

Chapter One

Elizabeth Bishop, Travel and Transgression

Every continent has its own great spirit of place.
Every people is polarized in some particular
locality, which is home, the homeland. Different
places on the face of the earth have different vital
effluence, different vibration, different chemical
exhalation, different polarity with different stars:
call it what you like. But the spirit of place is a
great vitality.¹

D. H. Lawrence, *Studies in Classic American Literature*

In my introduction, I propose to investigate into Bishop's writing from her position as a traveler, who projects an objective and non-judgmental consciousness to highlight the significant subject of Other in her works. In so doing, her poems are profoundly fraught with implicit ideologies of rebellion and transgression against monolithic authority and rigid hierarchy; her purpose is not to eradicate the dignity and status of Other, but to endorse and affirm the subjectivity of Other. Thus, we realize that Bishop as a traveler doesn't attempt to impose the egoistic judgments on the location where she reaches. Since traveling can enable us to move beyond the boundary freely, Caren Kaplan in her *Questions of Travel* provides us with a perspective to think about the modernist form of exile and expatriatism which fall into the category of modernism displacement.² She claims the modernism form of

¹ Lawrence, D.H.. "The Spirit of Place." *Studies in Classic American Literature*. Ed. Ezra Greer, Lindeth Vasey and Jogn Worthen. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003. 7-55.

² In *Questions of Travel*, Caren Kaplan quotes from Bishop's "One Art" and examines Bishop's rootless traveler identity. In this book she further applies the metaphors of travel to find its connections with the blurring of differences and identities based on genders, races, and nations...etc. She claims these identities cling to us and make us who we are.

displacement can be regarded as a means to free itself from any political and historical agendas and specificities “ in order to generate aesthetic categories and ahistorical values.” Kaplan proposes that this form of displacement is more concerned about “aesthetic gain” (28). Accordingly, Bishop herself falls into the category of modernism form of exile because she realizes the aesthetic of being a conscious traveler whose main concern of engaging with traveling doesn’t originate from any political enforcement, but personal willingness and fulfillment.

Since Bishop’s traveling originates from a personal choice which accounts for her expectations towards a new location, the correlation between the act of travel and the discovery of a new place can be inextricably interactive. As a traveler ventures to a new location, the act of traveling can have a prominent impact on shaping the travelers’ vision and attitude. In “ State of Becoming,” Piaras Mac Éinrí points out that the dealing with otherness, for example in the act of traveling, can help us to recognize “ the self in the other and the other in the self.”³ He further comments that none of us can be “ entirely fixed in our subjectivity.” As we can see, the traveling location possesses an extreme power to influence our way of perceiving. To explicate the prevalent impact of traveling on people’s mind and sensation, Lionel Cantu also quotes Hector Manuel Romeo’s perspective on tourism:

Tourism has its place, a place that is characterized by its diversification, for it is indifferent to nothing and affects all, the local as much as the foreign....And that does not refer only to foreign tourism, those visitors from afar who discover new realities, even as they offer them. (154)

In this sense, through traveling a traveler like Bishop can experience and get more exposed to excessive experiences of exoticism and displacement inasmuch as she

³ Éinrí, Piaras Ma. “ States of Becoming: Is there a ‘here’ here and a ‘there’ there? ” Available at < <http://migration.ucc.ie/statesofbecoming.htm> >. In this article, the writer reflects on the issues of displacement, a sense of belonging and identity.

retains the capacity to traverse the border and boundary. While traveling, travelers can also cross the borders of restrictions. Cantu also argues that traveling can also be regarded as “a response to one’s marginality.” He further advocates that homosexuals, for example, can temporarily “escape their marginalized status by traveling to other cities and countries” (161).⁴ Explicitly, Cantu argues traveling can help those sexual or ideological dissidents to escape the constraints of marginality at home. I find Cantu’s argument perfectly applies to Bishop’s identity as a traveler, for she is a lesbian and an ideological transgressor whose traveling can be seen as an aesthetic pursuit of her art as well as an escape from the oppression and restriction at home. Different from those colonists whose objectives of voyages are primarily aiming at subjugating and emasculating the diversity and difference within their new destination, travelers journey to other cities and countries to temporarily escape their “marginalized” status and take in new elements of sensation.

In this process, travelers reach for the dynamics of tourism and diverse locations, which liberalize their mindscape and help them discard oppressive restrictions. To understand the different position between being a traveler and colonist, we can have insight into the correlation between otherness and colonialism in terms of what Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak has attempted to account for concerning otherness in relation to colonialism. Spivak comments on, “the remotely orchestrated, far-flung and heterogeneous project to constitute the colonial subject as Other. This project is also the asymmetrical obliterating of the trace of that Other in its precarious subjectivity” (266).⁵ Instead of being a colonist who aspires for the thrill of

⁴ In “De Ambiente: Queer Tourism and the Shifting Boundaries of Mexican Male Sexualities,” Lionel Cantu examines the rise of gay and lesbian tourism in Mexico where many homosexual foreigners have come to seek new sensations. The dynamics and fascination of Mexican queer tourism provides foreign tourists with its accessibility.

⁵ Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*. Cambridge Mass: Harvard University Press, 1999.

dominance, Bishop expresses herself as a liberal-minded traveler who embraces and celebrates diversity and shows enthusiasm for taking in the limitless vision and knowledge provided by heterogeneous cultures. Before we plunge into her work, it is more important for us to initially have a general understanding of Bishop's biography, which I believe has urged Bishop to step on the road of personal search and journey.

Bishop's childhood and Loss

During her life, Elizabeth Bishop produced a huge number of letters and poems, which help us to get acquainted with the poet and her captivating forms of artistic expression. To honor this writer of eminent distinction, Robert Lowell once proclaimed, "she will be recognized as not only one of the best, but also one of the most prolific writer of our century." However, Bishop's life seems not as fortunate as her artistic achievement has been recognized; early in her life she became an orphan. In *One Art*, Robert Giroux offers us insight into Bishop's biography which helps us to grasp the poet's indelible trauma and her secret subjectivity. When she was nearly eight months old, her father died. Unable to accept the debilitating news, Bishop's mother was grieved and devastated by the shock of her husband's sudden departure and failed to recover her mental health; she was later sent to an asylum and eventually died there. After five, Bishop never saw her mother again (5~11).⁶ At the early stage of Bishop's life, the family was traumatized by the gloomy and melancholic atmosphere of sadness and loss because of these tragedies. The echo of the past grief reverberated in her mind even after she had grown up.

While composing "In the Village," Bishop draws on the description of her mother's mental disease, which correspondingly immerses her into the whirl of grief. Right here, we get a glimpse of how trauma maneuvers to intervene her life,

⁶ Bishop, Elizabeth. *One Art: Letters*. Ed. Robert Giroux. New York: Noonday Press, 1995.

intermingling past and present; trauma, as a demon deeply rooted in her heart, refuses to be exorcised:

A scream, the echo of a scream, hangs over that Nova Scotian village. No one hears it; it hangs there forever, a slight stain in those pure blue skies, skies that travelers compare to those of Switzerland, too dark, too blue, so that they seem to keep on darkening a little more around the horizon—or is it around the rims of the eyes?—the color of the cloud of bloom on the elm trees, the violet on the fields of oats; something darkening over the woods and waters as well as the sky. The scream hang like that, unheard, in memory—in the past, in the present, and those years between. It was not even loud to begin with, perhaps. It just came to live there, forever—not loud, just alive forever. Its pitch would be the pitch of my village. (251)

Mother's scream, the metaphor for inescapable insanity, suggests a home wherein a sense of belonging and safety are utterly devastated. Home is never a heart-warming place full of love, affection and tenderness; it is struck by a series of catastrophic events, torn into shatters and pieces.

Bishop was brought up by her grandmother for a while in Nova Scotia. Some of her poems will provide us with insight into her childhood life and experience. Evidently, the loss of childhood has turned into a nightmare which leaves scars and fears inside her heart; Bishop said, “ I used to ask my Grandmother, when I said goodbye[for school], to promise me not to die before I came home ” (*One Art*, 12). If the fear of loss has incarnated itself into a heart-wrenching trauma motivating Bishop to search for her home where she never feels complete and keeps aspiring for, Bishop's association with traveling and the question of belonging must reveal her subconscious motive to regard traveling as a method to acquire a sense of belonging.

Travel thus becomes a procedure for Bishop to process and negotiate with her feeling of loss, which I will focus on analyzing and interpreting in upcoming poems. Once plagued by anxiety and near-hysteria, Bishop confides to her friend, “I get myself into a fine state of discouragement and panic, sleeplessness, nightmare, etc.—and why, I don’t really know...When I went to the hospital for five days I had not been drinking so much, but I was afraid I was going to ...I am exactly the age now at which my father died, which also might have something to do with it” (*One Art*, xiii). Obviously, the childhood loss incarnates itself into a vampire which Bishop can’t get out of her mind.

As we can see from the previous information regarding Bishop’s childhood loss, the poet has been haunted by the dreadful sense of loss, which turns out to be an inerasable monster in mind. However, I argue traveling becomes a part of antidote to help Bishop cope with the sense of loss, which enables her to let go of the pain and trauma in life. In “One Art,” the poet describes how she has gone through the sense of loss by means of travel:

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 two cities, lovely ones. And, vaster,
Some realms I owned, two rivers, a continent.
I miss them, but it wasn’t a disaster. (178)

In this poem, the poet experiences her own epiphany concerning the issue of loss as she utters, “The art of losing isn’t too hard to master.” She gives us many examples to support the fact that explains how she has come to master the art of losing. And travel also plays an important role to bring forth her sense of understanding towards the

issue of loss. She says when you travel, you practice “losing farther, losing faster.” According to the poet, we experience loss as a traveler because we may probably experience losing “places, and names” as we physically leave a traveling spot. As the traveler like Bishop arrives in a new place, this new place becomes a part of her life, memory and understanding of the world. That is why she assumes that she experiences loss as she has to leave those places. In this sense, this traveler is always crossing the border and boundary, and she simultaneously experiences ownership of a place where she reaches and loss of a place where she has to depart. Therefore, she claims she loses “two cities”, “vaster realms” “two rivers” and “a continent”. In a sense, travel has an impact on how the poet has mastered “the art of losing.” Since travel is “the negotiation not of familiar spaces, but of strange places” (*Space and Place*, xiv),⁷ the unfamiliar places contain curing effect on the poet who intends to find a sense of belonging through the act of traveling across the borderland. As the poet has proposed to question herself in this very poem, “Should we have stayed at home, whenever that may be?” (94), we are led to believe that the poet’s definition of home can never be found in one single place, but is a fantasy which has maximized the extension of home to include the world as a wonderland.

Finally, as we speak of loss in Bishop’s life, we can never ignore one of the greatest losses in her life—Maria Carlota Costellat de Macedo Soares (Lota). On her journey to Brazil, Bishop comes to have an intimate relationship with Lota who has taken care of her materially and dedicated love and care to her mentally, which enable Bishop to really acquire a sense of stability, security and real home. Thus, in this stage of life, Bishop boldly looks back on her childhood trauma and loss by writing about

⁷ Carter, Erica, James Donald, and Judith Squires, eds. *Space and Place: Theories of Identity and Location*. London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1993.

her mother's insanity and her childhood time in Great Village. In addition to her childhood, poems concerning the Brazilian theme and her love addressed to Lota follow at this period of time. However, her lesbian relationship with Lota doesn't bloom into a happy ending but ends in tragedy; Lota commits suicide due to depression. While recalling her lifetime, Bishop describes Lota as the one who really gives her a sense of home and the years in Brazil with Lota as the happiest period of her life.

The reason why I tackle Bishop's life and loss is to delve into the correlation between Bishop's haunted sense of loss and her embarking on the task of traveling. Traveling, I believe, is Bishop's legacy of finding her lost self and to exorcise the pain and suffering along all the way; in my thesis, the theme of "transgression" has played a prominent role in shaping how I view Bishop's poems. Here the theme of transgression will be defined as the traveler's alternative way of perceiving, which goes beyond the surface of phenomena and provides readers with a new horizon of looking at things. In a sense the traveler not only transgresses the geographical restrictions of border and boundary physically, but also transgresses the ideological conventions mentally. Therefore, in the first chapter, I primarily focus on analyzing Bishop's poems regarding childhood loss and travel. Travel is one major component in her poems dealing with my major emphasis on the theme of transgression inasmuch as traveling can be regarded as a method to help the traveler to escape from the world of confinement and marginality.

Trauma and Related Childhood Poetry

First of all, it is essential to realize the impact of loss and trauma on Bishop's mind as we try to uncover the excruciating agony buried in Bishop's childhood and its impact on her creativity. Working on linking trauma with ghosts, Cathy Caruth asserts

that the trauma sufferers are “haunted” or “possessed” by images and events that they have missed as experiences. Therefore, “a trauma is violently imposed and is always reimposing itself”(2~3). Accordingly, trauma can become an undercurrent lurking beneath the shadow of the victim’s psyche, and forces psyche to reorganize itself. It is a pain which is hardly to be remembered, but also impossible to be forgotten. Caruth finally concludes, “A trauma is never...one’s own”(“Unclaimed Experience” 192). To support Caruth’s argument, Grubrich-Smitis explains that patients of trauma “literally lived in a double reality” (302). Therefore, trauma possibly forces characters to search for a feasible reconciliation between their divided selves. For example, many marvelously literary works have tended to engage their major theme with the act of searching and traveling; intriguingly, behind this surface arrangement trauma has always functioned as the catalyst precipitating the story characters to take on the task of searching.

To investigate into the issue of trauma, I will employ Toni Morrison’s monumental works related to the theme of trauma and search to explicate the correlation between trauma and searching. In *Beloved*, for example, the excruciating agony of the traumatic past can’t be eliminated from Sethe’s mind; the guilt of infanticide is repressed, which can be accessible only indirectly. Therefore, the inerasable trauma concretizes itself as Beloved, the baby ghost, who haunts and forces Sethe to confront the unspeakable and repressed pain buried inside secretly. In addition, Beloved’s leave and return also ignite Sethe’s search, not only physically searching for Beloved but mentally searching back in time to negotiate the repressed trauma. In another of Morrison’s acclaimed novel, *Song of Solomon*, suffering and anguish also originate from the traumatic past. Parental conflicts bring forth family violence. Macon’s tragic childhood memory makes him feel like “the outside, the

propertyless, landless wanderer” (27).⁸ Unfortunately, Macon repeats the tragedy of his suffering by inflicting violence on this family. In a deeper sense we figure out all homeless feelings come from traumatized past, which will never be eliminated successfully and will resurface by chance. All these absurd perversities surrounding family history pushes Milkman to leave, to escape, and to free himself from the fetters and burdens of “the Dead family”. In so doing, Milkman’s flight of travel can also be interpreted as a reaction against his homeless feelings, which come from a traumatized family. Through Milkman’s flight, Milkman not only searches for his own identity, but accidentally finds the thread to his family ancestry.

From these previous examples, we can see trauma has a connection with the act of search. In *Song of Solomon*, trauma even initiates the act of travel to take on the search for identity. Using these examples to support my basis that argues trauma can be regarded as one of the main factor motivating Bishop to travel and to find her “home,” I will now proceed to analyze Bishop’s poems, which draw heavily on the traumatic experiences of the past. The fragmented traces of Bishop’s childhood sorrow can be found in many of Bishop’s poems. More significantly, Bishop didn’t write these poems about tracing back to her traumatized childhood until she traveled to Brazil. From this recognition, we wonder although Brazil serves as an escape for her to leave the unhappy memory of Nova Scotia and Massachusetts behind, Brazil also functions to compel her to examine and look back on her childhood sorrow. Based on Steve Gould Axelrod’s analysis, “In Brazil, Bishop began to construct, for virtually the first time, literary texts that evoked scenes from her Nova Scotia past. Her physical journey south initiated a parallel aesthetic journey north” (“Elizabeth Bishop: Nova Scotia in Brazil” 279). Therefore, taking advantage of travel, she is empowered to confront her trauma.

⁸ Morrison, Toni. *Song of Solomon*. New York: Plume, 1987.

In her poem “Sestina,” Bishop’s fragmented childhood identity can be illuminated for understanding as I assume trauma as the inevitable factor leading this female sojourner to expatriate herself from her homeland, away from a place full of childhood sorrow:

September rain falls on the house.

In the failing light, the old grandmother

sits in the kitchen with the child

beside the Little Marvel Stove,

reading the jokes from the almanac,

laughing and talking to hide her tears.

She thinks that her equinoctial tears

and the rain that beats on the roof of the house

were both foretold by the almanac,

but only known to a grandmother.

The iron kettle sings on the stove.

She cuts some bread and says to the child,

It's *time for tea now*; but the child

is watching the teakettle's small hard tears

dance like mad on the hot black stove,

the way the rain must dance on the house.

Tidying up, the old grandmother

hangs up the clever almanac

on its string. Birdlike, the almanac

hovers half open above the child,
hovers above the old grandmother
and her teacup full of dark brown tears.
She shivers and says she thinks the house
feels chilly, and puts more wood in the stove.

The poem starts with the air of melancholy and depression as we seem to be able to feel the rhythm of the dropping rains falling down on the house roof. “The failing light” ushers in the scene of the grandmother and child surrounded by a dark secret. The grandmother seemingly endeavors to liven the atmosphere by reading “the jokes.” However, beneath the make-believe laughter and brightness, we know they share an unspeakable and heart-breaking secret. Instead of being the beacon lighting up the darkness, “the jokes” make readers empathize with the deep anguish they have repressed intentionally.

The grandmother seems not the only one who knows the sorrow; actually everything seems to feel the sorrow, vibrating with the dropping tears. We sense “the almanac,” “the teakettle,” and “the rain” are all impressively sensible as if they knew the sad secret hidden inside the family. While looking at the teakettle, the child seems to penetrate into the secret of sadness which her grandmother tries to hide. She sees the “small hard tears” of the teakettle dancing madly, echoing with the madness of the rain outside. The sorrow and sadness are compressed into the existence of surrounding things, which are all driven to the degree of madness. The grandmother hangs up the almanac, which seems to shed tears simultaneously when the grandmother’s teacup is full of “dark brown tears.” This stanza finally ends with the grandmother’s “shiver”, and we seem to feel the coldness of the house. Evidently, the sadness gives birth to madness, which finally leads to the lifelessness and coldness of the family atmosphere and human hearts.

In the following stanza, we will see much more contrast between the make-believe happiness and the real, heart-chilly sorrow buried beneath the surface. It is worth pointing out that all the materials reflect the true emotion and state of the mind of the grandmother and the child even though the grandmother tries to pretend as if nothing happened:

It was to be, says the Marvel Stove.

I know what I know, says the almanac.

With crayons the child draws a rigid house
and a winding pathway. Then the child
puts in a man with buttons like tears
and shows it proudly to the grandmother.

But secretly, while the grandmother
busies herself about the stove,
the little moons fall down like tears
from between the pages of the almanac
into the flower bed the child
has carefully placed in the front of the house.

Time to plant tears, says the almanac.

The grandmother sings to the marvelous stove
and the child draws another inscrutable house.

Now our attention centers around the child who pictures “a rigid house” and “a winding pathway”. The images of a rigid house and winding pathway both indicate the feelings of alienation, loneliness, solitude, and remoteness. Could they imply the hidden secret inside the humans, but are denied to be recognized and spoken out?

When the child draws, the emotion of grief and coldness is grasped and manipulated into her painting, which also reveal those “buttons like tears.” Maybe the man inside the drawing suggests the destiny of the grandmother and child, overwhelmed by the grief but unable to share “the tears” together. While interpreting the drawing of the man by the child, Ryan Lankford proposes that the child “unconsciously fills the space up with a man,” which implies the lack of father figure in her life (“Bishop's Sestina ” 58). But the grandmother is reluctant to share the pain openly with the child. The dark and brutal secret is better left unsaid.

Nevertheless, as the humans fail to communicate their true feelings with each other, the surrounding materials commiserate with their repressed anguish by sharing the grief. “The little moons” destroy the pretended warmth and happiness of the family embodied in “the flower bed” when they drop “like tears” into the flower bed. At this moment, we realize no matter what the family do they can't escape the fate of being enclosed by despair and sorrow. The grandmother insists on faking happiness by singing and the child keeps on drawing “another inscrutable house.” The word “inscrutable” suggests the detachment and inscrutableness of the adult world, which avoids facing the trauma honestly. However, the child seems to have insight into all the grief and sorrow deemed as unspeakable by her grandmother; she knows all this matter, but sharing the traumatic past with her grandmother is inaccessible to her. All in all, the only thing she could do is keep on drawing her inscrutable family. However, the grandmother will never be able to decode how her granddaughter feels inside. This poem describes the unspeakable and incommunicable trauma shared by the family, which plays a significant role in shaping the child's consciousness. The child, knowing the whole matter, can only repress this part of grief as her grandmother does. If this poem describes the epitome of the poet's childhood trauma, searching and questing for the lost part will definitely influence her to take on the task

of journeying.

Moreover, as we consider the title of the poem, “Sestina,” which refers to a kind of poetic form. It occurs to us, “why does the writer name this poem as ‘Sestina’?” Does it suggest any further implication behind the title? According to Lankford, “A sestina is a seven stanza poem with six lines in every stanza except for the last one, where they are only three”(57). In this sense sestina is a very rigid and formal structure, which stresses on the repetition of words, order and poetic form. Consequently, we notice that Bishop’s “Sestina” has a formal verse of the sestina. It has six stanzas of six lines. And when we look at the last word in every line of the first and last stanza, we find they follow the same order as far as the use of words is concerned. For example, “house,” “tears,” “stove,” “almanac,” “child,” and “grandmother” are used over and over again, and they follow the same pattern of repetition. But does this sestina form have anything to do with the poetic meaning that the writer intends to convey? Lankford further maintains that by using sestina as the basic form the poem “resists the emotions of the domestic scene that Bishop attempts” (58). Since sestina is a very rigid structure which puts stress on a rigid form and controlled word repetition, the family emotion is also repressed and controlled by the grandmother so as to hide the sorrow and anguished emotions. In this sense, the sestina form corresponds to the controlled and repressed emotions of the grandmother who refuses to reveal her private emotions concerning the family trauma. Therefore, the sestina supports the coldness and unrevealed secret of sadness that the writer wants to convey in this very poem.

Besides, the poetic structure of the poem is discernibly based on a progressive structure. The repetition of words not only creates a repetitive sadness and coldness infiltrating the very house, but also reveals the progressive understanding of the child’s perspective towards the unspeakable sorrow. I assume the form of the poem

supports the fact how a child sees things. The progressive pattern of the poem which brings us to the understanding of the grief shared by the family also reveals the truth that a child intends to grasp a matter by rearranging things until it makes sense. Therefore, the order and arrangement of the poetic form also suggest how the child's progressive understanding and grasp of the family sorrow. Moreover, the prevalent images of the water circles also have something to do with the sestina form in my view, which is also based on a progressive pattern contributing to our realization of the family trauma. For instance, the evaporation of the boiling water reverberates with the precipitation of the rolling rains outside. And the "brown tears" which fill up the teacup and "the little moons" which fall down the pages of the almanac both create images of the water circle. As a result, the poetic form, sestina, supports the repetitive sadness and coldness of the family secret.

While the previous poem focuses on the unspeakable trauma shared by the family, the later poem is mainly concerned about the narrator's witnessing the family tragedy, which constitutes the impressions of cold and inaccessible emotions, indifferent attachment bonds, and the loneliness and solitude of the described subject. In "First Death in Nova Scotia," the death of a cousin is immediately threatening to the integral identity of the child's perceptive subjectivity, which is suffused by the icy and blistering coldness of the weather and human gap:

In the cold, cold parlor
my mother laid out Arthur

In the cold, cold parlor
my mother laid out Arthur
beneath the chromographs:
Edward, Prince of Wales,
with Princess Alexandra,

and King George with Queen Mary.

Below them on the table
stood a stuffed loon
shot and stuffed by Uncle
Arthur, Arthur's father.

Since Uncle Arthur fired
a bullet into him,
he hadn't said a word.
He kept his own counsel
on his white, frozen lake,
the marble-topped table.
His breast was deep and white,
cold and caressable;
his eyes were red glass,
much to be desired. (125)

The poem begins with “the cold, cold parlor”, which immediately gives birth to the atmospheric iciness and chilliness. It strikes us that something inauspicious has happened. Later the gelid and sorrowful atmosphere escalates as we find the narrator’s mother is laying out Arthur “beneath the chromographs.” When speaking of the “loon,” the narrator turns the loon into a victim-like figure because he is “shot” and “stuffed.” As we can see, the death-like image of the loon reverberates with Arthur’s death. The loon is an incarnation of death, solitude, coldness and whiteness. However, he is also Arthur’s companion who shares the white and frozen lake and marble-topped table with Arthur. The words offer us a feelings of unbridgeable gap between the family members. We don’t know exactly why Arthur is prematurely dead,

for the narrator offers no definite traces. He probably died of a disease. However, we are certain that the family relationship is as white as the “frozen lake” and “the marble-topped table”, which both exude the aura of iciness and distance. All these images of white lake, marble-topped table, Arthur, and the loon’s white breast all link us with the gelid sensation so deep and impenetrable presented in this very poem.

However, the narrator offers us an alternative viewpoint with regard to the vision. For example, the narrator suggests that the loon’s white breast was “caressable” and his red glass eyes were much to be “desired.” In this sense the loon which is an embodiment of death turns out to be something not so horrifying, but tempting. Moreover, the loon can also be Arthur’s guardian angel who eyes his coffin. Death itself in the gaze of the child is filled with ambiguity, for it is something that is both dreadful and desirable. Based on Axelrod’s analysis, the poem preserves itself intact by employing the “uncomprehending gaze” of the child, regarding family members as “strangers in a play” (288). Therefore, the uncomprehending child witnesses the funeral scene, but unable to figure out what death means to be. The loon’s breast turns out to be “caressable” “and its eyes are “desired.”

Here the narrator implies death seems not nightmarish, but “caressable” and “desirable,” which the narrator perceives to be both desirable and repulsive. Axelrod further interprets this phenomenon of the narrator’s perceiving as an reflection on the “early, unsheltering home” of the poet (288). Since Arthur’s death creates the gelid air suggesting the coldness and distance felt by the poet concerning her “home”, the narrator comments Arthur’s corpse as caressable and desirable, which on the other hand implies the ideal and intact “home” is what the narrator longs for. Accordingly, Axelrod assumes that in this poem home becomes both desirable and repulsive, which positions itself in a precarious condition. Therefore, based on Axelrod’s research, I suggest that the loss of “home” during the poet’s childhood turns out to be the

graveyard of the poet's psychological trauma which implies a wish of home never fulfilled, but this lack in childhood also propels her to make her itinerary the search for "home."

In the following paragraphs of the poem, the chilliness and whiteness of the glacial atmosphere will continue to escalate. The confusing gaze of the child poses a threat to the assumed life-after-death belief in which the dead returns back to the heaven immersed in bliss and serenity:

"Come," said my mother,
"Come and say good-bye
to your little cousin Arthur."
I was lifted up and given
one lily of the valley
to put in Arthur's hand.
Arthur's coffin was
a little frosted cake,
and the red-eyed loon eyed it
from his white, frozen lake.

Arthur was very small.
He was all white, like a doll
that hadn't been painted yet.
Jack Frost had started to paint him
the way he always painted
the Maple Leaf (Forever).
He had just begun on his hair,
a few red strokes, and then

Jack Frost had dropped the brush
and left him white, forever.

The gracious royal couples
were warm in red and ermine;
their feet were well wrapped up
in the ladies' ermine trains.
They invited Arthur to be
the smallest page at court.
But how could Arthur go,
clutching his tiny lily,
with his eyes shut up so tight
and the roads deep in snow? (125~6).

The poem then continues with the narrator's mother who lifts her up to let her pay farewell respect to Arthur. While the narrator puts the lily in Arthur's hand, she notices that his coffin appears as "a little frosted cake." Furthermore, at the beginning we observe the whole farewell funeral takes place in the parlor. But we later encounter a confounding puzzle as the words describes the funeral scene of Arthur's coffin being turned into a drama-like scene, "the red-eyed loon eyed it from his white, frozen lake." In fact, I propose the narrator combines the funeral scene with chilliness and whiteness of the Nova Scotia landscape as a way to reflect the gelid family atmosphere. To support my argument, Axelrod also suggests that "Nova Scotia landscape has invaded the home and its affectation, taking them over" (290). Indeed, the frosty family interaction is tantamount to the arctic and bleak landscape of Nova Scotia for the narrator.

Moreover, as the narrator continues that Arthur looks like all white as if

unpainted yet. Whiteness is intertwined with death and chilliness. The narrator keeps on saying that though “ Jack Frost” has painted many things he leaves most of Arthur white and unpainted. Here “ Jack Frost” not only suggests the conjuration of the powerful winter which is capable of changing the earthly beings into a vision of whiteness, but implies the colorless and phantomlike angel of death who claims Arthur’s life. In contrast to the pictures of the royal couples whose exuding grace, exaltation, warmth and exhilaration make us wonder if the world after death appears to be placid and suffused with heavenly aureoles, the departure of Arthur doesn’t seem quite graceful and noble as one “page in the court.” Instead, the final scene depicts the sense of desolation and bleakness not only in terms of the snow-covered solitary roads but in terms of human suspicion of the supposedly glamorous paradise after passing away as well.

For those who have speculated on the family’s relation with whiteness, iciness, death and solitude vividly depicted in this poem, we may also wonder why the “uncomprehending gaze” of the child plays a dramatic role in bringing the story to an end by promulgating more dubious questions as she finally describes that Arthur seems unable to leave the earthliness in peace, but “clutches his tiny lily, with his eyes shut up so tight.” I suggest the child narrator functions as an agent not only to reveal the frozen family atmosphere, but to challenge the adult belief and societal consensus, which regard the after-death journey as a way to ascend to the Godly heaven permeated with light and peacefulness. Intriguingly, while reflecting on the childhood sorrow, the wondering and uncomprehending child narrator establishes herself as a neutral who hasn’t been mentally molded by social expectations or grown mature enough to repudiate the operation of social system for the sake of opposition. In this sense, the child’s gaze is neutral enough to look back on the childhood circumstances objectively and to induce readers to contemplate the perpetually working system

behind the adult-dominated hegemony. In a nutshell, if the childhood reminiscence demonstrates the poet's retrospection, she has claimed herself as an early pioneer of social transgressor; moreover, due to the "lack" in the childhood, she embarks on traveling as a means not only to transgress preconception but also to pursue her ideal "home."

Home, travel and Transgression

In the previous part of this chapter, we delve into Bishop's childhood sorrow and trauma so as to account for her personal quest through traveling. This lack in life apparently compels her to take on the task of traveling inasmuch as traveling emerges as a means to alienate oneself and to find bubbling colors of heterogeneous cultures intermingling but not exclusive. Through traveling, the traveler can refine her taste and dissolve the demarcating borders between two binary items, further exiling herself into the territory of in-betweenness, the ambiguousness and the composite. Commenting on Bishop's role as a self-conscious traveler, Marilyn May Lombardi argues that "even though Bishop's sexual preference alienated her from the marriage market, she nevertheless knew as a woman what it felt like to be on exhibition. For this reason, she might be expected to question the ethics of tourism with a greater urgency" (*The Body and the Song* 155). That is why Bishop intends to maintain a neutral perspective towards her traveling. For example, in her *Questions of Travel* the Brazilian landscape mainly functions as a means to initiate us into exploring the questions of travel instead of offering us answers directly. I think that is the reason why the traveler in Bishop's works is filled with a force of transgressivity.

The traveler questions authority and challenges our usual and habitual way of looking at things and thinking about issues related to the very identity of being a traveler. To stress Bishop's distinctive role as a self-aware traveler more clearly, I will

employ Robert J. C. Young's remark to explicate Bishop's position as an "outsider" when she ventures upon an exotic location:

Today's self-proclaimed mobile and multiple identities may be a marker not of contemporary social fluidity and dispossession but of a new stability, self-assurance and quietism . Fixity of identity is only sought in situations of instability and disruption, of conflict and change.(Young, 1995:4)

On the one hand, as Bishop changes from location to location on the way of her traveling, she produces multiple identities. However, when she renews her journey and begins to aim at reaching a new destination, she is also searching for her "fixity of identity," her ideal home as she has questioned herself, "Should we have stayed at home, wherever that may be?" Based on the previous literature on Bishop as a self-conscious traveler who always questions herself constantly, her poetic art thus reveals a tremendous capacity to transgress against the authoritative voice and ideological control. According to Shira Wolosky, Bishop's travel scenes in her art "take place as specific social-historical encounters and features a surprising variety of human figures within varying cultural contexts." By so doing, Bishop can manipulate perspectives, which "shift radically within a text" ("Representing Other Voices" 5). Based on Wolosky's analysis on Bishop's poetic strategies, in the second part of my investigation into Bishop's role as a traveler combined with her aesthetic of transgression, her traveler identity will be highlighted in how Bishop as a traveler intends to transgress against the socially dominant voices so as to acquire a profoundly new perspective which facilitates a better understanding and appreciation towards the worldly phenomena.

After investigating Bishop's position as a travel writer, in the final part of this chapter I want to look at the way in which Bishop has appropriated herself as a

traveler who explores the line between reality and imagination, nature and culture, home and travel, and subjection and domination. Moreover, as we walk into the world of her traveling poems, my focus on transgression concerning her poems will be more specifically emphasized. First of all, the traveler's non-involved gaze and the theme of transgression are closely linked as we savor her poem, "Squatter's Children"(95):

On the unbreathing sides of hills
they play, a specklike girl and boy,
alone, but near a specklike house.
The Sun's suspended eye
blinks casually, and then they wade
gigantic waves of light and shade.
A dancing yellow spot, a pup,
attends them. Clouds are piling up;

a storm piles up behind the house.
The children play at digging holes.
The ground is hard; they try to use
one of their father's tools,
a mattock with a broken haft
the two of them can scarcely lift.
It drops and clangs. Their laughter spreads
effulgence in the thunderheads,

Intriguingly, the story begins with the "gaze" of the narrator who sights two children playing in the far distance. Compared with the imposing view of the natural scenery, they are "specklike" and the pup becomes "a dancing yellow." Here the narrator

describes a vision in which nature grows more and more aggressive and intimidating as “ the unbreathing sides of hills,” “ the sun’s suspended eye,” and “ piling clouds” all appear to be threatening to the slowness of the children and pup. The narrator keeps on describing that the piling storm grows large enough to nearly besiege the house. Unaware of the threatening weather which can endanger their lives, the children are engrossed with their game. Furthermore, as the narrator claims the children can hardly lift the “mattock with a broken haft,” we can’t help but feel worried about the feebleness of the children who are soon under the intimidation of the menacing thunderstorm. But the children who remain unaware of the storm keep on with their game and their laughing disperses “ effulgence in the thunderheads.” Obviously, the laughter of the children makes readers empathize with their innocence when the children become so infatuated with their moment of happiness and disregard the “danger” lurking behind.

In the later part of the poem, the children's happy obliviousness to the oncoming storm will be broken as the ruthless rolls of thunder overwhelm “the puppy’s bark” and “ little, soluble , unwarrantable ark:”

Weak flashes of inquiry
direct as is the puppy's bark.
But to their little, soluble,
unwarrantable ark,
apparently the rain's reply
consists of echolalia,
and Mother's voice, ugly as sin,
keeps calling to them to come in.

Children, the threshold of the storm

has slid beneath your muddy shoes;
wet and beguiled, you stand among
the mansions you may choose
out of a bigger house than yours,
whose lawfulness endures.
It's soggy documents retain
your rights in rooms of falling rain.

As all the voices are overcome by the heavy rain, the thunderous “echolalia ,” sounds like “ Mother’s voice,” which keeps calling them to find a shelter. Right here the stormy rains which sounds like “ echolalia” and “ Mother’s voice” are all intimidating to the subjectivity of the children. Apparently, we realize the children are thrust into a dilemma in which they either have to succumb to the thundering rain or Mother’s voice which is “ ugly as sin.” The thundering rain which is powerfully threatening to the children sounds like “ Mother’s voice,” which also implies that nature is transformed into a Medusa-like Mother figure who can pose a menace to the integrity of the children. Hence, the children are paralyzed to acquire self-control. The children who are thought to be in the prime age of innocence are immediately under a variety of menacing circumstances, which also suggests that not only the environmental disaster but the symbolic order of the adult world always operates by control and repression, by thwarting the children’s self-autonomy.

Finally, the narrator describes that the children are all “wet and beguiled” in the storm. The mansions that the children can choose from to hide themselves are described as a “bigger house.” Besides, the house also gives us a sensation that it can protect the children from the encroaching storm. But actually the mansion is unstable because its “soggy” documents are supposed to be invaded by the “ falling rain” as well. As it turns out, the children can hardly escape the intimidating impact of the rain

no matter where they go and whatever they resort to. The theme of transgression is revealed in this very poem when the observer of the phenomenon seemingly stands outside the terrain of influence. The traveler provides us insight into the situation in which the children become stuck. On the one hand, nature functions as an intimidating force which can heavily jeopardize the security of the children. On the other hand, the mansion which could represent itself as a social legal system offers no shelter for the endangered children who may be engulfed by the upcoming storm. Therefore, the ambivalent circumstance in which the children become enmeshed suggests that a secure place for the children is utterly denied. In fact, this narrator is a traveler who positions herself as an outsider by casting a neutral perspective on everything. Most significantly, it is right from here; the power of traveler as a transgressor could be overseen. The traveler seems to have a better understanding of the children's predicament, and she can also discern the unacknowledged position of the mother figure presented in this poem.

Besides, it is also significant for us to ponder the very position of many social misfits revealed inside. The squatters implicitly refer to the parents' illegal identity. As we can see, the children intend to use their father's tool. The tool is "a mattock with a broken haft." Besides, the children can hardly lift the mattock up. The mattock with its broken haft suggests that it is useless for digging holes. This point implicitly indicates that the Father figure is a social misfit whose tool is rendered useless when confronted against the natural threat. And he can't provide the children with enough security because the children can barely lift the broken mattock. Moreover, according to Shira Wolosky, the mother figure reveals the "distressed voice" regarding her vulnerability. She is "protective, yet ineffective, having little shelter to offer, compulsive, intruding into the child's world." Most importantly, Wolosky also suggests the phrase, "ugly as sin," in the poem tends to reflect the poet's sympathy

for the maternal role who is “ caught in the social thunderstorms of poverty and homelessness not of her own making” (8).⁹ Therefore, the poverty, scarcity and invulnerability of the maternal figure proves herself as an illegal resident whose poverty and scarcity make the society reject to her. The lack of the father figure and the intruding of mother figure makes the theme of transgression more penetrating, and the Mother figure who is cast into a state of ambiguity can be both threatening and protective of the integrity of the children. Furthermore, the children can also be deemed as social misfits as we consider they are the offspring of illegal residents. If the mansion with its “ lawfulness” represent itself as a social legitimacy which possesses the right to accommodate or deny any individual, the children as the offspring of the illegal squatters are the illegal residents as well. From this perspective, the mansion with its “ rooms of falling rain” can make the documents become “ soggy.” This also suggests that the children’s security will be endangered even if they are sheltered by the mansion, which offers no substantial protection for the children. In this sense, their statuses are also denied by the society like their parents.

The following poem may not be explicitly linked with a traveler figure in the story. However, as we consider the fact that mostly a traveler would pay much more attention to the map, we realize the reflection on the map also suggests that the narrator’s implicit identity as a traveler provides us with an alternative viewpoint towards observing and interpreting the map, which is the inherent theme of transgression associated with the perceptive and imaginative capability of the narrator. In this poem, Bishop roams between the realms of reality and imagination, which allow reader to glimpse into the liberal mindset of the traveler. “The Map” (3) is representative of Bishop herself who is always eager to give her audience a new route

⁹ Wolosky, Shira. “ Representing Other Voices: Rhetorical Perspective in Elizabeth Bishop.” *Style* 29.1 (Spring 1995): 1-17.

of perceiving and of understanding people and places on the earth's surface:

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

As the story begins, we see the narrator is observing the map meticulously. The lap between the land and sea is described carefully, including the observation of the ledge colors. Nevertheless, after this intriguing observation, the narrator immediately poses a question by asking if the land leans itself down so as to “lift the sea from under” or if the land “tugs at the sea from under?” Considering from the first proposal, we envision the sea and land coexist peacefully inasmuch as the land can take a step back by drawing around itself. In this state, neither the land nor the sea is offended or perturbed. I think the narrator poses many questions concerning the mapped landscape for us because she wants us to think about the very issue of reality. Does truth only exist in one form of reality or can be shown in many ways? Surely, the answer to the question remains a mystery for the audience to contemplate independently.

The narrator leaves us with an open question without forcing an answer upon us.

And the second proposal imagines the sea and the land are wrestling in a tug of war because the land has to “tug” the sea. While savoring this supposition, we can't help wondering if this truly reflects the condition of the sea and land, the land must bear tremendous pressure because the land has to tug at the sea from under. Their coexistence may be conflicting all the time; no wonder we have so many earthquakes.

Bishop leaves these questions for readers to participate in and find answers by themselves:

The shadow of Newfoundland lies flat and still.
Labrador's yellow, where the moony Eskimo
has oiled it. We can stroke these lovely bays,
under a glass as if they were expected to blossom,
or as if to provide a clean cage for invisible fish.
The names of seashore towns run out to sea,
the names of cities cross the neighboring mountains
—the printer here experiencing the same excitement
as when emotion too far exceeds its cause.
These peninsulas take the water between thumb and finger
like women feeling for the smoothness of yard-goods.

In the second paragraph, we witness the astonishingly imaginative capacity of Bishop, who thrusts the geographical landscape and seascape into a fascinating and exhilarating kaleidoscope through which the audience can peer into the world of magic and amazement. Newfoundland turns out to be “Labrador’s yellow” oiled by Eskimo. Moreover, the narrator further comments a funny remark as she says that those bays which are breathed into life can be put under a glass for viewing or can be utilized as “a clean cage for invisible fish.” Afterwards, the poet promulgates that the printer must have experienced the emotional excitement of going back and forth when it printed the names of cities and seashores.

From these two examples, the poet animates the landscape features by envisioning their potentialities to rise out of rigidity and stability as if enchanted. In the end, the peninsulas can even “take the water between thumb and finger.” We imagine the smoothness of the sea can be caressed by the peninsulas as if “yard

goods.” In the narrator’s imagination, we see the map in an intriguing way, which keeps unfolding new terrain of surprise and excitement. The narrator breathes life into the geography, which turns the boring reality into a thrilling roller coaster taking readers ups and downs. In a nutshell, the narrator reminds us that we can ride our imagination by replacing reality scenarios with the magic of fantasy. In this sense we feel the mind of the narrator is free and boundless. The narrator, based on Bishop’s knowledge, knows that realities are literally constructed in our imagination towards imagined places and landscapes.

In the last paragraph of the poem, the narrator makes a very interesting conclusion as she thinks about the demarcating line between reality and imagination:

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

As the poem proceeds, the narrator proclaims that “mapped waters” appear to be more placid than the land is. At first, we are puzzled because both mapped waters and the land are concrete formulations on the map; so how could this be? Then we realize on the map the waves of the waters have concretized “conformation,” which deprives the waves of their diversity, mobility and multiplicity demonstrated by real waters. The map can’t breathe life into the waves stamped on it; therefore, the sea waves which are supposed to be moving and rolling turn out to be even more monotonous. Finally, the narrator wonders if the colors of mapped countries are assigned or can be

determined by themselves? Which color will suit the details of the character and waters most appropriately? In conclusion, the narrator asserts that the map-makers' colors are more delicate and imaginative than the historians' description.

After these wonderings, the narrator's conclusion apparently prioritizes the superiority of imagination over the reality. Since historians always have to measure and mold everything according to certain regulated rules, historians can never appreciate the power of saccharine fantasy. By contrast, a map-maker can determine the colors of various landscapes without adhering to rules or restrictions. They are stepping into the kingdom of dream and freedom, privileged to make the best of their fantasy. As we can obviously see, this poem is fraught with the ideology of transgression because the narrator overturns our perspective towards the mapped landscape by stressing the tremendous capacity of imagination involved in the making of the map.

The narrator refuses to be pinned down under the formality of one single reality. Bishop, as a traveler, knows how significant a perceptive and imaginative mind shapes our understanding towards the worldly phenomena. And the power of transgression derives itself from our very sense of curiosity and imagination, which emancipate us from the shackles of absolute sovereignty. Perhaps what the narrator wants to convey to the audience is not to take everything for granted and to use our imagination to see the world; in this sense everything will be tinted by a different light. This also reflects the poet's identity as a traveler who not only tries to transgress the geographical border and boundary physically, but ideological limitation and restriction as well. And what the poet intends to imply in this poem seems to be the very fact that we shouldn't waste away our capacity to imagine and fantasize if we want to be qualified travelers. Since the map is a necessity to every traveler, the traveler in this very poem unfolds another vision for us to see the map and its

attraction.

Featuring the similar theme, “The Imaginary Iceberg” (4) reveals the poet’s penchant for exploring the enchanting potency of imagination, which inspires the audience to think every issue alternatively. As we can see, the title of the poem is termed “The Imaginary Iceberg,” which suggests the narrator isn’t an ordinary traveler. The narrator goes through the pleasurable experience of envisioning the iceberg, and her visual gaze renders every scene in the poem extraordinary:

We'd rather have the iceberg than the ship,
although it meant the end of travel.
Although it stood stock-still like cloudy rock
and all the sea were moving marble.
We'd rather have the iceberg than the ship;
we'd rather own this breathing plain of snow
though the ship's sails were laid upon the sea
as the snow lies undissolved upon the water.
O solemn, floating field,
are you aware an iceberg takes repose
with you, and when it wakes may pasture on your snows?

Quite different from the previous poem, here we see the narrator becomes vigorously involved in the imaginative scenario. Indeed, the imaginary traveler encodes the aesthetic of transgression in her free association. The narrator proclaims that “the iceberg” is more desirable than the ship, which may overthrow the popular view. Most people, like you and me, would probably consider the iceberg unwelcome if compared with the ship, for the iceberg could jeopardize our security as we voyage out. However, the narrator repudiates this subjective claim by bringing the iceberg and the sea into life. Vividly and amazingly depicted, the iceberg is transformed into a

“cloudy rock,” “breathing plain of snow,” and “floating field” while the sea is metamorphosed into “moving marble.” Rather than shying away from the iceberg because of its potentiality to cause destruction, the narrator even makes fun of the iceberg. The iceberg is vigorously animated because it can “float,” “pasture on your snows,” and “take repose with you.” Intriguingly, the narrator isn’t discomforted by the iceberg, and through her vivid description we sense the iceberg can be both as active as a naughty child and as gentle as a lamb.

Continuously, the narrator reminds us of the tremendous power and capability of the iceberg, which can even compete with the sun:

This is a scene a sailor'd give his eyes for.

The ship's ignored. The iceberg rises
and sinks again; its glassy pinnacles
correct elliptics in the sky.

This is a scene where he who treads the boards
is artlessly rhetorical. The curtain
is light enough to rise on finest ropes
that airy twists of snow provide.

The wits of these white peaks
spar with the sun. Its weight the iceberg dares
upon a shifting stage and stands and stares.

Right from this paragraph, we witness the grandness and magnificence of the iceberg which can captivate the sailor and its “glassy pinnacles” can rectify “elliptics in the sky.” Sounding like she has witnessed this spectacular scene, the narrator proclaims whoever is on board will become “artlessly rhetoric” under the spell of the iceberg’s diverse exhibitions. Furthermore, the narrator highlights the iceberg profoundly by comparing it with the sun. Under the tribute of the narrator, those white peaks of the

iceberg demonstrate their wits to wrestle with the sun, for the light shone through from them won't be dwarfed by the glittering sunlight. In addition to associating the iceberg with the characteristics of grandeur, changeability, and cleverness, the narrator finally affirms the braveness of the iceberg, which bears tremendous weight still manages to float and rise up above the sea to stand and stare. In the narrator's eye, the iceberg is combined with several best qualities.

After diversifying the characteristics of the iceberg and further associating it with so many fine qualities, the narrator finally waves farewell to the iceberg, which will leave an unforgettable impression on her mind:

The iceberg cuts its facets from within.
Like jewelry from a grave
it saves itself perpetually and adorns
only itself, perhaps the snows
which so surprise us lying on the sea.
Good-bye, we say, good-bye, the ship steers off
where waves give in to one another's waves
and clouds run in a warmer sky.
Icebergs behoove the soul
(both being self-made from elements least visible)
to see them so: fleshed, fair, erected indivisible.

The unique quality of the iceberg is brought under gaze as the narrator claims the icebergs "cuts its facets from within." In a sense we know the way the iceberg cuts its facets is from within rather than from without. By so doing, the iceberg can further perpetuates itself because the real strength of its immensity originates from a humble beginning. In a sense the iceberg is like a grave jewelry which is glamorous but hidden from the eyes of the outsiders. Both of them are not processed extravagantly,

but have the quality to outshine other materials from their inner strength and quality. The iceberg adorns only itself because most people, unlike the narrator, can't appreciate the iceberg aesthetically, but take its presence for granted. The narrator doesn't only visualize the iceberg animatedly, but differentiate her identity as a distinct and extraordinary traveler from the others. Finally, the narrator leaves us with the impression of herself being fascinated by the iceberg's captivating spell.

It is conspicuous that the narrator finds it hard to say goodbye to the iceberg. We know not only the richness and grandness that the iceberg offers has attracted the traveler but also its humble beginning. Apparently, the narrator has a very strong sense of lively fancy and acuteness, for she is a traveler encountering gigantic icebergs on her journey while immersing in the serene and beautiful view of nature. But we will never forget what fascinates the narrator most is the iceberg's "being self-made from the elements least invisible," which is exactly how the soul is formulated. Here the juxtaposition of the soul and iceberg is especially intriguing because one is visible, and the other is invisible.

How can the iceberg parallel the soul? Prominently, the iceberg is "self-made", meaning that the iceberg is self-reliant and self-perpetuating. It accumulates tremendous numbers of "elements least visible" so as to accomplish its great immensity and grandeur. While saying that the iceberg is made "from elements least visible" which finally contribute to its immensity, the narrator implies that our soul, though invisible, can reach the magnitude of limitlessness, for we can turn our mind from narrowness to broadness, even as wide as the ocean. With an inquisitive and imaginative soul, we will have an unvanquished sense of curiosity and liberation to turn the monotony into a world of blossoming richness. Although the writer aims at taking advantage of imaginative capacity to open up a world full of incessant fascinations as shown in the previous poem, we find each of them is unique and

inspirational in its own way as we reflect on the whole poem. Both of these poems deal with the issue of imagination and its power to go beyond the border of ideological restriction as well as the implicit identity as a traveler.

However, this poem further emphasizes the narrator as a possible traveler who uses an alternative perspective to overturn various preconceptions. It is not exaggerating to say that the narrator, as a traveler, is more than a transgressor against deep-rooted social conventions, but can be conceived as a philosopher who extracts inspiration out of the iceberg scenery. What is suggested here is if we lose the sense of wonder toward the world, life will be deprived of its wonder, depth, and vitality. However, if we can enlighten ourselves with an inquisitive mind, our soul can be as “fleshed, fair, erected indivisible” as the iceberg and life can be impressively exciting. In this sense, the poet implies that a sensitive traveler can always think outside the box and come up with new ideas creatively to obtain imaginative pleasures. By so doing, an ordinary object can reveal its remarkably diverse facets. Accordingly, the power of transgression concerning a traveler lies in her vision and her imagination to think beyond the conventional viewpoints. And this poem further implies that the poet herself as an imaginary narrator and traveler whose engagement with an imaginary journey demonstrates her tendency to transgress by rejecting to adhere to the social standards and expectations if we take how the narrator fantasizes the iceberg scenario into account.

As we embark on the journey to explore the traveling theme and its possibility to transgress within Bishop's poems, *Questions of Travel* which contains the poet's series of poems on her traveling in *Brazil* can be regarded as the chronicle of her life experiences in Brazil. In “Arrival at Santos,” we journey with her to go deep into the land of interiority:

Here is a coast; here is a harbor;

here, after a meager diet of horizon, is some scenery:
impractically shaped and--who knows?—self-pitying mountains,
sad and harsh beneath their frivolous greenery,

with a little church on top of one. And warehouses,
some of them painted a feeble pink, or blue,
and some tall, uncertain palms. Oh, tourist,
is this how this country is going to answer you

and your immodest demands for a different world,
and a better life, and complete comprehension
of both at last, and immediately,
after eighteen days of suspension? (89)

The poet herself describes her traveling experience as a traveler. As the poem begins, she depicts the scenery in a detailed way. However, it looks like that the scenery doesn't appeal to her particularly as she goes further by portraying the landscape as "a meager diet of horizon" and some "self-pitying mountains, sad and harsh." The mountains are not only "impractically shaped" but owns "frivolous greenery." Apparently, these mountains look as if they were bald. Their impractical shape also suggests that the landscape doesn't look quite attractive and inviting, but kind of bare and weathered. Furthermore, when the narrator describes the warehouses in the distance, "feeble" and "uncertain" are used to describe their colors and profiles. After these images and comments, we sense that in the traveler's perspective the scenery doesn't appear to be friendly at all; instead, the scenery expresses a feeling of hostility so embedded in the traveler's eyes.

Moreover, the feelings of estrangement from the unfamiliar landscape also

conveys an out-of-touch sensation to the traveler, which implies that once entering the land of interiority she will be isolated from the outside civilization. Rather than feeling exhilarated, the poet makes us feel as if she felt disappointed at the place. Therefore, she asks herself, “is this how this country is going to answer you?” As a traveler, she realizes that she has high expectations towards a new destination, and also expects every new encounter can fulfill her fantasy of a new place. In *The Tourist Gaze*, John Urry discusses how travelers will involve their personal imagination with new destinations. He contends, “Potential objects of the tourist gaze must be different in some way or other. They must be out of the ordinary” (12).¹⁰ Accordingly, the reality concerning the act of travel itself is that a traveler always traverses between imagination and reality; as a result, they will always color their destination in an unreal way. The reality of a new place may turn the tourists off, for our imagination can’t totally correspond to the reality. Enlightened, the traveler has a further understanding of her craving: “Your immodest demands for a different world, and a better life, and immediately after eighteen days of suspension?” Definitely, this tourist is synonymous with a magician, who can always adjust herself to a new way of thinking. Therefore, she comprehends how she could expect so much out of this place just by spending so little time with it. Between reality and fancy, exhilaration and disillusionment, and freedom and imprisonment, the tourist is “liberal” because she knows her mind is free.

Basically, the theme of transgression in this poem can be discerned as we savor how the traveler instantly adjusts herself to cope with her sense of disappointment at her new destination. As Urry has proposed, the traveler tends to expect pleasurable experiences which “involve different senses or are on a different

¹⁰ Urry, John. *The Tourist Gaze, Second Edition*. London: Sage, 2002. When John Urry discusses how the tourists will react to a tourism spot, he claims the tourists’ imagination tends to involve with the intention of gaze.

scale from those typically encountered in everyday life” when reaching a new place (13). With no exception, the poet herself initially fantasizes Brazil in an aesthetic sense before she lands on it. That is why the poet would describe Brazil with a tone of disappointment at the very beginning of her depiction on the landscape. However, we see the poet isn’t an ordinary traveler, for she changes her subjective opinions on Brazil immediately after starting to question herself. She is a self-conscious traveler. Ashley Brown also points out that Bishop is a traveler endowed with the very sense of self-awareness when arriving in a new place. She claims Bishop’s poems have “have more the feel of life in Brazil” because they refuse “large generalizations that we all have when we approach a subject on this scale”(“Elizabeth Bishop in Brazil” 37). In this sense, the contrast between the poet’s initial perspective towards Brazil and her later coming to terms with her self through self-questioning underlies the fact that the poet is a traveler as well as a transgressor. Through traveling she transgresses her previous sense of subjective imposition on a new place and soon acquires a more objective knowledge of understanding herself and the new location. In this view, the poet’s extraordinary identity as an unique traveler as well as an ideological transgressor is explicitly revealed in this very poem.

The poem, “ Questions of Travel,” may represent itself as one of the most prominent poems, which features the traveling theme with great vivacity and insightful speculation. Inside the poem emerges a new way of viewing and questioning her position as a tourist, which adds a new dimension to consider the motive of pursuit and travel:

There are too many waterfalls here; the crowded streams
hurry too rapidly down to the sea,
and the pressure of so many clouds on the mountaintops
makes them spill over the sides in soft slow-motion,

turning to waterfalls under our very eyes.

—For if those streaks, those mile-long, shiny, tearstains,
aren't waterfalls yet,
in a quick age or so, as ages go here,
they probably will be.

But if the streams and clouds keep travelling, travelling,
the mountains look like the hulls of capsized ships,
slime-hung and barnacled. (93)

Quite different from the “meager diet of horizon” from the previous poem, this poem initially instills an imposing view of geographical diversity and uniqueness into us. “Waterfalls” and “the crowded streams” both leave us with the impression of the immense power and energy that nature has nurtured. This accumulated water pressure contributes to the clouded mountaintops, for they are immersed in the arena of rolling waterfalls and rapidly rotating streams. Right here, the distinction between mountains and waterfalls becomes blurred as the water pressure of the mountaintops is spilling over all sides, as if the mountains tops were flooded. This perspective certainly shakes up people's normal ways of viewing the world. In the next description, the traveler turns our expectations around in a much more significant way when she refers to those mountains as “the hulls of capsized ships.” Like herself, the streams and clouds are also traveling, rushing and rolling toward the land of the unknown. Besides, the immense power of water force has created a phenomenal landscape, which makes the mountains look as if “slime-hung and barnacled.” Intriguingly, compared with the vigorously forward-surging water force, the still mountaintops appear to be manacled and shackled. As we have repeatedly witness in her art, nature has been reinvigorated with breath and life. In the traveler’s eyes, the world is perceived in a different but delightful light, expressed in a dynamic presence.

In the next paragraph, the narrator begins to probe into her fugitive position as a traveler, which is extraordinarily intriguing and self-examining. She wonders what is the essential element within us drives us to embrace our identity as an incessant traveler, who proceeds to journey into the land of unfamiliarity and to capture the outlandish side of existence:

Think of the long trip home.
Should we have stayed at home and thought of here?
Where should we be today?
Is it right to be watching strangers in a play
in this strangest of theatres?
What childishness is it that while there's a breath of life
in our bodies, we are determined to rush
to see the sun the other way around?
The tiniest green hummingbird in the world?
To stare at some inexplicable old stonework,
inexplicable and impenetrable,
at any view,
instantly seen and always, always delightful?
Oh, must we dream our dreams
and have them, too?
And have we room
for one more folded sunset, still quite warm?

Bishop is sharply aware of her precarious state of being a traveler, for she probably wouldn't be sure of what lies inside propelling her to walk to the end of the earth. Consequently, she wonders, "What childishness is it while there's a breath of life in our bodies, we are determined to rush to see the sun the other way around?" Is the

desire for difference and exoticism so embedded in our mind spontaneously? But after her queries, she obviously creates two polarized tendencies of thinking concerning the worth of venturing out to the quarters of exoticism and mystery. The answer might be “yes,” which supports the positive prospect of traveling, or “no,” which shatters our idealization of foreign landscapes conjured up by our fantasy. Oscillating between these two mindsets which account for different results concerning the act of travel, we can feel although she seemingly feels ambivalent about the exact reason for her undertaking to explore a foreign land, the opportunity to pursue the “inexplicable” and “impenetrable” can possibly add “delightful” experiences to our life. The words, “impenetrable” and “inexplicable,” add a new dimension of mystery and sense of adventure to the new terrain that the traveler is about to journey through. Due to the vivid description of so many vivid and exotic images, “the hummingbird,” “old stonework” and “folded sunset” don’t make the audience think of traveling as a tedious and suffering task, but seem quite hypnotizing. The answers to the queries haven’t been revealed, yet we can’t help but confirm the pleasurable prospect of travel.

In the conclusion of this poem, the affirmation of the positive prospect of traveling is revealed, for the traveler proclaims it will certainly be a pity if we can’t brave up our courage to pursue various experiences that travel can bestow upon us; so many colors and rhythms in life might be deprived if we have simply stayed at our supposed home:

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

—Not to have had to stop for gas and heard
the sad, two-noted, wooden tune
of disparate wooden clogs
carelessly clacking over
a grease-stained filling-station floor.
(In another country the clogs would all be tested.
Each pair there would have identical pitch.)
—A pity not to have heard
the other, less primitive music of the fat brown bird
who sings above the broken gasoline pump
in a bamboo church of Jesuit baroque:
three towers, five silver crosses.

In this part, the narrator supports the desire to embark on the traveling of discovering the other lands. She thinks it would have been a pity if we couldn't have taken our time to appreciate many wonders the world have offered to us in different locations. Accordingly, we witness that in the narrator's imagination the trees can gesture "like noble pantomimists." Besides, the color of the trees is diversified as we can see the trees being dressed in pink. It would have been a pity if we couldn't have stopped to listen to the "wooden tune of disparate wooden clogs carelessly clacking." Here the narrator further emphasizes that the clogs are "in another country" and each pair could even have "identical pitch." This suggests the clogs can turn out to be musical instruments which can bring out the "sad, wooden-tuned" melody. And it is "in another country" that bestows these exotic and different sensations to us. Furthermore, "the other and less primitive" singing of the bird is also stressed upon its difference and exoticism because it is from the other place. And the place where the "fat brown bird" keeps its singing is also located at a "bamboo church of Jesuit

baroque.” The church itself also presents an image of exotic sensation as we notice the church is not only a baroque architecture but is made of bamboo as well. This stanza offers us many possible exotic experiences that the narrator has imagined, and the narrator is positive about the prospect of embarking on the journey of discovering the diversity and new sensation.

In the following part of the poem, the narrator reaffirms the positive and bright prospect of travel, which has the potential to liberate us from the shackles of boring reality. Intriguingly, we have to pay more attention to how the word “pity” has been stressed over and over again by the narrator. By so doing, the narrator highlights the significant prospect of travel to add a new dimension of vision and experience from exploring exotic places to our life:

—Yes, a pity not to have pondered,
blurr'dly and inconclusively,
on what connection can exist for centuries
between the crudest wooden footwear
and, careful and finicky,
the whittled fantasies of wooden footwear
and, careful and finicky,
the whittled fantasies of wooden cages.
—Never to have studied history in
the weak calligraphy of songbirds' cages.
—And never to have had to listen to rain
so much like politicians' speeches:
two hours of unrelenting oratory (94)

Throughout this paragraph, the traveler provides us with so many fascinating accounts of so many diverse and exotic adventures. The abundant feast of natural beauty, the

lively and carefree singing of the birds, and the antique and legendary wooden cages all cultivate our life in a much more compelling and memorable sensation when compared with those hustling and bustling reality of crowded cityscape. For example, those politicians' tedious speeches, the grease-stained gas station, and the deserted gas pump as a part of our real life only invite feelings of revulsion and depression. But traveling nurtures a mind and vision, which will never cease to wonder, to question, and to quest. It is through traveling the utmost appetizing experiences of foreign lands have been unfolded to us in extremely inspirational forms. This paragraph can be regarded as Bishop's rhetoric of crediting travel with so many advantages. The contrast between the tediousness of staying at the same place and the excitement of pursuing a new journey only endorses the promising prospect of travel as a method for the traveler to transcend herself from the boredom of reality and her original perspective.

Finally, the poem ends in prioritizing the mysterious and captivating spell of nature. After the unrelenting rains, "a sudden golden silence" warms up the sky, implying an epiphany that the traveler is about to experience:

and then a sudden golden silence

in which the traveller takes a notebook, writes:

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

As the narrator has termed the moment of contemplation upon her traveling identity as "a sudden golden silence," we know the experience of exploring the exotic and alien locations can prompt the narrator to ask her very position as a traveler. And this

moment is described as “ a golden silence,” which spotlights the significant process of the traveler’s reflection on herself. After initiating some habitual inquiries, she wonders if we seek exotic experiences because we are lacking in imagination? As a result, we embark on the journey to come to the imagined places. Does this also suggest the tediousness of realistic life has driven us to come for more exotic and different inspiration and imagination in foreign places? Although the interrogative intonation of the conclusion may look as if the narrator felt puzzled, we know the answer to her questions lies in the traveler’s heart solidly. Because of her previous affirmations towards the magnificent experiences that those imagined places and other lands can bless u with, she has affirmed the positive prospect of this enterprise by traveling. From one place to another, the traveler is always ready to embrace a new place even if it is different, foreign, and bursting with voices of conflict and heterogeneity.

Finally, the narrator claims that although the traveler traverses the border and boundary, the choice “ seems never wide and never free.” Right here, the narrator takes on a tone of ambiguity towards the freedom of such an undertaking:

Continent, city, country, society:

the choice is never wide and never free.

And here, or there... No. Should we have stayed at home,

wherever that may be?” (94)

Since the traveler is always crossing the “ continent, city, country, society,” how can the choice be “ never wide and never free?” In my perspective, a traveler like Bishop who has practiced the art of traveling in her personal life tends to regard the world as a wonderland to travel and explore. In this sense, the world offers many wonders and exotic places for the poet to explore. But the choices are too numerous, which makes her feel unable to make a perfect choice. Besides, as a traveler the poet also realizes

that it is impossible to explore many wonders in the world at the same time. In this sense, the poet may also feel the choice is “never wide and never free.” Moreover, as soon as the traveler questions us, “Should we have stayed at home, wherever that may be?” The stability of home is immediately deconstructed. Since the poet is a traveler who always crosses the border and boundary, she asks us if we should have stayed at home “wherever” that home may be. The ambiguity of home is brought forth because we see the poet uses the word “wherever” to describe the home. Based on the previous examples which credit the prospect of travel with many advantages, the traveler’s concept of home may be nowhere and everywhere. It is nowhere because the traveler like Bishop will never be able to really find a place as a permanent home since she exiles herself into a state of homelessness so as to absorb and take in many wonders of the world. On the other hand, it is everywhere because the poet has turned the world into a fascinating terrain filled with incessant charm for exploration. Therefore, when the narrator asks us if we should have stayed at home, the idea of home is apparently based on people’s construction and imagination in her eyes, which tend to fix home in a restrictive thinking. However, to the poet the definition of home turns out to be “wherever,” which only embraces the prospect of traveling since traveling refuses to confine oneself into one single place.

As we can see, the poet as a traveler significantly distinguishes herself from others by transforming home into a metaphysical status because home can be everywhere, which never takes presence in the world as totally real. As a traveler, she realizes the essential meaning of home corresponds to what Edward W. Said has commented on his exilic identity in *Out of Place*. Said states, “My search for freedom, for the self...Now it does not seem important or even desirable to be ‘right’ and in place(right at home, for instance). Better to wander out of place, not to own a house,

and not ever to feel too much at home anywhere” (294).¹¹ As a consequence, the traveler like Bishop isn’t marooned in the state of homelessness under force, but chooses to exile herself into the homeless state. The state of homelessness in mind propels the traveler to journey and pursue her ideal “home” by dismantling prejudice, preconception and subjective judgment.

Intriguingly, the transgression of this poem can be observed from these points. It is revealed in the poet’s state of mind and her contemplation. Initially, the way she describes the scenery turns the landscape into an extraordinarily imaginative vision, in which the view is perceived in an alternative perspective. Later, the poet plunges us into the contemplation concerning the worth of traveling to other lands. The poet proposes many questions concerning the prospect of travel for us to think about, but she never forces her answers upon us. Furthermore, the poem ends in an open question by asking us, “Should we have stayed at home, wherever that may be?” From this standpoint, we understand the poet doesn’t intend to express her views explicitly. Instead, she reflects on her very position as a traveler and implicitly conveys how she thinks about the act of travel. The infinite mind of the narrator inspires us to look at her position and mind as a traveler, which finds her idea of home corresponds to the act of travel since they both attempt to be free from a restrictive sense of definition. And the poet is obviously transgressing previously presumed concepts concerning home and the act of travel by proposing so many thought-provoking questions.

This chapter deals with the interrelationship between the poet’s childhood agony and her compulsion of travel. Interestingly, the loss of childhood home certainly have a dramatic impact on her quest, in which she always brings the subject

¹¹ Said, Edward W. *Out of Place*. New York: Vintage Books, 2000.

of home close to her expeditions of foreign places. Furthermore, by inspecting the traveling theme contained in her poems, we find the traveler is always subverting the conventional norms by opening up a new horizon of perceiving and a vaster field for roaming. Insightfully, the traveler is a transgressor against the hegemonic ideology and societal dominance. As an artist, a traveler, a philosophical transgressor and an emancipator of mind, Bishop's identity is always traversing beyond borders mentally and physically, which is proven as enchanting and kaleidoscopic as her artistic expressions. In the following chapter, the themes of transgression will be more focused by connecting it with multitudes of animal images demonstrated in her poems.