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**LOSS TRANSLATED: SAUDADE IN THE WORK OF  
ELIZABETH BISHOP**

by

**C. D Clawson**

**Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree**

of

**HONORS IN UNIVERSITY STUDIES  
WITH DEPARTMENTAL HONORS**

in

**English: Literary Studies  
in the Department of English**

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**UTAH STATE UNIVERSITY  
Logan, UT**

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**CONTENTS:**

<b>AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY .....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>ABSTRACT: .....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>INTRODUCTION AND LITERATURE REVIEW:.....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>DEFINING SAUDADE: .....</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>A POET DISPLACED:</b>	
<b>ELIZABETH BISHOP AND</b>	
<b>THE POETICS OF <i>UNHOMELINESS</i> .....</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>RETURNING TO THE “CEMETERY OF CHILDHOOD”:</b>	
<b>SAUDADE IN THE WORK OF ELIZABETH BISHOP</b>	
<b>AND HER BRAZILIAN CONTEMPORARIES .....</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>CONNECTIONS AND REFLECTIONS:</b>	
<b>BRAZIL IN NOVA SCOTIA;</b>	
<b>NOVA SCOTIA IN BRAZIL .....</b>	<b>31</b>
<b>LOSS TRANSLATED:</b>	
<b>SAUDADE IN BISHOP’S “ONE ART” .....</b>	<b>47</b>
<b>CONCLUSION:.....</b>	<b>50</b>
<b>WORKS CITED:.....</b>	<b>52</b>
<b>APPENDICES:</b>	
<b>APPENDIX A: DEFINITIONS OF SAUDADE.....</b>	<b>55</b>
<b>APPENDIX B: A TIMELINE OF DISPLACEMENTS.....</b>	<b>56</b>
<b>APPENDIX C: PHOTOS.....</b>	<b>57</b>
<b>APPENDIX D: POSTER PRESENTATION OF RESEARCH.....</b>	<b>70</b>

## AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY



Corey (C. D) Clawson, a Cache Valley native, graduated from Mountain Crest High School in 2003. Arriving at Utah State University the subsequent fall, he explored his interests in Biology, History, and Writing, but could not escape the call of literature. Upon returning from an LDS mission in the state of Minas Gerais in Brazil, Clawson discovered the poet Elizabeth Bishop in an introductory Literary Analysis course taught by Dr. Anne Shifrer. Inspiration hit when he opened up a volume of Bishop's poetry to "Under the Window: Ouro Preto," a city he had visited while living in Brazil. A series of questions such as "Why would Bishop write about Brazil?" and "How did its culture affect her and her writing?" came to mind immediately, resulting in a two-year project and a research trip to Bishop's childhood home in Nova Scotia under the guidance of Bishop scholar Sandra Barry.

At Utah State, Clawson discovered his passions for literature, research, and serving students. He worked as a lab technician in the Small Grains Program, as a peer advisor for the Honors Program, assisting students and managing online coursework, and as a Rhetoric Associate. Clawson also served as an Honors Undergraduate Teaching Fellow for HONR 2000: Scholars Forum, as an undergraduate representative on the Departmental Teaching Excellence Award Committee, and as Vice President of the Rho Tau Chapter of Sigma Tau Delta, the International English Honors Society. He also presented papers at a number of local, regional, and international conferences, earning an undergraduate researcher transcript designation.

Clawson graduated in May 2009 with a degree in English: Literary Studies with minors in Latin American Studies, Portuguese, and British & Commonwealth Studies. After graduation, he will spend three months volunteering as an English teacher in rural Chile. Upon his return, Clawson plans to apply to PhD programs in contemporary poetry and pursue a career in higher education.

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## LOSS TRANSLATED: SAUDADE IN THE WORK OF ELIZABETH BISHOP

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C. D CLAWSON

### ABSTRACT:

In 1954, former U.S. poet laureate Elizabeth Bishop wrote in a letter from Brazil to Robert Lowell, a dear friend and fellow poet: "With much love and *saudades* as they say here, a very nice word that seems to include all the sentiments of missing friends in one." This insightful observation illuminates a concept central to Brazilian culture which has been designated one of the most difficult words to translate. Later, Bishop defined the idea as "the characteristic Brazilian longing or nostalgia," which she "strongly associates with homesickness." Bishop's fascination with the concept, I argue, is more than that of a distant cultural observer. As her comprehension of *saudade* developed, the idea completely altered her own understanding of loss, home and even Bishop's own art. This is evident, not only in her letters to Lowell, but also in her own poems and short stories about Brazil and her childhood in Nova Scotia. By understanding the role of *saudade* in the work of Elizabeth Bishop, scholars are able to comprehend not only the importance of this Portuguese concept in her own work but also the complexity of the poet's cultural identity.

### INTRODUCTION AND LITERATURE REVIEW:

Bishop has secured a place in the literary canon as a Poet Laureate of the United States and the recipient of multiple Guggenheim Fellowships, the Pulitzer Prize for Poetry, the National Book Award and numerous other awards (*Words in Air* xxxi-xli). Bishop's place in this canon

differs, in important respects, from American writers and poets, who were intent on forging a unique, self-defined American poetic identity more or less independent of the British tradition. The writings of poets such as Longfellow, Whitman, and Dickinson in the “young nation” became distinct and definitive pieces of the American developing literary tradition. At the beginning of the twentieth century, however, American poets turned to the world for innovations in poetry. T.S. Eliot, Gertrude Stein, Ezra Pound, and many others of the modernist generation left the country in order to innovate, refine, and develop their craft elsewhere. Bishop, considered by some scholars a late modernist (Halliwell 70; Ellis 55 citing Pinsky), was highly influenced by similar transnational experiences throughout her life of displacement. The idea of transnationalism is particularly important to understanding her work because Bishop was exposed to and identified with Canadian culture at a very early age, and this “Canadianness” played a significant role in her poetry throughout her career

Bishop’s place in the literary canon should be reevaluated for this very reason. Having lived in Canada, Europe, Brazil, in addition to her time in the United States, Bishop’s time in and outside of the United States holds an integral place in her work reflected in the strong recurring theme of travel throughout all of the volumes of poetry she produced. Thus, it is important for scholars to understand Bishop’s ties to these distinct cultures and the way she viewed them as well as how they interrelate within her work. While Bishop’s place in the American literary canon and her relationship with American culture has been examined by many, the roles of Nova Scotia and Brazil in the poet’s consciousness as well as her work are only beginning to be understood by the literary community.

This study will examine the role of these two geographies—that of Nova Scotia and Brazil—in Bishop’s life as well as the relationship between them, paying particular attention to

how the Portuguese concept of *saudade* affected Bishop's perception of these landscapes. This study will provide evidence that the poet linked these landscapes to one another in her personal writings as well as her creative works. My study will build upon the findings of other scholars writing about Bishop in relation to these two distinct cultures. To provide this study with focus and clarity, I will orient my observations around the idea of *saudade*, which links Bishop's time in Brazil with her childhood in Nova Scotia because it provided Bishop with a new and innovative way for her to understand and portray memory and loss in her work. This concept provided Bishop with a means of coping with trauma and sense of abandonment she experienced as a child and throughout her life. The concept defines a painful relationship between the past and the present through loss expressive of complex and ambivalent feelings, "*saudade*" enabled her to face both the loss and the fond memories of her rural childhood in Nova Scotia.

Upon relocating to Brazil in the early 1950s, Bishop began writing prolifically about her childhood in Nova Scotia<sup>1</sup>. Upon her arrival in Nova Scotia, Bishop began writing two of her most famous short stories, both set in Nova Scotia—"In the Village" and "The Country Mouse"—and a number of poems. This fact suggests that there is a link between these two places that can, I propose, be explained by two key concepts: *saudade* and *unhomeliness* (a sense of cultural displacement and, in essence, a sense of belonging no where). These concepts are tied closely to a pattern of migration which shaped the poet's life from the age of five onwards. This profusion of writing about Nova Scotia suggests significant, visible links between the geographies, industries, and cultural commonalities of Nova Scotia and Brazil. Bishop's most vivid recollections of Nova Scotia are induced by Brazil, suggesting the power of *saudade* and

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<sup>1</sup> Nova Scotia was not an entirely new subject; her poem "Cape Breton," for example, was written before Bishop ever visited Brazil. However, these poems still have some bearings on her treatment of Brazil later in her career.

her continual sense of dislocation or *unhomeliness*. The connections Bishop makes between Brazil and Nova Scotia are visible in the textual treatment of the two places in Bishop's work and personal correspondence. For example, Bishop's poetry collection *Questions of Travel* is divided into two sections *Brazil* and *Elsewhere*, which notably consists almost entirely of poems about Nova Scotia. The binaries of North and South or here and there suggested by these section titles correlate directly to Bishop's sense of past and present. In this volume and her other writings on these two places, the poet, employing the idea of *saudade* links past and present in order to understand pain and loss.

Previous studies such as Paulo Henriques Britto's "Elizabeth Bishop as Cultural Intermediary" have generally focused on the effects of either Brazil or Nova Scotia on Bishop's work, but none of them has made the necessary connections between the two places. Britto's study examines Bishop's cultural identity and suggests that she did not act as a cultural intermediary because she did not go to Brazil to disseminate and understand its culture. Rather, he maintains that Bishop remained removed from Brazilian culture. My study will show that even though Bishop did go to Brazil without the intentions of learning about the culture, she did incorporate into her life certain aspects of Brazilian culture that are visible in her poetry, prose, letters, and interviews.

Like Britto's study, the most recent and major biographies of Bishop's life such as Brett Millier's *Life and Memory of It* have not examined the importance of Brazil in her understanding of her past. Millier's biography approaches the poet's life chronologically and does not examine the connections between the poet's Nova Scotian childhood and her adulthood in Brazil. Lorrie Goldensohn's *Elizabeth Bishop: The Biography of a Poetry*, on the other hand, focuses specifically upon Bishop's time in Brazil. While the work touches on Bishop's



relationship with Brazil and draws multiple connections between Nova Scotia and Brazil, Goldensohn does not account for the significance or cause of these connections. The questions of why Bishop made this connection and how it affected her work go unanswered. Another more recent book-length study, Jonathan Ellis's *Art and Memory in the Work of Elizabeth Bishop* examines the poet's life in relation to her work taking into account the poet's visual art. Ellis suggests that the relationship between Bishop's poetry and her migratory life is more complicated than scholars had assumed previously. My study supports and expands upon this idea as well as Goldensohn's observations on Brazil and Nova Scotia. By focusing specifically on the significance of connections drawn between Brazil and Nova Scotia, scholars can better understand the impact these connections had upon her art as well as her cultural identity.

Steven Axelrod also begins to bridge this gap in his essay "Elizabeth Bishop: Nova Scotia in Brazil"; however, his comparisons are also incomplete. Axelrod focuses primarily on *how* Bishop's view of Nova Scotia evolved rather than *why* it changed and how this change was linked to her time in Brazil, as I intend to explore in my study. I will examine some of the parallels between these two cultures and how Bishop's understanding of her relationship with these landscapes was enhanced by her identification with and internalization of the concept of *saudade*.

Another study that begins to bridge this gap is Sandra Barry's "'It Really Happened': The Confluence of Elizabeth Bishop's Nova Scotia and *The Diary of 'Helena Morley'*." The article explores Bishop's translation of the Brazilian novel *Minha Vida de Menina* into a work

known in English as *The Diary of "Helena Morley"*<sup>2</sup> The most Barry claims is that Bishop's adaptation of the diary contains imprints of Bishop's own childhood, and she focuses primarily upon her use of Nova Scotian idioms in the translation. My study will build upon Barry's findings that translation of Brazilian literature reflects her own experiences as I examine the idea of *saudade* in relation to Bishop's translation of the diary in addition to other writings such as her letters, short stories, and poems.

*Duas Artes* by Maria Lucia Milleo explores questions related to Bishop's cultural identity as reflected in her poetry and prose while also examining the relationship between Bishop and Carlos Drummond de Andrade. Milleo's study focuses mainly on the parallels between the works of these two poets in their respective environments (Bishop in Brazil, the United States, and Nova Scotia and Drummond de Andrade in a number of regions across Brazil from his hometown of Itabira in Minas Gerais to Rio de Janeiro), but it does touch on the effects they had on one another's poetry as well as the effect of Brazilian culture upon Bishop's work. Employing Milleo's observations on rural life in the works of these two authors will enable me to draw additional parallels between Bishop's views of Brazil and Nova Scotia.

In order to supplement these ideas, I also intend to use three collections of essays on the role of place in Bishop's work: *Divisions of the Heart*, *The Art of Elizabeth Bishop*, and *In Worcester, Massachusetts*. These three works contain essays on the role of place in Bishop's; however, *Divisions of the Heart* is devoted entirely to the role of Nova Scotia in Bishop's poetic

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<sup>2</sup> Note that the translation of the title is indirect. Bishop's choice to translate the title into *The Diary of 'Helena Morley'* rather than a more direct choice such as *My Life as a Little Girl* removes from the title its coming-of-age quality drawing the work more into Bishop's present than the author's past. This alteration demonstrates how the poet approximated herself to the work and imprinted her experiences in Brazil and Nova Scotia upon the translation of the work.

landscape. Most notable of these essays is Gary Fountain's " 'Maple Leaf (Forever)': Elizabeth Bishop's Poetics of National Identity." This essay uses a theoretical framework based in Homi Bhabha's concept of *unhomeliness* in order to examine Bishop's sense of displacement. This work hints at Brazil as a solution to Bishop's sense of *unhomeliness* but lacks the depth necessary to fully understand the relationship between Brazil and Nova Scotia in her work. By expanding upon this essay and others in this collection (as well as the other two listed above which are more associated with her life in Brazil and Massachusetts), I will be able to explain the importance of Brazil and Nova Scotia in Bishop's life and draw the necessary parallels between Bishop's time in these areas.

Because this study is informed by concepts from post-colonial theory, I have elected to use an essay defining these concepts in a similar context in order to shape my own argument and define these terms. In his essay "Place and Displacement: Recent Poetry from Northern Ireland," Seamus Heaney uses these concepts of *inbetweenness* (or culture-straddling) to explain the divided nature of poets in Northern Ireland and how they overcame psycho-political tensions they faced having interests staked in both sides of the conflict. Although the conditions of hybridity and the circumstances of the poets Heaney discusses in his essay differ greatly from that of Bishop, a similar phenomenon of displacement occurs known as *unhomeliness*. These concepts of *unhomeliness* and *inbetweenness* provide scholars with a greater understanding of Bishop's relationship to the United States, Brazil, and Nova Scotia and also help relate Bishop's writings to the idea of *saudade* in the context of her migratory biography.

This study will also include examination of the concept of *saudade* in order to provide a foundation for my analysis of Bishop's views on the idea in her letters and other writings. These articles such as Hubert E. Mate's "Treatment of *Saudade da Patria* by Certain Brazilian

Romantic Poets” tend to have a basis in Brazilian literature from the Romantic period on,<sup>3</sup> which I argue influenced Bishop’s own poetry in subject, form, and content especially in regards to loss and place.

Much of this study will be based, however, in primary texts such as Bishop’s prose and poetry. This study will also take into account a number of Bishop’s translations of Brazilian poetry and prose as well as letters to friends, family, and colleagues in the states. Examining Bishop’s choices in translation using the prose and poetry she translated from the original Portuguese, I will examine the appeal of the works she translated and the choices she made in the translation process. Bishop’s letters, collected in *One Art* and *Words in Air*, hold similar significance in that they reveal a great deal about the poet’s process, especially considering the poet’s views on the letters of her literary predecessors. At Harvard, Bishop taught a course devoted to the study of the correspondence of a few select poets (Goldensohn 1). Although *One Art* and *Words in Air* are large volumes and contain a number of important observations on Bishop’s relationship with Brazil and its ties to Nova Scotian memories, I will focus on a few select letters which provide a great deal of insight into the poet’s views on Brazil, art, home, and even the concept of *saudade* as well as the bearing of these views on the poet’s relationship with Nova Scotia.

Each of these sources provides a unique and important perspective, which together provide scholars with a greater understanding of the poet’s views on topics as simple and universal as home and as complex as *saudade* or the self. This study will put in context the roles

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<sup>3</sup> Bishop is also aware of this as she alludes to this tradition in her introduction to *A Twentieth Century Brazilian Poetry Anthology*, which she co-edited.

of Nova Scotia and Brazil, at home and from away,<sup>4</sup> as well as art and memory in the work of Elizabeth Bishop.

## DEFINING SAUDADE:

The word *saudade* is a problematic one for translators. It is extremely difficult to translate and its meaning is tied directly to the Brazilian and Portuguese cultures. For this reason, the concept was ranked the seventh most difficult word to translate of all words in all languages in a 2004 survey by London-based firm Today Translations (Young). At the center of the word lies a painfully strong sense of yearning. The *Pequeno dicionario brasileiro da lingua portuguesa* [Little Brazilian dictionary of the Portuguese language]<sup>5</sup> defines the concept as a “sad and understated remembrance of persons or things which are distant or lost accompanied by the desire to see or regain them” or “a heavy sentiment resulting from the absence of a loved one” (Lima “*saudade*,” my translations). Interestingly, these definitions are at odds with one another. *Saudade*, by definition, can be both “understated” and “heavy”; however, the pains of loss and desire are closely linked to the idea. (For a catalog of definitions of *saudade* see Appendix A).

The concept becomes even more abstract as one examines the definitions provided by the *Oxford English Dictionary*. The second and third definitions it puts forth outline the ambiguities and paradoxes associated with the concept. It is a “yearning for something so indefinite as to be indefinable: an unrestrained indulgence in yearning” as well as a “[v]ague and constant desire for

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<sup>4</sup> To use a phrase common in Nova Scotia.

<sup>5</sup> Edited by Manuel Bandeira, one of the poets whose work Bishop translated.

something that does not and probably cannot exist, for something other than the present, a turning towards the past or towards the future; not an active discontent or poignant sadness but an indolent dreaming wistfulness” (OED “*saudade*”). In other words, it is a desire for something in the present or the future that fills a void left by a loss which has occurred sometime in the past. It is both a positive and a negative feeling, which lingers for these voids can never be satisfied according to the definition. The first definition provided by the *OED*, however, ties the concept specifically to national identity: a “[l]onging, melancholy, nostalgia, as a supposed characteristic of the Portuguese or Brazilian temperament”<sup>6</sup> (“*saudade*”). The idea of *saudade* is connected to the formation of a Brazilian identity as Mate points out in his article *Treatment of Saudade da Patria by Certain Brazilian Romantic Poets.*” Citing José Veríssimo’s *História da literatura brasileira*, Mate points out that *saudade* is the “most intense and exact expression of our patriotic sentiment” and that two of the most clear examples of this sentiment can be found in the poetry Gonçalves Dias<sup>7</sup> and Gonçalves de Magalhães (181, my translation). Mate points specifically to their “fervent patriotism” and the “veneration” of their ancestors’ legacies (181). For these poets, *saudade* provided a way for them to assert a Brazilian identity and reconcile the past with the future.

Bishop defined this concept a number of times in her own writings. Bishop alludes to the importance of *saudade* in the construction of an identity in her introduction to *An Anthology of Twentieth-Century Brazilian Poetry*. In it, she introduces to readers the concept of *saudade*,

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<sup>6</sup> This definition, however, fails to take into account the role *saudade* has played in the formation of other Luso-identities such as that of Cape Verde or Angola, but serves the purposes of this exploration of Bishop’s Brazil-, US-, and Nova Scotia-based identity.

<sup>7</sup> Perhaps the most notable of these poems is his “Canção do Exílio” whose speaker recalls the landscape, flora, and fauna of Brazil from a distant land asserting its superior beauty, love, and music.

which she defines as “the characteristic Brazilian longing or nostalgia” and strongly associates with homesickness (xviii). This is true; however, understanding the concept of *saudade* is complicated by the fact that it can be felt for a great number of things such as people and places. These objects of desire can also be abstract. In a greater sense of the word, one can feel *saudade* for childhood innocence as well as for social reform. This notion of *saudade* stands out in the Brazilian poems she translated as well as Bishop’s own poetry including her villanelle entitled “One Art.”

Bishop and many others have written about this single word, its complexity, and its immense significance in Brazilian culture. Joaquim Nabuco, a Brazilian diplomat to the United States in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century described the concept of *saudade* in the following way:

It translates the pain of absence, the suffering of separation, the whole range of privation of loved beings or objects; it is the word that one chips into gravestones, it is the message one sends to relatives and friends. It is the feeling the exile has for his homeland, the sailor for his family, lovers for each other when they part. (Santiago 155)

All of these situations Nabuco describes have two elements in common. The first is an element of loss, such as loss of a loved one which is linked specifically to the past, and the second is a burning desire to regain it. Scholars have noted the prevalence of loss as a theme in Bishop’s poetry. Many of Bishop’s writings such as “One Art” share these senses of yearning and absence. Bishop’s familiarity with the concept of *saudade* enlightened Bishop’s poetry and allowed her to examine loss more deeply and understatedly in her letters, poems, and prose.

Although Bishop herself wrote fairly little about *saudade* in a direct fashion and never used the word itself in her poetry, the word held particular significance for the poet. In her

biography of Elizabeth Bishop, Brett Millier points out that soon after arriving in Brazil “*Abraços e saudades*” became Bishop’s regular closing in her correspondence with friends and colleagues in the United States (358). In this context, Bishop’s closing sends her hugs (*abraços*) and expresses to these people painful feelings of their absence in her life (*saudades*).<sup>8</sup> As Millier points out, she used this Portuguese concept to communicate her love to those she considered “her only connection to her past and to the English-speaking world” (359). Herein lies the first link of *saudade* to North America. Her use of the word *saudade* in this context indicates her familiarity and personal connection with the concept. As it becomes clear that Bishop employed the idea to serve the purpose of expressing her love, the possibility of Bishop using the concept to express her pain becomes more acceptable. In order to understand how the poet does so, it is necessary to understand the poet’s cultural identity before arriving in South America and how it was affected by her time there.

## A POET DISPLACED:

### ELIZABETH BISHOP AND

### THE POETICS OF *UNHOMELINESS*

Following the death of her father (when Bishop was 8 months old) and the institutionalization of her mother (four years later), the poet’s childhood became increasingly unstable. The struggles that Bishop faced following this course of events ultimately resulted in a

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<sup>8</sup> The plural form of *saudade* (*saudades*) is more common. It is common to ask someone away from home, “Você tem *saudades* de sua mãe?” Directly translated, the result is: “Do you have feelings of longing [*saudades*] for your mother?” The concept itself is referred to and discussed in the singular, however.



sense of *unhomeliness*, or cultural disconnection, which Bishop contended with for many years.

The concept of *unhomeliness* originates with the postcolonial theorist Homi Bhabha who characterized it as an “estranging sense of a relocation of the home and the world” (9).

According to Bhabha, this sensation arises out of an “*unhomely* moment” that requires the subject to realize one’s displacement from a home in a state of “incredulous terror” (9). In Bishop’s case, this moment is associated strongly with the destabilization of her childhood world as she was removed from her maternal grandparents’ custody for they provided her with the most stable home she knew.

Bishop and her mother left the United States to stay with the poet’s maternal grandparents in Nova Scotia following the death of Bishop’s father. Bishop was left in their care as her mother’s mental state deteriorated to the point that she was ultimately institutionalized. A year later, her paternal grandparents sent for her. Upon being taken to Massachusetts, Bishop felt alienated and out of place. Bishop found herself unable to consider herself part of either culture. When she was removed from the stable environment that she had grown accustomed to in Nova Scotia, Bishop struggled with her perceived identity and the one assigned to her by her paternal grandparents. In her prose memoir “The Country Mouse” Bishop recounts the feelings that she had as a child moving between these two cultures.

In “The Country Mouse,” Bishop frequently comments on the differences in language, economic conditions, and customs of these two cultures as well as the discomfort caused by her displacement. These conflicts reflect an internal struggle that Bishop had with her identity. In the story, Bishop recalls that her grandmother had a “confusing way of talking” as if she “were playing house” (*Complete Prose* 16). Because she was accustomed to the mannerisms of Nova Scotia, Bishop did not understand her grandmother’s way of speaking because she spoke

differently and treated Bishop, unable to perceive these cultural dissimilarities, differently than she had been treated before.

Bishop clearly favored the culture that she was accustomed to. In fact, her behavior suggests that she was ashamed of the life that her paternal grandparents had insisted on giving Bishop in order to save her “from a life of poverty and provincialism” (17). They insisted on removing her from a life in a small village in order to join them in a house that “was on a much larger scale, twice as large” as the one she knew in Nova Scotia (17).

The vastness of the house alienated Bishop. Unable to accept the house as part of her identity, she disassociated herself from her new home and her grandparents’ wealth. Bishop, “[in]secure about [her] status,” told a classmate visiting her home that more than one family lived in the house (32).

Unable to connect with her grandparents as a result of cultural difference, Bishop essentially became a cultural orphan. Upon revealing to her paternal grandmother that she “didn’t want to be an American,” she was presented with “a white card with the American flag in color at the top” with “all of the stanzas of ‘Oh, say can you see’ printed... in dark blue letters” (26-7). Forced to recite the “endless poem” every day at her grandmother’s feet Bishop felt that a piece of her identity—her Canadianness—was being stripped from her (26). For this same reason, she identified with the Swedish servants working in her grandparents’ household. While Bishop felt that she was accepted by Agnes and the other servants, Bishop clearly felt excluded by her family members’ cultural differences.

As a result of being removed from Nova Scotia, Bishop felt abandoned and torn between two cultures. For Bishop, this resulted in a lifelong struggle with her personal and cultural identity. For the most part, the internal conflict that Bishop faced at the time that this story

recounts eventually resolved itself. Bishop became a vessel of hybridized cultures. She didn't passively sit back and observe the world passing around her; Bishop, like many people in similar situations, adapted to the situation by identifying with both cultures in order to reconcile her hybridized identity. Bishop was able to internalize these two cultures and find an appropriate, personal balance.

Although Bishop resolved this struggle to a tolerable degree, a major part of her identity remained unresolved. Throughout her career as a poet, Bishop's sense of *unhomeliness* forced her to continue her search for a stable home and homeland in her writings. She identified with both the American and the Canadian cultures in which she lived; however, she considered neither of these cultures or their landscapes her home. Bishop's childhood experiences prepared her to explore the nuances and complexities of personal identity and cultural hybridity in her writings on home and travel as well.

A similar historical example, which sheds light on this phenomenon of *unhomeliness* is the life of British composer Maude Valerie White who formed her own hybrid identity which manifests itself in her compositions. In nineteenth century Britain, she considered herself an outsider on multiple levels. She was a woman, a Catholic, and a lesbian in Victorian England. The composer—talented enough to win the coveted Mendelssohn composition prize—did not feel accepted in the established musical community. As a result, White turned to Algeria for inspiration (Fuller 247). The place's exotic and accepting atmosphere became a refuge for writers such as Oscar Wilde who ventured to Algeria in order to escape Victorian morays. The product of White's refuge in Algeria was a technically-sophisticated and exotically-based set of compositions. These compositions fit within the Western tradition, but focused on the subject of

the orient as constructed by the European powers of Britain and France (248). White never identified herself with the culture in which she took refuge.

In later life, Bishop had a similar experience when she made the decision to permanently relocate to Brazil. This decision had a similar bearing on Bishop's cultural identity. Bishop never considered herself part of Brazil, but was enthralled by its exoticism and substantially affected by its culture. Like White, Bishop found acceptance abroad. In many ways, she found the United States in the 1950s stifling to her creativity and to her happiness. This society disapproved of her political ideals and her sexuality as a lesbian. Upon arriving in Brazil and being hospitalized, Bishop decided to stay most likely due to these circumstances. Bishop simply felt more accepted as her sense of displacement and non-acceptance was remedied. Paradoxially, the poet felt more at home in an alien culture removed from everything she knew. Brazil simply served as an answer to Bishop's sense of *unhomeliness*. The culture and Bishop's lover, Lota Macedo de Soares, came to symbolize that which Bishop needed and longed for the most: acceptance, love, art, and womanhood.<sup>9</sup> Although she was surrounded by English speakers in Brazil, Bishop still learned about and absorbed Brazil's culture and the language from the kitchen staff at Soares' estate. Bishop's hybridized identity prepared her to accept this completely foreign land as a new home and to utilize *saudade* in her work.

Although she considered herself "a North-American poet... living in Brazil" Bishop found Brazil to be an incredibly welcoming place (Monteiro 50). Even though the poet did not consider herself to be Brazilian in any way or seek to integrate herself into the culture, Bishop felt accepted. In her Time-Life book *Brazil*, she says that "[t]he country has no anti-Semitism"

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<sup>9</sup> All of which are highly visible in the poet's work. See "In the Waiting Room," "Crusoe in England," "Sestina," and others.

and characterizes racism towards “Negroes” as “occasional” and counter the norm of “native Brazilian tolerance” (114).<sup>10</sup> Brazil’s cultural diversity and tolerance so countered her traumatic feelings of childhood alienation that Brazil became the answer to her search for a home. These senses of displacement Bishop felt in childhood and the appeal of acceptance in Brazilian culture reflect the framework proposed by Gary Fountain who suggests that *unhomeliness* serves as a means of understanding Bishop’s cultural identity and for the poet herself to understand this inner conflict. Amending that argument, I suggest that this concept also helps us to understand the relationship between the different landscapes she wrote about, especially the relationship between Brazil and Nova Scotia. Examining the poet’s life, her poetry, and her autobiographical short stories, the relationship between the two places becomes clear. For Bishop, Nova Scotia became an archetypical, somewhat idealized vision of home and Brazil became a place which served her as a substitute home, paralleling Nova Scotia in its rural and exotic atmosphere. This landscape came symbolize not only a sense of belonging and acceptance but also one of reflection.

Before coming to Brazil, Bishop distanced herself from her traumatic childhood. The topic came up rarely in her correspondence and work, and was not approached directly until Bishop arrived in Brazil. *Saudade* enabled Bishop to approximate herself to her past and deal with her personal anguish stemming from her mother’s absence and the unstable environment in which she grew up. Bishop’s familiarity with the concept of *saudade* allowed her to reexamine her past in a new light as she wrote about it because the concept allowed her to understand the

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<sup>10</sup> Bishop’s point here is overstated. Race, in the latter half of the twentieth century and today, is an issue that is highly contested. That said, in relation to the United States of the 50s and 60s, Brazil was arguably more accepting as the Civil Rights Movement was at the forefront of American politics and international news.

pain of reflecting on loss and the psychological distance between past and present. Essentially, *saudade* provided Bishop with a new sense of perspective which allowed her to examine her past and connect it to her present.

Bishop longed for the stability that she lost with her mother's commitment to a mental institution and with her own removal from Nova Scotia. Familiar with the concept of *saudade*, Bishop found herself able to resolve this sense of *unhomeliness* as she approached her past in her writings. As Jonathan Ellis suggests, Bishop's "experience of living in Brazil somehow made her writing about childhood exclusion easier" (92). The poet's familiarity with the concept of *saudade* allowed her to distance herself from the pain of memory and understand her sense of longing.

Before coming to Brazil, Bishop's writings about her past were descriptive, but impersonal. According to Steven Axelrod, these works are characterized by their "psychological distance, avoidance, and desire" (283). In her pre-Brazil writings on Nova Scotia, Bishop focuses almost exclusively on the landscape. In "Cape Breton" for instance, the perspective of the poem is aerial and the speaker focuses almost entirely upon the landscape. As Axelrod suggests, the speaker "resists intimate contact" (283). The landscape is permeated by traces of humanity such as "bulldozers," "churches," and "a road [which] appears to have been abandoned" (*Complete Poems* 67-8). Bishop's own sense of abandonment seems to parallel that of the landscape found in the poem. The commitment of Bishop's mother to a mental institution when the poet was very young produced a void in her life visible in much of her poetry. Within "Cape Breton," humanity's impact upon the landscape is visible, but absent like the poet's mother. It is not until the penultimate stanza that an actual person appears in the poem as "a man carrying a baby" gets off of a bus and goes "to his invisible house by the water" (68). This detail

also draws the reader to Bishop's past. Axelrod points out that the baby of the poem, much like Bishop herself, is perhaps a "displaced child" or the child of an "avoidant or departed mother" (284). Here, Bishop distances herself from her past by focusing on the landscape as well as the distant or exterior symbols of the word "home" (such as the house or the broken family) prior to becoming familiar with the concept of *saudade*

Later in life, Bishop's writings concerning Nova Scotia became much more introspective as she drew connections between her past and her Brazilian present, which I will discuss at length in the penultimate section of this study. As a result of her familiarity with *saudade*, Bishop began to write more frequently about her childhood experiences. In Brazil, Bishop wrote several prose memoirs including "The Country Mouse" as well as some of her most celebrated poems such as "Moose" and "First Death in Nova Scotia." Soon after arriving in Brazil, Bishop began to draw parallels between her childhood and her new life in Brazil. In an interview with Léo Gilson Ribeiro, Bishop said, "When I translated into English *The Diary of Helena Morley*, an account of the author's childhood in Diamantina, I found that there were many similarities in the world that she describes and that of my own childhood" (Monteiro 17). These parallels in combination with (or perhaps as a result of) her familiarity with *saudade* helped Bishop to write about her past and reflect on it introspectively.

While Bishop focused exclusively on the exterior of the houses and churches of "Cape Breton," she focuses on the more personal *interior* of a house in her poem "Sestina" (see Figures 1-3 from Appendix C). Examining Bishop's introspection, Susan McCabe suggests that a "hidden and repressed" sorrow is at the heart of the poem (208). The poem describes a rustic scene with a child and a grandmother. Although there is no specific indication of the

geographical setting, the poem's Marvel Stove and almanac suggest a distant, rural atmosphere, likely a part of Bishop's past. This past is somewhat dreary; it is full of "tears" and "rain."

A clear sense of longing is present in both of the characters. The grandmother tries to "hide her tears" by "reading jokes from the almanac" and "laughing and talking" while the "child draws a rigid house," with a "winding pathway," "a man with buttons like tears," and a "flower bed" (123-4). Both of the characters long for something in their past. The child, presumably Bishop herself, yearns for stability and a home. She attempts to connect with and explore that past through her childish art and imagination. As in "Cape Breton," the absence of a mother figure in the poem suggests an autobiographical link. The beauty and stability of the "rigid house" and its surroundings allow the child to cope with her situation. The poem's rigid form as well as *saudade* provided Bishop "a method for reliving...painful experiences" (McCabe 207). The grandmother, on the other hand, copes in a different manner. She copes with the apparent loss by hiding her feelings from the child essentially burying them as the almanac suggests at the end of the poem: "*Time to plant tears*" (124).

The child's and the grandmother's respective responses to loss present readers with a spectrum of mourning which reflects the poet's own feelings in regard to mourning and the death of her mother. Bishop suffered from depression, but also used art as a means of connecting with and overcoming her past. As McCabe suggests, "Bishop abolishes the past, and perhaps more important, she makes the past so inextricably a part of the present that she reveals the falseness of separating tenses: the past haunts the present, and if we make the past the present we can potentially live within it" (208). McCabe's observation (as well as those of many scholars) reflects a paradox in Bishop's work which is central to the concept of *saudade*. Bishop is able to manipulate her relationship with the past by recreating it in the present; this lingering sense of



the past being in the present is another way of understanding the emotional effects produced by *saudade*. The child in “Sestina” is able to understand her past through art much like Bishop did as she explored the significance of loss and home in her own poetry.

Bishop does just that in her poem “Crusoe in England.” As many critics have pointed out, the situation of the poem’s protagonist, Defoe’s Robinson Crusoe, parallels that of Bishop in many ways. Essentially, both of them were Europeans displaced in a foreign and tropical land. However, as McCabe suggests, the great paradox of the poem—that Crusoe in England felt more like an exile in his home country of England and at home in imagination—also reflects Bishop’s sense of *unhomeliness*. When Crusoe’s connection to civilization was cut off, he invented a superior home in his imagination (196). The poet’s sense of *unhomeliness* stems from her displacement as a child when she longed for the stability of Nova Scotia upon emigrating to the United States. McCabe states that “Bishop... uses ‘Crusoe’ to explore her relationship to tradition, as well as her experience of personal exile” (197). Bishop, like Crusoe, felt culturally displaced upon leaving the home that she had created in Nova Scotia and later in Brazil. Crusoe longed for (or rather, felt feelings of *saudade* for) the home he had created in his imagination, just as Bishop longed for the internal sense of belonging and home that she had developed in Nova Scotia.

Much like “Cape Breton,” the poem begins with remarks about the landscape as well as the speaker’s links to nature, to the “goats and turtles” and the “fifty-two / miserable, small volcanoes” (162). This link to nature is intimate reflecting Bishop’s shifting focus from description to introspection. Bishop’s introspection is especially clear in stanza four in which Crusoe reflects on his situation aloud asking “Do I deserve this?” and “Was there / a moment when I actually chose this?” (163). It is at this point that Crusoe and Bishop are one in voice and

a connection between pain and creation is made because “the more pity [they] felt, the more [they] felt at home” (163). Both were forced to create homes that they did not have through imagination in addition to their art.

In order to maintain his sanity, Crusoe, as Brett Millier states, “makes the things he owns, [which] come to stand for sensations of pride and accomplishment, loneliness and loss” (448). Much like Bishop, Crusoe, marooned on a desert island, uses the creative process to cope with loss and heal the wounds of past and present. In the poem, Crusoe makes his own clothes, a parasol, a knife “reeked of meaning,” and a flute. These items come to symbolize his efforts to cope with the loss of civilization by bringing his past into the present, reflecting both Bishop’s understanding of the idea of *saudade* and her identification with the speaker of the poem. Crusoe profoundly states this himself in the poem as he assesses his craftsmanship, “Home-made, home-made! But aren’t we all?” (164). Through his art and his understanding of his past and present, Crusoe is able to survive just as Bishop did in her displaced circumstances.

Bishop’s cultural hybridity played a significant role in her development as a writer. The sense of *unhomeliness* that she felt throughout her life led her to understand and to identify with the concept of *saudade*. This understanding allowed Bishop to develop as a writer and explore the past that had haunted her so much. *Saudade* allowed Bishop to reflect on the past’s relationship to the present like Crusoe and also to understand the pain that she felt as a result of her unstable childhood through the child in “Sestina.” *Saudade* also enabled Bishop to use her art to explore the past and find the home she sought much like the figures found in her poems.

*North & South*, Bishop’s only volume of poetry published before relocating to South America reflects an evolution in Bishop’s poetry. The volume has been characterized by its “avoidance of [Bishop’s] own persona” as a result of “her private unhappiness” (Stevenson 22).

As Bishop grew as a poet, the subjects of her poems grew more personal as she found herself able to approach her past upon familiarizing herself with the concept of *saudade*. Throughout her life Bishop suffered from alcoholism and depression; having lost both of her parents before the age of eight, the poet's life was in chaos as she found herself shuffled between homes resulting in a sense of homelessness which continued into Bishop's adult life as the poet experienced a "sucessão de deslocamentos, em casas temporárias nos Estados Unidos...e viagens para o exterior [succession of displacements in temporary houses and in the United States...and her travels elsewhere]" (Martins 18, my translation). This evolution in the poet's work is also evident in her translations of Brazilian poetry. Upon arriving in Brazil, however, Bishop became better able to understand these feelings and embrace her "poetic persona" as she became familiar with Brazilian culture and the works of her Brazilian contemporaries such as Carlos Drummond de Andrade and Joaquim Cardozo. In order to understand this evolution in Bishop's work, one must understand *saudade*. Bishop found this concept in much of the literature she read and translated and integrated this idea into her own writings.

## RETURNING TO THE "CEMETERY OF CHILDHOOD":

### SAUDADE IN THE WORK OF ELIZABETH BISHOP

#### AND HER BRAZILIAN CONTEMPORARIES

*Saudade*, its complexity, and its significance in Brazilian culture (as well as in Bishop's own life) are illuminated by closer examination of Bishop's translations of "The Cemetery of Childhood" and "The Table" in addition to her own poem "One Art." In her translations, she found a sense of belonging and the very themes she explored in her own work. Bishop translated

and published more than a dozen poems and a diary.<sup>11</sup> These translations tie in thematically to Bishop's work and to her cultural identity.

In 1951, Bishop arrived in Rio de Janeiro for what was intended to be a short trip; however, following hospitalization for a severe allergic reaction and at the invitation of a Brazilian friend she had met in New York several years earlier, Bishop's "short trip" turned into a seventeen-year residency. Bishop moved in with her friend, Lota Macedo de Soares, and resumed her life. During this time, however, the scope and focus of Bishop's poetry shifted, following the introduction of Brazilian literature and culture into her life.

Upon arriving in Brazil, Bishop was able to examine her sense of *unhomeliness* and embrace her "poetic persona" as she embraced Brazil's culture and the works of her Brazilian contemporaries such as Carlos Drummond de Andrade and Joaquim Cardozo. As Bishop acclimatized to the culture of Brazil, she found the concept of *saudade* central to much of the literature she read and translated, ultimately integrating this idea into her own writings.

Milleo Martins points out a number of similarities between the work of Bishop and Carlos Drummond de Andrade, one of the most celebrated Brazilian poets of all time in her comparative study of the two poets entitled *Duas Artes*. She cites the ideas of family, home, and coming of age as well as the figure Robinson Crusoe—a symbol of the displaced or *unhomely* seeking and creating familiarity out of the exotic. Similar ties can be made to the works of the other writers Bishop translated such as Joaquim Cardozo and Helena Morley whose works also touched on these topics as well as the loss of innocence and coming of age. The translation

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<sup>11</sup> These, however, are not the only translations Bishop completed. For example, she refers to a number of short stories by Clarice Lispector (one of Bishop's female Brazilian contemporaries) that were never published (*Words in Air* 438). These translations also merit examination as they are set in a rural Brazil.

process held a special place in the poet's life which extended beyond mere dissemination of these stories and poems to an English-speaking audience. Translations of these poems as well as *Minha Vida de Menina* already existed.<sup>12</sup> Translation became perhaps a means for Bishop exploring and coming to terms with her traumatic past as much as her own creative process. Bishop selected works to translate that allowed her to explore themes she was interested in like loss and alienation, both themes associated with *saudade*.

In 1972, Elizabeth Bishop and Emanuel Brazil finished editing and published *An Anthology of Twentieth-Century Brazilian Poetry*. In the introduction to this anthology, Bishop highlights the importance of *saudade* in Brazilian literature. She introduces to readers the concept of *saudade*, which she defines as “the characteristic Brazilian longing or nostalgia” and “strongly associates with homesickness” and states that this feeling “appears obsessively” in Brazilian poetry from the romantic period on (xviii).

Her affinity for *saudade* is made clear in her letters. Writing from Brazil to her dear friend and fellow poet Robert Lowell, Bishop closed a 1954 letter with an insightful observation about the country she considered home and the language she had begun to learn: “With much love and *saudades* as they say here, a very nice word that seems to include all the sentiments of missing friends in one” (157). Having endured a long series of losses beginning with that of her father at eight months, ideas associated with the missing and the lost resonated with Bishop (see Appendix B). As a poet, the complexity and connotative economy of the word fascinated her. A few years later, in 1958, Bishop, again writing to Lowell, parenthetically refers to *saudade* as “that overworked word” (278). Bishop's assessment of the word's power suggests a certain

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<sup>12</sup> The first translation of the diary first appeared in the United States in 1957 according to Bishop's preface to the work (xi).

sense of respect and perhaps even reverence for the concept. Bishop explored (and to a certain extent internalized) this concept into her identity and, as a result, into her works as a poet and translator of poetry.

*Saudade* resonated with Bishop's past, helping her to reconcile the feelings of loss left in the wake of the death of her parents as well as the depression and pervading sense of *unhomeness* Bishop had experienced to this point in her life. A short time after arriving in Brazil, Bishop began to familiarize herself with the language by working on translations of Brazilian short stories and poems, including Cardozo's "Cemitério da Infância." As Goldensohn suggests in her book *Elizabeth Bishop: The Biography of a Poetry*, these translations dropped Bishop "deep inside childhood and folk consciousness, where the Brazilian primitive represented childhood" (174-5). Through the Brazilian works she translated including Cardozo's "Cemitério da Infância" and Carlos Drummond de Andrade's "A Mesa," Bishop gained a deeper understanding of *saudade* and was able to break through the boundaries of time and isolation in her poetry enabling her to write about her own childhood.

Cardozo's poem "Cemitério da Infância" reflects on the transition from childhood to adulthood and the resulting loss of innocence, an idea which parallels Bishop's own experiences. In the poem, the speaker walks through the cemetery of childhood apparently looking back on his youth with a distinct sense of *saudade*. The man finds many beautiful things he had forgotten including *girassóis* [sunflowers] and the smiling faces of children he had known (*Anthology* 28-9). These images represent the innocence and happiness of children, but are quickly replaced by images of mourning and death such as "[m]ulheres rezando as lágrimas [women praying tears]," and "covas pequenas; / De urtiga branca e de espinhos [small graves / with thorns and white nettles]" (28-9). This transition suggests a period of mourning for children's inevitable loss of

innocence. As the poem comes to a close, the speaker alludes that this transition is a kind of death; a transition of light, life and happiness to “[c]arne, cinza, terra, adubo [flesh, ash, and earth]” (30-1). Here, a sense of *saudade* is clear as the sense of childhood innocence is lost so easily and so quickly. The speaker suggests that, in the process of this loss of innocence, boys and girls are simply “[m]eninos, depois adultos [children, then adults]” (30-1). This quick and sudden transition is infused with a melancholic sense of loss and an implied desire to regain the innocence which has been lost—a desire visible not only in Bishop’s translation of this poem, but also in her own work.

Bishop’s decision to translate this particular poem reflects a tendency to read and translate works that allowed her to reflect upon her own experiences. Upon reading Bishop’s translation of *Minha Vida de Menina*, a book in the form of a diary, Marianne Moore, Bishop’s mentor and fellow poet declared to Bishop, “The real excitement, Elizabeth is that it is as much you as it is the Diary” (as quoted in Barry). This is also true of her translation of Cardozo’s “Cemitério da Infância.” While Bishop’s translation of the poem is faithful to the original, the *saudade* which is so clearly present in it reflects upon Bishop’s own experiences and decisions as a writer. It was at this time in her life that Bishop published her second volume of poetry, *A Cold Spring*, and her short story “In the Village” which explores the theme of losing one’s childhood innocence. This sense of *saudade* is most clear in “In the Village,” which recounts the loss of her mother to mental illness. Essentially, this experience left Bishop an orphan; having lost her father years before, it was at this point that the poet’s life became unstable and her childhood innocence was lost like that of the children in Cardozo’s poem. At the climax of the story, Bishop’s mother screams as she loses her mind. This scream, much like Bishop’s feelings of longing for her lost innocence, pierces time—it is “in the past, in the present and in those

years in between” (*Collected Prose* 251). In the years following this incident, Bishop lived with various relatives, but having no stable environment to call home, she was forced into premature adulthood. Bishop’s “In the Village” is an example of how Bishop tries to return to her lost childhood. This story and many of the poems Bishop wrote in this period reflect a strong sense of *saudade* in that they express a strong connection to the past infused with an immutable sense of longing and isolation.

A similar connection between past and present is present in another Brazilian poem translated by Bishop, Carlos Drummond de Andrade’s “A Mesa.” The speaker of the poem, presumably Andrade himself, addresses his deceased father describing the “festa grande [great party]” their family would have had were he still alive (66-7). At this point in his career, Andrade was writing from Rio, miles away from his hometown of Itabira in the state of Minas Gerais. In the poem he expresses *saudade* not only for his father, but also for his homeland. For this reason, he describes not only the imagined conversations and accomplishments of his family but also the food and drink at the heart of *mineira* [belonging to Minas Gerais] culture such as *tutu* [a dish made with manioc flour and beans], *farofa* [a dish made with manioc flour, sausage and eggs often served with beans] and *cachaça* [a strong alcoholic drink derived from sugarcane] (70).

Like Bishop, Andrade connects the past and the present with this sense of loss and longing. As Sant’Anna suggests in his book *Drummond, o Gauche no Tempo*, that in Drummond’s “A Mesa” “[p]assado, presente e imaginação...se fundem...mostrando a família como era, adicionada à família como deveria ou poderia ter sido [past, present, and emotion merge showing the way family was as well as the way it should or could have been]” (as quoted in Martins 83, my translation). By invoking this sense of regretful loss both Andrade and Bishop



are able to embrace and explore their past. Though Bishop approached the past with the same idea in mind, Bishop accomplished this fusion of past and present using her own distinct style and newly refined poetic persona. In one of her last and most famous poems, “One Art,” Bishop uses her talent for understatement to express the extent of her loss and the resulting pain. In the final section of this study, I will examine how Bishop’s “One Art” is a meditation on the concept of *saudade*.

Bishop’s translation of these works presented her with an opportunity to understand the culture in which she lived and its language; however, in exploring the literature of Brazil, the poet did more than just explore the culture and language. She explored her own experiences of displacement and loss, imprinting her translations with her own experiences. The translation process also shaped Bishop’s presentation of the losses she experienced in her life. The poems Bishop wrote in Brazil such as “One Art,” “Sestina,” and “Brazil, January 1, 1502” are marked by understatement and distance, which reflect the poet’s understanding of *saudade*. This sense of *saudade* is also evident in the geographical, psychological, and textual connections between the two landscapes in Bishop’s life and in her work.

## CONNECTIONS AND REFLECTIONS:

### BRAZIL IN NOVA SCOTIA; NOVA SCOTIA IN BRAZIL

In examining the relationship between Brazil and Nova Scotia in Bishop’s work, a closer examination of the connections between the two places reveals the extent to which these places were connected in the poet’s life and work. By understanding the connections Bishop made between these two places psychologically, historically, and textually, the poet’s senses of

displacement and loss grow clearer as well as the extent to which the poet employed the concept of *saudade* to explore and understand her sense of *unhomeliness*. This section will focus on three distinct sets of evidence. First, The Bulmer-Bowers Family Archives in Wolfville, Nova Scotia provide insights into the role of Bishop's family in the formation of her cultural identity as she tried to reconnect with her Canadian identity in Brazil; second, a set of paintings Bishop made depicting the two regions; and finally, Bishop's treatment of the Brazilian landscape in her poem "Brazil, January 1, 1502" echoes that of her Nova Scotia poem "Cape Breton" written years earlier, reflecting Bishop's sense of *saudade* for Nova Scotia while living in Brazil.

As indicated earlier, the findings of a few scholars such as Steven Axelrod and Harold Moss begins to make connections between Bishop's northernmost and southernmost landscapes began to explain the significance of the connections between the two places. Steven Axelrod, for example, explores these connections in his essay "Elizabeth Bishop: Nova Scotia in Brazil." Axelrod focuses primarily on how Bishop's view of Nova Scotia evolved rather than why it changed and how this change was linked to her time in Brazil, The same can be said of an essay by literary critic Harold Moss entitled "The Canada-Brazil Connection." The study is somewhat superficial making observations about the two places being rural and exotic in their own right (32). This section will focus on the role of these connections and how they fit into the model presented in earlier sections which outline the sources of Bishop's sense of displacement and her efforts to understand and overcome it.

The contents of the Bulmer- Bowers Family Archives illuminate the importance of Bishop's Nova Scotian heritage to her work and her cultural identity. A number of the artifacts from the archives fit into this model of *saudade* and *unhomeliness* described earlier. Upon being displaced, Bishop made several attempts to reconnect with Nova Scotia and the set of losses

associated with it such as the loss of her cultural identity as evidenced by her short story “The Country Mouse” and the loss of her mother to insanity.

One of Bishop’s earlier attempts to reconnect with this past is her poem “Over 2,000 Illustrations and a Complete Concordance.” The inspiration for the poem is the Bulmer Family Bible, which is housed at the archive in Wolfville. Bishop lived in Nova Scotia roughly from the ages of five to six, a key point in a child’s development, especially in regards to language acquisition. The poem recalls exotic images from this bible, and, considering the fact that Bishop lived in the same household as this bible, the poet likely associated it with fond memories of Nova Scotia, her family, and the wonder of language itself. The poem itself is full of a number of images from the family bible such as the nativity, the “squatting Arab,” and the tomb, reflecting Bishop’s learning process in Nova Scotia (57; see Figures 4-9 from Appendix C). This poem is one of many attempts Bishop made to reconnect with her Nova Scotian identity.

Upon arriving in Brazil, these attempts became more frequent and sophisticated. As noted earlier, Bishop began writing more stories and poems based in her childhood. Many of these attempts are closely connected to the holdings of the Bulmer-Bowers Family Archives in Wolfville, Nova Scotia including the translated works and paintings of her great uncles John Roberts and J. Robert Hutchinson as well as her aunt Maude Bulmer Shepherdson.

Among the artifacts housed in the archives are a number of books from the collections of Bishop’s Nova Scotian relatives including a work titled *Fortune’s Wheel* (see Figures 10-12 from Appendix C). The work’s subtitle, “a tale of Hindu domestic life” indicates its basis in the native culture of India. The work was originally published in author K. Viresalingam’s native language, and focuses on one boy’s coming of age story. Bishop’s great uncle J. Robert Hutchinson translated the work into English while working as a Baptist missionary in India. In

many ways, the history of the novel's translation parallels that of Bishop's translation *The Diary of Helena Morley*. *Fortune's Wheel* was translated nearly a century earlier under similar circumstances. Like Bishop in Brazil, Hutchinson had lived in India for some time and made the decision to perform the translation as a means of understanding the cultures and languages he had been immersed in. Taking this into consideration, we can see that Bishop's decision to translate *The Diary of Helena Morley* as well as her short stories were more than a means of exploring her past losses.

The very act of translation was, for Bishop, an active attempt to assert her Nova Scotian identity by following artistically in her great uncle's footsteps as a translator. The legacy of Bishop's Nova Scotian relatives was more than rural or familial. It was also a legacy of language and art. By completing these translations, Bishop asserted her identity and brought voice to her sense of longing or *saudade* in regards to her childhood. Bishop's poems abstractly reflect the loss that she faced in Nova Scotia in their imagery. For instance, while still living with her grandparents in Nova Scotia, her mother was institutionalized in the city of Halifax and in 1917 one of the worst disasters of history took place, known as The Halifax Explosion. World War I had begun and shipments of explosives were constantly passing through Halifax Harbor (which sits approximately sixty miles away from Great Village). Following the collision of two ships in the harbor, the largest non-nuclear man-made explosion in history took place (see Figures 13-14 from Appendix C). The city lay in ruin and windows were shattered almost as far away as Great Village.

Although Bishop's mother survived the explosion which destroyed the hospital in which she was committed, she never recovered her sanity following the explosion. What is most interesting about these events is their echo in Bishop's works typically associated with Brazil. In

“Crusoe in England,” for example, a set of volcanic explosions takes place at the beginning of the poem reflecting the importance of explosions in Bishop’s poetry and their significance in her personal life. Similar connections can be drawn to the recurrence of shipwrecks as in “Crusoe in England” and screams in Bishop’s works such as “In the Waiting Room.” The poet’s tendency to draw upon her Nova Scotian heritage and her childhood experiences in the province was an effort to explore and understand this past in order to overcome her feelings of displacement, asserting a familial and artistic identity.

Bishop also asserted this artistic identity as she dabbled in the visual arts. The Bulmer-Bowers Family Archives hold a number of paintings and sketches by George Hutchinson and Maude Bulmer Shepherdson (see Figures 15-17 from Appendix C). Like the family bible, the art of these relatives inspired the poems “Large Bad Picture” and her work entitled “Poem.” Bishop’s poems reflect her efforts to reconnect with her past using the idea of *saudade* in order to resolve her sense of displacement by bringing her past in Nova Scotia into the present while writing in Brazil. This can also be said of her paintings. Just as Bishop asserted the artistic part of her Nova Scotian heritage as a translator, she attempted to do the same by forming a bond with these relatives in the act of painting. Bishop reconnected with this past by bringing it into the present and employing it upon learning about the concept of *saudade* in Brazil.

The paintings themselves contain greater insights into Bishop’s understanding of these two places in relation to her identity. Briefly, I will discuss two of Bishop’s paintings—“Nova Scotia Landscape” and “Brazilian Landscape”—and how the poet’s views of Brazil and Nova Scotia reflect each other visually within the paintings (see Figures 18-23 from Appendix C). As

noted earlier, the two places share similar industries such as mining and fishing;<sup>13</sup> however, they also share similar physical features. For instance, the landscapes of Cape Breton in Nova Scotia and Ouro Preto in Brazil (two regions in which Bishop lived for extended periods of time) are both covered with deep green foliage, steep, rolling hills, winding roads, and frequent fogs during the rainy season. Her paintings “Nova Scotia Landscape” and “Brazilian Landscape” reflect these similarities as they both consist of villages imposed upon these comparable landscapes (*Exchanging Hats* 24, 44). The landscapes use the same yellow-green color palette and emphasize the distance between the houses and other buildings in the landscape. Bishop’s similar treatment of the two landscapes reflects not only the physical connections between the two regions, but also the psychological and emotional connections Bishop made to her Nova Scotian heritage while in Brazil. This is also evident in her similar treatment of the two places in her landscape poems “Cape Breton” and “Brazil, January 1, 1502.”

Bishop’s poem “Cape Breton” was one of her earliest examinations of the landscape of Nova Scotia and reflects her personal feelings towards the place at the time she wrote it. Her later work entitled “Brazil, January 1, 1502” echoes it in many aspects, including its free verse form and similar stanza lengths, suggesting that the connection between the two places is not only historical or psychological, but also textual within Bishop’s poetry and prose.

In Elizabeth Bishop’s second letter to Robert Lowell, written in Briton Cove on Cape Breton Island, Bishop briefly describes her surroundings to her fellow poet:

This is a very nice place—just a few houses and fish houses scattered about in the fields, beautiful mountainous scenery and the ocean. I like the people particularly, they are all Scotch

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<sup>13</sup> Visible in her poems “Cape Breton” and “At the Fishhouses”;

and still speak Gaelic, or English with a strange rather cross-sounding accent. Off shore are two “bird islands” with high red cliffs. We are going out with a fisherman to see them tomorrow—they are sanctuaries where the auks and the only puffins left on the continent, or so they tell us. There are real ravens on the beach, too, something I never saw before—enormous, with sort of rough black beards under their beaks. (6)

Bishop’s description of the island of Cape Breton reflects the poem by the same name in its completed stage years later. The poet’s attention to fauna, language, and landscape is evident in both the letter and the poem. As Thomas Travisano points out in his introduction to *Words in Air: The Complete Correspondence between Elizabeth Bishop and Robert Lowell*, “Traces of this letter’s description appear throughout Bishop’s poem ‘Cape Breton’ published two years later”

(xx). Travisano points specifically to the first lines of the opening stanza:

Out on the high “bird islands,” Coboux and Hertford,  
the razorbill auks and the silly-looking puffins all stand  
with their backs to the mainland  
in solemn, uneven lines along the cliff’s brown grass-frayed edge,  
while the few sheep pastured there go “Baaa, baaa.” (67)

The images of birds and land found in the poem subtly echo the letter and show how the inspiration for Bishop’s poetry can lie in landscape. These opening lines also illuminate Bishop’s cinematic approach to the landscape. She starts with a great deal of distance describing a shot from afar in which the islands, the birds, and the sheep are all visible. The speaker of the poem approximates herself to the landscape more and more in each stanza throughout the poem, concluding the poem with an intimate yet distanced focus on human tragedy. The man stepping off of the bus with a baby only in the penultimate stanza of the poem comes to symbolize the losses of identity, family connections, and place that Bishop faced in Nova Scotia (68). This

cinematic treatment of the landscape is echoed in Bishop's "Brazil January 1, 1502" as this cinematic approach to examining the island focuses first on the greenery of the landscape then gradually shifts to human tragedy in the form of the native women being raped. The similar treatment of these two landscapes suggests an important relationship between the two places in her work. As the poet echoed her treatment of Nova Scotia in "Brazil, January 1, 1502" by using a similar strategy, similar forms and similar imagery, a connection between the two places is drawn suggesting not only that the two appeared similar in her work, but also that one was a reflection of the other. Bishop's Brazil became a way of understanding her past tragedies in Nova Scotia.

Bishop's treatment of Brazil in "Brazil, January 1, 1502" parallels that of Cape Breton in three distinct senses. First, the distinction between man and nature is apparent and thematically tied to tragedy and pain. Also, Bishop explores the relationship between man, nature, and religion. Second, Bishop uses language associated with fabric to describe the landscape. On the most literal level, the poet describes the Brazilian landscape as a tapestry; however, this tapestry serves as an extended metaphor for the interactions between man, nature and religion in the poem. These different actors in the poem build upon one another and weave together much like a literal tapestry would. And finally, as mentioned above, the poet constructs the poem cinematically: the focus of both poems shifts from the broadest sense of landscape down to a scene depicting trauma and society on its most basic level. In the case of "Cape Breton," this examination is on the level of a family focusing on a man holding a baby. In "Brazil, January 1, 1502," the poet ends focusing on the sexual relationship between men and women. Bishop constructs her poem with this in mind as she examines this matrix of nature, conquest, and



religion a layer at a time in order to suggest to readers that these different entities in the poem are more intertwined than traditional perceptions would indicate.

Bishop's tapestried approach to the poem follows a bible-like sequence of creation and thus creates an Edenic atmosphere. The first stanza of the poem focuses upon plant life later moving on to animal life and then to man. This parallel with the biblical account of the creation points not only to the idea of nature as paradise, but also to the tenuous and fragile state of this Eden. Inevitably, following the biblical tradition, this paradise is destined to some form (or rather forms) of corruption. In the poem, corruption is tied to man and religion. As Ross Leckie suggests in his essay "That Watery Dazzling Dialectic," Bishop's use of the biblical account of the creation points towards an interpretation of the poem as an account of "original Christian European imperial violence," an allusion to the fall of Adam and Eve and the concept of original sin (189).

In "Cape Breton," the first stanza of the poem is largely dominated by the fauna of the bird islands—the "razor-bill auks and silly-looking puffins," the pastured sheep, and a shag, a medium-sized seabird—as well as a number of images tied to the water surrounding the island (67). The "silken water is weaving and weaving"—referring once again using the language of fabric— and a mist represent the peace found in nature as indicated by the smoothness and coolness of these images. The water is disturbed by two things, however: first by the shag raising its head out of the water and then by the rapid but unurgent pulse of a motorboat (67). Civilization, as represented by the motorboat, affects nature and encroaches upon it, yet the two manage to coexist. Man and civilization represent a threat in these landscape poems to the calmness and stability of nature. The looming threat to stability on the horizon serves as a means for Bishop to understand a stable sense of place, then the loss thereof.

Bishop is able to explore these ideas as a result of her choice to base the form and content of the poem around a tapestry. The epigraph of this ekphrastic poem, "... embroidered nature...tapestried landscape." from Sir Kenneth Clark's *Landscape into Art*, immediately serves as a prelude to the set of images Bishop uses to construct her tapestry of nature. The poet frames her creation with a number of references to tapestries speaking in terms of layers and threads at several points throughout the poem. These references to this art form tie the distinct pieces, or layers, of the poem together. Each stanza focuses on a particular entity within the tapestry and as Bishop examines each of these entities, she complicates the relationship between them visually and thematically.

In the first stanza of the poem, plant imagery is established as a foundational ideal. The foliage is associated with Edenic purity free from corruption. "[E]very square inch" of this layer of the tapestry is "filling in with foliage" (91). This layer of the poem establishes the link between the stability of the poem's imagery and the extended metaphor of the tapestry. Bishop ties together the language of fabric and the language of nature simply by juxtaposing the two, describing the landscape of "satin underlea[ves]" and "ferns / in silver-gray relief" (91). These two levels of description unify the tactile and linguistic aspects of fabric and nature as Bishop establishes a paradisiacal backdrop which the poet describes as "solid but airy; fresh as if just finished and taken off the frame" (91). This peaceful backdrop is established in order to contrast directly with the conflict about to ensue and the corruption that will destroy the atmosphere associated with this landscape.

Following the biblical account of the creation, the poem's focus shifts from the plant world to the animal world. The first image of the stanza alludes to spiders and birds using words like "web" and "feathery" (91). Bishop continues her use of the tapestry metaphor by referring

to the scene she describes with words associated with layering. The “blue-white sky” seen through the foliage is a “simple web, backing for feathery detail” (91). Bishop purposefully uses this language of layers to construct a two dimensional representation of the complex scene she creates. The “symbolic birds” and “five sooty dragons” overlay the green backdrop of foliage established in the first stanza (91). Similarly, the speaker establishes the centrality of religious thought in the poem and ties it to the poem’s extended metaphor by stating, “in the foreground there is sin:” (91). Sin is placed in the forefront of the tapestry and tied by Bishop’s use of the colon to the subsequent lines which describe the lizards as they perform their mating ritual. Transgression is tied up in the language of religion and the language of conquest in the representation of the mating lizards of stanzas two and three. The lizards are associated with sin and with hell as they lie on the rocks covered with “lovely, hell-green flames” in the form of moss and the lone female lizard’s tail is characterized as “wicked” (91, 92). The man-made concept of conquest is also imposed upon the lizards as Bishop employs the image of a “scaling-ladder” vine and aggression-related verbs such as “threaten” and “attack” to describe the scene of the lizards. As the ideas of religion, nature, and conquest converge in the poem, Bishop shows how they are intertwined and not distinct from one another. She complicates our views of nature by associating it with sin and with conquest as she uses the tapestry metaphor to weave these thematic threads together.

This is perhaps most evident in Bishop’s use of colors. The extended tapestry metaphor of the poem would be incomplete without Bishop’s focus on colors because they are the most basic elements of a tapestry that—woven together—produce images and meaning. Bishop uses these colors to establish the Edenic imagery of the first stanza with a distinctly cool palette of colors: “blue, blue-green, [and] olive” leaves and flowers in “purple, yellow, two yellows, pink, /

rust red, and greenish white” (91). Together, these colors contribute to the cool, stable and earthy atmosphere established in the first stanza. This coolness is gradually replaced by warmer colors associated with fire and flames. The second stanza opens with a “blue-white sky” and a “pale-green broken wheel,” but upon the mention of sin, soot and gray surface along with “hell-green flames” and finally the female lizard’s tail “red as a red-hot wire” as the speaker describes the scene of the lizards’ original sin (91, 92). It is at this point in the poem that nature is most closely tied to the religious concept of sin. The vibrant colors associated with this mating scene successfully link sexuality to nature while tying it to sin, an idea usually based exclusively in the realm of humanity. Using colors in addition to language, Bishop successfully complicates perspectives on the relationship between religion and nature by characterizing nature as having the capacity to commit sin.

The elevation of nature over humanity and the association humanity with falling from an Edenic state alludes to Bishop’s lifelong struggle with displacement. “Brazil, January 1, 1502” as well as “Cape Breton” reflect Bishop’s state of *unhomeliness*. The relationship between man and nature is also key to understanding Bishop’s “Cape Breton” in which civilization imposes itself upon the natural world literally and figuratively as “[t]he wild road clammers along the brink of the coast” (67). The landscape’s pure state is overridden by the whims of humanity much like Bishop’s cultural identity was taken from her as a child upon being removed from Nova Scotia. Upon the road in the poem is a set of “small yellow bulldozers,” whose sole purpose is to destroy natural or existing things in order to replace them with civilization. Especially significant are the lines: “The road appears to have been abandoned. / Whatever the landscape had of meaning appears to have been abandoned” (67). These lines both ending in the word “abandoned” suggest a sense of misuse in regards to the land and allude to the sentiments the poet felt in her

own struggle to assert her identity. The land has been unnaturally left and now has neither a natural nor a man-made purpose. The road is compared to a “disused trail” and “scar-like gray scratches in the side of the mountains” (68).

The land has had several things robbed of its purpose and identity by these bulldozers. First, the abandoned land has lost its meaning. It becomes a blank canvas left to be inscribed upon. Second, the natural beauty which made up part of the land has been robbed of its meaning. And finally, without meaning or beauty, the landscape serves no purpose. It remains inactive and unused in this scene and is characterized by what it is not. The road is described as “disused” and associated with “song-sparrows” which sing “dispassionately” reflecting the inaction and abandonment of the road and its imposition upon nature (68). This impersonal characterization of the landscape maintains a distance between civilization and nature throughout the poem. Although the two affect each other, they are distant and disconnected despite their coexistence. Bishop’s deconstruction of the landscape’s meaning and its relationship with humanity suggests a personal disconnection from the landscape. By evoking these emotions, Bishop expresses her deep sense of *unhomeness* and amplifies it.

Bishop continues focusing on these themes in the final stanzas of her poem, specifically examining the relationship of civilization and religion as well as with nature. The stanza describes a bus, “packed with people, even to its step,” transporting a group of people from one town to another (68). This group is isolated from nature and dispassionate towards the world around them, just as its dispassion towards these people is implied in the second stanza of the poem. In parallel with the landscapes lack of action and meaning, civilization lacks action and meaning because it is Sunday. The bus does not carry on it the “groceries, spare automobile parts, and pump parts” that it does on weekdays (68). The roadside stand and schoolhouse are

closed and “no flag is flying” there. Just as the inactive bulldozers displaced and destroyed the meaning and beauty of the landscape, Sunday and the religious institutions associated with it have temporarily created inaction and displaced meaning. The bus, the roadside stand, and the schoolhouse lack the meaning and purpose that they possess on the other days of the week.

The stanza ends as the bus stops and “a man carrying a baby gets off” (68). The man then “climbs over a stile, and goes down through a small steep meadow / which establishes its poverty in a snowfall of daisies, / to his invisible house beside the water” (68). For the first time in the poem, man and nature intersect. Even though the man walks through the meadow, he does not interact with it. He simply goes through it in order to arrive at his house which has been inscribed into the landscape just as the “little white churches” of the third stanza were “dropped into the matted hills” (67). The man continues a pattern of disconnection and dispassion seen throughout the poem. As alluded to earlier, the fact that he is carrying a baby suggests the absence of a mother figure—a common element of Bishop’s poetry. The absence of this figure draws Bishop into the poem as she associates the evasive ideal of a home (as indicated by her use of the adjective “invisible”) with this landscape. Place and nature are cold and impersonal towards civilization and the man because they lack connection, meaning and purpose in the poem. The final stanza reinforces this idea as the different entities in the poem do not connect or interact.

The birds keep on singing, a calf bawls, the bus starts.  
The thin mist follows  
the white mutations of its dream;  
an ancient chill is rippling the dark brooks. (68)

The images refuse to intersect and interact. They suggest an amplified sense of *unhomeliness*.

The distance between civilization and nature as well as the buildings within the poem imply a deep disconnection. In the poem, humanity is simply out of place or without a home or purpose.

The singing birds, the bawling calf, and the bus starting do not affect one another. As the bus leaves the scene of the poem, the “thin mist” and “ancient chill” are ominous indicators of the effect civilization has upon nature; civilization is taking from nature an identity and imposing purpose upon it. This stanza examines how even after having an identity imposed upon it by civilization, the landscape can lack identity and purpose, reflecting Bishop’s state of *unhomeliness* and her attempts to remedy and explore it through her memories of Nova Scotia and later through the concept of *saudade*.

The final stanza of the “Brazil, January 1, 1502,” following the pattern established by Bishop in the earlier stanzas of the poem, moves its focus from the animal world to mankind and civilization in order to show humanity’s lack of purpose and place. This stanza delineates the complex relationship between man, nature, and religion working in direct contrast with the first stanza and in parallel with the third stanza. Bishop’s conceit of nature and history as a tapestry in the poem captures a moment of horror in Brazil’s history which contrasts to the natural beauty. As the Christian conquerors encounter the native women, the encounter between man and nature, as represented by the native women, ends in terror and the retreat of the women into nature, behind the “hanging fabric” of the uniting tapestry image (92). This presents a compelling juxtaposition for the reader who anticipates the horrors of rape woven into a backdrop of “big leaves, little leaves, and giant leaves, blue, blue-green, and olive” (91). While this image contrasts to the first stanza’s benign foliage and flowers, it parallels in many ways the sin attributed to nature in the animal kingdom. The sexual ritual of the lizards in the second and third stanzas parallels the sexual aggression of the Christians in the final stanza. These contrasts and parallels illuminate the reader’s understanding of nature as Bishop portrays it. Nature is not easily pinned down as good or evil or anything in between. It has multiple layers as represented

by Bishop's use of the extended, layered tapestry metaphor. Its identity, like that of Bishop, is elusive and fluid.

The imagery at the forefront of this tapestry lies in its final stanza and is rooted almost entirely in civilization—in nails and “creaking armor,” in the bowers, lute music, and “wealth and luxury” the conquistadors lust after, and finally in images of religion such as Mass and “*L’Homme armé*” (92). The product of these images is not a work of art as found in the first stanza, but rather the destruction of art as the Christians “[rip] away into the hanging fabric, / each out to catch an Indian for himself” (92). As Bishop describes the human presence in this natural tapestry, she ironizes the un-Christian acts of the Christian conquerors against the Native women using the Edenic imagery of the first stanza. The irony of the Christian conquerors causing damage and horror to the tapestry and to the landscape reveals humanity's lack of purpose and home within nature. Despite the beauty of the tapestry and the Christians' attendance at Mass, they still destroy everything around them out of desire—a characteristic generally attributed to nature, removing from nature and from the women they rape a sense of identity and purpose in order to ascribe their own senses of purpose and identity onto the landscape and the female sex. Again, the deconstruction of nature with humanity, as well as that of men with women, in the poem demonstrates Bishop's strong sense of *unhomeness*. Bishop expresses her disconnection and yearning to regain that connection by examining the relationship between nature and humanity while emphasizing the emotional distance between the two.

Using imagery, voice, and figurative language, Bishop skillfully weaves a tapestry of words and symbols to define the relationships between man, nature, and religion in her poems “Brazil, January 1, 1502” and “Cape Breton.” Bishop's definition of these relationships results from a struggle for Bishop to understand her own identity and to understand her own trauma as



she employs the idea of *saudade*. The threads and images of the poems, just as literal tapestries, are interwoven and layered creating a nuanced yet two-dimensional snapshots of trauma and history. Bishop's use of similar imagery and technique in the poems reflects a connection in her memory between the two places which resulted from the *saudade* she felt in relation to her childhood in Nova Scotia. The similarities between Bishop's portrayal of these landscapes speaks to the fact that the two places were connected in Bishop's mind and that her perceptions of Brazil were shaped by her relationship with Nova Scotia. Ultimately, one became a reflection of the other as Bishop came to terms with her sense of *unhomeliness* and as she learned to understand the pain of losing by bringing it into her present as she did when she wrote "Brazil, January 1, 1502." However, Bishop's use of the concept of *saudade* in her own work is perhaps most evident in her masterpiece "One Art."

## LOSS TRANSLATED:

### SAUDADE IN BISHOP'S "ONE ART"

Again, Elizabeth Bishop stated that *saudade* is characteristic of Brazilian culture; however, her relationship with the concept was not limited to casual observation. In fact, her own poetry, as my argument has suggested, is infused with and employs the same emotions encompassed by this single word. These feelings of loss and longing are central to Bishop's poem "One Art." The poem was written in the wake of a long series of losses for Elizabeth beginning with the death of her love Lota Soares. According to Susan McCabes's biography of Elizabeth Bishop, Lota's death is closely linked to the "topographical loss Bishop felt in repatriating to the States from Brazil: loss of person, home, family, country" (34). These losses from Bishop's personal life are reflected in the poem.

The speaker in “One Art” faces a deep internal conflict. She systematically catalogues a life’s worth of losses and assures herself that “loss is no disaster” (3). Everything in the poem from its structure to Bishop’s diction conveys this sense of *saudade* as Bishop approaches the topic of loss. The poem is written in a somewhat traditional style as a villanelle. The iambic meter and refrain lines help to convey the reflective tone of the poem.

In an attempt to convince herself that these losses are not so grave, the poem’s speaker opens the poem declaring that “the art of losing isn’t hard to master” (1). It soon becomes apparent to the reader that the speaker feels that these losses truly are great as she tries to convince herself that they are not. Following the villanelle form, Bishop uses the refrain lines in “One Art” to reaffirm throughout the poem that “[t]he art of losing isn’t hard to master” (6, 12, 18). The lines ending in “disaster” such as “I miss them, but it wasn't a disaster” (15), also provoke strong feelings of reassurance and denial as the non-refrain lines call into question the validity of the first line. As the poem echoes and assesses its first line, Bishop establishes a sense of loss, yearning, and denial reflecting the idea of *saudade*.

The speaker’s feelings of painful reflection continue as the speaker lists various personal losses and tells herself that the loss of “None of these will bring disaster” (9). The specific losses catalogued by the speaker are listed from small items such as “door keys” and an “hour badly spent” (5) to large ones like a “continent” (14) and the “you” of the poem (16). These objects fall into the same categories used to explain *saudade* including abstract concepts such as innocence and trust as well as material things such as places and people. This painful yearning reflective of *saudade* is central to the poem and its catalog of losses.

The speaker starts to list this series of personal losses in the third stanza with some abstract losses. Detailing these losses, she instructs herself, “Then practice losing farther, losing

faster: / places, and names, and where you meant/ to travel” (7-9). Bishop uses an understated tone to express the *saudade* of the speaker. Reassurance and denial are expressed as Bishop structures her list of losses from least to most painful. In this sequence, the speaker does not directly mention or describe the pain she feels, but rather denies the gravity of the pain she has experienced by using words such as “isn’t” (1) and “none” (9) as she catalogs her losses.

The speaker’s list of abstract losses is followed by a set of more concrete losses in the fourth stanza beginning with an incident from her childhood stating, “I lost my mother’s watch” (10). The loss of the watch is in fact three different losses: first, the literal loss of the watch; second, the memories of her mother attached to the watch; and third, much like the man in Cardoso’s “Cemetery of Childhood,” the speaker desires a distant sense of childhood innocence, which the speaker in Bishop’s “One Art” also lost. The speaker’s mother not only gave her the watch, but also a sense of trust, which was lost with the watch. The speaker’s desire to regain the watch, her memories, and her missing childhood innocence is painful and reflects the different aspects of the Portuguese concept of *saudade*.

The speaker’s catalog of literal losses continues as the speaker remembers her “three loved houses” (11), “two cities” (13), “some realms [she] owned, two rivers, [and] a continent” (14). Upon losing these houses, cities, and rivers, the speaker of the poem loses pieces of her personal and cultural identity. The speaker experiences the pangs of *saudade* not only for the places and possessions she has lost, but also these pieces of herself.

The same can be said of the last stanza. With the loss of this loved one, the speaker also loses an important relationship. In much the same way as Andrade’s “The Table” the speaker feels *saudade* for the loss of the more abstract things directly associated with her loved one. In

the case of “One Art,” this includes the loved one’s gestures and mannerisms such as her “joking voice” (16).

The last lines tie the rest of the poem together and serve as a resolution declaring, “It’s evident/ the art of losing’s not hard to master/ though it may look like (Write it!) like disaster” (17-19). These lines exemplify *saudade*. They extend the sense of denial, reflection, and reassurance expressed in the first stanza and the refrain lines of the poem, preserving the tone of painful, understated loss evoked by the speaker’s catalog of losses. All of these elements are representative of “the characteristic Brazilian longing or nostalgia” Bishop described in the introduction to the anthology of Brazilian poetry she helped to translate (xviii).

The time that Bishop spent in Brazil resulted in more than just an admiration for its culture, natural beauty, and language. The experiences she had and the knowledge she gained, whether consciously or unconsciously, led to the incorporation of ideas such as *saudade* into the body of her work. “One Art” contains the same feelings of loss and pain at the center of this word. The poem examines both the abstract and more literal senses of the word, which range from losses of innocence and identity to the desire to regain distant people, places or things. “One Art” also encompasses the meaning of the word *saudade* in its structure and tone. In examining this concept in the context of Bishop’s life, her work as a translator, and in her own writings, it becomes clear that *saudade* has particular significance in understanding the influence of Brazilian culture upon her poetry and the evolution of her perception of loss.

## CONCLUSION:

By examining Elizabeth Bishop’s understanding of the concept of *saudade* as well as its significance in her life and her work, we gain a greater understanding of the poet’s cultural

identity. Bishop cannot simply be labeled “A Great American Poet,” for, in many ways, one can contend that she is Canadian and Brazilian also. This research on *saudade*, one of many important aspects of Brazilian culture, furthers our understanding of the poet’s cross-cultural identity and its implications upon her work.

Clearly, Bishop understood this idea and found it in much of the literature she read and translated. Bishop’s poetry, correspondence, and other writings indicate the strength and emotion of the concept as well as Bishop’s affinity for the concept. Whether consciously or unconsciously, the poet incorporated this idea into her identity and her work. The importance of this concept demonstrates not only the significance and complexity of Bishop’s cultural identity. It also indicates the impact that Brazilian culture had upon the poet’s work.

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## APPENDICES:

### APPENDIX A: DEFINITIONS OF SAUDADE

Young, Robin (Times of London) defined *saudade* as:

- “Portuguese for a certain type of longing”

The Oxford English Dictionary defines *saudade* as:

- “Longing, melancholy, nostalgia, as a supposed characteristic of the Portuguese or Brazilian temperament.”
- “Vague and constant desire for something that does not and probably cannot exist, for something other than the present, a turning towards the past or towards the future; not an active discontent or poignant sadness but an indolent dreaming wistfulness.”
- “[Y]earning for something so indefinite as to be indefinable: an unrestrained indulgence in yearning.”

The Pequeno dicionario brasileiro da lingua portuguesa defines the concept as:

- “A sad and understated remembrance of persons or things which are distant or lost accompanied by the desire to see or regain them.”
- “A heavy sentiment resulting from the absence of a loved one.” (My translations).

Bishop herself addressed and used the word a number of times:

- “[T]he characteristic Brazilian longing or nostalgia,” which she “strongly associates with homesickness” stating that this feeling “appears obsessively” in Brazilian poetry from the romantic period on (*An Anthology of 20th Century Brazilian Poetry* xviii).
- “...a very nice word that seems to include all the sentiments of missing friends in one” (Dec. 10, 1954).
- “...*saudade* (that overworked word)” (Dec. 1958).
- Bishop regularly closed her letters to friends and family “abraços e *saudades*” or roughly translated “with hugs and fond memories” (Millier 538).

## APPENDIX B: A TIMELINE OF DISPLACEMENTS

1911–Bishop born in Worcester , MA. Loses father (William) eight months later to Bright’s

Disease.

1915–Moves from Boston to Great Village, Nova Scotia.

1916–Mother (Gertrude) committed; Bishop left in care of maternal grandparents in Great

Village. Halifax Explosion.

1917–Sent to live with paternal grandparents in Worcester.

1918–Sent to live with aunt in Revere, MA.

1934–Mother dies in sanitarium.

1935-37–Travels throughout Europe.

1938-48–Lives intermittently in Key West and New York with trips to Nova Scotia, Maine, and

Washington, D.C.

1949-50–Serves as poetry consultant to Library of Congress in Washington.

1952-67–Travels to Rio de Janeiro and stays following hospitalization.

1967–Lota de Macedo Soares, lover of 15 years, commits suicide

1969-1971–Bishop relocates to Ouro Preto.

1971-1979–Returns to the US teaching at a number of universities.

1977–A string of colleagues and fellow poets die including Lowell.

1979–Dies as a result of a cerebral aneurism.

Appendix C: Photos



Figure 1: The Bishop House, Great Village, NS



Figure 2: The Kitchen of the Bishop House



Figure 3: Bishop's Bedroom in Great Village



Figure 4: The Bulmer Family Bible



Figure 5: A Side View

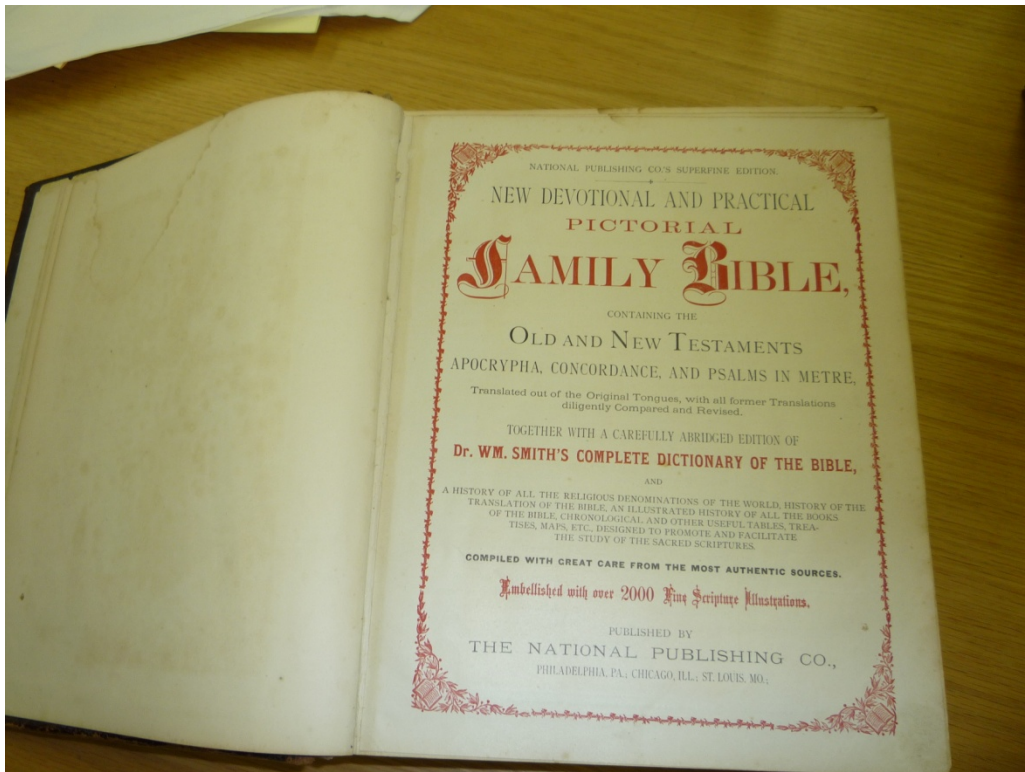


Figure 6: The Cover Page

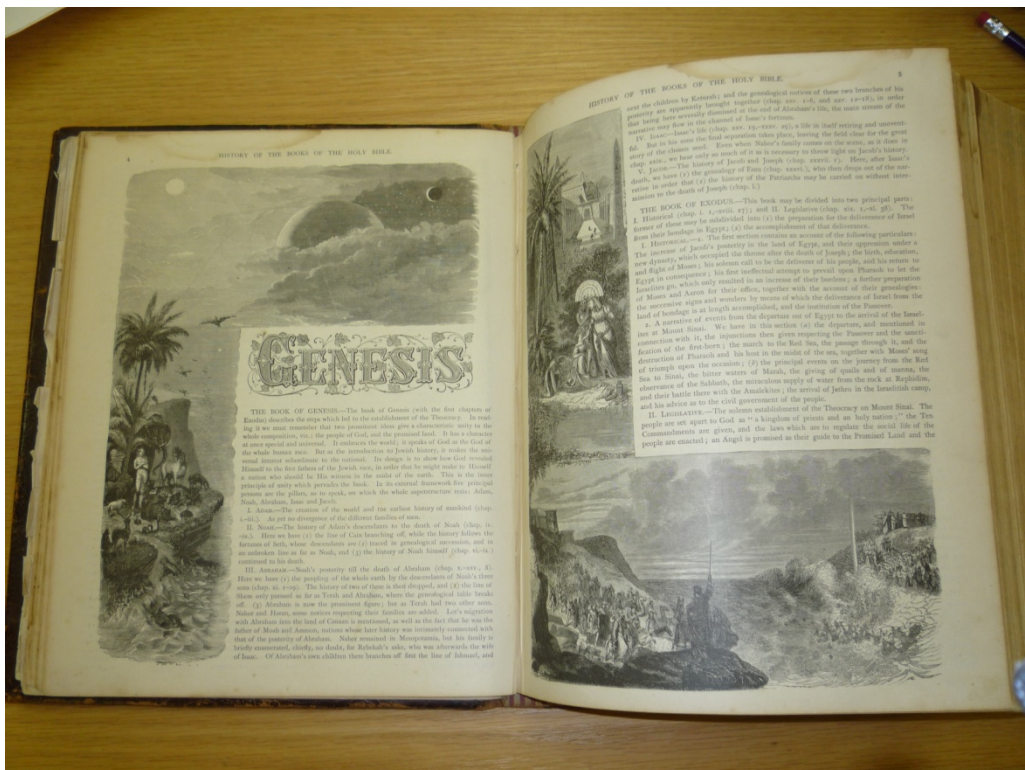


Figure 7: The Book of Genesis

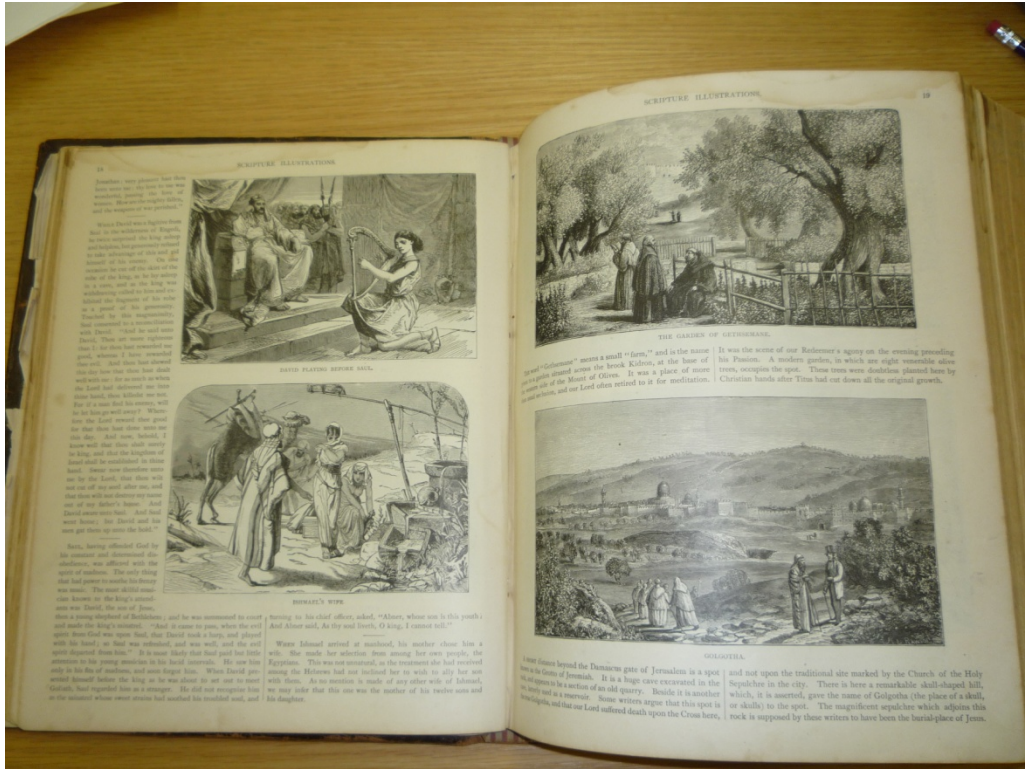


Figure 8: Old Testament Illustrations

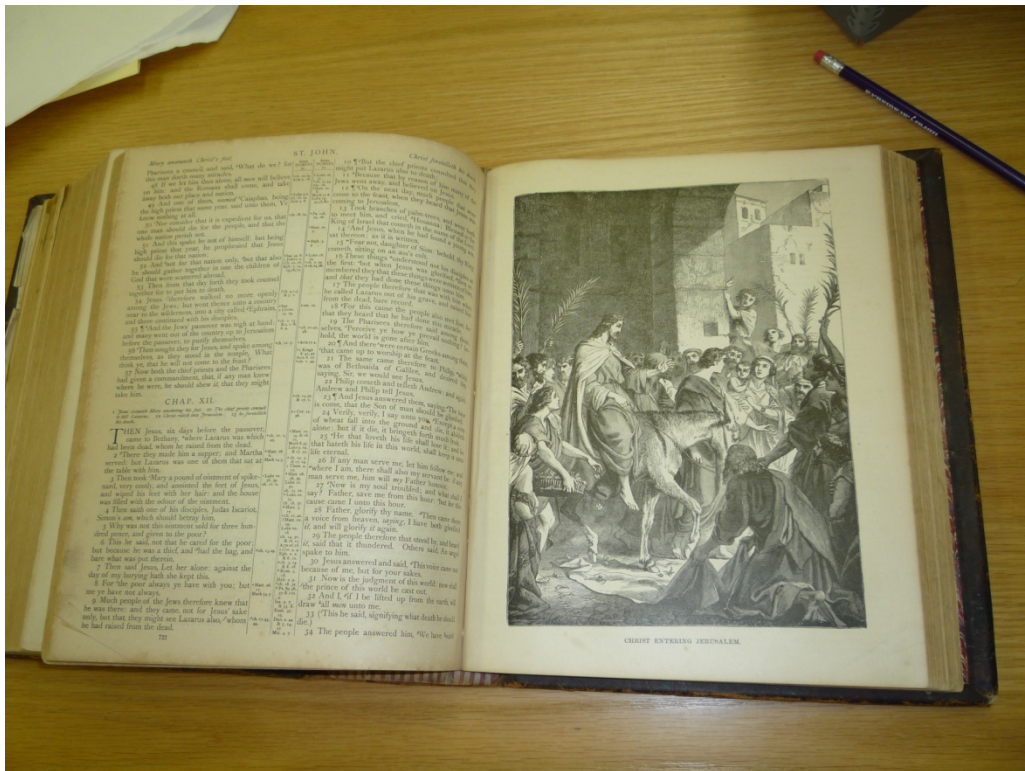


Figure 9: New Testament Illustration

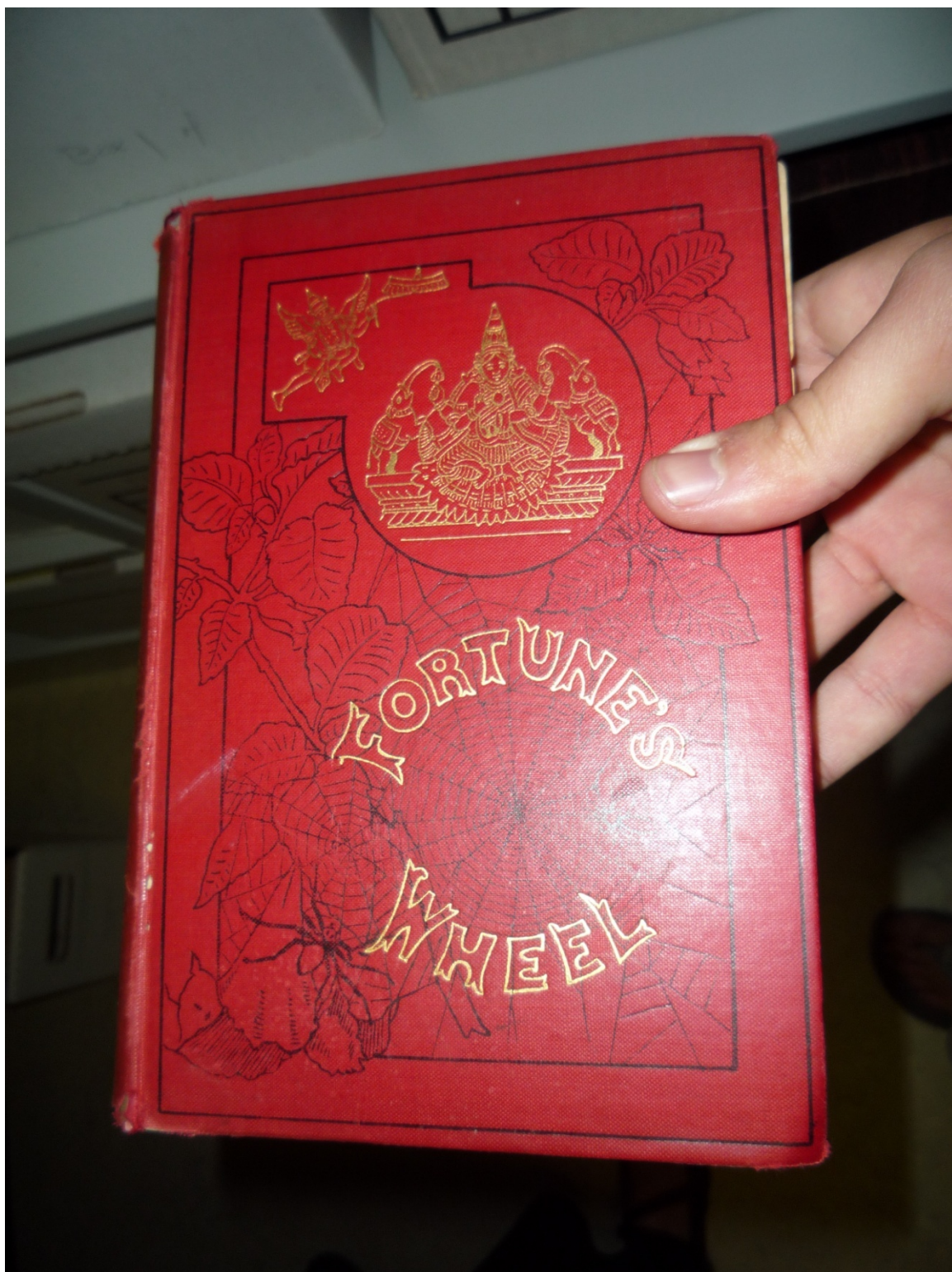


Figure 10: A copy of *Fortune's Wheel* sent by J. Robert Hutchinson to His Mother



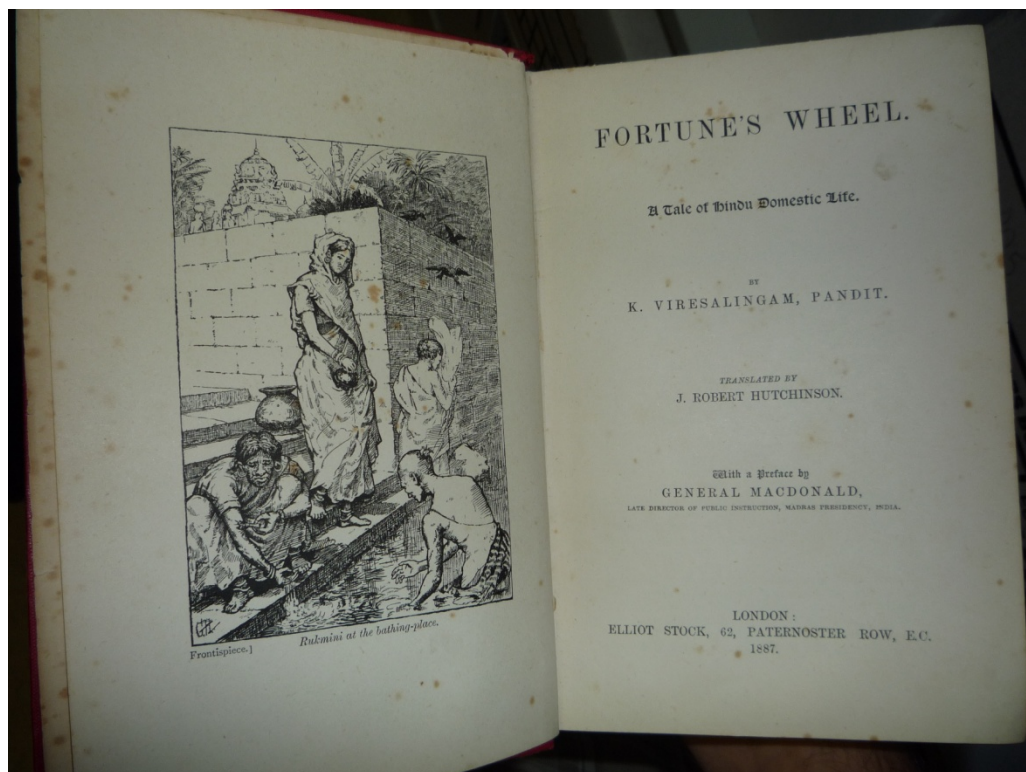


Figure 11: The Cover Page



Figure 12: A Side View



Figure 13: The Halifax Explosion Exhibit at The Maritime Museum in Halifax, Nova Scotia



Figure 14: Debris from The Halifax Explosion. A Watch Stopped at the Moment of the Explosion



Figure 15: A painting by George Hutchinson



Figure 16: An Autograph Book Signed with an Illustration by George Hutchinson



Figure 17: A Painting by Maude Bulmer Shepherdson



Figure 18: Map of Nova Scotia (courtesy Google Maps)



Figure 19: Maps of Brazil (courtesy Google Maps)



Figure 20: Cape Breton Island, Nova Scotia, Canada



Figure 21: Ouro Preto, Minas Gerais, Brazil

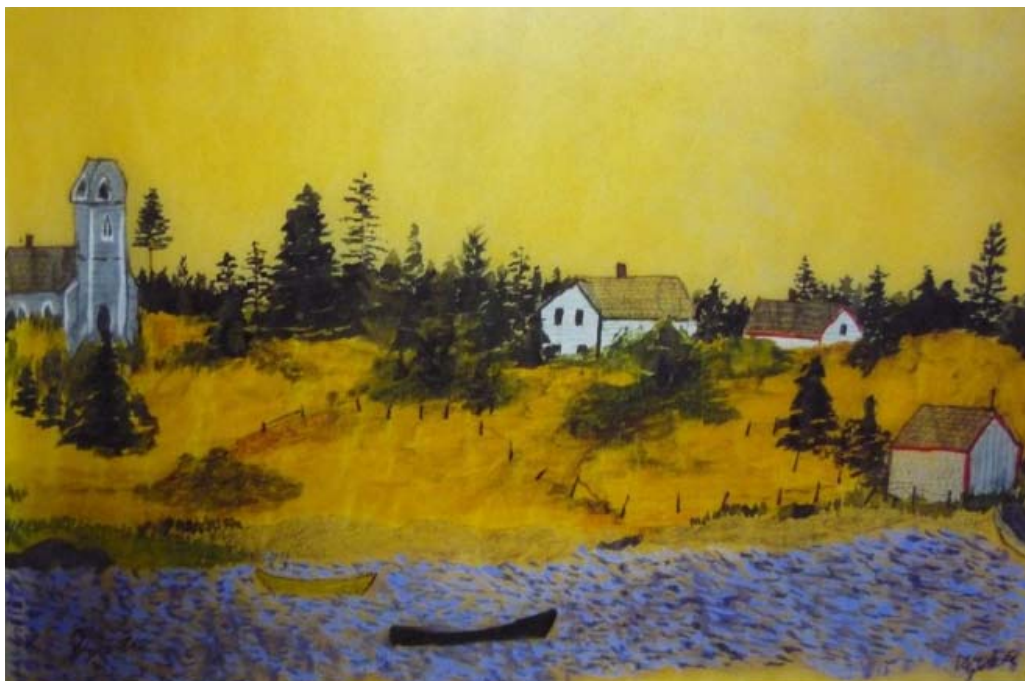


Figure 22: Bishop's Painting "Nova Scotia Landscape" from *Exchanging Hats*



Figure 23: : Bishop's Painting "Brazilian Landscape" from *Exchanging Hats*

## APPENDIX D: POSTER PRESENTATION OF RESEARCH



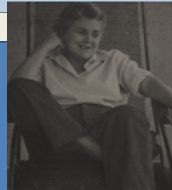
# LOSS TRANSLATED: SAUDADE IN THE WORK OF ELIZABETH BISHOP

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## Abstract

In 1954, former U.S. poet laureate Elizabeth Bishop wrote in a letter from Brazil to Robert Lowell, a dear friend and fellow poet: "With much love and *saudades* as they say here, a very nice word that seems to include all the sentiments of missing friends in one." This insightful observation illuminates a concept central to Brazilian culture which has been designated one of the most difficult words to translate. Later, Bishop defined the idea as "the characteristic Brazilian longing or nostalgia," which she "strongly associates with homesickness." Bishop's fascination with the concept, I argue, is more than that of a distant cultural observer. Her understanding of *saudade* completely changed her own understanding of loss, home and even Bishop's own art. This is evident, not only in her letters to Lowell, but also in her own poems and short stories about Brazil and her childhood in Nova Scotia. By understanding the role of *saudade* in the work of Elizabeth Bishop, we are able to comprehend not only the importance of this Portuguese concept in her own work but also the complexity of the poet's cultural identity.



## Defining and Applying Saudade

The goal of this study was to account for Elizabeth Bishop's influx of writings on Nova Scotia upon arriving in Brazil. This study first explains the idea of *saudade* and how Bishop understood it, then explains why and how these two places are linked in the poet's life and work. Research was conducted using primary and secondary materials in addition to field study and archival materials in Canada.

The Oxford English Dictionary's defines *saudade* as:

- "Longing, melancholy, nostalgia, as a supposed characteristic of the Portuguese or Brazilian temperament."
- "Vague and constant desire for something that does not and probably cannot exist, for something other than the present, a turning towards the past or towards the future; not an active discontent or poignant sadness but an indolent dreaming wistfulness."
- "[Y]earning for something so indefinite as to be indefinable: an unrestrained indulgence in yearning."



The Bishop House, Great Village, NS

Priberam, an online dictionary of the Portuguese language, defines the concept as:

- "A sad and understated remembrance of persons or things which are distant or lost accompanied by the desire to see or regain them."
- "A heavy sentiment resulting from the absence of a loved one." (My translations).

Bishop herself addressed and used the word a number times:

- "[T]he characteristic Brazilian longing or nostalgia," which she "strongly associates with homesickness" stating that this feeling "appears obsessively" in Brazilian poetry from the romantic period on (*An Anthology of 20th Century Brazilian Poetry* xviii).
- "...a very nice word that seems to include all the sentiments of missing friends in one" (Dec. 10, 1954).
- "...saudade (that overworked word)" (Dec. 1958).
- Bishop regularly closed her letters to friends and family "abraços e saudades" or roughly translated "with hugs and fond memories" (Millier 538).



Bishop with Lowell in Brazil

Clearly, Bishop understood this idea and found it in much of the literature she read and translated. These passages indicate the strength and emotion of the concept as well as Bishop's affinity for the concept. Whether consciously or unconsciously, the poet incorporated this idea into her identity and her work.

Aside from these instances, Bishop's identification with *saudade* is evident in:

- A pattern of loss and an evasive sense of home and identity in the poet's life.
- Geographical, cultural, and psychological, connections between Nova Scotia and Brazil.
- Bishop's treatment of related themes in her work such as travel, home, loss, memory, and art.

## Parallels between Brazil and Nova Scotia in the poetry of Bishop

Upon Bishop's arrival in Brazil in 1952, Bishop's she began writing a number of poems and short stories about Nova Scotia. This work reflects her familiarity with the concept of *saudade*. Bishop's understanding of the concept enabled her to better understand her life of loss and displacement. Ultimately, this familiarity with *saudade* allowed Bishop to reconcile and reconnect with her past in Nova Scotia—one of the few places Bishop ever truly considered "home."

### Physical/Geographical:

- Green, forested landscapes
- Mountains
- Fog and coastline; rainy, wet climates



Cape Breton Island, NS



Ouro Preto, Brazil

### Cultural:

- Rural lifestyles and villages imposed upon these forested landscapes as seen in Bishop's paintings of these landscapes. See also the poems "Sestina" and "Santarém."
- Similar industries such as mining, fishing as in "Cape Breton" and "At the Fishhouses."
- Bishop pays careful attention to crafts (which she considers rural art forms) such as blacksmithing



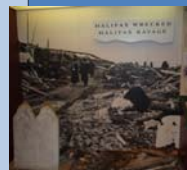
"Nova Scotia Landscape"



"Brazilian Landscape"

### Familial and Psychological:

- Aware of her family history, Bishop made several connections to her ancestors' travels and her own while in Brazil. One of her great uncles translated an Indian coming of age novel while living as a missionary in India. Bishop did the same thing nearly a century later upon arriving in Brazil when she translated *The Diary of 'Helena Morley'*, a popular Brazilian coming of age novel.
- Explosions and loud sounds permeate Bishop's work s about Brazil and Nova Scotia such as "Crusoe in England" and "In the Village." Bishop used the concept of *saudade* to reconcile with the loss of the mother and the screams and the Halifax Explosion which almost killed her mother.



Images of the Halifax Explosion from the city's Maritime Museum

### Textual Treatment:

- Bishop translated works that reminded her about rural Nova Scotia and/or explored the idea of *saudade* (a common feature of Brazilian poetry). Examples include *Minha Vida de Menina*, Drummond de Andrade's "A Mesa," and Cardozo's "Cemitério da Infância."
- She treats the two places similarly in her own work. Bishop's "Brazil, January 1, 1502" and "Cape Breton" both:
  - Use images of cloth to describe the landscapes of Nova Scotia and Brazil.
  - Begin by focusing on nature and end focusing on human trauma.



## Applying Saudade to "One Art"

Bishop's "One Art" is a meditation on the idea of loss and its magnitude. In the poem, Bishop discreetly catalogues a set of losses taken from her own life and conveys the pain and understatement associated with the concept of *saudade* including the losses of her mother, her senses of innocence and home, and a lover.



Bishop's Studio at Samambaia

### One Art

The art of losing isn't hard to master;  
so many things seem filled with the intent  
to be lost that their loss is no disaster.

Loss something every day. Accept the fluster  
of lost door keys, the hour badly spent.  
The art of losing isn't hard to master.

Then practice losing farther, losing faster:  
places, and names, and where it was you meant  
to travel. None of these will bring disaster.

I lost my mother's watch. And look! my last, or  
next-to-last, of three loved houses went.  
The art of losing isn't hard to master.

I lost two cities, lovely ones. And, vaster,  
some realms I owned, two rivers, a continent.  
I miss them, but it wasn't a disaster.

--Even losing you (the joking voice, a gesture  
I love) I shan't have lied. It's evident  
the art of losing's not too hard to master  
though it may look like (*Write it!*) like disaster.

## Conclusion:

By examining Elizabeth Bishop's understanding of the concept of *saudade* as well as its significance in her life and her work, we gain a greater understanding of the poet's cultural identity. Elizabeth Bishop cannot simply be labeled "A Great American Poet," for, in many ways, one can contend that she is Canadian and Brazilian also. This research furthers our understanding of cross-cultural identity and has implications on topics ranging from education to immigration.

Additional support provided by:

