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Elizabeth Bishop's "The Riverman": A Story of Appropriation and of Vocation

Few places captured Elizabeth Bishop's imagination like the Amazon. From the moment she arrived in Brazil, she wanted to visit the region and began to research it. Bishop made the unusual decision to write a dramatic monologue set in the Amazon prior to visiting, composing "The Riverman" based on a passage from *Amazon Town: A Study of Man in the Tropics* by Charles Wagley. Given her commitment to accuracy, this was a significant break from her typical writing process, and she often expressed uneasiness about the poem.

Read today, "The Riverman" poses several problems of representation due to the gap between Bishop and the poem's speaker, a character based on Satiro, an indigenous Amazonian who appears in Wagley's study. Satiro is doubly interpreted: first by Wagley and then by Bishop, raising questions of whose story this is and who has the right to tell it. In this paper, I discuss Bishop's appropriation of Satiro's story alongside their commonalities. To write this dramatic monologue, Bishop needed an entry point into the character. The Amazon, though compelling, remains elusive in the poem, unlike the places of Bishop's other Brazilian poems. Instead, "The Riverman" tells a story of shared vocation and ambition.

Keywords: Elizabeth Bishop; Brazil; appropriation; the Amazon; Charles Wagley

When Elizabeth Bishop first traveled to Brazil in 1951, she intended to visit briefly before continuing her scheduled tour around South America, but she famously had an allergic reaction to the fruit of a cashew plant that turned her two-week stop into a nearly twenty-year residency, as she entered a new relationship during her recuperation and extended her stay indefinitely. Within four months of her arrival in Brazil, Bishop composed the aptly titled travel poem, "Arrival at Santos," but as her stay lengthened, she struggled to find a vantage point from which to engage her new country in her compositions. She did not want to write as a tour-

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ist but was deeply aware of her outsider status, and her early compositional efforts in Brazil demonstrate her difficulty in situating herself poetically in this new place, although her correspondence is full of lively descriptions and uncharacteristic effusiveness about her new home and life.

Bishop did not finish many poems during her first four years in Brazil, instead composing semi-autobiographical short stories about her childhood in Nova Scotia. She finally began to complete poems about Brazil in short bursts beginning in 1955. Throughout her years in Brazil, she repeated this pattern of producing several poems in quick succession and then stopping, as she tried to negotiate her changing relationship to and understanding of her new home. Eleanor Cook divides Bishop's collection *Questions of Travel*, which was composed entirely in Brazil, into three movements: the first group of poems "centered on outsiders: tourists, explorers, travelers," the second group features figures who "are at home only on sufferance: squatters and a 'half-squatter' gardener of sorts," and the third set are "true poems of home" (149). The collection does not exactly follow Bishop's compositional timeline; however, it mirrors the development of her poetics and approach to Brazil.

Although most critics categorize "The Riverman" as the first of Bishop's "true" Brazilian poems—one of these "true poems of home" that Cook describes—I read it as a transitional poem given its many layers of mediation. Bishop does not relate a direct, first-person experience of Brazil; instead, "The Riverman" is a dramatic monologue told in the voice of an indigenous Amazonian, a narrative act that we recognize today as appropriative and thus troubling. In the poem, the unnamed speaker is summoned from his bed one night by a river spirit who is part dolphin and part man. The speaker, upon accepting this call, is initiated into an underwater, shamanic world where he interacts with various spirits who reside deep below the river's surface, including Luandinha, the snakelike goddess of this realm. As a result of these repeated encounters and his growing powers, the riverman begins to transform and to merge with his environment, exhibiting fishlike characteristics. Unlike the figures that Cook identifies as "at home only on sufferance," the riverman belongs to Brazil in a way that Bishop never could, first through his indigeneity and then through his physical assimilation to the environment. Thus, to call "The Riverman" a "true poem of home" strikes me as somewhat presumptuous. For Bishop, it is a poem of an imagined home, which at the moment of composition was also still an imagined place. To a certain extent, "The Riverman" counters Bishop's late poem "Santarém" in which the speaker states, "I liked the place; I liked the idea of the

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place" (Bishop *Poems* 207). The idea of the Amazon drew Bishop, but she had no firsthand experience of it.

Few places captured Bishop's imagination like the Amazon. From the moment she arrived in Brazil, she wanted to visit the region, and she began to research it, which was common practice for her. However, Bishop made the unusual decision to write "The Riverman" prior to visiting the Amazon, composing the poem based on a passage from *Amazon Town: A Study of Man in the Tropics* by anthropologist Charles Wagley in what David Kalstone calls "a poem of expectation" (195). Rather than exploring the gap between expectation and reality as she does in other poems, Bishop uses Wagley's construction of the region and its people as a foundation for a fantastic tale. Given her lifelong commitment to accuracy, this was a significant break from her typical writing process, and she repeatedly expressed her ambivalence towards the finished poem until Robert Lowell called it a "fairy story" (Bishop & Lowell 321). By prioritizing the fantastic elements of the poem, Lowell freed Bishop from the burden of accuracy—yet her magical character was still based on a real person, raising questions of whose story this is and who has the right to tell it.

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Mediation of Satiro's Story

In the preface to *Amazon Town*, Wagley details his experience of Brazil and specifies that most of his anthropological research was conducted during the summer of 1948. The book was published in 1953, two years after Bishop's arrival in Brazil, and reflects a post-war vision of modernity and progress. *Amazon Town* includes the subtitle "A Study of Man in the Tropics" which clearly outlines its purpose. Wagley was progressive for his time: he worked with Brazilian locals to conduct interviews of the Gurupá tribe (pseudonymized as "Itá" in the text). As Bethany Hicok remarks,

> Wagley adopts a style in this chapter that allows his interviewees to speak for themselves for long stretches of the narrative, so the effect is that we, as readers, are able to adopt different points of view as we move through their stories. (125)

Rather than simply observing and interpreting the Gurupá people, Wagley attempts to document individual perspectives. Hicok identifies the figure of Satiro from *Amazon Town* as the basis of the riverman, and this name is

handwritten in the margin of Bishop's first draft of the poem along with a list of "famous" *sacacas* (or shamans) that is also taken from the text (Bishop, Manuscript Drafts).

Although Wagley includes interviews and anecdotes in his book, he also explains the tribe to his Northern audience, so Satiro's story is framed for the reader by Wagley's chosen facts and context. Wagley attempts to be objective in his treatment of the tribe, employing a distant, nonjudgmental tone that has the paradoxical effect of exoticizing the Gurupá people, as they are presented as objects of study, not individuals sharing their stories and experiences. Despite this tone, he succeeds in describing a complex society in which the Gurupá tribe follows two conflicting belief systems: indigenous spiritual practices and Catholicism coexist. This is the kind of observation that Bishop normally makes during her travels. However, Bishop removes her indigenous character from Wagley's frame and instead focuses exclusively on the shamanic religion in her rendition of Satiro's story. Thus, Bishop decontextualizes and reworks elements of Satiro's story, which had already been framed and interpreted by Wagley, complicating the question of whose story this is.

When composing narrative poems, Bishop typically devoted a great deal of effort to ordering story elements, often rearranging stanzas from one draft to the next. Wagley's text provided an outline of the riverman's story, so her compositional process focused less on structuring the narrative and instead involved establishing her authority on the subject—in other words her right to tell this story. In her correspondence with both her editor and her friends, Bishop never questioned whether she should tell Satiro's story—only whether she could compose a poem about a place she had not visited. Her concerns pertained to being accurate about the Amazon, as she had composed a magical (and therefore clearly fictional) version of Satiro.

In "The Riverman," Bishop employs two distinct voices to mediate this already mediated version of Satiro's story: the ostensible authorial voice, which ultimately matches Wagley's ethnographic tone, and the riverman's first-person voice. The number of times Bishop rephrases and reframes the poem's opening across manuscript drafts is striking.[1] By citing Wagley's book as her source for the poem, she appears to be attempting to establish her authority while distancing herself from the subject matter. Bishop, despite her lack of firsthand experience, has clearly

1 The manuscript drafts of "The Riverman" are available in folder 57.16 of the Elizabeth Bishop Papers, Archives and Special Collections Library, Vassar College Libraries (see Bishop, Manuscript Drafts).

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done her research and therefore has the right to compose this poem. The academic nature of this text also seems important: her poem derives from a rigorous study of the people of this region. Bishop's many revisions to the opening reveal her attempts to resolve questions of accuracy. Through her drafts, she seems to be considering how to contextualize the poem for readers: how much information does she need to include to establish her authority on the subject and thus the accuracy of her poem? Which details are necessary? And whose authority should she borrow through citation?

The first precompositional fragment begins as follows:

> Juca becomes a Sacaca
> might become in a remoted village
> (This poem is supposed to tell the story of how a man in the Amzaonian region became a shaman, or witch doctor. True sacacas are very rare nowadasy; the usual wicth doctor is a page, a lower form who sometimes works with land spirits instead of river spirits. The names at the end are of famous sacacas of the past fifty years or ealrlier. The factual detail domes from AMAZON TOWN by and from conversations with Brasilian friends.[2]
> (Bishop, Manuscript Drafts)

In this version, the riverman has a name, giving him a specific identity that sounds potentially authentic. Although Satiro's name appears in the margin of this draft, Bishop renames him and eventually removes his name entirely. He simply becomes "The Riverman." Bishop immediately fictionalizes the original story, taking some elements of Wagley's text and Satiro's story and discarding others.

Unlike the final draft of the poem's opening, this fragment begins by establishing the poem's goal, which, like Juca, may or may not succeed. Then follows a description of different types of witch doctors in a hierarchy that valorizes river shamans more highly than land shamans. Bishop mentions "true" sacacas as well as "famous" ones, which grounds her first version of this tale in reality. Both this taxonomy and the references to "today" and "the past fifty years" provide evidence of scientific expertise. Finally, Bishop credits both Wagley and local friends, acquiring her authority from diverse sources, which establishes the poem as both academically researched and commonly known. Essentially, she tries to preemptively address every possible doubt regarding the poem's accuracy and her authority.

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[2] My transcription faithfully reproduces Bishop's typographic errors and underlining.

The published version of "The Riverman" takes a simpler approach, beginning with a gloss of the poem that is presented in the distanced manner of an encyclopedia entry:

> A man in a remote Amazonian village decides to become a *sacaca*, a witch doctor who works with water spirits. The river dolphin is believed to have supernatural powers; Luandinha is a river spirit associated with the moon; and the *pirarucú* is a fish weighing up to four hundred pounds. These and other details on which this poem is based are from *Amazon Town*, by Charles Wagley. (Bishop *Questions* 26)[3]

Bishop only credits Wagley for the details about the Amazon, not local friends, which distances Bishop the author from the subject, and she anonymizes the riverman, which implies that this character was invented and not a specific person such as Satiro or Juca. The phrase "is believed to have supernatural powers" signals that the author does not share these beliefs, which belong in this "remote" and obviously primitive place. Bishop juxtaposes magical beings with the weight of a fish, as if they were equally real or true. No sense of wonder or even curiosity disturbs this recitation of "facts"; thus, the tone, which seems both direct and objective, establishes authority. Foreign words are introduced and defined. Finally, framed by this white, Northern perspective, the dramatic monologue begins in the riverman's first-person voice.

Part of the compositional process for this poem involved finding the right name for the riverman's role. At first Bishop follows Wagley and calls him a shaman, an unambiguously indigenous figure whose title connotes a certain mysticism. Yet in subsequent drafts, she changes "shaman" to "witch-doctor," a composite term like "river-man" that combines magic and science, or in Wagley's worldview, indigenous and modern practices. This is notable given that Bishop ignores the central paradox of Wagley's chapter: that the tribe concurrently practices indigenous and Christian faiths. Instead, she establishes a binary of native/modern or magical/mundane. Applying this rather standard frame could be seen as a reduction of the Gurupá tribe's reality; however, Bishop does not make it so simple. In her version of the Amazon, the binary elements do not oppose each other; rather, they coexist as part of her speaker's identity, so she

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[3] Although most of this paper references "The Riverman" as it appears in *Poems*, that version adds brackets and italicization to the prefatory text that do not appear in the first edition of *Questions of Travel*, which is cited here instead.

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maintains the duality of the Gurupá that Wagley observes, even as she rewrites the opposing poles.

Victoria Harrison interprets "The Riverman" as a story "of two worlds —the *pagé* under the sea and the poor godson, cousin, and husband of a snoring wife, who wants to make good for his family" (157). In this depiction of the riverman, Harrison finds a parallel to Bishop's life and says that both the character and the poet "are of two worlds, their prose and lyric overlapping, their desire for clear-sighted access to a compelling mystery similarly thwarted by the limitations of their own perspective" (157). Harrison identifies a desire to access a visible yet unreachable space and claims that the riverman's attempts to belong to the underwater world resemble Bishop's cross-cultural navigation. She finds light humor in the poem's suggestion that "[…] pure, unmediated knowledge of another's spirit […] is all the riverman requires and all Bishop would need in order to be conversant with Brazilian difference" (156). Both Bishop and her character attempt to cross a liminal space in an authentic way. By contrast, Melissa Zeiger connects this poem to breath and the "crucial literal and figurative ability to breathe and to the threat of suffocation" which she links "to questions of poetic freedom and constraint" (49). Bishop's newfound productivity upon completion of this poem, according to Zeiger, results from resolving doubts (56). Sarah Kennedy argues that "The Riverman" represents a "swerve," which in Bishop's poetics permits "a fugitive form of empathy" (118). Kennedy elaborates that "[t]o 'swerve' is to deviate, to transgress and to stray. The motion encompasses the strategic (deliberate deviation) and the responsive (deflection)" which Kennedy links to phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty's "image of the *chiasm,* the criss-crossing interplay between flesh and world" (Kennedy 118). In the riverman's transformation, Kennedy finds the "gradual interpenetration of mind and environment" (119). Harrison and Kennedy both identify different sets of binaries within the poem, the first between two disparate cultures, and the second between mind and environment. Somehow in this poem these oppositions must be spanned or synthesized. In Kennedy's reading, the reconciliation stems from acceptance of this exchange of elements, whereas Harrison notes the impossibility of what is being attempted: an unmediated understanding of a foreign epistemology.

The focus on boundaries and their potential porousness is typical of Bishop's work. Beginning with "The Map," she shows interactions between elements rather than conflict or difference. Bishop does not represent land and water as disparate spaces that need to be bridged; rather,

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the liminal points of intersection have their own epistemology that encompasses both land and water. The riverman, as a hybrid figure, can access every space but cannot stay in any of them. Returning to the opening of the poem and the two distinct voices that mediate Bishop's idea of the Amazon, one can argue in favor of both the intellectual and the imagined experiences of place. Both provide access; however, neither is enough.

As I have established, in writing "The Riverman," Bishop interpreted Satiro's story, or at least Wagley's presentation of it. Her poem was further shaped for readers during the publication process, and this additional context also affects the way the poem is read. When "The Riverman" appeared in *The New Yorker*, the poem was juxtaposed with a full-page cartoon of two white women at a cocktail party. The contrast between the far-off magic of the poem and the blasé modernity of the image is jarring. The magazine's design adds yet another mediating layer for the audience, thereby complicating the matter of whose story this is. "The Riverman" in magazine form becomes *The New Yorker*'s framing of Bishop's interpretation of Wagley's study *Amazon Town*, in which the story of Satiro, a member of the Gurupá tribe who wanted to become a powerful shaman, is first recounted.

In *Questions of Travel*, by contrast, "The Riverman" is the ninth poem in a sequence of poems that are explicitly set in Brazil. It appears in the published book after poetic compositions in which Bishop questions the purpose of travel and describes Brazil's brutal colonial history. This direct engagement with themes of invasion and colonization makes "The Riverman" feel more like a "fairy story" by clearly situating the poem in an imaginary Amazon than when it is presented as a standalone poem.

Imagining the Amazon

While "The Riverman" can be read as either a combination or a juxtaposition of identities, it is not a poem of place, as some of Bishop's "second wave" dramatic monologues and persona poems had been. The "Squatter's Children" inhabit a land that is not their own, observed from a distance "[o]n the unbreathing sides of hills" (Bishop *Poems* 93), a strange opening that recalls the "self-pitying mountains" (87) in "Arrival at Santos" and the querulous figure of "The Mountain" itself. The character of Manuelzinho similarly occupies land, or attempts to, and meets endless, surprising failure. The riverman, by contrast, is not an occupant but a person who truly belongs to the place where he lives, with a calling to deep-

en that connection. However, as has been established, Bishop had not visited the Amazon prior to composing “The Riverman,” and she was concerned about possible inaccuracies. While she could research and read about *sacacas*, when writing about place, her compositional method typically relied on observation and on evoking the process of perception. Without direct experience of place, she depicted an archetype instead, an idea of the Amazon rather than the Amazon itself. To keep this prototypical Amazonian town from becoming too static, Bishop used routines and temporality to create a sense of place out of placelessness.

While the riverman constantly moves throughout the poem, from the very first draft the Amazon is essentially “placeless.” Bishop’s descriptions typically include ever shifting colors—of the map, of the fish, of Brazilian nature—and yet in a poem about the Amazon, she relies solely on green, yellow, and white. Luandinha is dressed in “elegant white satin, / with her big eyes green and gold” (*Poems* 104) and as the riverman transforms, his skin turns “yellow” (104). He receives a “pale-green coral twig” and the moon casts a “silver” light on Luandinha’s rooms (105). Later the moon “burns white” (106). The description reads flatly, as if in a dream. Despite the dreamlike aspects of this place, however, Bishop does not describe the underwater realm, which would push this dramatic monologue too far into fantasy. The riverman enters Luandinha’s domain through a door which has a lintel and opens inward with a physicality that much of the rest of the poem lacks. On land, the riverman’s house is mentioned along with washing, but even the shop is not mentioned—only the shopkeeper. Underwater, the spirits show him “room after room” (104), but what does this mean? How is a reader to visualize this? Do the spirits share a palace? Are these rooms made of water, like the doorway into this realm? Do they exist materially or only conceptually?

Even the riverman’s travels occur in a disoriented manner. The spirits took him “from here to Belém / and back again in a second” (104), and “faster than you can think it / we travel upstream and downstream, we journey from here to there” (104). Place breaks down into axes of here/there and up/down, situating these spirits everywhere and nowhere at once. The riverman does not even know where he is beyond “miles, under the river” (104). On land, however, the riverman’s disorientation results from an oblique shadow cast by the spirit world. At first, the Dolphin was “hid by the river mist” (103), but once the riverman is initiated into this magical world, they all smoke together, and “[t]he smoke rose like mist / through the water, and our breaths / didn’t make any bubbles” (104). Lu-

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andinha gives the riverman access to language through smoke as well, but he can only see this world "when the moon shines on the river." Even when he shops for a virgin mirror, a tool he needs for his new craft, he cannot gaze into it directly. The mirror can only be regarded sideways in order to glimpse members of the spirit world. He hides the objects given to him by the spirits under his canoe, a location that is mentioned parenthetically, hiding it away from the surface world.

Although Bishop cannot seem to situate this poem through physical or spatial descriptions, her version of the Amazon is not, in fact, "placeless." In developing the idea of placelessness, Edward Relph first describes place as a sense that is developed "in a chiaroscuro of setting, landscape, ritual, routine, other people, personal experiences, care and concern for home, and in the context of other places" (29). At the heart of place is openness and authenticity, which relates to one's willingness to engage with the surrounding environment. While the industrial world might appear homogenous or placeless due to a lack of unique characteristics, Relph stresses that "placelessness is an attitude and an expression of that attitude" (80). He singles out mass tourism as one of the most "inauthentic" attitudes towards place, "for in tourism individual and authentic judgement about places is nearly always subsumed to expert or socially accepted opinion, or the act and means of tourism become more important than the places visited" (83). In this sense, "Arrival at Santos" depicts "placelessness" more precisely than does "The Riverman" in which the speaker is so invested in his surrounding environment that he merges with it.

Furthermore, spatiality comprises only one part of place sense. Unable to rely on sensory perception, Bishop instead establishes a sense of place through temporality. Doreen Massey and Nigel Thrift describe places as "gatherings of habitual practices that are necessarily attached to particular locations" (295), and this temporality, or development of routine, marks another key element in the construction of place. Bishop specifies that the riverman has visited this underwater realm three times, a magic number. Only the first visit is fully described as the latter ones replicate the experience, assimilating and normalizing a behavioral shift. A stanza break shows the passage of time, and within that visual break, the journey becomes routine—so much so that the riverman himself experiences physical transformation. Soon he travels "every moonlit night" (*Poems* 104) with the spirits "upstream and downstream" and "from here to there" (105), and the implacement that Edward S. Casey (29) describes in which

place is not only a location but an encounter occurs through these repeated visits.

After establishing this new routine, the riverman shares a slight adjustment: “Luandinha gives a party. / Three times now I’ve attended” (105). Then the description offers a temporal surprise:

> Her rooms shine like silver
> with the light from overhead,
> a steady stream of light
> like at the cinema. (105)

Until this point, the poem seems somewhat timeless, or perhaps set in a period of early industrialization. In the opening, the riverman compares the light of the moon to a gasoline-lamp and mentions “[…] a piece of washing / forgotten on the bank” (103). These details establish an expectation of a village that has not yet been electrified. Luandinha’s eyes are compared to the lights on a river steamer, which is temporally ambiguous. Thus, the cinema feels anachronistic with contemporary technology and culture intruding on what had until that moment appeared to be a mostly “primitive” village. The juxtaposition of these temporal elements energizes the composition, which reads like a more classic “Bishop poem” with the startling observation that reframes the scene and forces the reader to incorporate jarring new information.

Lorrie Goldensohn interprets the “disjunctive weaving of industrial objects with the organic world of the river” (217) as a “tactic” of defamiliarization and remarks on the “persuasive junction of prosaic and exotic” (218). Items like the primus stove and gasoline-lamp serve to accentuate the differences between the magical world below the river and the manufactured world above, returning to the notion of opposition within the poem. In considering this poem as depicting an “idea” of the Amazon, Bishop’s real concerns about modernization encroaching on indigenous land and culture intrude on this imagined space. The repeated romantic language about the moonlit night and the beautiful Luandinha are disrupted by “the worms / with tiny electric eyes” and the river making a sound like “a primus pumped up high,” indications that nature and industry have also begun to merge.

In addition to temporal placemaking, Bishop employs a classic device to evoke sense of place: personification. As in “A Trip to Vigia,” Bishop personifies the river, and, once again, she subverts a romantic image. This river, instead of nourishing the earth as one might typically expect,

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> […] drains the jungles; it draws
> From trees and plants and rocks
> From half around the world,
> It draws from the very heart
> of the earth the remedy
> for each of the diseases—
> one just has to know how to find it. (*Poems* 106)

Whether this river is intentionally acquisitive or not, it siphons "the pure elixirs" from the land—some primal life force, which Bishop later reframes as, "When the moon shines and the river / lies across the earth / and sucks it like a child" (106), but in either case, the river takes, and the riverman's role is to restore balance, claiming some of the accumulated hoard for society above.

Vocation

According to the opening of the first draft of this poem, at its core "The Riverman" is "supposed to tell the story" of a man becoming a *sacaca*. The dramatic monologue is, after all, a narrative form, and the drafts reveal a startlingly simple story: one of vocation. The first precompositional fragment begins with an apostrophe, and the riverman calls on Boto the Dolphin and Luandinha. By the second fragment, however, this invocation disappears. Instead, the riverman responds to the Dolphin's call. Then follows the riverman's initiation, where he is given tools of this craft and time to learn and to practice it.

The first full draft of the poem ends with a prayer to Luandinha and the Dolphin: "Mother of Waters, teach me! / Father of Dolphins, guide me!" (Bishop, Manuscript Drafts). As with the introductory text, Bishop constantly adjusted these final lines. Ultimately, the riverman is cast as a "Chosen One," and the poem ends with, "The Dolphin singled me out / and Luandinha agreed" (*Poems* 107) rather than a request for a blessing. The poem's overarching narrative then becomes a response to a calling and an enthusiastic acceptance of that role. After all, the transformed Riverman sibilantly asks, "Why shouldn't I be ambitious? / I sincerely desire to be / a serious *sacaca*" (105).

The paragraph in *Amazon Town* that most directly corresponds to "The Riverman" is about Satiro's efforts to learn his craft. Wagley portrays a sympathetic figure but seems unsure that Satiro will achieve his goal, unlike Bishop's confident *sacaca*. In fact, although Kalstone characterizes

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"The Riverman" as a poem of Bishop's expectations of the Amazon, the poem tells the story of Satiro's expectations, not his accomplishments. According to Wagley, Satiro says that he cannot yet travel underwater but "[he] believes that he will one day be able to travel under water and visit the great water snake" and there "he expects to receive his *maracá* (rattle) from the very mouth of a giant water snake" (232). Bishop gives her riverman the tools and power that Satiro desires.

By the end of the poem, the riverman is sure of his abilities and ambitious in his pursuit, and that spirit fills the next phase of Bishop's Brazilian compositions as she finally writes her "true" poems of home. While Bishop inhabits this character and writes through his first-person perspective, demonstrating a marked change from her earlier poetic compositions, the riverman serves as an intermediary until she can relate her firsthand experience of Brazil. Of all the figures who appear in *Amazon Town*, Bishop chose the one who wanted to perfect his craft—the person whose story most closely matched her own.

For Bishop, "The Riverman" served a dual purpose of first imagining the Amazon, a place that she longed to visit, and second considering the demands of vocation. Yet Bishop's identification with Satiro and her awareness of the complexities of writing from a privileged status did not preclude her from appropriation in several of her attempts to write sympathetically across race or class. The issue of orientation, as described by Sara Ahmed, further complicates matters. In her book *Queer Phenomenology*, Ahmed demonstrates how the language of direction intersects with both sexual orientation and the concept of 'the Orient.' Bishop was queer and oriented herself towards other 'outsiders.' However, her orientation towards other 'outsider' figures, while understandable, was not necessarily reciprocated. This lack of reciprocity makes a poem like "The Riverman" particularly troubling.

"Manuelzinho," another dramatic monologue that Bishop composed in Brazil, has often been criticized for its classist tone; however, the lines between the poet, speaker, and gardener Manuelzinho are clear, and the poem engages the frustrations of a tenant-landlord relationship in which the characters bear responsibilities towards each other. Goldensohn describes Bishop's "exploration of the ironic gap between the pretended speaker of dramatic monologue, and the voice of the poet herself, exploring her own disconnections and powers" (209) as one of the strengths of "The Riverman," but this description and the language I use above about the fictional riverman serving as an "intermediary" for Bishop also illustrate the problem of this poem. Rather than an encounter between two

individuals with a shared hope or vision, one becomes a vehicle for the other's self-expression.

Of course, it is possible to write cross-culturally and to ethically compose a dramatic monologue, but to do either requires consideration of the people whose story is being told. Bishop's uneasiness about this poem was justified, although not for reasons of accuracy regarding place. "The Riverman" is about transition and acts as a transitional piece in the development of Bishop's Brazilian poetics and as such was necessary for her to write. Yet by using the idea of Satiro's world, a clearly fantastic place, to tell a story of their shared ambition and of fulfilling their vocations, the story becomes Bishop's own.

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