

NOMINATION FOR A LAUREATESHIP

By V. L. O. CHITTICK

ARE there any generally accepted ground rules governing the proposal of a candidate for a laureateship which require that the nominee be a native of the country, or province, asked to bestow the honor? Or the acknowledged literary representative of an entire geographical or ethnological area instead of a restricted, and perhaps not wholly characteristic, portion of it? Or an author of widely recognized achievement, and not one of little more than recently admitted promise? Or the writer exclusively of verse, no matter how gifted in prose? I know of none. And so, with possible temerity, but with no shade of apology, I venture to nominate such a person as my inquiries suggest to be Nova Scotia's unofficial laureate.

The "Who's Who" sort of data about my candidate (my prospect, I should better like to write) can be readily, and briefly, assembled:

ELIZABETH BISHOP, born, at Worcester, Massachusetts, 1911. Graduate of Vassar College. Awarded: the Houghton, Mifflin \$1000 poetry fellowship, insuring publication of her first volume of verse, *North & South*, 1946, (a second is scheduled for publication in 1955); a Guggenheim fellowship in creative writing; a \$2500 fellowship from Bryn Mawr; first place prize of the Poetry Society of America, 1952. Consultant in Poetry, United States Library of Congress, 1950-51. Contributor to various periodicals since 1942, among them, *Partisan Review*, *New Republic*, *Direction*, *New Directions*, *New Democracy*, *Life and Letters Today*, *Poetry*, *Forum*, *Harper's Bazaar*, *Nation*, *New Yorker*. Selections from her poetry included in *A Little Treasury of Modern Poetry* (1946), *Mid-Century American Poets*, 1950, *Modern Poetry*, 1951, and *The Penguin Book of Modern American Verse*, 1954. Readings from her poetry on Columbia Records, *Pleasure Dome Album*.

In that list there is surely a dearth of evidence showing any connection with Nova Scotia! But a half-dozen details supplied (in one of her book reviews) by Miss Bishop concerning her childhood background bring the connection clearly, if remotely, into sight: "Tremont Temple with its Baptist sermons, Symphony Hall, the Harvard Glee Club, the Museum of Fine Arts"—and the swan boats in the Public Gardens. Any indigenous, and mi-

grant, Bluenose ever mindful, as he must be, that Boston, despite its location, is the chief metropolis of Nova Scotia, will experience a joyful shock of recognition of shared-in-common cultural influences in that memory-stirring recall. Miss Bishop's ancestry makes her Maritime Province affiliations still more apparent. Her paternal grandfather came from Prince Edward Island to Massachusetts, and her mother was born, and grew up, in Great Village, Colchester County, Nova Scotia. (One of her great-uncles was for a time president of Acadia.) And—this is the clincher point in maintaining her Nova Scotia provenance—in Great Village Miss Bishop had her “primer class” schooling, and has lived in her mother's birthplace at various times since. From the associations then established come her nostalgic memories of Nova Scotia's “fir trees and elm trees,” and the confession *via* far away Brazil, where she is now resident, that she'd “give anything” to see them again “and go picking blueberries.” And obviously from the same source derive both the scenes and the characters in several of her poems, as well as those in her prose writings.

In her poetry, whatever its regional origins, Elizabeth Bishop is completely the mistress of her art. Her work in this *genre* resembles that of no other poet I can think of. It is thoroughly her own. Never once has she poured her thought or her feeling into some prefabricated mould. Her verse forms, whether elusively free or strictly patterned, are scissors-cut to clothe their subjects. Many of her poems appear at first glance vagrant enough to seem only a slight remove from prose. But alter the ordering of a single cadence, and the absolute control under which it has been fashioned becomes evident. Yet the principle by which her rhythms and line lengths is determined evades discovery—unless it be to trust to the guidance of an impeccable ear. The indisputable rightness of her words, the sense of their being the result of an inspired choice, is as unmistakable as the invariably satisfying movement of her lines. Both virtues are revealed in the arresting statement that “the gray scratches” of burnt-over timberland are

“like the admirable scriptures made on stones by stones.” Note that “admirable” has been selected as the wanted epithet with a probable awareness of what T. S. Eliot demands in a poet's use of words: a knowledge of their root as well as of their surface meaning. Reverse the sequence of those two concluding short phrases, and see how subtly the precarious balance between what spells and what spoils the intent has been achieved. Her use of rhyme, terminal or interior, whole or oblique, inter-

mittent or regular, is another feature of her verse that is undictated by convention. It serves a well-defined need that is quite other than that of mere decor. Yet, unless for purposes of amusement, it is never obtrusive but always deftly functional. Even her capitalization (initial) and punctuation are intelligently personalized. Take her handling of the colon, for instance. The colon, a recent critic has stated, is ordinarily a bridge, otherwise a chasm. Hers is neither. Instead she employs it as a launching platform from which she catapults a jet-propelled load of completing detail into her context.

The inviolability of Miss Bishop's individualism as a writer was characteristically disclosed a few years ago in her reply to a questionnaire inquiring about the how and why of her verse technique. "It all depends," was the answer. That response might well be accepted as a declaration of her literary credo. She refuses to be bound by arbitrarily imposed standards. Each of her writing problems she solves by considering, wholly on her own it seems, the various factors involved. By that process alone "it all depends" what the outcome will be. So that one may be certain it will be primarily expressive of herself, though that need imply no failure to be universally expressive too. This insistence on being herself inevitably brings to mind (for one who has read them) the successive entries revealing the same attitude towards her craft in Virginia Woolf's *A Writer's Diary*—without in the least suggesting, however, any dependence of the younger author on the older. Statements such as these, for example: "I have to some extent forced myself to break every mould and find a fresh form of being . . . for everything," and, "I will go on adventuring, changing, opening my mind and my eyes, refusing to be stamped and stereotyped, [and continue] to adventure and discover and allow no rigid poses: to be supple and naked to the truth." Something of the same independence towards critical commentary as that towards precedent and tradition is indicated in these further remarks in Miss Bishop's reply to the questionnaire referred to: "The analysis of poetry is growing more and more pretentious and deadly. . . . This does not mean that I am opposed to all close analysis and criticism. But I am opposed to making poetry monstrous or boring and proceeding to talk the very life out of it."

With that warning in mind, I warily proceed to acclaim Miss Bishop's performance in both verse and prose. Much of her verse is descriptive. It ranges in scene from Newfoundland and Cape Breton down through New England, Maryland, Florida, and the Caribbean islands as far south as Santos, Brazil,

and eastward to Paris and Rome. In a very special sense she has that double vision called by everybody (since Blake) the gift of seeing not only with but through the eye—of seeing, as the old folk-sayers put it, “into the heart of a grindstone.” And she has that other gift of the poet, the ability to put what she sees into *histrionic* words. They act as well as tell—they tell *by* acting—what she has to report. Witness, from among her many revelations of the sea:

“All is silver: the heavy surface of the sea,
swelling slowly as if considering spilling over,”

or,

“I have seen it over and over, the same sea, the same,
slightly, indifferently swinging above the stones,”

or,

“The silken water is weaving and weaving,
disappearing under the mist equally in all directions.”

Witness again how she records, with an accuracy which no scientist would dispute, two instances of the ocean's surface tension, one at wading-beach depth:

“the waves
. . . try revolving, but the wheels
give way, they will not bear the weight;”

and the other a long way off-shore:

“the ship steers off
where waves give in to one another's waves.”

And here, still considering the sea, her vision reaches, as it does time and again, well beyond the exquisitely sensory into the realm of the profoundly contemplative, first to warn that there are limits to man's conquest of nature:

“Cold dark deep and absolutely clean,
element bearable to no mortal,
to fish and to seals . . .”

and then to draw this complacency-disturbing analogy:

“It [the sea] is like what we imagine knowledge to be
dark, salt, clear, moving, utterly free,
drawn from the cold hard mouth
of the world, derived from the rocky breasts
forever, flowing and drawn, and since
our knowledge is historical, flowing and flown.”

"Gray" is Miss Bishop's favorite adjective, or at any rate the one which occurs most frequently in her work. Here are some samples of her use of it: "clear gray icy water;" "gray and blue-gray stones;" "down the gray avenues;" "the gray lights / on duller gray;" "a gray rag of rotted calico;" "my gray wasps' nest." It sorts aptly with what catches her attention in the wide expanse of dreary seascapes and the forbidding coastlines about which she so often writes. As it does also with those depressing aspects of modern life about which she equally often writes. No one, it seems to me, could face up to the harsh realities of everyday existence with more awareness and open-mindedness than she does. Yet it would be a grave mistake to think of her as a poet of gloom and chronic discontent. Rather her outstanding virtue is her consistent readiness to give play to an insouciant and delightful sense of humor. Perhaps as agreeably diverting an example of her amusingly straight-faced manner of employing it is this passage recalling an encounter with a seal. (A Nova Scotian seal, though I was sceptical on that score until reassured. Seals were no part of *my* growing up in the Maritimes.) It reveals, too, that her Tremont Temple memories were not short lived, even if the hymn she mentions is more than likely Baptist only by adoption:

"One seal particularly

I have seen evening after evening.

He was curious about me. He was interested in music;

like me a believer in total immersion,

so I used to sing him Baptist hymns.

I sang him 'A mighty fortress is our God.'

He stood up in the water and regarded me
steadily, moving his head a little.

Then he would disappear, then suddenly emerge
almost in the same spot, with a sort of shrug
as if it were against his better judgment."

If there is barely more than a trace of impiousness in this recital of a disillusioning experiment in religious appeal, there is no doubt of its being cogently present in the following caricature depicting an allegorical figure in what, it is safe to predict, will be another failure in high minded intention. (Perhaps Tremont Temple lies behind the deserved satire of this account too. Who knows?)

"But a skeletal lighthouse standing there
in black and white clerical dress,
who 'lives on his nerves,' thinks he knows better"

than the poet, to whom the scene before the lighthouse
looks "like heaven."

"He thinks that Hell rages below his iron feet,
that that is why the shallow water is so warm,
and he knows that heaven is not like this.
Heaven is not like flying or swimming,
but has something to do with blackness and a strong glare,
and when it gets dark he will remember something
strongly worded to say on the subject."

Twice-barbed though this is, it provides no ground for sustaining a charge of irreverence against Miss Bishop's poetry in general. When reverence is demanded she yields it gladly. A striking example of this willingness on her part is afforded by "Roosters," in joyous defiance of its seemingly irreverent title. The three-rhymed stanzas, echoing the crucial barnyard call, narrate the cock's crow incident, and its outcome, in the Apostle Peter's denial of the Master. The point made is that the before-dawn clarion notes did something more than convict Peter of his foretold treason. They brought him to a realization of the enormity of the betrayal, and hence to the beginning of his redemption. And for that reason, rather than for the cock-crowing fulfillment of Christ's prediction, the legend is commemorated to this day by a statue facing the Lateran chapel in Rome. The poem concludes:

"Old holy sculpture
could set it all together
in one small scene, past and future:
Christ stands amazed,
Peter, two fingers raised
to surprised lips, both as if dazed.

But in between
a little cock is seen
carved on a dim column in the travertine,

* * *

Poor Peter, heart sick,

still cannot guess
those cock-a-doodles yet might bless,
his dreadful rooster come to mean forgiveness

* * *

and that outside the Lateran
there would always be
a bronze cock on a porphyry
pillar so the people and the Pope might see

that even the Prince
of the Apostles long since
had been forgiven, and to convince

all the assembly
that 'Deny deny deny,'
is not all that roosters cry.

In a day when religious themes, reverently handled, in the poetry of the younger Younger Generation are none too common, "Roosters" is a poem to be treasured.

Being modern Miss Bishop's verse can hardly escape the charge of obscurity brought against the work of many present-day poets. As a matter of fact her verse is not at all obscure, though admittedly it is, on occasion, difficult. Or, to make that remark less cryptic, perhaps: you can always be sure as to what she says, though, now and then, you may be in doubt as to what she means. And the blame for that, if blame there be, lies, I am inclined to think, less in the density of the writing than in the density of the reader. Too many delayed reactions to modern verse on my part make me leery of any other opinion. Close reading at times is required, of course, for Miss Bishop often concerns herself with problems that are not easy of either statement or solution. Other and older philosophers (and experts in aesthetics) have seldom, if ever, come up with more comprehensible, or sounder, answers. In any event, the courage of Miss Bishop's convictions compels admiration, as does the courage with which she fights her way to them against whatever odds. A quick spot-check of the questions she has not hesitated to consider shows so wide a range of intellectual interests as this: the poetic versus the scientific reading of fact ("The Map"); the problem of personal identity ("The Mountain"); the problem—and the absurdity—of man's duality ("The Gentleman of Shalott"); the effect of modern urban existence on human aspiration ("Man-moth"—a Kafka-like fantasy touched off by a misprint of "mammoth"); the artifact's endurance against the ravages of time ("The Monument"); the power of the ideal over the actual ("A Miracle for Breakfast"); and the triumphant humility that follows from one's recognizing one's betters ("The Fish").

Full-length quotation, obviously, will tell more, and in less time, about Miss Bishop's verse than any amount of such data listing. Though how to select what might be called representative from such variability of subject matter and treatment as hers is no simple task. Frankly, I find that a selection that is

truly representative quite impossible to make. I have chosen the poem which follows, therefore, not because I think it her best, or most typical, but because, if I had the opportunity of button-holing a listener, it is the one among all she has written I should most wish to quote. That it will have a wide appeal is certain, I feel, in spite of its being, almost pointedly, local in its action and setting—so much so in fact that on first reading it I was certain that I could name the place, if not the person, involved. I was mistaken, of course, but the poem is none the less Nova Scotian in origin. (I have the poet's word for that.) But let it speak for itself:

THE PRODIGAL¹

The brown enormous odor he lived by
 was too close, with its breathing and thick hair,
 for him to judge. The floor was rotten, the sty
 was plastered halfway up with glass-smooth dung.
 Light-lashed, self-righteous, above moving snouts,
 the pigs' eyes followed him, a cheerful stare—
 even to the sow that always ate her young—
 till, sickening, he leaned to scratch her head.
 But sometimes mornings after drinking bouts
 (he hid the pints behind a two-by-four)
 the sunrise glazed the barnyard mud with red:
 the burning puddles seemed to reassure.
 And then he thought he almost might endure
 his exile yet another year or more.

But evenings the first star came to warn.
 The farmer whom he worked for came at dark
 to shut the cows and horses in the barn
 beneath their overhanging clouds of hay,
 with pitchforks, faint forked lightnings, catching light,
 safe and companionable as in the Ark.
 The pigs stuck out their little feet and snored.
 The lantern—like the sun, going away—
 laid on the mud a pacing aureole.
 Carrying a bucket along a slimy board,
 he felt the bats' uncertain staggering flight,
 his shuddering insights, beyond his control,
 touching him. But it took him a long time
 finally to make his mind up to go home.

One image in this double sonnet (count the lines—picking out the rhyme scheme will surprise you) tempts me to forget my implied promise of no comment. That two-by-four! From the

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beginning of wooden building construction two-by-fours, I suppose, have been in existence. Yet it took the splendid audacity of Miss Bishop to employ poetically (and alongside an aureole) so seemingly unpoetic an object. Asked about it, she replied simply that it "was just true." A more satisfactory response would be hard to imagine.

Nova Scotia is of little more than sporadic concern in Miss Bishop's verse. (Besides "The Prodigal," her other poems that relate to the province are "A Summer's Dream," "Cape Breton," and "At the Fishhouses"—the last her favorite among them.) It is the almost exclusive concern of her prose. I know of nothing else written that conveys with such an impact of nostalgia the essential Nova Scotianess of Nova Scotia—or at least those aspects of it manifest along the inner reaches of the Bay of Fundy during the years of my boyhood there. So far only two of her recalls of that segment of former Old Province life have appeared in recent print. There are more to follow. (I am omitting consideration of an early sample of her work of this sort, published in *Life and Letters To-day*, for no better reason than that for the moment it is unavailable.) Both these ventures in retrospective narrative—they are too uncomplicated in "plot" to be properly called short stories—have stamped indelibly, though delicately, into their texture a *motif* that certifies them at once as definitely Nova Scotian, of an era now passed or passing. Its pattern may be traced in the incidental references that bring Boston back to mind as the place where nearly every provincial boy—and girl, too—when in need of work went to look for a job, and always found one. Another movement along that same Nova Scotia to New England axis, indirectly referred to in the second of these renewals of an elder day, produces a comparable, though sharply contrasting, effect: the migration of tubercular patients toward Boston or vicinity for medical care, where, too often, they remained to die.

"Gwendolyn," the first of the *New Yorker* pieces, is an objectively straightforward account of some not more than mildly unusual inter-related day-by-day happenings in the life of a Nova Scotian six year old as remembered from the standpoint of, say, youthful maturity. An unexpected permission to play with an aunt's wonder-doll during an interval of childhood illness; a perhaps overly devout attachment to the "pink and white" Dresden china title figurine, a small girl diabetic, with "pale gold hair," who because her parents could not or would not keep sweets out of her diet, knows she is going to die—and does, two days after confiding her doom to her much distressed com-

panion; a near-traumatic shock that follows an imagined indignity done to the corpse of the dead playmate by the village undertaker; a reenactment of the funeral, a teen-age boy cousin assisting, while playing again (this time without permission, "doing something really bad") with the aunt's wonder-doll, and christening it with the name of the lately buried idol;—such are the not a little touching, and amusing, events which make up the chronicle. Plainly there is nothing here that might not have taken place in any number of settings. The undeniable Nova Scotian quality that marks their recital for its own comes not from the reminiscent details about the principals in the action, but from those about the attendant "props" and "supers"—their look, their sound, their touch, and in addition, in the case of the "props," their smell, and their taste.

There are grandmother's button basket, for instance, "large and squashed. . . filled with everything from metal snaps of men's overalls to a set of large cut-steel buttons with deer heads and green glass eyes in them;" grandmother's crazy quilt, made "long before, when such quilts had become a fad, [of] small irregularly shaped pieces of silk or velvet of all colors," on which names had been copied in "chain stitch," and the whole thing "put together on maroon flannel, with feather-stitching joining the pieces;" and the hymns ("nice watery ones—because we were Baptists") with which grandmother "in her rather affectedly lugubrious voice . . . thinned out to half its ordinary volume on the higher notes" sang the little visitor to sleep, "There is a green hill far away," "Will there be stars in my crown," "In the sweet bye-and-bye," and ". . . precious jewels / Bright gems for his crown." And there is the strawberry basket "half filled with new marbles—clay ones, in the usual mottled shades of red, brown, purple, and green, [and] several of . . . fine, unglazed, cream-colored clay, with purple and pink lines around them, [and] a really big one, probably an inch and a half in diameter, of roughly shiny glazed pink, like crockery."

The village church (Presbyterian) was "quite large—a Gothic structure, with non-flying buttresses, and a tall wooden steeple." In the rear were buggy sheds, and around the enclosing "large green plot were white wooden pillars with double chains slung slackly between them," [on which] my cousin Billy . . . and I liked to clamber and swing." The village graveyard "was on the bank of the river . . . where the bank was high. It lay small and green and white, with firs and cedars and grave-stones balancing against the dreaming lavender-red Bay of Fundy. The headstones were mostly rather thin, coarse white marble slabs, frequently leaning slightly, but there was a scat-

tering of small urns and obelisks and broken columns. . . . The favorite memorial for small children was a low rectangle of the same coarse white marble as the larger stones, but with little lambs recumbent on top. I adored these lambs, and counted them and caressed them and sat on them. Some were almost covered by dry, bright-gold lichens, some with green and gold and gray mixed together, some were almost lost among the long grass and roses and blackberries and tea-berries." Perhaps the most heart-stirring (or is it only mouth-watering?) of these village memories is the community picnic-supper: "Pans of beans and biscuits and scalloped potatoes were set out on long tables, and all our varieties of pickles and relishes (chowchows and piccalillies), conserves and preserves, cakes and pies, parkins and hermits [*parkins and hermits!*—all glistening and gleaming in the late sunshine—and water for tea. . . . brought to boil over two fires." Not the least vivid of the remembered features of the once familiar locale is "the trace of rustic corruption. . . . the whitewashed privy in the barn," and its "little window, with the beautiful view of the elm-studded 'interval' in back."

The second of the *New Yorker* pieces, "In the Village," is an altogether different remembrance of things past. It is written in a prose that is impressionistic, atmospheric, almost lyric, rather than in one shaped to the needs of an objective realism. Instead of holding herself apart as a spectator removed in time from the life of her earliest youth, the narrator merges herself into the very consciousness of the child recalled from long ago. The word pictures of provincial manners and scenes are replaced by an antiphony of sounds—of two sounds, no more, that between them somehow define, contain, all that remains significant of whatever formerly occurred in the recollected village. The first is heard only once, yet it lives on in memory, possibly with diminished intensity, seemingly unending. It hangs there "in the past, in the present, and all those years between. . . . not loud, just alive forever." It is the scream of an invalid, widowed mother, temporarily unbalanced during the fitting of her first after-mourning dress, when she realizes that she will never live to wear it. A devastating death-cry, the threat of its recurrence haunts every waking moment of the little girl who was in the sick-room at the time the dressmaker's efforts to please were rudely halted. The other, the opposing, countervailing, sound is an exhilarating life-shout, that comes close to being a song, the repeated "*Clang! Clang!*" of duplicate hammer strokes on the anvil of Nate, the village horseshoer. In the end it dominates, perhaps completely vanquishes, the mother's scream. The outcome is left uncertain.

There are subordinate sounds also, too widely spaced to affect the reader as continuing elements in the harmony, though they are integral parts of the score. The ominous bump of a tin washbasin on the carpeted floor of the upstairs hall, for example. Or the raucous summons from the church steeple, the frightening, insistent bell-ringing, calling out the volunteer nighttime fire fighters, followed by the rattle and rumble of the assembled wagons carrying men and water-casks from the river to the blazing barn. Or the stubborn, unflagging attempt to offset the gloom of a former pet-pig's butchering, an aunt's pianoforte rendition of "Out in the Fields." "She plays it and plays it; then she switches to Mendelssohn's 'War March of the Priests'." A markedly variant sound sequence relates to the partial escape from the cloud that lowers over the distraught family, the daily routine of driving Nelly, the cow, to pasture. "Switch. Switch," goes the big stick, "clad in bark," against her insensitive hide; and then, "Whack!" as it strikes her hip-bone. But "Nelly, oblivious, makes cow flops. Smack. Smack. Smack. Smack." (How partial the escape was appears when the over-turned youngster reaches the pasture to find there "an immense, sibilant, glistening, loneliness," and on the way passing through a yard planted with "unhappy apple trees," has fears of being accosted by an ogre of a man, who had once stopped her and asked how her soul was. "I had felt a soul, heavy in my chest, all the way home.")

Color strands, too, some, perhaps most, of them symbolic, are woven into the developing theme. The Nova Scotian skies, "pure blue. . . too blue," stained around the horizon with "the cloud of bloom on the elm trees, the violet on the fields of oats." "The long green marshes," bordering the Minas Basin shoreline, "with the tide halfway in or out, the wet red mud glazed with sky blue until it meets the creeping lavender-red water." A horse's nose, "with ink spots under milk." A superannuated shepherd dog, "with too much black and yellow and white fur, . . . [and] yellow caterpillars for eyebrows." The "most interesting hat in the village," the minister's, "a man's regular stiff straw sailor, only it is black." And ever and again the somber touch of gray. Even once popular confections are restored to memory in terms of color rather than of flavor. "Pink and yellow" popcorn balls; "*humbugs* [*italics mine*] . . . brown like brook water;" and—the ultimate among these reminders of bygone years—Moirs' chocolates! (Within weeks after encountering them in "In the Village," I saw, for the first time in forty years, a box of Moirs' chocolates, in a drugstore window, in suburban Vancouver.) The last named, and not otherwise

described, of these delectables are intermittently enclosed with a diversified selection of homemade goodies and uplift reading matter in stoutly wrapped packages, and mailed every Monday afternoon to a sanitorium, the purple pencilled address of which must, so the little bearer of the lovingly assorted gifts is convinced, be carefully hidden from the sight of the lustily hammering Nate. "Your grandmother is very faithful," observes the postmaster.

The conclusion is a crescendo of sheer loveliness, the recreation of the remembered child's yearning for the final victory of the living over the dead or dying:

"Clang.

Clang.

. . .

Oh, beautiful pure sound!

It turns everything else to silence.

But still, once in a while, the river gives an unexpected gurgle. 'Slp,' it says, out of the glassy-ridged brown knots sliding along the surface.

Clang.

And everything except the river holds its breath.

Now there is no scream. Once there was one and it settled slowly down to earth one hot summer afternoon; or did it float up, into that dark, too dark, blue sky? But surely it has gone away, forever.

Clang.

It sounds like a bell buoy out at sea.

It is the elements speaking: earth, air, fire, water.

All those other things— . . . damaged and lost, sickened or destroyed; even the frail almost-lost scream—are they too frail for us to hear their voices long, too mortal?

Nate!

Oh, beautiful sound, strike again!"

* * *

Not long ago I was talking with a recent Pulitzer Prize winner in verse about Miss Bishop's work. "Among the younger poets, of her age group," he said, "she is one who will be remembered." The authority of that opinion, based as it is on a full awareness of how close to perfection her writing comes, should be enough to justify my attempt at nominating her for at least a provincial laureate's honours. It ought to insure also, I feel, the implied motion of that attempt's being seconded and passed.

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