

HOME AND ABROAD: ELIZABETH BISHOP'S POETICS OF PLACEMENT  
IN *QUESTIONS OF TRAVEL*

A Thesis by

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The following faculty members have examined the final copy of this thesis for form and content, and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Arts with a major in English.

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## ABSTRACT

Who *is* Elizabeth Bishop? In spite of the vast number of studies done on Bishop and her work over the last twenty-five years, cohering Bishop the poet with Bishop the person is hardly any less difficult than it was upon the poet's death in 1978. Bishop leaves behind four collections of poetry as well as a handful of unpublished and uncollected works in addition to her posthumously published letters and prose. For their part, critics have approached Bishop from as many critical lenses as offered by the theoretical schools flourishing during the second half of the twentieth century. A survey of critical responses from the last ten years alone yields scholarship on Bishop's feminism, her tourism, her formalism, and even her brief forays into socialism.

As wide-ranging as the contemporary academic opinions of Bishop, the responses of creative writers reveal her pervasive influence on generations of poets who appreciate her adherence to form and close attention to the object. Equally appealing to her colleagues is Bishop's retention of mystery and irresolution in her poems that rewards repeated readings of her work. Contingent with current Bishop scholarship, I plan to discuss the ways in which Bishop's poetry at once seeks to construct and evade stable identity and how her time in Brazil provided the perfect setting for such negotiations. With an emphasis on her poetry written while in Brazil, as well as her letters and other biographical resources, my work will focus on Bishop's displacement in Brazil as a facilitator to her creativity.

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Elizabeth Bishop exhibited a perpetual sense of unrest. This sense of unease not only affected her personal life, as evidenced by her frequent travels, but permeates her poetry as well, specifically in its avoidance of conclusiveness and disdain for fixed meanings. In her third volume of poetry, *Questions of Travel* (published June 1965), Bishop examines themes of place and home, otherness and familiarity, and the traveler-poet's relation to and involvement with such binaries. The *Brazil* section of the collection, particularly through its first three poems, explores the attitudes and impressions prevalent in the encountering of new places.

"Questions of Travel" renegotiates several of the themes introduced in the preceding poems including the touristic impulses of "others" (namely Westerners) in foreign lands and the personal value of travel. This poem in particular reveals what Zachariah Pickard calls "the benefits of travel en route to the next tourist attraction" (164). Through all three poems, Bishop explores the conflation of "home" and "away" during travel and how these respective spaces underscore the attitude of the tourist and poet. By the end of "Questions," Bishop's speaker seems to be challenging the very concept of home—that home is as much a matter of perspective and attitude as are foreign destinations. Many critics continue to read these poems as a suite but fail to mention the dimensions added by "Manuelzinho," which appears two poems later in the collection.

"Manuelzinho," (the fifth poem in the collection) explores the bonds linking people to place and to each other, as Bishop replaces the autobiographical speaker/tourist of the previous poems in favor of a "native" voice, offering a narrative that is both Brazilian and privileged, and as a result one-sided. This change in speaker provides an added dimension to the theme of representation present in the previous poems, as even those who call Brazil home

fail to guarantee an accurate comprehension or description of place, and rely on a similar, subjective point-of-view to that of the tourist. Bishop's scenery shifts from ships, ports, and jungles to a more intimate, yet readily negotiable place as property, house, and territory and the dynamic forces shaping the relationships therein. In "Manuelzinho" Bishop offers love as a possible mediating force, linking the land and the various bodies cohabitating in space to an emergent emotional connection regardless of differences in social position or wealth. This bond, then, forms the nucleus of a home, one accepting of mutuality and singularity, perseverance and vulnerability, and one which, most importantly, may foster reciprocal understanding between individuals bound by shared experience. Though reached for, this understanding is left hanging in the balance by poem's end, with the poet, speaker, and reader left with a starting point more than a resolution.

In "Arrival at Santos," "Brazil, January 1, 1502," and "Questions of Travel" Bishop introduces a suite of poems that engage the reader in moments of arrival and departure, eliciting awareness and unease in response to the tension accompanying the exotic and familiar images as witnessed, recorded and embellished by Bishop's tourist-speaker. It is on this note in which we drive to the interior, to examine Bishop's Brazil not solely for traces of the poet's aesthetic sensibility but her attitudes towards the cultural conscription of home as well.

Bishop offers a tenuous definition of home during an interview with Alexandra Johnson in 1978, explaining "I've never felt particularly homeless, but then, I've never felt particularly at home. I guess that's a pretty good description of a poet's sense of home. He carries it with him" (quoted in Thomas Travisano's *Elizabeth Bishop: Her Artistic Development* 131). In typical Bishop fashion, the quote dually showcases the poet's relative ambivalence towards home

while also maintaining its constant presence, however transitory the poet's sense of home may be. Much like the image of the packed and folded sunset in "Questions of Travel," Bishop's quote offers a poetics of gathering and savoring experience and suggests that the cataloguing of such moments both shapes and is shaped by the poet's ability to "carry" home.

Bishop seems to be adopting a "home is where the *art* is" stance, in other words; home is a place arrived at or present in the imagination only. Bishop's time in Brazil perhaps softened this attitude to some degree. She was able to find a companion and lover in Lota de Macedo Soares, who tempered some of Bishop's diffidence towards the country and offered stability, allowing Bishop to produce some of her most resonant and personal work. Having a personal studio, as well as being liberated from the competitive, high-stress, and mostly male New York poetry scene also provided a material sense of home for the poet, one which dovetailed with an altered view of time. Brazil, then, offered the setting required for Bishop to meditate on questions of home and place, with her poetry giving shape to the conflicting impulses of the traveler, who must make an effort to identify with place-and the self therein- before ever hoping to immerse oneself into a foreign setting. "Arrival at Santos" frames such concerns while continually heightening the tension, as the speaker-traveler finds difficulty not only in familiarizing the exotic, but distancing herself from the familiar.

Bishop's speaker in "Arrival at Santos" attempts to conform Brazil to a set of preconceptions she carries abroad with her, which, from her marginalized, coastal position, fail to materialize. Rather than simply discard her misguided impressions, the poem's speaker begins an inquiry addressing herself as "you" and using personification to humanize a landscape which leaves the speaker starved on a "meager diet of horizon" amongst "self-pitying

mountains/ sad and harsh beneath their frivolous greenery" (2-4). In this opening section of the poem, the speaker clearly imposes her deflated expectations and surly mood upon the paltry coastal setting. The interrogative "who knows?" (3) relates a general ambivalence by the speaker towards her surroundings, while also hinting at the self-scrutiny to follow over her skewed perception and flawed representation and of Santos. As the poem continues both landscape and tourist are implicated in Stanzas II and III.

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

Bishop's tourist is equal parts demanding, impatient, uninformed and, perhaps most importantly, incomplete. These qualities form the traveler who, according to Jeffrey Gray, "must stay embedded in the foreign in order always to see afresh, to forestall automatism and enslavement by convention." Accompanying this thirst for the exotic is a defamiliarized "home" reliant upon "transporting the whole subject-object system from one cultural and geographic context to another" (Gray 14-15). On one hand the landscape (and the nation as well) is further accused for its scanty salutation, but the speaker also suffers scrutiny for her own "immodesty." In the above stanzas, the speaker thus appears equally sardonic towards both the surroundings and her inflated expectations.

The poem shifts gears again with the abrupt, "Finish your breakfast." (13) beginning Stanza IV. Functioning as both a reminder of sustenance (referring back to the "meager diet" of

the first stanza) and as a stabilizer for the speaker, the command recenters the speaker back in literal time. Accompanying this temporal shift is the altered pronoun case—from second to first-person singular—which moves the poem from the speaker’s dislocation in place and time towards her more comfortable (and controlled) position as an “I.” Bishop’s move to first person also signals a reversion back to old habits for the speaker, who now identifies her “self” and Brazil in a separate yet similar context. As Pickard notes, the tender becomes a trigger which lyricizes the poem at this juncture, ushering in an altered point of view and perception.

The tender is coming,  
a strange and ancient craft, flying a strange and brilliant rag.  
So that’s the flag. I never saw it before  
I somehow never thought of there being a flag,  
(89).

Images of the flag, the tender, and later, coins, all serve as emblems of a modernized nation and readily allow the speaker the much needed association lacking earlier in the poem.

Ironically, the “strange” and “brilliant” flag (or rag) and the “strange and “ancient craft” (14) are made exotic by the speaker, and thus compensate for the lack of exoticism in the surrounding countryside despite being arbitrary symbols signifying modernity and utility (in the case of the tender). At play in Stanza IV, then, is the speaker’s touristic impulse to compensate for what she perceives as lacking in the foreign by conjuring the familiar and thus appropriating her foreign surroundings. Even more specifically, the stanza comments on the traveler’s inevitably disjointed self upon encountering unfamiliar terrain; the conflicting desire to acquaint oneself with a new place while never leaving home too far behind.

While reassembling Brazil, the speaker incompletely disassembles the ideal “Brazil,” as she hastily finds delight in its similarities to home despite recognizing the inherent dangers of

exoticising a place and thus restricting it to postcard images of palm trees and sunshine. Oddly, the speaker seems to record a more sustainable rendering of Brazil only after recognizing its less authentic features. The speaker relies even more heavily on the familiar through her association with Miss Breen. Again, the shift or “descent” in the poem is marked by a change in pronoun, this time the third-person plural “we,” connoting the bond between the speaker and Miss Breen. Similar to the previous section of the poem, the speaker finds wonder not in the native customs or scenery of Brazil, but in the extraordinary size-“six-feet tall”-and “beautiful bright blue eyes” (26-27) of Miss Breen, and advances the tension between tourist and place as the speaker “descends” literally and figuratively from the boat back towards the condescension and disassociation rampant in the opening stanzas.

In Miss Breen, the speaker finds the comforts connected with home, with “Glen Fall/s” (28-29) pouring into the following stanza and paralleling the seepage of Western custom into the port, which follows in Stanza VIII. Glenn Falls, being located in New York and familiar to both the speaker and Miss Breen (it’s her hometown), also provides an important geographical context cementing the duo as Western. The speaker’s mention of place is, in fact, what precedes the travelling partners getting “settled.”

There. We are settled.  
The customs officials will speak English, we hope,  
and leave us our bourbon and cigarettes.  
Ports are necessities, like postage stamps, or soap,  
(90).

As the stanza develops the speaker continues to reinforce her preference for familiarity and her tone takes on the curtness of the imperial traveler, accustomed to being catered to no matter the occasion. Language, custom, and the commonplace saturate this stanza as do the repeated

“s” sounds which communicate symmetry between object(s) and subject, as form amplifies the stanza’s content. Also at play here is the speaker’s recognition of the necessity of ports and her evident realization that perhaps ports are nothing more than rest stops, gathering places, preceding departure for the “interiors.” Ports, then, serve as a pivot point in this poem and the speaker’s difficulty in negotiating their function is due to their provisional status as an introductory landmark incapable of the profound impression sought by the eager tourist. To the speaker, ports equally house and dispel her touristic expectations and are perhaps more suited to accommodate her extant self than aid in cultivating a new identity.

Despite her recognition of a port’s shortcomings, the speaker continues to belabor a port’s lack of regard for the effect it has on the traveler.

but they seldom care what impression they make,  
or, like this, only attempt, since it does not matter,  
the unassertive colors of soap, or postage stamps-  
wasting away like the former, slipping the way the latter

do when we mail the letters we wrote on the boat,  
either because the glue here is very inferior  
or because of the heat. We leave Santos at once;  
we are driving to the interior  
(90).

Claiming that ports merely “attempt” an impression again emphasizes the tenuous nature of ports as stopping points for travelers on their way to more substantial discoveries. This attempt, then, seems more an effort to accommodate the perceived needs of the traveler rather than provide an authentic Brazilian experience. Like the ports, the speaker too is caught in a dichotomous position, bemoaning her touristic urges only to rally behind them as the poem advances. The poem ends with the final three stanzas conjoining and then segregating home

and abroad as the speaker reverts to her tangential monologue, disdaining equally ports, soap and stamps and their lack of beauty.

The images closing Stanza IX segue from the port—a symbol of faded but permanent functionality—to the lack of fixity associated with the “wasting” soap and the “slippery” stamps. Bishop marks this with the continued sibilance of s’ as the poem (and speaker) slide towards the inevitable departure. The port, after providing a momentary respite, is now used up much in the same way that the soap and stamps will wear out their utility. However, the image of the stamps continues into Stanza X if only for their propensity to come unglued from their envelopes. The postage metaphor is significant here, as the stamps signal not only a separation (based on their inferiority) from their American counterparts, but also symbolizes the spatial disconnection between speaker and home as the apparent difficulty to ensure correspondence coincides with the speaker’s interest in interiority, one which perhaps requires a separation from home. The speaker, by choice and necessity, is leaving the port and in its wake the small conveniences it offers. The departure from Santos not only promises a deeper exploration of Brazil, but for the speaker, opens a threshold to the psyche as the journey by land makes possible a canvassing of the self in the process.

“Brazil, January 1, 1502,” rather than greeting the speaker and reader with an interior, opts instead to introduce an impenetrable “Nature.” The poem also obscures both reader and speaker’s sense of time. The title and first word—“Januaries” (1)—evoke a timelessness and series of firsts stretching from Amerigo Vespucci’s landing at Guanabara Bay to the speaker of “Arrival at Santos” inaugural landing in January, 1952, a date which Bishop chose to insert at the end of the poem. As Pickard aptly suggests “the echoing of repetitions of the word

January...suggests a possible connection between the 'we' who are 'driving to the interior' at the end of 'Arrival at Santos' and the 'us' whose eyes 'Nature greets' in 'Brazil, January, 1'" (159). However uninviting the landscape is to the speaker and her companion, it provides a canvas which allows her mind to continue the mental-mapping begun at the beginning of "Arrival" only this time with a change in scenery and subject-matter.

As a three stanza poem, "Brazil I" neatly illustrates Brazil's biological diversity. The poem evolutionarily ascends from the giant plants in Stanza I to the birds and lizards of Stanza II, and finally ending with "Christian" colonizers of Stanza III. However, rather than constituting a realistic rendering of Brazil's jungles, "Brazil, January I" instead offers the speaker's psychological processing of the landscape, first noticeable in her patterned generalizations of the greenery in the first stanza.

Januaries, Nature greets our eyes  
exactly as she must have greeted theirs:  
every square inch filling in with foliage-  
big leaves, little leaves, and giant leaves  
(90).

Much like the previous poem, "Brazil" begins with an arrival, one which, like that of "Arrival at Santos" features the speaker critiquing her surroundings. In contrast to the preceding poem, however, is the speaker's tone; in this case, one of marvel rather than remonstrance. Also shaping the speaker's newfound attitude is the self-delusion that she *has* reached a possible interior, thus fulfilling her desire professed in "Arrival" and allowing her to survey the landscape with renewed fascination.

Again, touristic urges are at work in this stanza as she constructs nature as if it were a painted portrait, noting the shades of green which predominate the scene but making sure to

list the purples, yellows, pinks, and reds so that nature appears, “fresh as if just finished/ and taken off the frame” (14-15). As the stanza unwinds it almost appears as if the speaker, brush in hand, is filling in colors as needed to enhance the beauty of the landscape. The “their” reference aligns the speaker’s touristic urges with those of her predecessors from the sixteenth century. Bishop shows an understanding of initial conquest in terms familiar from modern tourism and the visual culture of the tourist industry.

Of added significance in this opening stanza is the use of a “frame” as an endpoint. Not only does the speaker’s representation of nature frame the landscape as art, but Stanza I, from a thematic and imagistic standpoint, frames the entire poem as it echoes the themes of impenetrability and colonization found in Stanza III. Wedged in-between, Stanza II then serves as a lynchpin counterpoising the idyllic representation of Stanza I to the subject of Sin present in each of the final two stanzas. The stanza begins with the arrested imagery of the sky functioning as “backing for feathery detail” (17) and birds, “symbolic,” perched in profile, and quiet with “beaks agape” (20). The stanza then makes one of Bishop’s trademark “divigations” to borrow a term from critic Barbara Page (12), shifting from the Eden-like imagery of water-lilies and feathery sky, introduced as background, to the more immediate Sin resting in the center of both poem and painting.

Still in the foreground there is Sin:  
Five sooty dragons near some massy rocks  
(91).

The natural imagery that follows transforms the scene from one of stillness and beauty to one of danger as Bishop uses verbs such as “threatened” and “attacked” in conjunction with the “hell-green flames” tied to the moss. Sin, like Nature, is capitalized and this mark of distinction

suggests a rivalry, one supported by Nature being referred to as a “she,” just as Sin is associated with the sooty, masculinized dragons. As the stanza closes, the speaker observes the now disquieting stillness of the scene, as the four male lizards stare at the backside of the smaller female lizard whose “wickedly” erect tail, “straight up and over,/ red as a red-hot wire” (35-36), appears both menacing and provocative and suggestively points to the final stanza’s themes of sexual exploitation and conquest.

Picking up on the imagery and thematic interests present in the preceding stanzas, the final stanza seeks to consolidate the disparities between man, beast and jungle and, as Jeffrey Gray points out, “to fulfill the us-them, now-then comparison set up in the opening two lines” (38). Adding to this landscape of likenesses is the transitory parallel linking lizard to Christian which moves from the end of Stanza II to the beginning of Stanza III.

Just so the Christians, hard as nails,  
tiny as nails, and glinting,  
in creaking armor, came and found it all,  
not unfamiliar  
(92).

More than simply making historical allusions, connecting the speaker’s point-of-view with an imagined retrospective, the final stanza sets forth implications which blurs the boundaries between man-animal, Sinner-Christian, and tourist-imperialist, while dually reinforcing and revising the divisions between man and nature. For the Christian explorer/conquerer, Brazil may not provide their familiar local scenery and customs, but instead offers the potential for something even more enticing, as the speaker relates that the new country, “[corresponded], nevertheless,/ to an old dream of wealth and luxury/ already out of style when they left home-/ wealth, plus a brand new pleasure” (43-46). Brazil, then, offers the Portuguese a landscape out

of place and out of time, where they can just as easily chase treasures or native women, all from the threshold of the church. By conflating Christianity, wealth, and male sexual deviance, Bishop critiques the inherent contradiction accompanying Christianity's patriarchal superstructure, as crimes committed under Judeo-imperialist authority are blurred by a self-proclaimed, noble, religious intent and excused by the perceived status of the colonizer.

As the poem closes, so does the proximity between the lustful Christians and the native women, only to be followed by the enclosure of the jungle, around the terrified natives, for protection. Just as the speaker is impeded in her initial encounter with the jungle, so too are the Portuguese men who "ripped away into the hanging fabric, each out to catch an Indian for himself" (49-50). What becomes apparent in the final stanza, then, is the speaker's complicity in sharing the imperialist attitudes of the Portuguese, as both seek a new but "not unfamiliar" Brazil, though for different reasons. Bishop's speaker seeks the interior as a possible haven for original experience, all the while using recorded observation to reduce Brazil to a landscape painting. The Portuguese, on the other hand, entered the country to fulfill sexual and commercial desires; however, both parties witnessed Brazil through a Western lens. Just as the Portuguese, the speaker of the poem is isolated from the heart of the jungle, which transforms itself from a sheer physical obstruction to a cultural barrier as well, as the native women, "calling" and "retreating" become confused with waking birds, thus signaling the failures of the Portuguese and the speaker to fully apprehend their humanness. Like the Portuguese, so the speaker, as both create imagined "Brazils" to more suitably integrate their persons into a foreign place. Whether due to a lack of regard (the Portuguese), or the lack of a proper access

point (the speaker), both parties are sealed from the physical and cultural depths of Brazil and resort to imagined versions of it for personal satisfaction.

In "Brazil, January I," Bishop's speaker must again imagine Brazil, as her only prior knowledge seems to be the equally flimsy historical account. This merely legitimizes Brazil through a Westernized, popular imagination. In "Questions of Travel," the speaker acknowledges the significance of imagined places and begins to question the function of imagination in constructing reality and negotiating time and place. "Questions of Travel" begins with the sobering "There are too many waterfalls here" and moves the series of poems back into real time, while retaining the tourist/speaker of the previous two poems. As Jeffrey Gray reminds us, "the disappointment here is not, as it was in 'Arrival at Santos,' at the flatness of coast, harbor, and 'some scenery' but at the fullness of presence familiar from the opening of 'Brazil, January I, 1502'" (41). Gray's quote reminds readers that, in travel, many revisions and reversions are possible and that the tourist gropes repeatedly in assembling that which at first is deemed unfamiliar.

There are too many waterfalls here; the crowded streams  
hurry too rapidly down to the sea,  
and the pressure of so many clouds on the mountaintops  
makes them spill over the sides in soft slow-motion,  
turning to waterfalls under our very eyes  
(93).

Similar to the slippage of postage stamps in the final stanza of "Arrival," Bishop again avoids using enjambment, allowing the stanza to flow just as the imagery of waterfalls coalesces with the winding of the speaker's mind-in-motion and unlike the still-life imagery of "Brazil, January

I," the speaker in "Questions" is confronted with nature's dynamism as the waterfalls, in number and rapidity, appear to elicit a welling of tears under the speaker's eyes. The beginning of the stanza sets up what's to follow as the water imagery descends, dissolving both place and time with the image of the "capsized ships" signaling the parting of the clouds as well as symbolizing home to the speaker, who is equally wary of the "quick age[s]" (8) of altered time evoked by "those mile-long, shiny, tearstains" (6). The continuous "travelling" of the clouds allows the reader to associate the motion of nature with her own perpetual movement as traveler, as the speaker's continued use of personification shelters her from the inexplicable while rendering home as an inevitable point of return and abroad as variable, constant flux.

While interrupting the unsettling and indecipherable landscape, the image of the ship, as Pickard explains, is "the first explicit indication of travel, and it is a strange one in that it implies stranding-the end of travel" (162). The image also segues neatly into Stanza II, where regret underscores the speaker's debate over lived vs. imagined places.

Think of the long trip home.  
Should we have stayed at home and thought of here?  
Where should we be today?  
Is it right to be watching strangers in a play  
in this strangest of theatres  
(93).

On the surface the beginning of this stanza seems to be asking whether or not the inconvenience of travel is worth the trouble or not, as ultimately we always return home. What further begins to emerge from this passage, however, are the larger problems the poem

addresses in the last stanza-questions concerning the meaning of “home,” the stakes of failing to ever leave, and as in “Arrival,” the mediation involved in construing the visited place. Just as the speaker begins implicating herself as a guilty voyeur of “strangers,” she exonerates herself as her questions continue, challenging her childishness while affirming her delight in the world’s smallest hummingbird and the “inexplicable and impenetrable” (23) stonework. For the first time in the suite the speaker is finding affirmation in her visitation, no longer plagued by impenetrability but, rather, appreciating it precisely for the fact. This realization also makes home not so easily transferrable, as the speaker’s worldliness and cosmopolitanism is insufficient to fully immerse her in the native.

In the final questions of the stanza, the speaker ponders whether the actualization of dreams is paramount to their mere presence, and whether the mind, as storehouse of memories, can pack in one more vivid image. Stanza III, then, gives testimony to the importance of travel no matter the stakes, as the confusion over representation and self-integration abroad becomes secondary to the precious, more authentic moments in travel which frame the stanza.

But surely it would have been a pity  
not to have seen the trees along this road,  
really exaggerated in their beauty,  
not to have seen them gesturing  
like noble pantomimists, robed in pink  
(93-94).

Though the stanza begins with the speaker’s more appreciable moments of travel, adjectives such as “exaggerated” and the personification of the trees “gesturing” signals the speaker’s consistent subjecting of landscape to her imagination, as the pantomimist trees echo the

“strangers in a play” (16) of the preceding stanza. Far from mere fantasy, however, this section of the poem also incorporates the regularity of filling-stations and footwear, rendering both all the more beautiful for their casual offerings. Rather than continue to catalog the lack of exoticism, as in “Arrival at Santos,” this section depicts the wonder in the mundane and reveals a preference in the speaker for disparity at the expense of familiarity. This disparity is not merely imaginative, but has national implications as well, as Brazil’s perceived randomness and discordance stands in sharp contrast to the factory-tested American efficiency alluded to later in the stanza.

The speaker’s representation of the off-pitch sandals, whose clacking is more primitive than the domesticated, “fat brown bird” (43) in the cage, recasts distinctions between the primitive and the domestic. The attention also redistributes the perceived value of primitive and industrial cultures. To the speaker, the exchange rate leans in favor of the local clogs, whose “[careless] clacking” (38) appears much more alluring than the mechanically conformed, quality-insured sandals produced “in another country” (40). Similarly, the speaker relishes in numerous other disparities, many formerly disruptive, as she asserts:

-Yes, a pity not to have pondered,  
blurr’dly and inconclusively,  
on what connection can exist for centuries  
between the crudest wooden footwear  
and, careful and finicky,  
the whittled fantasies of wooden cages  
(94).

Blurred vision is no longer considered an impediment to the speaker but, rather, an important part of discovery, even if the only discovery is a lack thereof. This vagueness interacts with the

speaker's imagination to make connections and raise further questions, the answers to which are not as important as the questions themselves. Embracing inconclusiveness opens the speaker to continued experience and the retrospective account also comments on a traveler's tendency to find value in minor moments, once safely distanced from them. Just as the speaker's study of history is inconclusive, so too is her comprehension of the inaudible rain, as only after the parting of the clouds, a metaphorical removal of obstruction, is the speaker prepared to recount her experience.

Perhaps more than any other passage in the opening suite of Bishop's *Brazil* poems, this line evokes the poet's sense of home as described by Bishop in the interview cited above. The final two stanzas record, literally and figuratively, the speaker's most decisive conclusions about what travel suggests about the self and human nature at large. Home, then, is the discovery of the self within the imagination and one's surroundings, with the reciprocity of mind and material, thought and action coalescing to form the most possible, coherent version of the self. Fittingly, the stanzas are presented in question form, offering perhaps the most inevitable and rewarding gift to be had from any newfound awareness of self or place, that of further exploration.

*"Is it lack of imagination that makes us come  
to imagined places, not just stay at home?  
Or could Pascal have been not entirely right  
about sitting quietly in one's room?"*

*Continent, city, country, society:  
The choice is never wide and never free.  
And here, or there...No. Should we have stayed at home,  
wherever that may be?"*  
(94).

This final series of inquiries assembles the varied formal and thematic interests operating in each of the three poems. Stanza IV targets the traveler's initial impulse to travel, with "lack" denoting an innate weakness which makes travel a necessity. "Home," in this context represents fixity, reluctance, and the forfeiture of desire to enact change.

Further, the reference to Pascal offers a philosophical context regarding the necessity of solitude, which the speaker seems to both consider and reject. Passive syntax frames the question, as Pascal is deemed "not entirely right" (62). This passivity in language mimics the passivity of Pascal's philosophy, which favors extreme interiority aided by physical enclosure in space. Bishop's speaker recognizes these self-imposed limitations and their similarities to the connotations of terms such as country, society, and continent. Hard and soft "c's" alternate to denote the constraints associated with the strictures of home, be it a foreign *or* domestic locale, whether as expansive as a continent or as proximal as a city. Additionally, the speaker is commenting on the tension resulting between the meaning and implications of such terms, as one's place in each appears equally decided yet illusory. The phrase "here, or there...No" (66) supports these claims, as the speaker's self-censorship portrays a resiliency in the speaker, resistant towards reducing her sense of place to a set of capricious linguistic determinants, yet recognizing that merely being born into a place shapes one's perceptions of that which is unfamiliar. The speaker's concluding question, then, encapsulates the indeterminacy of and fears associated with notions of home, as it is as equally risky to leave as it is to stay, and never a place Bishop, nor the speaker, can specifically pinpoint, but one that remains present nonetheless. Bishop's speaker acknowledges that home is often defined by restrictive models

such as continents, countries, and cities, and that these markers carry social significance even if they seem arbitrary and unfulfilling.

In “Manuelzinho,” the tourist/poet of the abovementioned poems takes a backseat, albeit to a speaker whose social position offers an additional, skewed perspective on the relationships extant between the poor and the wealthy in mid-century Brazil. In the poem Bishop represents the role class structure plays in determining identity, while offering a form of mutuality based not on an exchange of services but on an acknowledgment of the humanity to be found in all. If anything, Bishop focuses her energies on what binds humanity, both spatially and spiritually, in order to comment on how these interstices of human experience allow for multiple points-of-view as well as foster understanding. By situating the poem specifically in Brazil and diminishing her authorial governance by carefully separating herself (as poet) from the speaker, Bishop seems to allow Brazil’s inhabitants to tell their own story. “Manuelzinho,” then, offers a more mature comprehension of Brazil, one which offers the possibility of home as a shared concept rather than as a mere byproduct of interiority.

Whereas the suite of poems that open *Questions of Travel* focus on the interaction between the speaker (as outsider) and place, “Manuelzinho” details the dynamic forces, particularly economic forces, that influence an individual’s connection to place. In the poem “place” is determined by the shared human experiences and personalities extant in a given space. The poet, rather than serving as protagonist, as in the previously mentioned poems, becomes the witness and recorder of another’s story. This gesture allows Brazil to be seen through Brazilian lenses, or at least seem to be, as Bishop’s point of view remains accounted for; the use of the dramatic monologue offers a between-the-lines look at the deeper

commentary on humanity surfacing in the poem. Bishop resists the traditional ethnographic impulse of relegating the place and identity of an “other” to the perceptions of the studious outsider. Rather than fixating on the relational qualities of self and other, American custom vs. Brazilian, Bishop holds her focus on the interrelationships extant along the fault lines of a class separation predicated on spatial proximity. This interest in *human* experience, coupled with her use of storytelling and poetic form allow Bishop to expand on a cultural event and add an allegorical dexterity to the text.<sup>1</sup>

The first line of “Manuelzinho” sets up the rest of the poem’s commentary on identity and belonging. Labeling and marking are central to the poem and are noticeable immediately, as Manuelzinho, a peasant laborer living on the speaker’s land, is described as:

Half squatter, half tenant (no rent)-  
a sort of inheritance; white,  
in your thirties now, and supposed  
to supply me with vegetables,  
but you don’t; or you won’t; or you can’t  
get the idea through your brain-  
the world’s worst gardener since Cain.  
(96).

Formally, the first half of the first stanza, with its repeated use of semi-colons, commas, and dashes, perfectly captures the speaker anxiously groping to characterize Manuelzinho, with her finally making the association between her gardener and Cain, noted by the couplet ending the stanza. In grappling with a title befitting her Manuelzinho, the speaker acknowledges (knowingly or not) the dubiousness of simple categorization. The link to Genesis is important, then, as a direct literary referent whose interest in the role naming, grouping and structuring

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<sup>1</sup> In his essay, “On Ethnographic Allegory” James Clifford offers ethnography as a powerful means of “performance emplotted by powerful stories” (98). His study focuses specifically on the ways anthropological reporting becomes larger in context through its account of personal stories.

play in creating order coincides with the linguistic strategies the speaker employs in attempting to understand Manuelzinho. Of added significance, is the relative out-datedness of both respective world views and Manuelzinho seems stuck in the cross-hairs of an archaic social order, one preserved by the attitudes of the wealthy (Bishop identifies the speaker as Lota in a letter to May Swenson) and a fast-encroaching modernity more accepting of individual rights.

Manuelzinho, incapable of fulfilling his social contract with the speaker through labor or commerce, is seen as an additional obligation rather than an asset. Bishop's ironic choice of "a sort of inheritance" (2), playfully links the speaker to her squatter in financial terms while also qualifying the assertion ("a sort of") so that what exactly Manuelzinho "is" remains in doubt. Even Manuelzinho's intentions come under scrutiny with the inclusion of "don't," "won't," and "can't." To the speaker, it is unclear whether Manuelzinho's inactivity is a product of his will, his laziness, or sheer incompetence. As a dramatic monologue, meaning is provided in the interstices between the language of the speaker and the action of the poem so that unintended meanings arise from what is said. Through the first half of the first stanza, the speaker belittles Manuelzinho, only to conditionally compliment him on the beauty of his gardens, which coincidentally bear few of the vegetables owed to the speaker. The repeated use of the pronouns "you" and "your" suggest that the speaker's audience is Manuelzinho himself (and possibly Bishop) and the repeated shifts between "you" and "I" support the simultaneous bond and distance present between the poem's speaker and subject.

From the opening stanza, Bishop's speaker grapples with exactly who or what Manuelzinho is, as she describes him as, "Half squatter, half tenant (no rent)-/ a sort of inheritance; white,/ in your thirties now..." (1-3). Manuelzinho's identity, from the beginning, is

as dubious as his financial status. What is readily apparent is that he is both an economic hindrance as well as a boost to her class position, as one can read “inheritance” in both ways. The double meaning of inheritance makes the speaker’s lament seem half-hearted and despite the speaker’s apparent disillusionment, the reader also senses a mutually inescapable bond linking landowner and squatter, and one not void of affection. Manuelzinho-as squatter-is equally lazy, unreliable, ignorant, and hopeless in the eyes of his landowner; however, beyond his obvious flaws lies a somewhat elusive (if not enchanting) figure, one whose character and behavior, despite years of family service to the speaker, remains impossible for her to fully grasp.

Bishop prefaces the poem by specifying both place (Brazil) as well as who is speaking (a friend of the writer). This effort becomes crucial as the poem develops, as it distances Bishop from the speaker of the poem while keeping her close enough to bear witness, and thus reduces any possible skepticism of the poem as a solely pro-Western critique of Brazilian class relations. The “friend of the writer” and her tenant Manuelzinho’s relationship not only carries personal import but national as well, as it highlights the presence of social stratification, however flimsy, and the poor’s continued dependence on the wealthy for survival. Typical to the Bishop oeuvre, these distinctions begin to blur: a mutual dependence between the speaker and Manuelzinho begins to develop as the poem continues.

Manuelzinho may be bound to the land out of necessity, but his meekness doesn’t preclude his fostering his creative faculties. Though reliant upon the speaker for basic daily needs, Manuelzinho often fails to reciprocate, as he neither produces vegetables nor money. Instead, he elicits amazement in the speaker with his Edenic gardens which yield few

vegetables, but are beautifully arrayed with red carnations and alyssum. Manuelzinho's eccentricities at once lend him autonomy, all the while reinforcing his dependency on the speaker for survival. The speaker views Manuelzinho with a sense of awe mingled with sharp criticism and, at times, mild sympathy. In the second stanza the speaker confesses:

I watch you through the rain,  
trotting, light, on bare feet,  
up the steep paths you have made-  
or your father and grandfather made-  
all over my property,  
with your head and back inside  
a sodden burlap bag,  
and feel I can't endure it  
another minute; then,  
indoors, beside the stove,  
keep on reading a book  
(96).

It becomes clear in Stanza II the kind of imprint Manuelzinho and his ancestors have left on the land. Manuelzinho and his ancestors have left the speaker with a physical reminder of their coexistence "all over [her] property" (25) and boundary lines play a prominent role in this stanza. The foot-paths are both a signature of occupation illustrating the relationship of body to land, while also symbolizing the restrictive existence of the servant class. They are physical demarcations of territory, presence subsumed by the legal authority of land ownership and privilege.

Also building in this stanza is the emotional connection linking the speaker to Manuelzinho. Despite Manuelzinho's flaws, the speaker recognizes him as a human and though she finds his suffering unendurable, she remains inert, safe by the stove and distracted by a book. This sense of locality allows the middle of the poem to center on negotiations of space-

physical, temporal, and emotional-which simultaneously bind and distance the speaker and her tenant. The speaker is able to observe Manuelzinho from inside her home and thus remain safe from the weather and distant from Manuelzinho's suffering.

As the poem progresses, the nature of the speaker's relationship with Manuelzinho continues to unfold and Stanza III begins with a laundry list of reasons the speaker has for finding Manuelzinho objectionable as she pointedly remarks:

You steal my telephone wires,  
or someone does. You starve  
your horse and yourself  
and your dogs and family  
(97).

The series of "you's" serves as an act of deflecting guilt by the speaker, as they immediately follow the account of her idly watching Manuelzinho prancing through the rain. Confusing the speaker's accusation, particularly that of theft, is her absence of proof, though it seems unimportant to her whether Manuelzinho or someone else is actually stealing the telephone wire. Her second accusation seems to work as a corrective, as if the first charge was too obviously unfounded. Clearly Manuelzinho struggles to survive and fails to provide for family and landlord alike, but it remains unclear as to how much blame he should shoulder for his misfortune. On one hand, his laziness and inscrutability seem blameworthy in impairing his living conditions; however, as a legacy of generational bondage, Manuelzinho can also be seen as a by-product of a failed system reliant upon the subjection of the poor to those with privilege. In this light, Manuelzinho can be seen as a reactionary figure, although one whose weapon is unabashed ambivalence rather than deafening protest.

Further developing from this section of the poem is the sense of surreal which accompanies Manuelzinho, as the speaker explains:

The strangest things happen, to you.  
Your cow eats a "poison grass"  
and drops dead on the spot.  
Nobody else's does  
(97).

Proceeding from this stanza are the speaker and Manuelzinho's alternate and equally disputable conceptions of reality. To the speaker, the real is not to be conflated with the imaginary and, much to her consternation, Manuelzinho tenuously walks a tight-rope between the two. From Manuelzinho, the speaker asks for potatoes and carrots, not mysterious, cow-killing poison grasses or funerals for undead fathers. Accompanying such differing attitudes towards reality are the speaker and Manuelzinho's alternate views of time. In Stanza III the speaker relates:

And once I yelled at you  
so loud to hurry up  
and fetch me those potatoes  
your holey hat flew off,  
you jumped out of your clogs,  
leaving three objects arranged  
in a triangle at my feet,  
as if you'd been a gardener  
in a fairy tale all this time  
and at the word "potatoes"  
had vanished to take up your work  
of fairy prince somewhere  
(97).

Time represents work and efficiency to the speaker of the poem whereas to Manuelzinho time (at least in a linear sense), remains relational and thus his gardening schedule, a work in progress. The allusion to the fairy tale is significant here as a means of signifying the flexibility

of time and identity in storytelling. By yelling at Manuelzinho, the speaker seems to disrupt Manuelzinho's sense of time and place and the interruption is so jarring that Manuelzinho disappears. The language of the stanza confuses the reader's sense of time as it remains unclear whether Manuelzinho vanishes back into a fairy tale or hurries to fetch the potatoes. Similarly, Manuelzinho's identity comes into further question, as it is unclear whether he is both prince and gardener or whether each is mutually exclusive from the other. Bishop herself noted Brazil's loose sense of time in her letters, claiming: "It is nice & relaxing to be in a country where no one knows what season it is, quite what date or hour it is" (Bishop 232). Manuelzinho too thrives in this relative timelessness, as only outside the strictures of the time=money equation is he able to fashion or much less imagine an alternate identity.

The transition from Stanza 4 to 5 is an important one in the poem, as it parallels how rapidly Manuelzinho's independence and pride are supplanted by his everyday needs.

And then you come again,  
sniffing and shivering,  
hat in hand, with that wistful  
face, like a child's fistful  
of bluets or white violets,  
improvident as the dawn,  
and once more I provide  
for a shot of penicillin  
down at the pharmacy, or  
one more bottle of  
Electrical Baby Syrup  
(97-98).

This shift from pride to privation characterizes the flux of Manuelzinho's existence, one in which his role as father and caretaker falls under scrutiny, as he relies on the speaker to provide the means for his children's basic healthcare needs. The speaker's description of his face is telling, as Manuelzinho is not only described as physically resembling a child, but the use of

wistful and “improvident as the dawn” imply a sense of expectancy masked in longing and hopelessness, much like the child who manipulates a parent by appealing to pity. Indeed, Manuelzinho relies equally on adaptation and performance for survival, and these attributes more than any other astound the speaker, perhaps prompt the monologue in the first place.

Of added significance in the stanza is the role Manuelzinho’s hats play in relation to his character and to the poem at large. In Stanza 4, Manuelzinho’s father, remembered in his black plush hat, is described as superior. In contrast, Manuelzinho wears a “holey” hat, and in Stanza 5 the removal of his hat serves as both a gesture of respect as well as humility. By removing his hat, Manuelzinho is also stripped of his pride and perhaps even his masculinity, as he is forced to rely on a female patron to support his family, one whose authority Manuelzinho repeatedly bucks against, but one who he ultimately bows to in times of desperation. Manuelzinho’s dependence on the speaker allows Bishop to comment on the topsy-turvy nature of gender relations when divisions in socio-economic status are at play. The sciences of finance and commerce are lost on Manuelzinho, and whatever the reason, be it his social station or individual ignorance, or both, Manuelzinho is unable to suitably provide for his wife and children, much less plan for a future. The absence of an explanation for Manuelzinho’s comparative ignorance reflects the speaker’s own ignorance, as her class position keeps her removed from the plight of the poor.

This lack of fiscal responsibility carries over into the second half of the stanza, as the speaker and Manuelzinho attempt to settle their accounts.

Or, briskly, you come to settle  
what we call our “accounts,”  
with two old copybooks,  
one with flowers on the cover,

the other with a camel.  
Immediate confusion.  
You've left out the decimal points.  
Your columns stagger,  
honeycombed with zeros.  
You whisper conspiratorially;  
the numbers mount to millions.  
Account books? They are Dream Books.  
In the kitchen we dream together  
how the meek shall inherit the earth-  
or several acres of mine  
(98).

Much like the garden and later the hat, Manuelzinho's notebooks descry functionality in favor of flair. The speaker's mention of the cover art offers additional implications in terms of the poem's thematics. Covers give distinction to appearances, but also offer concealment and for Manuelzinho, markings such as colors and objects, such as his hat, signify his eccentricity and are as much reactionary as they are aesthetic choices. Cover also implies protection and this too becomes a valid reading when looking both forward and reflexively in the poem. In relation to the account books, the illustrated covers only conceal the chaos contained within. As confounding an appearance as Manuelzinho makes personally, his account books are described as staggering and serve as a symbolic gesture signifying the level of uncertainty accompanying Manuelzinho's daily existence. The missing decimal points and misaligned columns parallel the unpredictability shadowing Manuelzinho, who is left with dreams rather than tangible figures, and dreaming, at least momentarily, becomes an escape which both the speaker and Manuelzinho share. In line with the tone of the poem, however, this dream is deferred as the speaker repossesses herself by reclaiming ownership of *her* land, linguistically, which in dream and her participation therein, is somehow under threat of becoming *their* land. These lines hint at the guilt underlying the speaker's account, although as long as the idea remains a "dream"

the speaker retains her privilege. Bishop's use of the dash formally separates the mutual reverie in favor of reality-one which upholds boundary lines separating the poor from the wealthy and suppresses the hope for any upward mobility by Manuelzinho.

Boundary lines also feature prominently in the sixth stanza, with proximity and distance expanding on themes of family, friendship, charity, and reciprocity. Though one of the shorter stanzas in the poem, Stanza 6, more so than any other, exhibits the duality of the poem's speaker and comments on the complexity of personal relationships when class division is considered. In her encounter with Manuelzinho's children in Stanza 6, the speaker appears both charitable and threatening and the tension of the meeting perhaps best magnifies the separation extant between social classes, despite (and because of) their direct daily contact.

With blue sugar bags on their heads,  
carrying your lunch  
your children scuttle by me  
like little moles aboveground,  
or even crouch behind bushes  
as if I were out to shoot them!  
-Impossible to make friends,  
though each will grab at once  
for an orange or a piece of candy  
(98).

Consistent throughout the poem is the blue motif, which begins in the preceding stanza with the mention of bluets and continues through the poem's finish. Bishop's choice of blue seems to shade the burdens of poverty, as the blue sugar bags atop the children's heads coincide with the fistful of blue flowers resembling Manuelzinho's wistful face in Stanza 5 as marks of struggle and/or shame. Blue colors the mood of the poem and suggests the form of "blues" developed

in American culture.<sup>2</sup> While Manuelzinho can face the speaker, his children appear timid and an even greater sense of their marginalization. More out of mistrust than the threat of violence do Manuelzinho's children reduce themselves to "scuttling" rodents. Again, the notion of cover is present, this time as a protective measure, with the bushes providing safety through concealment. Much like in the above stanza, Bishop's use of the dash marks a corrective measure by the speaker, this time as an attempt to establish her role as victim rather than menace in the scene.

She is, in fact, charitable, yet for the children to see her as a friend involves the speaker traversing a seemingly invisible and insurmountable barrier, as the respective stations each occupy are distinguished by the socio-economic differences between the two. Taking charity is part of the fabric of the children's family life, but the binds of social class remove the possibility of that charity being accepted as a form of mutuality between peasant and land-owner. The eagerness with which the children grab at the offerings reveals not trust, but hunger or even a greediness provoked by constant want.

Sight, distance, and shared experience all play a role in the poems final stanzas. In Stanza VII, the speaker's vision is veiled by the fog that "twines" Manuelzinho's family as well as by nightfall, as the "dim moonlight" and "pale-blue" fireflies provide the only sources of illumination for the speaker.

Twined in wisps of fog,  
I see you all up there  
along with Formoso, the donkey,  
who brays like a pump gone dry,

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<sup>2</sup> I am gesturing to a broader argument outside the margins of this paper. This argument includes other Bishop poems such as "Songs for a Colored Singer," and "Song for a Rainy Season" that in form and meter evoke the American Blues.

then suddenly stops.  
-All just standing, staring  
off into fog and space.  
Or coming down at night,  
in silence, except for hoofs,  
in dim moonlight, the horse  
or Formoso stumbling after.  
Between us float a few  
big, soft, pale-blue,  
sluggish fireflies,  
the jellyfish of the air...  
(98-99).

Additionally, spatial relations distance the speaker from the family and this separation provides significant insight into the speaker's character. Building upon the I/You relationship featured prominently in the previous stanzas, Stanza VII slightly alters the juxtaposition to that of I/You all. This small change carries larger implications by conveying the speaker's relative insularity in comparison to Manuelzinho's family ties. The family is located "up there" and though it is unclear where they are exactly, the mention of elevation corresponds to the steep paths paved by Manuelzinho and his ancestors, mentioned in Stanza II as markers of territory and position. Through these images the poem links status to an individual's relationship to place. This relationship transcends property ownership in the legal sense in favor of a home based on one's sense of community and the bond between the body (both plural and singular) and landscape.

The tone of the scene is both pensive and apprehensive and the imagery is dreamlike. Bishop's repeated punctuation evokes the activity of a mind in motion, as the speaker attempts to capture the mystery and emotion comprising the almost surreal events. Stanza VII mixes silence, stillness, and darkness to create a scene nearly void of time, one where the fireflies begin to take precedence over the narrative and offer the possibility of a shared experience

between the speaker and Manuelzinho's family. Much like the dashes employed earlier in the poem, the ellipses recenters the focus of the monologue, shifting it from the speaker's account of a moment of potential mutuality back to her determined, yet defective attempts at branding Manuelzinho.

Patchwork, stitching, and covers coexist in the eighth stanza, and correspond to identity formation as well as the faultiness inherent in the speaker's efforts at construing Manuelzinho.

Patch upon patch upon patch,  
your wife keeps all of you covered.  
She has gone over and over  
(forearmed is forewarned)  
your pair of bright-blue pants  
with white thread, and these days  
your limbs are draped in blueprints  
(99).

In the latter portion of the poem, the speaker's account of her own role in Manuelzinho's life dissipates in favor of her attention to his family. If, as insinuated early in the poem, the speaker serves in some matriarchal capacity, it's clear in the later stanzas that she isn't the only female holding sway in Manuelzinho's life. Though the speaker admirably, though somewhat begrudgingly, provides financial support to Manuelzinho and his family, she clearly remains outside the fabric of his home life. The images of patchwork, thread, and blueprints are all crucial markers of familial togetherness and identity being woven into the presence of family. The wife (and mother) can then be seen as the lynchpin of Manuelzinho's family, as her covering implies both safe keeping as well as denoting her role as family seamstress. Manuelzinho's wife, then, serves as corrective of sorts to his inability to provide while also commenting on the topsy-turvy nature of gender roles in the poem.

At the center of Manuelzinho's poverty-ridden existence is the woman, both as benefactor, in the speaker's case, and binding agent in the case of his wife. This non-traditional domestic arrangement was undoubtedly of interest to Bishop, who, along with Lota (the poem's alleged speaker), often considered adopting Lota's servant's children and spent significant time providing for and educating the children sharing their household. Bishop, a virtual orphan herself from the age of five, more specifically uses the poem to negotiate the role of family in not only forming identity, but preserving it as well, while also exploring the possibilities of gender roles within the poem. Both his wife and the speaker serve as parental figures for Manuelzinho and the fact that both are women challenges notions of the traditional family, while also transcending patriarchal constructs of gender identity. In a narrower context, what continues to emerge in the poem's later stanzas is the speaker's loose grip on Manuelzinho's identity. Her repeated confusion and misidentification colors her understanding of Manuelzinho and disrupts a personal reconciliation between the two.

In the tradition of the dramatic monologue, by the end of the poem the speaker's commentary has revealed more about her own character than that of her subject. Rather than paint a life-like portrait of Manuelzinho, the speaker's diatribe often suggests her own faults, her desires, her impatience, her lack of sympathy and intimacy, and a possible longing for meaningful human companionship. Most importantly, the later stanzas centralize the speaker's guilt. Manuelzinho subsists, in large part, due to his eccentricity and it's this same peculiarity that aids him in eluding description and a figurative death by language. Despite her efforts, the speaker never seems to accurately or fully portray Manuelzinho. Her relationship to him is largely based on his required service and economic dependency to her. Because of the lack of

intimacy between the two, largely on socio-economic grounds, the speaker cannot relate to Manuelzinho emotionally and thus humanely.

The emotional distance between Manuelzinho and the speaker is best conveyed through representations of Manuelzinho's family and the speaker's comparative singularity. Family, and the possibility for individual development within, seems to provide spiritual sustenance for Manuelzinho, despite his poor socio-economic status, and cause him to remain elusive to the speaker, to stay a work in progress. Instead, she continues to quibble over appearances:

You paint-heaven knows why-  
the outside of the crown  
and brim of your straw hat.  
Perhaps to reflect the sun?  
Or perhaps when you were small,  
your mother said, "Manuelzinho,  
one thing: be sure you always  
paint your straw hat."  
One was gold for a while,  
but the gold wore off, like plate.  
One was bright green. Unkindly,  
I called you Klorophyll Kid.  
My visitors thought it was funny.  
I apologize here and now  
(99).

Emerging from the close of the stanza is the repeated use of clothing as identity marker. Much like the pieced together blue jeans, Manuelzinho's hats are similarly distinguished, only rather than his wife doing the branding; Manuelzinho demarcates himself by painting and thus coloring himself. To the speaker this behavior is unfathomable and rather than accept Manuelzinho's behavior, the speaker again relies on reason in an attempt to explain the oddness and her resultant discomfort away. For Manuelzinho, painting his hat is a form of self-

expression regardless of reason and a means of extending his socio-economic limitations, as the shifting coloration offers Manuelzinho dexterity of character and allows him to elude categorization. This section foregrounds the dueling forms of representation in the poem, as well as states of mind. The speaker depends on linear narrative and logical explanation to construct her version of reality. Manuelzinho, who doesn't have a voice in the poem, is characterized more so by what he signifies than what he or the speaker says. This is useful to Bishop, who constructs dialectic model of sorts, with Manuelzinho and the speaker serving as antithetical entities through which Bishop must process their significance to create the poem. The strategy invites multiple points of view, with Bishop's retelling of the story giving the reader additional access to Manuelzinho and the speaker, while allowing Bishop to continue to elaborate on the position of the outsider in a foreign land. In "Manuelzinho" Bishop was able to explore the ways class structure inhibit understanding and human involvement, regardless of national affiliation.

The eighth stanza offers a resolution of sorts as the speaker shifts from finding fault in Manuelzinho to accepting responsibility for her role in making sport of Manuelzinho. The direct, "I apologize here and now," (139) serves as a culmination of what is implicit as well as what's on the surface of the poem, a confessional release of the repeatedly suppressed guilt and regret only hinted at previously in the story. What remains unclear is whether the apology is being offered directly to Manuelzinho or in memoriam. This lack of surety depersonalizes the apology without rendering it insincere. The final line of the stanza also fits the trajectory of the poem by immediately transitioning towards a set of insults, albeit in the speaker's mildly detached tone, again directed at Manuelzinho.

By featuring the pronouns “you” and “I” the final stanza, along with the first, form a framework for the rest of the poem. The oppositional pronouns, by the poem’s end, form a loosely united “we,” one defined by helplessness, foolishness, misunderstanding, and most importantly, love, however limited it may seem.

You helpless, foolish man,  
I love you all I can,  
I think. Or do I?  
I take off my hat, unpainted  
and figurative, to you.  
Again I promise to try  
(99).

Again, Manuelzinho is subjected to criticism and though it is unclear whether the speaker’s love is sincere or if it is imaginary, love, in some form, is present in the speaker’s attitude towards him. Of specific concern is the speaker’s doubt over whether she loves enough, as her questioning fits the thematic interests of the poem as a means of evaluating and reevaluating the circumstances bringing people together. Apart from the ever-present class distinctions dividing the speaker and Manuelzinho, the emotional aspect of their relationship offers a way to transcend class roles. The speaker’s “figurative” removal of her hat supports this reading by providing a role-reversal, thus replacing her typical literality in favor of a flexibility which allows her to acknowledge difference and accept the inexplicable. What’s at stake in the final stanza is not so much the speaker’s change of character but rather its potential. By “trying,” the speaker finally confronts her own complicity in her strained relationship with Manuelzinho. As presumptuous as they may seem, her efforts suggest that there is no easy reconciliation between herself and Manuelzinho, as class separation is real and time-honored, but that loving at all is an important starting point.

The poem also shows a side of Bishop willing to put touristic impulses aside and to sit quietly and observe, to see Brazil beyond the pale of postcard promises and impenetrable tapestry, and provide a record of Brazil as a place rather than an imagined destination, even if that place and the traveler requires continued scrutiny. "Manuelzinho" is indeed a story poem, and between the lines is a commentary and critique on the very act of storytelling itself. By staying in the background, Bishop responsibly avoids authorial imposition and in the process relates the limitations in human understanding present when national, cultural, or socio-economic boundaries are at play. What Bishop offers by the end of "Manuelzinho" is self-scrutiny as a possible first step in establishing human commonality while also identifying her own place within this superstructure as a figure more in line with the poem's speaker than the poem's subject, but a necessary mediator between the two regardless.

As traveler and poet, Bishop supported an imaginative life that was inextricably linked to the clear representation of one's material surroundings, all the while cognizant that such precision is difficult and susceptible to misreading. The suite of poems comprising the beginning of *Questions of Travel* enact the process of witnessing, interpreting, and constructing a place and a self outside the generic conventions of nation, country, citizen, and subject. Bishop's subject is the traveler/tourist as well as the landscape, wildlife, locals, and fellow travelers caught, as Simon Coleman and Mike Crang describe it, "within the ambit of the hegemonic tourist system...posit[ing] a world of bounded cultures-national, ethnic, or regional-all modeled on coherent and closed systems of meaning" (1). With the use of imagination, Bishop's speaker (and person) instead inhabits a space transcending provisional borders and enforced cultural coherence, but not without first adhering to and then critiquing such cultural

constructs. Bishop's speakers, then, don't live outside culture, but rather occupy a liminal space between cultures, offering her the ability to negotiate conflicts in place and time, self and other, and home and abroad without the pressure of blindly subscribing to "closed systems of meaning." Though oppressed, Manuelzinho is able to fashion a homemade self through more subtle forms of expression than verbal or physical defiance. This removal from ideological absolutism positions Manuelzinho alongside Bishop who, while not participating directly in the political outpouring of 1960's America, relied on her private vision, one influenced heavily by her experience in Brazil, to comment on humanity at large. "Arrival at Santos," "Brazil, January 1, 1502," "Questions of Travel," and "Manuelzinho" all favor the mutability of the individual (or poet) in and outside of culture, with the primary semblance of home being found in the interstices of the imagination and the material.

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