratic entitlement to property in Jonson's "To Penshurst," dissolution of hospitality and community in Thomas Carew's "To Saxham," and political change that opened a road to land ownership in Andrew Marvell's "Upon Appleton House." These country-house poems include a description and history of the manor

house justifying its political existence, a panegyric to its aristocratic owner, including his noble past and entitlement to property, the theme of hospitality and social responsibility to the surrounding tenants and tradesmen in the present, and the connection of the estate to ideals of character and virtue which will be passed on in the future by inheritance. However, these poems are far more political than Lanyer's, in that they are a record the gradual erosion of the relationship between the hospitality of manor lord and his tenants (1616 to 1652). In them the "idealization of the house as an embodiment of tradition and social stability masks, or at least attempts to mask, the fact of perpetual social and economic change" (Patton 836). The values idealized in these poems yield to the historical and political pressures of their times. In these representative country-house poems there is a movement from community to social isolation that parallels a shift from Medieval standards of hospitality to land ownership viewed as separate from its community.

Although Aemilia Lanyer's publication of "Description of Cooke-ham" in 1611 probably predates Jonson's "To Penshurst," which was published as part of *The Forest* in 1616, Jonson has had the ascendancy in the country-house poem genre and is considered the most influential on later poets. Flora and fauna in "To Penshurst" exist to be harvested by the manor lord and serve the communal trough. Hunting and fishing motifs introduce a violence that is also, paradoxically, self-willed. Jonson's poem extols the hospitality of Sir Robert Sidney and his virtuous wife in order to praise Jonson's patron (Sir Robert) and reinforce his rightful ownership of Penshurst. As the standard for country-house discourse, Jonson's poem establishes the convention of anchoring the lord

to his estate and to the people who live under his aegis. Unlike many manor lords more drawn to London and the Court, Sir Robert Sidney actually lived at Penshurst, and interacted constantly with its tenants and laborers, offering them, according to Jonson, the same food as the family ate. The Sidneys' hospitality comes naturally to them:

Whose liberal board doth flow,
With all that hospitality doth know!
Where comes no guest, but is allowed to eat,
Without his fear, and of thy lord's own meat:
Where the same beer, and bread, and self-same wine,
That is his lordship's, shall be also mine.
And I not fain to sit (as some, this day,
At great men's tables) and yet dine away. (ll. 59-66)

The large, central hall (a kind of office and living room combined) allowed the family and tenants or tradesmen to mix freely. Sir Robert Sidney as manor lord looked after the numerous tradesmen and workers, seeing to their requests and needs. In contrast to Lanyer's "Description of Cooke-ham" where the woods and streams are the setting for the poem, Jonson emphasizes the solidity and authenticity of the manor house with its central hall and naturally organic additions over nearly two centuries.

Lanyer's poem only very briefly alludes to the male control that affects women's destinies in the seventeenth century, including, of course, Clifford's and her own. Rather, the first 50 lines are a panegyric to Margaret Clifford solely and to nature existing delightfully in her service. No male is present. Only one reference, in line 103 to "Unconstant Fortune," hints at the reality that as a dowager widow she has no choice but to be evicted. The manor house and its property at Penshurst, on the other hand, are a microcosm of the King's just relationship to his commonwealth. "'To Penshurst' asserts

classical values of sobriety, weight of utterance, concern with Nature, and Jonson's debt to Horace and Martial" (Hibbard 159). The poem concerns primarily the inner, natural virtues of the Sidneys as opposed to the exterior ostentation of larger manor estates, emphasizing the classical idea that the man makes the house, and not the house the man: "Thou are not, Penshurst, built to envious show,/ Of touch, or marble; nor canst boast a row/ Of polished pillars, or a roof of gold" (ll. 1-3). As G. R. Hibbard states, "the main theme of the poem, namely, the function of the house in the community as the centre of a complex web of relationships which makes of the fabric of civilized living . . . is the embodiment of a natural bond between lord and tenant" (164). Lanier's "Description of Cooke-ham" establishes a relationship based on heavenly rewards and ethical values.

The woods should belong to Lady Clifford because of her Christian piety:

In these sweet woods how often did you walk,
With Christ and his Apostles there to talk;
Placing his holy writ in some fair tree,
To meditate what you therein did see. (ll. 81-84)

Gender and entitlement are not the only subtext of the two poems. The setting in "To Penshurst" (ll. 7-18), especially the praise of the sturdy oak trees, connects stateliness, beauty, longevity, and security to the timeless virtues associated with the Penshurst estate: abundant game, harvest bounty, bucolic nature at its autumn peak. The abundance (ll. 22-44) spills over as provident nature revels in being used, as in fish wishing to be caught:

Thou hast thy ponds, that pay thee tribute fish,
Fat, aged carps, that run into thy net.

And pikes, now weary their own kind to eat,
And loth, the second draught, or cast to stay,
Officiously, at first, themselves betray.
Bright eels, that emulate them, and leap on land,
Before the fisher, or into his hand. (ll. 32-38)

Edenic images juxtapose physical spaces as environs for a perfect relationship between beasts, nature, and lord: its copse “To crown thy open table, doth provide/ The purpled pheasant, with the speckled side:/ The painted partridge lies in every field,/ And, for thy mess, is willing to be killed“ (ll. 27-29). The bounty of nature serves Sidney, but, as Jonson points out in lines 45-48, “though thy walls be of the country stone,/ They are reared with no man’s ruin, no man’s groan,/ There’s none, that dwell about them, wish them down:/ But all come in, the farmer and the clown.” There is a reciprocal interplay in the bounty of nature’s offerings to the manor lord which reinforces Sydney’s claim to the land. Sir Robert Sidney is thus seen as a proper steward for his land with a wife epitomizing gracious hospitality and virtue. They are hospitable to rural dependents (ll. 48-60) who are described as fruit: ripe, plump, healthy. The harvest time of year emphasizes their largess towards all. “To Penshurst” emphasizes the ideal of easy, liberal, gracious relationships between the lord and his tenants.

In addition to the day-to-day comings and goings of a bustling and prosperous manor house inhabited by the lord’s family, described in the pastoral language of beasts, hunting, wine, food, fish, and fruits, Penshurst’s claim to be the epitome of hospitality came when King James I arrived unannounced but found everything to his satisfaction nevertheless (ll.60-88). Jonson elevates his tone using classical allusions of ultimately pleasing hospitality (cf. Horace *Satires* II.8). Classical allusions are appropriate to

Jonson's personal references and this section continues the theme of abundance and graciousness and providing transition, by speaking of guests, to the visit of King James. Once King James arrives unannounced (ll. 76-88), he is welcomed with themes of plenty, graciousness, and natural, innate virtue:

There's nothing I can wish, for which I stay.
That found King James, when hunting late, this way,
With his brave son, the prince, they saw thy fires
Shine bright on every hearth as the desires
Of thy Penates had been set on flame,
To entertain them; or the country came,
With all their zeal, to warm their welcome here (ll. 76-82)

The poem is not only a representation of perfection, "as locus amoenus—a necessary motif in the country-house poem—but also as equivalent of the Golden Age" (Fowler 280). "To Penshurst" idealizes the Medieval world order whereby those manor lords that "have" bear the solemn responsibility to look after those who "have not," an ideal that devolves from the authority of a king entrusted by God with the responsibility for the commonweal. G. R. Hibbard sees the symbiotic relationship between the poet and the manor lord, where the poet partakes of the "hospitality" of the manor as well as do the commoners: "There is nothing 'patronizing' in the patronage of Sir Robert Sidney or Lord Fairfax, and nothing servile in the gratitude of Ben Jonson or Andrew Marvell; both poet and patron are parts of an organic whole, each recognizes the importance and place of the other in the life of the community" (11). Indeed, Jonson satirizes the fashionable, new and ostentatious country manors:

Now, Penshurst, they that will proportion thee
With other edifices, when they see
Those proud, ambitious heaps, and nothing else,
May say, their lords have built, but thy lord dwells. (ll. 99-102)

Jonson's pure evocation of a Medieval model for property entitlement in "To Penshurst" attempts to vindicate the basic reasons for unequal distribution of land and wealth, but inevitably comes too late for history, as the "proud ambitious heaps" surround its borders.

Penshurst manor house as a structure predates the so-called prodigy houses, built to impress a monarch on progress. The ostentation of the prodigy house shows how it has become an adornment for the manor lord to impress the monarch, rather than a vivifying and integral part of the surrounding country life, as is Penshurst. The ostentation of court life is one factor in the breakdown of the manor's historical and authentic connection to the land. Prodigy houses are among the earliest English examples of domestic architecture built by a known architect. Elaborate planning, careful proportions, symmetry, and definition of line "soon began to affect the design of the large country house and after the Restoration it became the dominant mode" (Hibbard 160). Alistair Fowler discusses the prodigy houses Theobald's, Hatfields, and Knole with extensive detail, finding that they "represent an ideal form of objectifying some political or philosophical idea" (Fowler 270): "Knole had 365 rooms, 52 staircases, and 7 courts Now Penshurst, a house that had developed through the accretions of centuries, could offer no such ideal significances. And that is why Jonson credits it instead with 'better marks', or symbols" (Fowler 270). Jonson here connects to the pastoral mode, as Poggioli's iteration of the pastoral economy makes clear:

Foremost among the passions that the pastoral opposed and exposes are those related to the misuse, or merely to the possession, of worldly goods. They are the passions of greed: cupidity and avarice, the yearning after property and prosperity, the desire for affluence and opulence, for money and precious things.
(4)

By underpinning his argument in the pastoral, Jonson establishes the moral benchmarks for Penshurst's success:

Pastoral economy seems to realize the contained self-sufficiency that is the ideal of the tribe, of the clan, of the family. The pastoral community produces all it needs, but nothing more, except for a small margin of security. It equates its desires with its needs. (Poggioli 4-5)

Paradoxically the abundance of Penshurst is markedly un-wasteful; its steward and mistress embody all the classical and pastoral virtues of economy and share with their community.

John Summerson discusses the country buildings of late Tudor and early Stuart England, of which Penshurst is an example, and finds they "are the visible evidence of a revolution in the Englishman's attitude towards land, which had been proceeding since the fifteenth century. . . .The change in outlook was the accompaniment of a corresponding social change" (104). So Jonson's poem "To Penshurst" can be seen in relation to his age in the same way that J. S. Bach's Baroque music is the culmination of an age that was already engaging with the early Classical style. It is a remnant of older attitudes as new ones are beginning to appear. Carew's poem "To Saxham," is situated between the stable values extolled in "To Penshurst" and the ultimate severance of communal ties seen in "Upon Appleton House." "To Saxham" records the erosion of

hospitality at the country houses during the mid-seventeenth century, and is a daguerreotype of a moment in England when land ownership did not have to be validated by community needs. The setting of the poem, deep winter, sets the tone of estrangement between the manor lord and the estate.

“To Saxham” shifts the perspective from the interior bustling and mixing of lord and tenants in “To Penshurst” to the exterior perspective of cold and starving commoners during winter, gazing up at the brightly lit windows of the manor from outside. What does the marked change in tone from positive to negative indicate? Written in 1624, only six years after the bountiful harvest depicted in “To Penshurst,” “To Saxham”’s cold winter night shows how less privileged inhabitants felt very separated from the manor’s warm interior, even though the speaker is at pains to point out they could get handouts of food if they could trudge on to its door, left unlocked. In “To Saxham,” the speaker embeds the details of those left outside within the poem’s praise of the owner: “The cold and frozen ayre had sterv’d/ Much poore, if not by thee preserv’d” (ll. 11-12) and

To all that wander in the night,
And seeme to becken from aloofe,
The weary Pilgrim to thy rooffe;
Where if refresh’t, he will away” (ll. 36-39).

Its 61 acres of wooded preserve protected numerous “beasts” (ll. 16-28) who, as in “To Penshurst,” were all too happy to be consumed by the rightful manor lord.

“To Saxham” seems to imply a forced hospitality in the somewhat ironic description of the Ark:

The Pheasant, Partiridge, and the Larke,
Flew to thy house, as to the Larke.
The willing Oxe, of himselfe came
Home to the slaughter, with the Lambe,
And every beast did thither bring
Himself, to be an offering.” (ll. 20-26)

Certainly the pattern of lordly praise of “To Penshurst” is replicated in “To Saxham,” yet the divide between outside cold and inside warmth, the contrast between plenty and starvation, is the dominant tone of this poem. Where Jonson’s poem “To Penshurst” depicts the bustling interior business of a rich harvest season between tradesmen, tenants, and the Lord Robert Sidney in a completely consensual effort, “To Saxham” does not gloss over the real conditions separating the manor lord from his surroundings. The older manor house (as in Penshurst) had a central large hall which functioned as a place for the landowner’s family to live and the landowner to receive tenants--all mixed together civilly with a tradition of equality in sharing food. However, due to the influence of architects and the desire to build homes to impress the queen, the central hall evolved into a foyer, the family’s living quarters moved to wings removed from estate business; servants’ quarters were separated from family. The changes effected a disconnection between the property owner and the tenants: “There was a marked tendency for the great man to make much more use of intermediary officials in his dealings with tenants and servants, and in this way to cut himself off from direct contact with the humbler day-to-

day activities of his estate” (Hibbard 161). These activities involved a commoner population under severe stress from gentrification, enclosures, and economic stagnation.⁴

Demographic statistics show a marked rise in poverty during this time. Peter Turchin and Sergey Nefedov’s book *Secular Cycles* analyzes the demographics of cultural pressures on populations which reflect the increasing isolation and absentee-landlordism of the period. Chapter 3, “Early Modern England: The Tudor Cycle (1485–1730),” summarizes statistics on the percentage of rural poor in England in 1610. The document charts a pattern away from relative comfort and modestly growing wages during the fifteenth century, to a protracted period of stagflation that by 1590 had made a serious reversal of workers’ disposable income for food and shelter:

During the sixteenth century wages grew slower than prices, collapsing in real terms. For example, agricultural wage in southern England stayed constant. The purchasing power of the wage rate, however, declined by 50% by the 1590s. . . . [D]uring the stagflation phase rents increased faster than prices, and the direction of the flow of profits was reversed. (Turchin and Nefedov 1)

This entrenched stagflation, coupled with political changes that rapidly expanded the number of gentry, put definite pressures on the working class laborer: “In 1603 demand was so great that James I created more knights in four months than Elizabeth I had in forty-four years” (Kishlansky 24).⁵ The decline in purchasing power by 1590 falls in relatively close proximity to the 1611-1612 date when “To Penshurst” was written and its relative contemporary country-house poem, “To Saxham” (mid-1620s). Two chilling

⁴ David Hill Radcliffe discusses four poems about Percy Lodge showing that the country-house genre changed as a result of political, rather than economic forces.

⁵For a discussion of the expansion of ranks within the nobility and the revenue gained by the crown through their taxation, see Kishlansky 23-25.

graphs on fiscal distress and rates of infanticide show a rapid rise after 1600 to a high in 1625-1630 (Turchin and Nefedov). Jonson indirectly addresses the rise in poverty by praising the older system of manorial responsibility now being displaced by ostentatious new-made lords. "To Saxham" by Carew opens a window on a more realistic assessment, where the manor lord is more removed from his surroundings.

Carew's "To Saxham" reflects Cavalier uncertainties about threats to England. James I died in 1625 and after several years of increasing conflict Charles I dissolved Parliament in 1629. In this uncertain environment, Saxham house is a shelter from upheaval and hostility (hostility : cold winter :: Saxham : warm retreat). More to the point, the poem records the retreat from the social responsibilities that devolve upon a manor lord and vindicate his title to the land. In contrast with "To Penshurst," where the seasonal changes involve everyone in the harvest and distribution, "To Saxham" opens with lines that delineate its separation from the surrounding tenants and tradesmen, and even from seasonal cycles at all:

Yet, Saxham, thou within thy gate
Art of thyself so delicate,
So full of native sweets, that blesse
Thy rooffe with inward happiness; As neither from, nor to thy store/
Winter takes ought, or Spring addes more (ll. 5-6).

This Saxham house is self-contained, remote, self-sufficient and seasonless. The house and lord are not averse to giving alms and protection to commoners, yet there is obviously not a daily give-and-take between the community and the manor house, as in "To Penshurst." Perhaps the firelit windows and the cold emphasize this separation:

“Those chearfull beames send forth their light,/ To all that wander in the night,/ And seeme to becken from aloofe,/ The weary Pilgrim to thy rooffe” (ll. 35-38).

Further isolating Saxham from connection to the surrounding populace, the poem seems to have usurped Nature’s prerogatives: “Water, Earth, Ayre, did all conspire,/ To pay their tributes to thy fire” (ll. 29-30). The house is a beacon for hungry and cold strangers rather than a natural gathering place for local tenants. The manor lord’s relationship to the land in “To Saxham” is quite different from that in “To Penshurst.” The reader’s sympathy lies with the cold and hungry people in the dark outside Saxham, whereas the reader’s respect lies with the truly hospitable Sidneys at Penshurst. “To Saxham” seems a more realistic view of 1625, and it contrasts with “To Penshurst” in its depiction of realistic conditions in a way that “To Penshurst” seems to avoid. Lanyer’s “Description of Cooke-ham,” on the other hand, manipulates pastoral motifs in order to advance her authorial claims and draw attention to property entitlement. These varied uses of the country-house poem illustrate the adaptability of the form to differing authorial purposes, giving it a malleability that belies its conservative conventions.

The last country-house poem that I will consider, Andrew Marvell’s “Upon Appleton House” (1650-52), leaves hospitality behind entirely, for its purpose is political: to validate the Fairfax’s claim to Nun Appleton and justify their daughter’s inheriting it. The poem completes the movement away from the Medieval connection between hospitality and right to land ownership seen in “To Penshurst” and the strained yet attempted hospitality in “To Saxham.” The values expressed in “Upon Appleton House” are not the personal and private issues seen in Lanyer, or the classical and Medieval

values of hospitality found in “To Penshurst”; nor are they the emphasized but self-destructing statements about hospitality in “To Saxham.” The central purpose of “Upon Appleton House” is to justify manor land ownership in a politically-charged atmosphere that challenged the basic rights of a lord to his estate. This poem seeks to assert the right to property by reinforcing Protestant values as well as attempting to solve the problem of the lack of a male heir by skillfully re-arranging the family history.

According to Charles Molesworth in “Marvell’s ‘Upon Appleton House,’” Andrew Marvell has taken the country-house poem much further stylistically than his predecessors. He notes that Marvell creates a “complex persona,” making the poem “a spiritual autobiography,” almost a meditation on the “nature of political power and meaning of history” (149): “Value is ultimately founded, for Marvell, on the Eternal . . . the poet becomes a public mediator . . . a priest” (152). This mediator/priest persona, according to Molesworth, “was Marvell’s most radical addition to the genre of the country-house poem” (153). Marvell’s values are similar to Jonson’s in that the relationship of estate/lord to land is grounded on the relationship between king and commonwealth (essentially Medieval). Justifying ownership and control of land and surrounding populace is central to both. The difference can be seen in Jonson’s justification of the lord’s constant interaction with the populace; in Marvell is it in a more philosophic remove from them. In Lanyer, the concern is not to justify control and ownership of land; she, on the contrary, assumes that ownership is beyond the control of Lady Clifford. Her focus, rather, is on the personal relationships of the three women. These differing concerns all fit well within the malleable country-house poem genre.

The central theme of Marvell's poem is to assert Protestant values in land ownership, and thereby justify the Fairfax claim to Appleton house. Lord Fairfax acquired Nun Appleton house after he led the Parliamentary army to victory over the Royalist forces. The royalist Buckingham's were forced to give the property to the Fairfaxes, yet later daughter Mary Fairfax is married to the second Duke of Buckingham. Marvell's poem emphasizes two serious issues: how to validate the Fairfax claim to Nun Appleton through an appeal to Medieval land tenets, and how to elevate their only child, Mary Fairfax, into a position to inherit it, and thus keep it in the family. These two rather selfish motives show that the poem is using the country-house genre's virtues to serve the particular and personal needs of a family, completely removed from the ideals of hospitality and community. Marvell accomplishes his dual public/private purpose by comparing Mary's many virtues to Classical models and predicting her fecundity by identifying her with the fecundity of the estate, a *locus amoenus*. David Evett sees Marvell unifying the Fairfax estate and that "As he is drawn or driven down and into the *locus*, he is schooled by it out of skeptical mockery into serene idleness: he achieves the golden pastoral state, the state of Adam in Eden" (510).⁶

Thematically, Marvell situates the Fairfax's protestant claim to the estate by demonizing its Catholic origin as a nunnery that had become a den of iniquity:

I know what fruit their gardens yield,
When they it think by night concealed.

⁶ Renato Poggioli analyzes Marvell's "The Garden" and the meaning the garden before Eve's creation as "thus suggesting that pastoral innocence existed from the beginning of life itself. Marvell goes even further: to establish a perfect equation between the pastoral of solitude and the pastoral of the self, and to make both of them absolutely, rather than relatively, independent of the pastoral of love . . ." (179).

Fly from their vices. 'Tis thy 'state
Not thee, that they would consecrate. (Stanza 28)

In this passage Marvell links Mary Fairfax's ancestor, Thwaites, a virtual prisoner in a licentious nunnery, to a Catholic attempt to take over Nun Appleton property. Marvell uses this history to satirize the Catholic nuns, calling them "Hypocrite witches, hence avaunt" (l. 205) and continues his Protestant diatribe:

It must have fall'n upon her head
Who first thee from thy faith misled.
And yet, how well soever meant,
With them 'twould soon grow fraudulent
For like themselves they alter all,
And vice infects the very wall. (ll. 212-16)

In the first instance, like Jonson in "To Penshurst," "Marvell affirms the natural connection between the family name and the estate, by having identified the house and grounds (specifically) with the marriage of Marvell's patrons, Thomas Fairfax and Anne Vere" (Patton 828). "The result is the creation of a dramatic and providential moment of founding" (Patton 829). Granted that the country-house poem is a panegyric to the manor lord, it seems that in Marvell's "Upon Appleton House" the primary consideration is to defend the somewhat unstable claim to the land, and not to extol universal values of property and the virtues of hospitality, meaning the relationship between lord and tenants, the basis of the Medieval justification for property ownership. This poem therefore reflects the real discontinuity between manor lord and populace seen by 1650.

The country-house poem is flexible enough to record a variety of attitudes towards the turbulence of a culture losing its feudal moorings, and undergoing a systemic shift in property and entitlement. Mary Ann McGuire sees Jonson “emphasizing Penshurst’s symbolic value as something more than the reflection of its present owner’s identity” (97). She sees “To Saxham” by Carew reflecting “an institution in transition. Saxham is not the working community and its owners not the hereditary governors that Jonson had depicted” (97). Unlike “To Penshurst,” with its picture of the Sidneys’ ancestral home, times had changed: “Like many families of the early seventeenth century, the Crofts [owners of Saxham] thus owed their good fortune to preferment rather than to successful estate management” (98). She then refers to the omission of the “system of mutual allegiances that was basic to the traditional roles of the landed aristocracy” (98). What has clearly happened is a withdrawal from the connection between lord and estate: what was an interrelated and vital, thriving connection was severed during the first half of the seventeenth century. “Carew insists upon Saxham as a timeless institution, but his assurances of stability lack the personalized details that Jonson had included in ‘To Penshurst’ to identify the estate with a family secure in its status” (McGuire 98). In “Upon Appleton House” the chief purpose of the poem seems to have been to invent a plausible justification for land ownership as well as to justify the transference of the property not to a male heir, but to Mary Fairfax, which would involve undoing the lawful primogeniture on English property.

“Upon Appleton House” shows how the Medieval concepts of land ownership firmly in place with Jonson’s “To Penshurst,” whereby the manor lord is justified in his

ownership by right of his relationship to the people, have been forgotten. The Fairfaxes, post-Civil War, are seen in “Upon Appleton House” as chiefly concerned with pedigree, entitlement without responsibility, and a very tenuous legacy. For Lanyer of course, there is no legacy at all. Her poem neglects social concern for the poor as the anchor and justification for estate ownership. Perhaps the established tradition of gender inequality, paternalism, and primogeniture created the conditions for Lanyer’s interiorized drama about female fulfillment as the only avenue for her female authorial voice. The evolution of the country-house poem in the seventeenth-century helps us understand the changing values of a society before, during, and after a civil war, and becomes a means for understanding the erosion of a rural society once firmly established on Medieval land values and responsibilities. The three male poets premise their country-house poems on conservative values very specifically intended to validate the right of the estate lord to remain in perpetuity on the land. As a woman, Lanyer is outside that argument. However, each is uniquely positioned in a rapidly changing historical moment, and each reveals an increasing ambiguity about that mission in the context of its time. Interestingly, Jonson’s “To Penshurst” does not recognize what must have been an evident dislocation between the country people and the country-house manor lords evident at that time; as only six years later we have “To Saxham,” which departs in substantive ways from Jonson’s elevation of his patron, Robert Sidney. In “To Saxham” we see a strangely disconnected setting of those who are outside freezing and hungry, and the brightly lit fires in the windows that they look at. This poem, written only a decade after Jonson’s, shows a radically different picture of the state of the rural inhabitants than

that of “To Penshurst,” who happily and gratefully supplied the lord of their estate with game, produce, and company. Thirty years later the separation of estate from the surrounding population seems complete: “Upon Appleton House” is a panegyric to a manor lord without entitlement, without creditable issue, and without connection to the inhabitants of his land.

The conservative country-house poem recorded the subtext of a turbulent era. The discourse field of country-house literature, including diaries, instruction manuals, letters, and poetry formed a remarkably diverse palette for many of the best writers in the seventeenth century. Versatile in theme, its amicable blending of classical and pastoral motifs, adaptability to feminist critique and space, as well as social and political markers of a rapidly changing century where property and entitlement were at the center, make this canon surprisingly nuanced. These four country-house poems concern changing values towards female entitlement and authorial respect, land ownership, hospitality, and political expediency. Jonson’s panegyric to Medieval land entitlement “To Penshurst” (1616), compared to Carew’s “To Saxham” (1624), shows a clear shift away from the standards of land entitlement that were impossible to maintain. If “Saxham” is a paradise within, immune to both the natural adversity of inclement weather and to vagaries of socio-political climate (McGuire 99), then how much further removed is “Upon Appleton House” (1650-52), which retreated entirely from its environs and sought to establish a right to land and property that was largely fictional? Country-house poems, situated as they are during English revolutionary history, are exemplars of a poetic genre that extolled essentially Medieval land ownership in a society rapidly changing. Yet adding

Aemilia Lanyer to the canon enriches and informs the social and political aims of the other poems under review. Her “Description of Cooke-ham” is the most daring, for it positioned the genre in a subspace (at that time) that called into question the entire property and legal rights of women. “To Penshurst” extols relationships between the manor lord and his subjects, yet glosses the realities of its time; “To Saxham” keeps the lord but he is sequestered; and “Upon Appleton House” justifies the lord’s claim by reworking genealogical evidence to support Protestant land confiscation. The ideal values asserted in these poems illustrate the ability of the country-house genre to accommodate the societal pressures of seventeenth-century England, both public and private.

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BOTH/AND: ELIZABETH BISHOP'S POETIC IDENTITY

Elizabeth Bishop's accurate eye for detailed observation led to immersion in her natural subjects. A modern stylist using objective physical description in her poems, Bishop both employed emotion in an Imagist manner and achieved a vision "perhaps more profoundly existential than the poetry of any of her contemporaries" (Mazzaro 195). Bishop also re-figured the pastoral expression of the human and the natural by uniting them on equal terms. Her reflective depth allowed her to cross deeper boundaries that went beyond Imagism. She observed the world as Imagists like H. D. or William Carlos Williams could. However, she went beyond the cryptic and obscure. More than a defense against an unhappy childhood and a repressed gender, Bishop's poems are creative, experimental, exuberant, carefully polished affirmations of her self-constructed poetic identity. Her poems are both formal and free in structure, direct and reticent in voice, observational and metaphorical in theme. Bishop's poetic identity exists both in the observed moment and in creative vision.

Bishop's acute sensory intelligence made her a sharp observer of detail; attention to visual detail distinguishes her writing approach. While the inspiration for new poems seems to have been unfocused, the finished product was notable for its precision and polish. In an interview first published in 1966, Bishop said, "I think I'm more visual than most poets. I'd love to be a painter" (Brown 296). She described her composition method as beginning with "a group of words, a phrase [that] may find its way into my head like something floating in the sea, and presently it attracts other things to it" (Brown

296). Bishop's work requires a particular vortex of sensory stimuli to facilitate its moment of perception. In this paper, however, I argue that she goes beyond a piling up of visual input; her creative vision directs her poems toward inward depth and outward accessibility, making her poetry both personal and universal. I shall show that this dual nature, which I shall refer to as inclusiveness, is clear throughout her work and especially in the autobiographical short story *Primer Class* (1960), the poems "Man-Moth" and "The Fish" from *North and South* (1946), "Arrival at Santos," "Brazil, January I, 1502" and "Electrical Storm" from *Questions of Travel* (1965), and "In the Waiting Room" from *Geography III* (1976). The result, I argue, is a type of modern pastoral in which Bishop unites human with the natural, like the traditional pastoral, but on equal terms.

Questions of Travel

Patient observation and an artist's eye for detail characterize Bishop's poetry. An observant traveler throughout her life, she began writing as a child bedridden with illness. Reading and poetry became a natural outlet for an intelligent young girl plagued by asthma. Losing her parents in childhood, Bishop tried to create stability and independence for herself. Moving in time and space from her foster home in Great Village, Nova Scotia, she was carried from relative to relative and place to place after her father's death in 1911 and her mother's total breakdown. Recalling that childhood with photographic memory from the contentedness of Samambaia, Brazil, Elizabeth Bishop wrote the memoir *Primer Class* about Great Village, Nova Scotia. We see her eagerness

to learn in her tactile response to shiny, roll-down maps used for the older third and fourth graders' geography recitations:

The light coming in from their windows, falling on the glazed, crackly surface, made it hard for me to see them properly from where I sat. . . . I wanted to snap them up . . . and touch all the countries and provinces with my own hands.
(*Collected Prose*, 408)

The slanted light, the crackly surface, and the pastel colors attracted the child's imagination, already forming around immersion and distance, reality and subjectivity, sight and perception. *Primer Class* records Bishop's eagerness to learn and put the tragedy of her mother's madness behind her. The openness of its tone reflects Bishop's maturity and strength. The strength of the piece is its photographic memory for tactile and visual detail, an ability that gives her work an orientation towards nature that is characteristic of pastoral poetry.

In a similar manner, her poems begin at the surface with observations, and reveal emotion obliquely. Bishop combines the visual clarity of the Imagists with the philosophical distance of the objective correlative. In Eliot's words, "The only way of expressing emotion in the form of art is by finding an objective correlative, in other words, a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events which shall be the formula of that particular emotion; such that when the external facts, which must terminate in sensory experience, are given, the emotion is immediately evoked" (Preminger 581). For example, in "The Sandpiper," from *Questions of Travel: Elsewhere* (Bishop, *Poems*), the sandpiper's concentration on the next meal blurs the distinction between high and low tide: "The world is a mist. And then the world is / minute and vast and clear. The tide / is

higher or lower. He couldn't tell you which" (ll. 13-15). "His beak is focused; he is preoccupied" (l. 16). The emotion arises from the speaker's repetition and emphasis: "looking for something, something, something. / Poor bird, he is obsessed!" (ll. 17-18). The sandpiper's actions show both his controlled urgency and the imperturbable landscape that cannot be rushed. The final image, "The millions of grains are black, white, tan, and gray, / mixed with quartz grains, rose and amethyst" (ll. 19-20), draws back from the scene in solitude. Both urgent and imperturbable, the poem itself becomes the objective correlative of the sandpiper's experience. As James Longenbach notes,

Bishop wanted her work to embody her Eliotic sense of the indeterminacy of understanding and perception. . . . She came to see that her bramble bushes—poems that seemed in motion, poems able to accommodate a jumble of observations—did not necessarily require the rejection of what she once called poetry's "ancient, honorable rules." (25)

In Bishop's modernist clarity and objectivity, Jerome Mazzaro finds a characteristic inwardness that he connects with a postmodernist emphasis on the "psychological rather than philosophical" (182). While I agree with Mazzaro in finding a central psychological approach to experience, my paper shows the danger of excluding the philosophical. I want to suggest that Bishop's poems immerse readers in a continually evolving moment to the point of self-forgetfulness. The momentary escape from self is the luminal moment, like Eliot's "heart of light." "When she seems to be on the verge of an answer or even of isolating a single question," Anne Colwell writes, "she artfully complicates the picture with an unexpected word, a change of perspective, or, especially in her last two books, a parenthetical rephrasing and rethinking of what had

almost settled the problem” (6). She “backtracks” on finality by asking questions. In “The Monument” the speaker questions, “Where are we? Are we in Asia Minor, / or in Mongolia?” (ll. 33-34). The last lines of “Paris, 7 A.M.” ask a question, “Can the clocks say; is it there below, / about to tumble in snow?” (ll. 33-34). “Questions of Travel” concludes with “*Should we have stayed at home, / wherever that may be?*”(ll.66-67). This tentativeness adds both psychological tension to the poems’ conclusions and a reflective philosophical depth. My analysis of Bishop’s poems emphasizes their inclusiveness, “both/and,” instead of Mazzaro’s choice of psychological inwardness “rather than” philosophical exploration. This inclusiveness, I shall make clear, is a central characteristic of Bishop’s modern pastoral.

Darwinian Strangeness

Bishop’s perception of visual detail was the preliminary step in crafting a poem. In her admiration for Charles Darwin one can see a model for her objective, almost scientific concentration on her subjects. Her pastoral is a modern recognition of the independent or non-reductive “strangeness” of nature. Though as a poet rather than a scientist, Bishop clarifies her understanding of the conscious and the subconscious in her famous “Darwin Letter” started on January 8, from Rio de Janeiro. In the letter she finds the scientific method of Charles Darwin somewhat akin to her own philosophy of seeing and understanding:

reading Darwin, one admires the beautiful solid case being built up out of his endless heroic *observations*, almost unconscious or automatic—and then comes a sudden relaxation, a forgetful phrase, and one *feels* the strangeness of his

undertaking, sees the lonely young man, his eyes fixed on facts and minute details, sinking or sliding giddily off into the unknown. What one seems to want in art, in experiencing it, is the same thing that is necessary for its creation, a self-forgetful, perfectly useless concentration. (*Poems*, Letter 8-20 Jan. 1964)

The poem “Over 2000 Illustrations and a Complete Concordance” exemplifies the Darwinian method of fixing on details and sinking into the unknown. As a poem, its theme is the foreignness of travel: “The Seven Wonders of the World are tired/ and a touch familiar, but the other scenes,/ innumerable, though equally sad and still,/ are foreign” (ll.3-6). In succession the numerous images accumulate. To name just the beginning few: date-palms, courtyard and Well, brickwork, camel/horse, birds, smoke. “And in the brothels of Marrakesh/ the little pock-marked prostitutes/ balanced their tea-trays on their heads/ and did their belly-dances” (ll.49-52). After the first set of twelve images give specific visual details, lines 26-29 shift to an inward contemplation: “The eye drops, weighted, through the lines/ the burin made, the lines that move apart/ like ripples above sand, / dispersing storms, God’s spreading fingerprint.” The next section cites nineteen distinct images that eventually become too numerous for categorizing in the tourist’s mind: “Everything only connected by ‘and’ ‘and’ ‘and’” (l. 65). The scene reflected in the poem evokes an almost phantasmagoric variety of color, image, and sound. Its details connect to the speaker’s initiation in a new culture, much as Darwin would have drawn insight from carefully observed scientific data.

In addition close observation leads to modern pastoral immersion in the subject, that Darwinian “strangeness” or loss of self that results from intense observation of objective detail. Bishop explores creative ways to achieve this immersion, in, for

examples, the evocative colors of “The Map,” and in the mystery of “The Imaginary Iceberg”: “This iceberg cuts its facets from within/ Like jewelry from a grave/ it saves itself perpetually and adorns/ only itself” (ll. 23-25). “Brazil, January I, 1502” immerses itself in the past. “Insomnia” shows the Moon’s “deep” reflection in a bureau mirror:

into that world inverted
where left is always right,
where the shadows are really the body,
where we stay awake all night,
where the heavens are shallow as the sea
is now deep, and you love me. (ll. 13-18)

In this poem and others in her first collection, including the well-known poems “The Map,” “The Imaginary Iceberg,” “Man-Moth,” and “The Fish,” the boundaries between dimensions are blurred. The carefully detailed fish explodes in an intense psychological rainbow. Writing about *North and South*, Lorrie Goldensohn finds an inter-dimensionality and creative exploration in the poems: “In this first book of poems Bishop tests spatial metaphor as a means of recognizing both inner and outer dimensions, as through them she finds her way to both poetic and personal identity” (101).

A state of “self-forgetful concentration,” like Charles Darwin’s, is important for Bishop’s pastoral union of the human with the natural. The descriptive process, detail, concentration create an interior sight for the poet. However, Bishop’s epiphanal moment is never fixed, just as the boundaries between air and water or night and day can also remain fluid. She can simultaneously absorb external stimuli and poetically give it shape, while at the same time “sinking or sliding giddily off into the unknown” of her interiority (Bishop in Pickard *Natural History* 269). Like Darwin, Bishop’s poet model

is the scientist, a collector of specimens in mud boots, connecting visual with metaphoric truths. As Zachariah Pickard notes, “The jump from a patient accumulation of detail to an imaginative realization of something larger and more abstract is . . . the pattern that underlies a number of her poems” (Pickard 276). The late poem “Santarém” (1978) describes a realization of contentment and peace (inner truth) amid the bustling sights and sounds of a place still clearly embedded in memory. “I liked the place; I liked the idea of the place” (l.12), Bishop writes. Her lines capture the immediacy of actual experience as well as a sense of the ideal moment both in real time and recollected in memory:

Suddenly there'd been houses, people, and lots of mongrel
riverboats skittering back and forth
under a sky of gorgeous, under-lit clouds,
with everything gilded, burnished along one side,
and everything bright, cheerful, casual—or so it looked. (l.7-11)

The energy of her scene leaves an imprint on the speaker who feels “That golden evening I really wanted to go no farther” (l. 3). Because it is a halcyon moment, everything about the place shimmers with light and inner tranquility. Similar to Darwin’s detailed observations, Bishop’s pastoral transforms natural details into liberating, cathartic moments.

From External to Internal

Bishop re-works external observations into internal reflection. For this reason her visual details require stylistic discipline. Ann K. Hoff sees this discipline as authorial restraint resulting from Bishop’s chaotic childhood and need for control. Feminist critic

Susan McCabe, in *Elizabeth Bishop: Her Poetics of Loss* (1994), writes that Bishop “foregrounds loss in connection with gender and poetics” (xix) as a motivating factor in her poetic reticence. However, in “Santarém” we find a free, forthright statement of participation in experience as well as validation of that inner knowledge:

In the blue pharmacy the pharmacist
Had hung an empty wasps’ nest from a shelf:
Small, exquisite, clean matte white,
And hard as stucco. I admired it
So much he gave it to me. (ll. 66-70)

Back on board ship, “a fellow-passenger, Mr. Swan” (l. 72) asks “What’s that ugly thing?” (l. 76), a question which points to the gulf separating the poetic vision of experience and the mundane. Although Bishop accepted Marianne Moore’s restraining influence on her development of observation, she ignored Moore’s advice to tone down “Roosters” (Kirsch 70-71). Lynn Keller gives a helpful assessment of the differences between the two poets: “In Moore’s work the object described is the genuine focus of interest; in Bishop’s work the interest lies less in the object itself than in the narrator’s relation to what she describes and in what this relation reveals about her. Bishop appears to be trying, in Modernist fashion, to see external things truly, while in fact what she scrutinizes is herself” (Keller 99-100). McCabe links Bishop’s childhood losses to the development of “the restless linguistic surface that we never quite move beyond. She looks toward transcendence and knowledge, but in every volume refuses any assurance of possession of them” (xv).

A foundational moment of self-awareness leading from the external to the internal is the autobiographical subject of “In the Waiting Room,” the first poem from her collection entitled *Geography III* (1976). In this poem, the speaker begins matter-of-factly relating a visit to a dentist’s office accompanied by her Aunt Consuelo. The speaker, a young girl, feels uneasy; perhaps the idea of the dentist’s drill, or the early darkness of winter, or the roomful of grownups makes her a little tense. The wait seems long, but resourcefully she reads *National Geographic* to pass the time. We move to the interior of the article’s details about tribal piercings, actually more disturbing to the seven-year-old than the dentist’s office. Scanning for something safe, she sees pictures of violence, “the inside of a volcano, / black, and full of ashes; / then it was spilling over / in rivulets of fire” (ll. 17-20):

A dead man slung on a pole
—“Long Pig,” the caption said.
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. (ll. 24-33)

The tempo of the narrative (quiet, uneventful, but rather hot waiting room) increases as the child is enthralled by the images in the article. The repetition of “round and round” communicates a growing sense of being surrounded by too much knowledge, as the girl is stuck there physically and psychically. At that moment a cry of pain, “oh! / —Aunt Consuelo’s voice—” (ll. 37-38), reminds the speaker where she is. And it was

not the cry of pain, “even then I knew she was/ a foolish, timid woman” (ll. 41-42), that shocked her, but a sudden, awful epiphany: “The waiting room was bright/ and too hot. It was sliding/ beneath a big black wave, another, and another. / Then I was back in it” (ll. 89-92). The illuminating moment awakens the speaker’s identity, and she could only be surprised afterwards that “Outside, / in Worcester, Massachusetts,/ were night and slush and cold,/ and it was still the fifth/ of February, 1918” (ll. 94-98). The crescendo of sensory stimuli: late, dark afternoon, feeling small in a roomful of adults, their closeness, the heat, Aunt Consuelo’s pain, and the shocking images in the *National Geographic* became a crucible for experiencing a truth about the conditions of her life. As the speaker comes back to herself, she states her surprising new knowledge simply: “How—I didn’t know any/ word for it—how ‘unlikely’ . . . / How had I come to be here, / like them” (ll. 83-85). Bishop’s biographer Mary Goodwin identifies it as the defining moment of Bishop’s self-awareness: “The ‘waiting’ begins in childhood; the ‘end’ of waiting, in the ‘cold, blue-black space’ of existential isolation” (107). Fifty-two years after the experience she put it into words.

Awareness of Limitations

Bishop’s childhood epiphany arises from an awareness of limitations that both motivates her postmodern poetic awareness and allows her poems to be experimental in style and form. This duality appears in two poems that deal positively with loss, courage, and understanding: “The Man-Moth” and “The Fish.” Reflection on human meaning arising out of awareness of limitations lends the poems both seriousness and affirmation.

In Bishop's earliest collection of poems, *North and South* (1946), both "The Man-Moth" and "The Fish" merge the natural and the human worlds. In the earlier poem, "The Man-Moth," a shy, sensitive man "emerges / from an opening under the edge of one of the sidewalks / and nervously begins to scale the faces of the buildings" (ll. 12-14). The speaker sees the exterior of a building, where the Man-Moth is presumably crouching underneath the sidewalk: "Here, above, / Cracks in the building filled with battered moonlight" (ll. 1-2), the man-moth is battered from many nights of trying to accomplish his mission to find the light. Perhaps like the fish, he also cannot be aware of his isolation, it just *is*: "He does not see the moon; he observes only her vast properties, / feeling the queer light on his hands, neither warm nor cold, / of a temperature impossible to record in thermometers" (ll. 7-9). The focus shifts to the interior thoughts of this Man-Moth where we find him cautiously emerging; he "pays his rare, although occasional, visits to the surface" (l. 11). Once exposed, nervous and trembling, he "must investigate as high as he can climb" (l. 17). These lines reveal the courage this creature exhibits in the face of terrific psychological fear. "He must investigate" shows the yearning for knowledge and understanding in spite of his psychological inadequacy and physical fear. The speaker observes the halting progress of the man-moth objectively, "his shadow dragging like a photographer's cloth behind him" (l. 19), thinking he will succeed. The zoom lens opens now to include all men: "Man, standing below him, has no such illusions. / But what the Man-Moth fears most he must do, although / he fails, of course, and falls back scared but quite unhurt" (ll. 24-26). He returns to the subterranean world where he lives, feeling the "full, terrible speed" of the subway train. So, in one

sense, “The Man-Moth” is a conqueror of interior demons, who acts in spite of fear. As the subway trains hurtle through the underground, he attempts his own slow climb to light and knowledge. The slow climb is positive, though not without fear and trembling. His act of climbing is its own justification and nightly reward for accepting a limited, human identity. The Man-Moth is serious and affirmative, a creature that inhabits both worlds and brings purpose to each through duty and survival.

The poem illustrates Bishop’s creating a world in which the protagonist “Man-Moth” exists half in and half out. Moth or human, this boundary existence both liberates him and burdens him. He is more human than moth, because the tempting, suicidal third rail of the subway train adds to the desperation of his condition. His only possession, a tear, also human, which Bishop likens metaphorically to a bee’s sting, becomes a potent symbol for redemption and unification between the upper and the lower world he inhabits because he pays a price for continuing his existence while belonging completely to neither world. The tear symbolizes his memory as well as his struggle. Even though Man-Moth lives most of the time in a subterranean world, he does come out at night and attempt to reach the light. We are perhaps implicated in his hellish, Sisyphean world, or maybe just cautioned to be gentle and non-judgmental, observing him quietly. His tear is “pure enough to drink” (l.51). Yet if we pass the test and “look at him, receiving his tear, which is pure as from an underground spring,” we can bring redemption both to ourselves and the Man-Moth. Both in the agonized ascent and the speeding train—other humans spend lots of time underground as well—the poem creates the emotions of desperation and isolation, but also courage. By turning his fear into resolute action, his reclusiveness

into self-containment, and his exploration into a positive search for knowledge, the poem overcomes despair or loss without forgetting them. Here Bishop both recognizes the struggle and finds meaning in that struggle for identity.

Man-Moth's struggle resonates with readers because it forces them to answer the question "what does it mean"? Kathleen Spivak relates her own experience of reading "Man-Moth" at Harvard in 1960, where she was a student in Robert Lowell's poetry seminar. She remembers the classes which were to end at 4:00 and were still going at 6:00 as the darkness gathered outside; Lowell "just stared at the poems, obsessively repeating words and lines (What does it mean? This is wonderful . . . what does this mean?) until the poor poem, like the Man-Moth himself . . . handed over its secret meaning. . . . We all left the classroom shattered! . . . We were each of us, we realized, the Man-Moth. We had become so in that reading of the poem" (Spivak 499). The "you" in the last stanza, Spivak notes, is "us":

If you catch him,
hold a flashlight up to his eye. It's all dark pupil,
entire night itself, whose haired horizon tightens
as he stares back, and closes up the eye. Then from the lids
one tear, his only possession, like the bee's sting, slips. (ll. 44-48)

Spivak sees the "you" as

the trusted one, the confidant, perhaps the psychoanalyst, perhaps the awaited lover; someone who will be patient enough to gain the trust of the Man-Moth. Perhaps the "you" is the longed-for friend . . . the one who will simply be there for you, wait, bear witness, and understand. And finally the "you" is *us*—readers waiting quietly for the meaning to reveal itself, like the tear "cool as from underground springs, and pure enough to drink." (Spivak 499)

Spivak describes the effect of Bishop's dual attention to detail and vision. She begins with the meticulous attention to details and observation and point-of-view, the Man-Moth's shuttered, dark eyes, the oblivious passers-by who do not notice his distress, and finally the reaction of the reader. In Bishop's work, "it is that tension between suppressing and expressing" (507) that make her transcendent moments fleeting and qualified. Precise observation accumulates until there is enough to trigger deeper understanding and connections. "Man-Moth" moves the reader from the external description to an internal realization and identification with its subject. The reader experiences the knowledge of the "other" which would otherwise be inaccessible. This knowledge cannot be fixed, or certain, but the illuminating moment occurs. Both external and internal knowledge are created, both a product of an alien landscape as well as human striving.

A Modern Pastoral

Bishop's poetry raises the question "how does knowledge about the natural world inform our knowledge of ourselves?" Her recognition of the natural world as a way to examine human identity links her with the union of the human and the natural in the pastoral genre. But as I show, Bishop unites them on equal terms. Her poetry is especially suited to realizing this pastoral connection because Bishop traveled extensively throughout her lifetime to locations with distinctive natural settings, like Mexico and Brazil. The pastoral mode in Bishop's poetry, like the pastoral tradition in earlier poets—

Jonson, Lanyer, and Marvell, for examples— connects humans with an Edenic natural world. Dominic Gavin notes (of Marvell’s pastoral):

The speaker supposes himself to be in an ideal state of nature, where the lost harmony of man and world still prevails. Here the bond between word and thing, sign and signified, has not been sundered. The pastoral romance of the return to origins takes place in that “twilight region between the literal and the metaphorical.” (226)

Gavin’s analysis of the pastoral in Marvell’s poetry leads to Bishop, for whom, like Marvell, “The poet’s resolve is to resist abstraction of any kind, lest the spell of nature be broken” (229). Bishop’s poems characteristically insist on clear natural detail.

Consequently, her poems move the pastoral into an awareness of actual existence. “The Fish” from *North and South* (1946) focuses on an entity that will not interact with humans voluntarily, in contrast to the pastoral Ben Jonson’s “To Penshurst,” (1612) whose “Fat, aged carps, that run into thy net./ And pikes, now weary their own kind to eat. . . . / Bright eels, that emulate them, and leap on land, / Before the fisher, or into his hand” (Jonson ll. 33-38). Bishop’s “The Fish” compels the speaker to identify with the fish in its environment, rather than the other way around, as in Jonson’s example of the traditional pastoral. In Bishop’s pastoral, there is the awareness of both fish and human as equal entities, not one serving the other.

An epiphanal moment occurs, but in a modification of the traditional pastoral. The speaker in “The Fish” acts forcefully to catch the fish but then is changed by its presence: “I caught” (l.1), “I thought” (l. 27), “I looked” (l. 34), “I admired” (l. 45), “I stared and stared” (l. 65), “And I let the fish go” (l. 76). Unlike the traditional pastoral,

where an abundance of flora and fauna seem to jump into the nets or willingly sacrifice themselves for human use, Bishop's speaker respects the fish which "hadn't fought at all" (l. 6). However, this fish is both a noble product of its natural world, and also a survivor of many violations by the human world. Bishop achieves this inter-dimensionality, "half out of water" (l. 3) where the fish is half in its natural world and half in the human world. The speaker describes its appearance: "he hung a grunting weight" (l. 7), "battered and venerable/and homely" (l.9):

Here and there
his brown skin hung in strips
like ancient wallpaper,
and its pattern of darker brown
was like wallpaper:
shapes like full-blown roses
stained and lost through age.
He was speckled with barnacles,
fine rosettes of lime,
and infested
with tiny white sea-lice,
and underneath two or three
rags of green weed hung down. (ll. 9-21)

The scientifically noted detail reveals age and fish-wisdom. The speaker catalogues what appears from the deep, inhospitable world of the fish, but a world in which the fish has survived till now. The speaker sees the fish in its final struggle, out of its watery element: "While his gills were breathing in/the terrible oxygen /—the frightening gills, / fresh and crisp with blood, / that can cut so badly—" (l. 22-26). Bishop's symbolic play on the fish as dying gladiator gives it an almost mythic identity.

The intersection of the natural and the human is both literal in the poem's physical detail and metaphoric in its description of their interaction. The speaker pulls the fish to the surface and looks into its eyes, "which were far larger than mine" (l. 35). Its eyes "shifted a little, but not to return my stare" (l. 41-2). The speaker seeks knowledge or response from the fish but acquires it only through observing the physical detail. The speaker "admired his sullen face" (l. 45):

and then I saw
that from his lower lip
—if you could call it a lip—
grim, wet, and weapon-like,
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. (ll. 45-60)

The sheer density of physical detail observed in the short period of time while the fish was hooked and gasping in the boat intensifies the reader's identification with it.

Stylistically the poem's short lines increase the tempo to the moment it escapes.

But the speaker describes this fish both in itself and in metaphoric relation to the human world: "To see landscape as the outward semblance of the self, as the mirroring or external correlative of the self's condition, has become nearly automatic to Bishop" (Goldensohn 8). The fish assumes heroic qualities: "Like medals with their ribbons / frayed and wavering, / a five-haired beard of wisdom / trailing from his aching jaw" (ll.

61-64). By characterizing the jaw as “aching,” the speaker makes a connection with its struggle to live: “I stared and stared” (l. 65). The breathing fish, dying moment by moment, precipitates the connecting moment between man and nature, described in vivid metaphor: “until everything / was rainbow, rainbow, rainbow! / And I let the fish go” (ll. 74-76). In “The Fish,” Bishop examines the moment of intersection between the natural and the human world. By letting the fish go, the human bends herself to nature, whereas in the traditional pastoral, nature serves man’s continuous needs. Bishop’s pastoral creates a union of human with nature, on equal terms.

A Deeper Kind of Seeing

Bishop’s fifteen years in Brazil both gave her a sense of security and home, and allowed her to experience the culture more deeply from an exile’s perspective. As Mary Goodwin notes, “It would follow that the greater the ‘estrangement,’ the greater the acuity of vision, and that estrangement is greatest in the experience of exile” (109). Estrangement may have a negative connotation in ordinary parlance, but this is not necessarily so for a poet. Rather, it might sharpen one’s perception. The first two poems in *Questions of Travel: Brazil* (1965), illustrate a contrast between surface-level observation (“Arrival at Santos”) and the deeper kind of seeing or immersion in the landscape that reflects on time and culture (“Brazil, January I, 1502”). Adam Kirsch identifies the poems as being “the best of Bishop’s Brazil poems . . . in which travel itself is the subject, rather than the things seen” (84).

The overwhelming sensory experience found in Brazil brought out Bishop's accurate eye for detail and reflection. In "Arrival at Santos," the speaker names the first impressions as the ship comes into port as if physically pointing at them excitedly: "Here is a coast; here is a harbor" (l. 1). The eye travels over the imagery of "self-pitying mountains" (l. 3), "frivolous greenery" (l. 5), a church, warehouse, "tall, uncertain palms" (l. 8), the tender coming to remove the passengers, "a strange and ancient craft, flying a strange and brilliant rag" (l. 15). A comic moment occurs when a passenger named Miss Breen catches her hem with her heel. After posting some letters with stamps that annoyingly slip— "either the glue here is very inferior/ or because of the heat" (l. 39-40) — "We leave Santos at once; / we are driving to the interior" (ll. 40-41). Miss Breen, the shipboard acquaintance, goes on her way; the speaker is reunited with a friend and they start their real journey to the interior of Brazil. The carefree tone and tongue-in-cheek details of the debarking and the post office nevertheless have to be interpreted in context with the more serious second poem of the collection, "Brazil, January 1, 1502." The sensory experience of "Arrival at Santos" is a companion to the mature reflection of "Brazil"; Bishop immerses herself in both the outer and inner worlds (present and past) of Brazil in these poems. In "Arrival at Santos" and "Brazil, January I, 1502," Bishop describes the journey from bustling harbor to interior depth.

"Brazil, January I, 1502" (1959-60) is a poem of reflective intensity, connected with cultural narrative. Here the imposition of religion and European culture invert the traditional pastoral theme. Three intertwined perspectives shape the details of the poem: the modern traveler/speaker experiencing the interior of a rain forest for the first time; the

flora and fauna (foliage, ferns, rocks, birds, lizards); and the humans— Christian explorers and Indians. Close-up “every square inch filling in with foliage” (l. 3), the speaker combines both the present and the past. The opening, “Januaries, Nature greets our eyes/ exactly as she must have greeted theirs” (ll. 1-2), joins two Januaries separated by 450 years, yet the time difference evaporates by Bishop’s situating the poem during just another January. The slow wonderment and visual description present in the poem’s opening imagery of color and foliage contrast with the first poem’s panoramic sight. They observe a drama, “five sooty dragons near some massy rocks” (l. 25): “The lizards scarcely breathe; all eyes/ Are on the smaller, female one, back-to,/ her wicked tail straight up and over,/red as a red-hot wire” (ll.35-36).

The next stanza connects this natural scene of flora and fauna with the third, reflective perspective: “Just so the Christians, hard as nails” (ll. 37-38). The Christians find the landscape ripe for their use. They, too, are ignited by its promise of power and wealth. The tone captures the sense of anticipation and drama both seen in the natural world as well as in the European explorers. However, Bishop ironically points out the “civilized” European who prays at Mass but who then strolls out to “catch an Indian for himself,” (l. 50) “humming perhaps ‘*L’Homme armé*’” (ll. 47-48). The allusion to the Mass “*L’Homme armé*,” composed by Guillaume Dufay (1400-1474), aptly draws attention to exploitation. Its text reads:

L’homme, L’homme, l’homme armé
 L’homme armé,
 L’homme armé doibt on douter.
 On a fait partout crier
 Que chascun se viengue armer

D'un haubregon de fer. (Davison and Apel 71)

Its English translation reads:

Oh, the man, the man at arms
Fills the folk with dread alarms.
Everywhere I hear them wail,
“Find, if you would breast the gale,
A good stout coat of mail.” (Reese 73)

This “Brand-new pleasure” (l. 46) is Bishop’s euphemism for making sport in killing Indians right after Mass, “whose maddening little women who kept calling,/ calling to each other (or had the birds waked up?)” (ll.52-53). The parenthetical question is a form of litotes; it emphasizes the drama of killing by seeming to minimize it. Finally, the women’s calling (not screaming, but perhaps in warning as the Indians no doubt could see and hear the Europeans coming after them) was “maddening” to the Europeans. The poem sums up European domination in the delayed “it” (l. 53) whose antecedent is the “hanging fabric” of the Mass banner: “they ripped away into the hanging fabric, / each out to catch an Indian for himself—” (l. 49-50) and the culture “retreating, always retreating, behind it” (l. 53).

Bishop’s eye for sharp detail complements the way in which the reflective traveler apprehends a new landscape. The lens of observation supplies the medium in which the history is embodied, just as the lens of history supplies a shaping medium for observation. The speaker begins the journey to the interior surrounded by nature and realizes that it can never be seen without its baggage of conquest. The first impressions of the travelers entering the jungle lead to an awareness of cultural tension. Bishop

explores, too, the relationship between civilized and uncivilized action, dispassionately. The inscription for the poem, “. . . embroidered nature . . . tapestried landscape,” introduces the idea that nature and landscape are always subject to interpretation in art, an insight that necessarily distances the traveler from a different culture. “Brazil, January I, 1502” has an open ending. This poem inverts the pastoral narrative by showing the clash between two cultures. Instead of absorbing the Europeans, the culture eludes them and all they represent. Nature, represented by jungle and native culture untouched by Europeans, absorbs the blows of the conqueror, and “retreating, always retreating, behind it” that culture survives to the present and is the focus of the modern traveler into its interior. In this poem, reflection emerges from detail: identification with the pastoral landscape is subverted by European invasiveness. In the next poem, the pastoral mode is subverted by the inability of humans to penetrate the water element of fish.

Bishop inverts the pastoral differently in “At the Fishhouses,” in the sense that it is the human seeking knowledge from fish. The speaker’s immersion into observation is complete. It is a process of forgetting and taking on the opposites of the other world. “At the Fishhouses” is a poem which, as Robert Bly points out (Bly 26), portrays the heaviness of the moment: “cold evening,” “the heavy surface of the sea, swelling slowly as if considering spilling over,” the “ancient wooden capstan, cracked, with two long bleached handles/and some melancholy stains, like dried blood” (ll. 28-30). But out of this ordinary human contact the poem comes to its precipitous conclusion:

The water seems suspended
above the rounded gray and blue-gray stones.
I have seen it over and over, the same sea, the same,

slightly, indifferently swinging above the stones,
icily free above the stones,
above the stones and then the world.
If you should dip your hand in,
your wrist would ache immediately,
your bones would begin to ache and your hand would burn
as if the water were a transmutation of fire
that feeds on stones and burns with a dark gray flame. (ll. 70-75)

In this section, the speaker imagines immersion in the bone-aching cold water, wondering if the sensory experience might lead to knowledge. The speaker, intrigued, yet unhopeful, describes the intense cold (death) of merging with the dark water:

If you tasted it, it would first taste bitter,
then briny, then surely burn your tongue.
It is like what we imagine knowledge to be:
dark, salt, clear, moving, utterly free,
drawn from the cold hard mouth
of the world, derived from the rocky breasts
forever, flowing and drawn, and since
our knowledge is historical, flowing, and flown. (ll. 76-83)

These lines suggest a mind entirely focused in the moment of discovery:

down by one of the fishhouses
an old man is netting,
his net, in the gloaming almost invisible,
is a dark purple-brown,
and his shuttle worn and polished.
The air smells so strong of codfish
It makes one's nose run and one's eyes water. (ll. 2-8)

The poem imagines both knowledge and freedom, grounded in perception.

In the intersection between water and air, Bishop finds an important location for her version of pastoral union. In her analysis of Bishop's journals, Samuels notes

numerous instances where Bishop imagines the fluidity of water in terms of the fluidity of the poetic line: “All of these passages, scattered over more than a decade, reveal that Bishop habitually imagined the sea as lines of verse and, conversely, imagined verse as a kind of liquid contained by walls. The walls can be the edge of the line, the use of rhyme, the shape of couplet or stanza” (312). Samuels also detects the strong influence of the senses on Bishop’s density of experience. Citing Bishop’s notebook entry from a night in Key West when the wind, starlight, and interior space made her feel like “Jonah in the whale’s belly” (Papers 77.3, p. 3), Samuels finds that

a dimensional space is created among the three kinds of movement occurring at their different paces (slowly gliding stars, stationary shutters, swaying palm trees that produce shadows equated to a fluttering heart). The consciousness of the observer hovers between these spaces—as near (and flat) as the shadows on the wall and as far (and deep) as the stars. (314)

Bishop’s accurate eye for detailed observation gives depth to her subject. The directness of “Electrical Storm,” from *Questions of Travel* (1965), records a moment of waking to a direct lightning strike on the house: “Dawn an unsympathetic yellow./ *Craack!*—dry and light./ The house was really struck” (ll. 1-3). The cat reacts instantly: “Tobias jumped in the window, got in bed—/ silent, his eyes bleached white, his fur on end” (ll. 5-6), while the speaker compares the hail “Dead-white, wax-white, cold” (l. 11) to the “artificial pearls” of “diplomats’ wives’ favors/ from an old moon party—“ (l. 12). The couple watches the hail: “they lay in melting windrows/ on the red ground until well after sunrise” (ll. 14-15). While “the cat stayed in the warm sheets” (l.19), “We got up to

find the wiring fused, / no lights, a smell of saltpeter, / and the telephone dead” (l. 16-18), details leading to her immersion in pleasant and unexpected solitude.

The immersion into both the observational and reflective dimensions of her subjects occurs not only in domestic locales like “Electrical Storm” but also in her wanderings. Bishop lived longest and happiest in Brazil, where she found the culture vibrant and fascinating. Perhaps Ouro Prêto, Lota’s Brazil home, reflects Bishop’s childhood in Nova Scotia. Robert Boschman’s dissertation *Questions of Travail: Travel, Culture, and Nature in the Poetry of Anne Bradstreet, Elizabeth Bishop, and Amy Clampitt* (1999) discusses Bishop’s complicated attitude towards these travels. On the one hand, he finds, her peripatetic lifestyle brought her in touch with a wide range of cultures and individuals, which benefited her writing. On the other hand,

Bishop’s poems reveal how desire is thwarted, denied, or deferred during travel. The seemingly casual language she employs helps to take the edge off disappointment, but also signifies the modernists’ dilemma concerning the formal expression of the desire for meaning. Bishop attempted to solve this problem by articulating it, returning again and again to expressing a wish for what could no longer be had, using a language whose apparent nonchalance became a device both for expressing desire and for surviving disappointment and pain. (49-50)

Boschman cites the critical work of Goldensohn, Costello, Colwell, and McCabe, who see a close connection between Bishop’s difficult childhood and her search for home and belonging expressed by her wide travels. His work with Anne Bradstreet’s poetry of travel as travail points to a relationship with Bishop’s writing, “a reckoning of the yearnings that cause one to undergo the kind of suffering implicit in this older word for travel” (51). Eric J. Leed describes “travail” as “the paradigmatic ‘experience,’ the

model of a direct and genuine experience, which transforms the person having it” (Boschman 51). If we look at Bishop’s poetry in that sense of travail and hard-won knowledge, we can see that her self-possession and accurate eye for detail take in the landscape’s possibilities for the traveler, even though constrained by different cultural prejudices.

Yet the personal knowledge in Bishop’s poems remains private: “With few exceptions, she keeps her most pained or bewildered selves undercover in terrestrial or marine disguise as snail, sandpiper, fish, armadillo, man-moth, or moose” (Goldensohn 2). In *Owning Memory: Elizabeth Bishop’s Authorial Restraint*, Ann K. Hoff examines the anti-confessional or para-confessional mode of Bishop’s style: “Bishop strikes this curious balance between speaking out and resisting public utterance . . . the balance between passion and restraint in her poems; her manners in confessing the withholding the personal in her poetry” (578). She “asserted a subversive tenacity in her self-revelatory poems” (580) “of being just outside knowledge” (579). “Indeed, Bishop’s trajectory remained aimed toward frankness and exactitude in observing her world and her self in poetry” (581). Her stance “of being just outside knowledge” gives her detailed confrontation of nature the tension of a freedom, beyond confession, a kind of objective correlative. As Samuels observes, Bishop might be seen to approach the objective correlative through the senses, to give it the agency of becoming a “mobile threshold” into visionary experience:

Bishop appears to be moving toward an image of the birth moment of a poem as that moment when “one is trying to record the precise instant when a thing

outward and objective transforms itself, or darts into a thing inward and subjective.” (Goldensohn 93)

In “Santarém,” the wasps nest “small, exquisite, clean matte white” is precise description operating as a correlative to the illuminating subjective moment embedded in its sensory experience. In “The End of March,” seeing the vacant beach house, “my proto-dream house” (l. 24), causes the speaker to imagine living there (lines 32-48). The inner reverie ends with the call back to reality: “A light to read by—perfect! But—impossible” (l. 48) with the knowledge “and of course the house was boarded up” (l. 51).

The pastoral explicitly creates a mode for human interaction with nature. Writing about Marvell, but in a way applicable to Bishop, Dominic Gavin makes clear the connection between nature and human identity: “For the poet, his magic garden or wood is the place where higher and lower worlds meet and he can imagine they have never been sundered” (228). Likewise in Bishop’s pastoral, the worlds have not been sundered. The Man-Moth’s and the Fish’s worlds are both/and worlds, not either/or worlds. Bishop’s visual accuracy is based on experience: “The poet’s criterion of truth is experiential, and that experience is curiously aesthetic (Gavin 228).

Bishop’s poetry is experiential and confident, regardless of its quiet conclusions. Far from a weakness, her experiential grounding actually can be seen as liberating. It identifies her poetry. “The Fish” and “Man-Moth” successfully merge both human and creature, water and air, day and night. For one who traveled throughout her life, the ways that immediate and reflective experience both contrast and unite would be apparent. As she writes in “Dimensions for a Novel” (1934) at the time she met T. S. Eliot at Vassar,

“Is it possible that there may be a sort of *experience-time*, or the time pattern in which realities reach us, quite different from the hour after hour, day after day kind?” (676).

Bishop’s intense description of the present moment is the doorway to that personal knowledge, a poet who is not afraid of experience.

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