The Impact of Elizabeth Bishop's Tragic Experiences on her Poetry

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Abstract
Elizabeth Bishop is one of the most renowned modern American female poets. Her early life was characterized by some tragic events. However, she overcame all such saddening happenings and established herself as a major twentieth-century American writer. The paper investigates how some of the important topics handled in the author's poetry can be traced back to her biographical background. The significance of the study is that it brings to light the role played by the tragic incidents in the poet's life in the formation of her poetic production; which could enable her readers to understand some of her most famous poems better and enjoy them more. The method applied is the Biographical Critical Approach. By applying this approach, the researcher aims to indicate how the poet depended on her memories of actual events which took place in her life to author a number of her well-known poems. The study reaches some significant findings through the analysis of the selected literary texts. The researcher, for instance, draws attention to the way Bishop tackled the idea of death when she encountered it for the first time in her life. Moreover, the effect of the loss of the literary figure's parents, especially the mother, on the under-discussion literary works is illustrated. Further, the study demonstrates how the writer expressed a lot of wisdom and stoicism in the face of destiny after reaching maturity. The analyzed literary texts evidently immortalize certain tragic events in Bishop's life.

Keywords: Biographical Critical approach, Elizabeth Bishop, First Death in Nova Scotia, In the Waiting Room, Lota de Macedo Soares, Manners, One Art, Sestina

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Introduction

Throughout the analysis of some of Elizabeth Bishop's famous poems, the researcher attempts to illustrate the effect of a series of sorrow-laden events which took place in the poet's life on her poetic production. From the very beginning and up to almost the end of her life, the renowned writer went through several tragic happenings, which she was keen on handling in her literary production. Many of the great literary figures in the history of the world literature, in general, and English literature, in particular, showed the influence of certain events in their own lives on their literary production. The English war poet 'Wilfred Owen' (1893-1918), the modern American poet 'Robert Frost' (1874-1963) and the modern Egyptian novelist 'Taha Hussein' (1889-1973) are good examples of this fact. Like them, Bishop was profoundly affected by major incidents that befell her in her life. The traces of such an effect can be clearly found in some of her literary works. The poems that are to be analyzed in the study are "First Death in Nova Scotia," "In the Waiting Room," "Sestina," "Manners," and "One Art." All these texts deal with specific saddening happenings which took place in the author's life. The method applied in the analysis of these literary works is the Biographical Critical approach.

The present study aims to point out how certain significant sorrowful events which befell Bishop in her life were thematically reflected in her poetry. For instance, the theme of the profound grief resulting from the loss of parents actually sprang from the poet's biographical background. Besides, the idea of the anguish and sorrow caused by the writer's lover's suicide was resonated in her literature. Then, later in her life and due to maturity, she began to express her submission to fate and accept her life as it was. The paper is meant to handle a number of Bishop's poems from a biographical perspective. Like many of great literary works, the under-discussion poems were written mainly to echo the author's feelings stemming from the grief-laden happenings she faced in her life. The researcher brings to light the role played by the tragic incidents in the poet's life in the formation of her poetic production. The aim is to enable her readers to understand some of her well-known poems better and enjoy them more.

The paper is divided into a number of sections. The literature review, which follows the introduction, handles Bishop's sublime literary position and her prominent poetic production. Also, some of the terrible events which the poet witnessed in her life and that were reflected in her poetry are elucidated. Furthermore, the Biographical Critical approach applied in the study is elaborated. Then, the analysis section focuses on some of Bishop's famous poems, which sprang from specific incidents in her life. The strong connection between these happenings and the selected poems is emphasized.

Literature Review

Elizabeth Bishop could be undoubtedly regarded as one of the most remarkable twentieth-century American poets and short story writers. Despite her limited production of poetry, which included just five slender books of verse, Bishop was awarded the Pulitzer Prize in 1956 as well as the National Book Award in 1970. The most noticeable feature of her verse was her accuracy in depicting both the physical and emotional contexts of the events she went through in her life. Therefore, she managed to use her memories about the different stages of her life, especially that
of childhood, to illustrate her attempts to escape from the depressing feelings resulting from the tragic experiences she underwent as a child and to submit to destiny as an adult.

Bishop's life actually witnessed a lot of tragic happenings as well as ceaseless attempts to survive and rise to the heights of glory. This distinguished poet was born in the American city of Worcester, MS, in 1911. When she was just one year old, her father passed away. Left alone with an only baby, the mother was inflicted by deep grief and depression. Due to such destructive feelings, the mother began to suffer from symptoms of insanity and psychological disorder (Fountain & Brazeau, 1994). One day, Bishop herself mentioned an incident in which “her mother had once been discovered holding a knife while sleeping with her, although it was not clear to anyone that she intended her daughter any harm” (Fountain & Brazeau, 1994, p. 3). Therefore, the parent’s admission to a mental hospital was the only procedure which had to be taken for her own safety and that of her five-year-old child. The mother was kept there until her death. Many years later, specifically in 1967, the prominent writer lost her lover.

The most difficult time in Bishop's life was her childhood years. After losing her father through death and her mother through hospitalization, Bishop had to move from one house to another. Norton (2016) describes the orphaned girl’s feelings by explaining that “she …[was] left motherless, and … [was] tormented by homelessness, as well as a longing for home” (p. 10). The girl had first to live with her maternal grandparents in the region of Nova Scotia in Canada. The child enjoyed living on her grandparents’ farm there. Fountain and Brazeau (1994) point out, “By all accounts, the Boomers were kind, loving grandparents” (p. 6). Tóibín (2015) emphasizes this idea by stating that “The house of Bishop’s grandparents, later an artists’ retreat, has an air of comfort and ease and warmth” (p. 15). Unfortunately, this short-term settlement did not last long for the child had to move again to live with her parental grandparents in Massachusetts, USA. Commenting on these biographical facts, Gill (2020) argues:

By way of background with regard to Bishop's childhood story, she was born in 1911 in Worcester, Massachusetts. Her father died later the same year and Bishop spent her early years between Boston and Great Village, Nova Scotia (home of her mother’s family). Bishop’s mother was institutionalized in 1916 and Bishop was taken in by her paternal grandparents in Massachusetts. (p. 150)

Moving to Worcester where she was going to live with her paternal grandparents, “Elizabeth felt as if she were … kidnapped by people whom she hardly knew” (Fountain & Brezeau, 1994, p. 12). Anderson (2013) stresses this view when she argues that “Bishop underwent …[a] major trauma when she was taken away from her beloved maternal grandparents …to be brought up by her paternal grandparents” (p. 1). Yet, her new guardians were wealthy, and they cared a lot about her education. They provided the money needed for her education fees. Hence, under their care, Elizabeth joined the Vassar College. There, she got acquainted with Marianne Moore (1887-1972) who became one of her friends (Besner, 2000). Bishop used to communicate with this friend through correspondence to tell her about her feelings and what she faced in life. In a letter, the poet told Moore about the death of the psychiatrist whose name was Ruth Foster and who never stopped helping her to overcome her psychological problems, and how this loss was horrible (Bishop,
2005). Despite all the hardships she encountered at the early stage of her life, Bishop's graduation in 1934 marked the beginning of a new stage with both new aspirations and frustrations.

A year after her graduation, Bishop became financially independent and she embarked on a period marked by traveling. She traveled to many countries such as Spain, Italy, France and Brazil. These travels widened her vision about life and provided her with various ideas to discuss in her literary works. The last of these countries represented the favorite place for Bishop where she settled "for sixteen years" (Arditi, 2002, p. 77). There she had a close relationship with Lota de Macedo Soares, who was one of the aristocrats and who became “her Brazilian lover” (Zeiger, 2019, p. 49). Adding more information about this intimate friend, Fortuny (2003) elucidates, "Bishop’s companion … [was] a landed but cash-poor Brazilian aristocrat and social activist" (p. 21). So, the writer's worldwide tours provided her with a lot of scenery which represented the raw materials for her distinctive poems in which she proved her ability in portraying the physical world. The journey of her life came to an end with her death in the American city of Boston in 1979.

In the period from 1946 to 1977, Bishop was able to raise readers' admiration for her noteworthy poetry production. She managed to publish five volumes of verse which secured her a distinctive position among preeminent modern American poets. She started her career with the publication of North and South in 1946. Then, it took her nine years to publish her second volume, Poems: North and South – A Cold Spring. Her third book of poetry, Questions of Travel, came to light in 1965. Four years later, her book of verse, The Complete Poems, was published. At last, the year 1977 witnessed the emergence of her volume of poetry Geography III. However small-sized these books were, they placed her among the noted modern poets in the English-speaking nations.

Bishop evidently tended to resort to her memories of suffering during her life and use them as a source of inspiration to display her creative power in producing remarkable literary works. This is the reason why Inhoff (2019) describes the famous American poet's verse as a "Heaped-up Autobiography" (p. 90). In brief, Bishop was able to use her personal life events, especially the tragic ones, in a constructive way by turning her memories into masterpieces. Norton (2016) supports this view:

[Bishop] writes out her pain to embrace tragic memory as muse. As a poet … [she] uses the subjective language of loss as a frame of reference. She immerses herself in the psychic forces of the underworld to gain metaphoric ascendancy from personal tragedy. …. Bishop responds to her own psychological abductions by reworking episodes of childhood neglect into poetry and prose to expose the very essence of experience. (p. 11)

Anderson (2013) adds, “Bishop returned several times to the facts of her early life” (p. 2). As illustrated above, the poet underwent several tragic experiences in her life which left their effect on her verse. Most of the time, Bishop portrayed herself specifically as a child who tended to escape one way or another from focusing on such unfortunate happenings. Nonetheless, late in her life and due to the wisdom coming with age, the writer as an adult preferred to accept tragic events as something doomed by destiny. Thus, she pointed out reconciliation with life and submission to fate.
Relying on the use of the Biographical Critical Approach, the present paper aims to demonstrate the impact of Elizabeth Bishop's harrowing experiences in life, especially those of her childhood days, on her poetry. This critical method indicates the influence of the personal experiences in a writer's life on his or her literary production and how s/he responds to them. Guerin, Labor, Morgan, Reesman, and Willingham (2005) emphasize that "this approach sees a literary work chiefly, if not exclusively, as a reflection of its author's life and times" (p. 51). According to Pugh and Johnson (2014), this critical method is part of what is known as "Extrinsic criticism [which] looks outside a text to consider its relationship to its author, history, and sources" (p. 224). In this way, this approach is meant to help the reader to have an idea about the living conditions as well as the experiences that a writer went through and which triggered off his or her work of art. However, this critical method should carry out a two-sided function. First, it should relate the literary text to an event which led to the composition of this work. Second, the approach is expected to draw attention to certain linguistic or poetic aspects in the under-discussion text which support the revealed connection between the biographical events and the ideas tackled in the literary work. Tyson (2006) sums up this view:

some critics do choose to talk about the author's intention, and they shoulder the burden of providing biographical arguments to try to convince us that they are right. .... [Nonetheless] we still must provide evidence from the text to support our view. (p. 8)

Accordingly, to analyze the selected poems, the researcher is to connect the theme tackled in each of them with a sorrowful event which took place in Bishop's life, and support the discussion with textual linguistic or poetic aspects. This approach of analyzing literary texts is needed to connect the intrinsic critical elements and the extrinsic ones in a meaningful manner so as to help interpret the selected poems of Bishop in a more profound and meaningful way and enhance readers' enjoyment.

Analysis

Evidently, Bishop wrote several poems in which she recalled memories of unhappy experiences she suffered from in her childhood, especially in her maternal grandparents' house. Biele (2009) emphasizes that Bishop was keen on drawing "on childhood memories of Great Village, Nova Scotia" (p. 69). "First Death in Nova Scotia" is a good example of such poems. This literary work first appeared in the volume Questions of Travel. The poem was based on a real event which happened to Bishop when she was still a little child living with her mother. When the author was less than five years old, her mother took her to a relative's house in Nova Scotia to say goodbye to her cousin who had recently passed away.

The setting described in the poem manages to concretize the experience discussed. The place is a regular house in Nova Scotia. It is important to refer to the fact that this Canadian area's name means in the Latin language 'New Scotland' (O'Grady, 2021). This region was historically part of the British colonies. People living there have English origins, and most of them show loyalty to Britain and its royal figures (Moody, 2021). Lakes usually become frozen in winter. Also, shooting birds like loons is a famous hobby practiced by the inhabitants. All these aspects of life in that place are vividly depicted in Bishop's poem.
Thus, the speaker in the poem is Bishop herself as a child. She is narrating a painful experience in which she had to pay farewell to her deceased cousin “little Arthur (whom she was later surprised to discover had actually been named ‘Frank’)” (Millier, 1993, p. 4). She remembers how her mother lifted her up to have a final look at the face and the body of the dead child in the coffin. Biele (2009) clarifies, "Looking at the coffin, the speaker understands… that her playmate is 'shut … inside it forever'" (p. 73). This is why, as Axelrod (2001) comments, the speaker in the poem "is a suffering witness” (p. 294). It is evident that this was the first time for Bishop to go through such an experience connected with death. The mother was keen on making her daughter face this situation as a social custom she had to be familiar with:

"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. (Bishop, 2011, lines 21-26)

The experience of confronting death for the first time was very harrowing for the little child. Consequently, the unfortunate event was engraved in the writer's mind. She found herself suddenly face to face with death. This early terrible confrontation made her very confused. Therefore, she, out of curiosity, sometimes attempted to think about the nature of humans' invincible enemy represented in death. Yet, other times the child sought to divert her attention to the surrounding physical aspects of the mourning house to escape from the catastrophic event. In the above extract, the repetition of the word 'come' hints at the little Bishop's fear of looking at the dead child. Also, the lexical items 'was lifted up' allude to the idea that the speaker was still so little that she had to be lifted up to reach the upper surface of the coffin. The verse lines crystalize the critical moment at which the speaker had to face death for the first time.

Bishop's first encounter with death in her early years of childhood caused her a lot of fear and aimlessness. Through the above-mentioned poem, she emphasizes that everything around her felt cold. When she came into the house of the deceased cousin, Bishop, as a little child, felt that the parlor where the body of the dead boy was kept in a coffin was cold. There was a preserved body of a dead bird. This bird was placed on a table whose upper surface was made of marble. This piece of marble was likened to a frozen lake. Consequently, the bird seemed to be floating on the surface of a frozen pool. Additionally, the coffin looked like a frozen cake. Also, the dead child himself was compared to a white doll. It is noteworthy that the feeling of cold and the white color dominate the scene. Whereas the feeling of cold suggests the speaker's fear, the white color hints at her aimlessness and disorientation in a boundless white world:

Arthur was very small.  
He was all white  
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. (Bishop, 2011, lines 31-40)

Like many of her other remarkable verse lines, those above reflect “Bishop's very method - that of careful description” (Epstein, 1995, p. 51). The extract is also imbued with a number of significant figures of speech.

The rhetorical aspects used in the above verse lines contribute a lot to the explanation of the ideas handled. For instance, there is a simile in which Arthur is compared to a little doll. This image indicates how death changed the lively body of the boy into a lifeless white doll. Due to death, the body of the dead boy became a helpless object. Emphasizing the small size of the deceased child could refer to his premature death. The white color of the body may suggest the child's innocence. Moreover, the cold weather is compared to an artist called Jack Frost. This artist started to draw the boy but never completed the picture. This man colored the child's hair but did not do the same with the rest of the body. Hence, it was left in the white color. This personification suggests the lifelessness of the dead body of Arthur. Besides, the use of an epistrophe represented in the repetition of the word 'forever' at the end of the sixth and seventh lines is meaningful. This technical device draws attention to the similarity between the dead yellow Maple leaf covered partially with snow and the cold corpse of the child. To escape from these horrifying and depressing ideas, Bishop turns away from these scary memories to other acceptable ones.

Throughout the same poem, Bishop expresses her earnest attempts to escape from the fearful and bewildering confrontation with death. Accordingly, she states how her eyes tried to avoid looking at the scary cold body of her dead cousin and were directed to concentrate on the portraits of the English royal figures fixed on the walls of the parlor. She begins to describe them. Another attempt to run away from facing death was represented in the description of the red and shining eyes of the preserved loon. Axelrod (2001) sees that “the immobilized loon” is a symbol which enhances the gloomy effect of the child’s death (p. 290). However, unlike most of the things in the place whose color was white, the eyes of the loon were depicted as shining pieces of red glass. The speaker liked these eyes which seemed to be like valuable gems. These eyes tried to pull her from the lifeless world dominated by the white color. A third attempt was clarified when Bishop, as a child, tried to go back to the description of the portraits of the English royalties. They seemed to be warm in their red and white clothes. The pictures were very lively. Then, the speaker tried to reassure herself by imagining that her cousin would join these figures in the world after death:

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? (Bishop, 2011, lines 41-46)

However, the speaker's feeling of reassurance did not last long because she quickly began to express her skepticism. She skeptically wonders how the dead boy could reach the apparently attractive kingdom of the world after death where the royal figures exist whereas the child's eyes are firmly closed and his body seems to be buried in deep snow. Such a question suggests the speaker's bewilderment and her inability to have clear beliefs about the nature of death. Further, it is noticeable that two royal couples are mentioned. These were Prince Edward and Princess Alexandra together with King George and Queen Mary. This point could hint at two valuable ideas. First, the author may allude to the fact that death reaps the souls of both males and females. Second, the writer may allude to the idea that, due to his premature death, Bishop's cousin would never have the chance to grow up and enjoy life as a young man with a wife. In this manner, the poem ends with a note of hopelessness and frustration.

Similarly, another poem authored by Elizabeth Bishop and titled "In the Waiting Room" has a clear autobiographical element. It discusses a memory based on an event which happened in the poet's childhood days when “one February afternoon she …[had to sit] in the waiting room of the dentist's office while her Aunt Florence was inside for her appointment” (Fountain & Brezeau, 1994, p. 15). Through the poem, the writer tackles a personal experience meditatively. Accordingly, Wilson (2017) describes this narrative text as a “meditative lyric” (p. 17). The literary work was published in 1969. It was set during the First World War, specifically in 1918. One winter afternoon, Bishop's aunt Florence took her when she was about to be seven years old to a dentist's clinic in Worcester, MS. Bishop, who used to avoid “direct personal references in most of her poetry,” calls her aunt 'Consuelo' in the poem (Fast, 1988, p. 16). The aunt had an appointment in the clinic. So, the child had to stay in the waiting room until her aunt was done with her visit to the dentist. While waiting for the aunt, the little girl went through a group of negative feelings including fear and anxiety. Through the poem, the speaker tries to escape from these bad feelings.

As elucidated in the poem, the little girl's feeling of restlessness was triggered off by her fear of the immediate future stage in her life. This is the reason why Pickard (2004) thinks that this literary work is an 'epiphany' for it represents a moment of perceiving a real situation in life. Hence, she got aware that she was growing up, and that she was gradually leaving the world of childhood. She felt that she was rolling fast towards the stage of adulthood. She would become an adult person similar to those around her in the clinic. Millier (1998) explains that the poem shows the terrible anxiety that six-year-old Elizabeth … [felt] at the dentist's with her aunt [and how it was] … explicitly associated with a rush to maturity, represented … by her aunt and by the 'awful hanging breasts' she sees in National Geographic. (p. 56)
Unlike most children, the girl was not eager to grow up and become an adult. This idea seemed to her like falling off the earth and plunging into a scary cold and dark blue space. She could not imagine herself becoming like the other women who were in the waiting room. She even abhorred the idea that one day she would become just like her aunt:

I said to myself: three days
and you'll be seven years old.
I was saying it to stop
the sensation of falling off
the round, turning world
into cold, blue-black space.
But I felt you are an I,
you are an Elizabeth,
you are one of them. (Bishop, 2011, lines 54-62)

These verse lines demonstrate how "the conversational tone" strengthens the narrative technique used in the poem (Biele, 2009, p. 84). The speaker obviously likens her feeling of apprehension resulting from her fear of growing up to falling off the planet earth and drowning in an endless dark space. The image suggests how the child felt insecure and lacked stability in her life especially when moving from one stage to another. The speaker’s dilemma started with the loss of her father and then her mother. Girls at such a stage of life like that of Elizabeth Bishop are usually in bad need of their mothers; they usually guide them to grow up safely and to understand the nature of every stage in their lives. Unfortunately, Bishop was deprived of the great privilege of having a mother near her at this critical transitional stage in her life. The little girl had to move from one house to another until she lost the real meaning of having a home. She became unable to understand the nature of biological change in her life and consequently became afraid of the vague future.

To pass the time of waiting for Ms. Florence and to flee from her apprehension and anxiety, the little niece took a copy of the National Geographic Magazine and began to go through it. Unluckily, reading the magazine and seeing the pictures in it enhanced the child's negative feelings (Tóibín, 2015). The child saw a horrible photo of a volcano eruption. The crater of the volcano was full of fire and lava. She also looked at a picture of a dead man hanging on a pole. This man was likely a meal for some cannibals. The photo displayed how some human beings changed into ferocious animals eating one another:

…while I waited I read
the National Geographic
(I could read) and carefully
studied the photographs:
the inside of a volcano,
black, and full of ashes;
then it was spilling over
in rivulets of fire
A dead man slung on a pole
- "Long Pig," the caption said. (Bishop, 2011, lines 13-25)

The poet creates a very significant metaphor when she compares the volcano to a legendary monster or a dragon-like creature producing horrific fire through its mouth. Volcanoes are one of the dangers threatening human life. Roman (2001) elucidates that the above-mentioned image "seems closely connected to" the First World War with all its catastrophic outcomes (p. 43). In addition, the term 'long pig' is used to refer to the human flesh eaten by cannibals. Hence, the little girl did not want to be part of the human race.

In the fourth stanza in "In the Waiting Room," Bishop reaches the climax of her feeling of fear and anxiety. Due to the horrible ideas that dawned upon the child's mind, she began to fall into the abyss of panic and apprehension. Accordingly, she started to feel that the whole waiting room became excessively hot. It plunged into a bottomless dark hole:

The waiting room was bright
and hot. It was sliding
beneath a big black wave,
another, and another. (Bishop, 2011, lines 90-93)

The speaker's feelings of fear and restlessness are compared to a terribly deep and dark ocean full of mighty and ruinous waves which keep striking the waiting room and pushing it towards a dreadful depth. The last line suggests how the waves of apprehension are endless. This description paves the way to the depressing end of the literary work.

The poem ends in a very frustrating and gloomy manner. Bishop, as a child, remembered that the First World War was still going on. Adult people were killing one another. Thus, she could not imagine growing up and becoming one of such adults who were similar to man-eaters and that never ceased destroying human life mercilessly:

Then I was back in it.
The War was on. Outside
in Worcester, Massachusetts,
were night and slush and cold. (Bishop, 2011, lines 94-97)

The last two lines above shed light on the depressing and cold atmosphere which wraps the last part of the poem. The reader is left with a note of pessimism. The little girl emphasizes her feeling of hopelessness. The cyclic structure of the text is overt for it ends where it started (Spivack, 2005). The repetition of the name of the place where the event narrated took place, and which was the city of Worcester, MS, proves to be meaningful. This reiteration alludes to the cyclic structure of life. In the case of the speaker, passive feelings such as fear and frustration have no end.

In addition, Bishop's famous poem "Sestina" introduces another example of the agonizing experiences she suffered from in her childhood. The poem was published in 1965. The word
'sestina' is a poetic term which refers to a certain type of highly repetitive poems which appeared in the 12th century. Milne (2018) points out, “Sestinas are tightly structured poems with intricate patterns of repetition. The sestina dates back to the twelfth century, was widely used by the troubadours, and is rooted in the tradition of courtly love” (p. 91). This poetic mold is highly musical depending on the excessive use of repetition. A sestina has seven stanzas: six sestets and a final triplet. The lexical items used at the end of lines are repeated according to a certain order in the first six stanzas. Then the same words are repeated freely in the triplet. Milne (2018) adds, “Traditionally, the sestina has often taken the form of a complaint against unrequited love, injustice, immorality, or other matters” (p. 92). Consequently, despite the noticeable musical quality of Bishop's "Sestina," the tone is depressing and gloomy. The work displays a child’s complaint against the loss of parents and the inability to express the triggered feeling of sadness. The discrepancy between the musicality of the form and the depressing content is apparently intended by the author to attract attention to a significant idea. Though there are various features which may imply that the event discussed is about a normal attempt to catch up with life and to feel happy, there is something saddening and somber hidden under the surface of the daily routine affairs described.

"Sestina" obviously narrates a pessimistic event which befell Bishop when she was still a child. Logan (2006) points out that this literary work, “with its mournful old woman and trusting granddaughter, … appears painfully autobiographical” (p. 5). The setting is one rainy afternoon in autumn inside the author’s maternal grandmother's house. The speaker is the poet herself telling about this harrowing experience she went through in that place. Due to the loss of both her parents, as stated above, Bishop, as a child, had to live with her maternal grandparents in Nova Scotia. In spite of their kindness and tenderness, they could not compensate the child for the loss of her parents. At that time, the child failed “to properly grieve the loss of her parents, and …[needed] encouragement to talk about loss, to accept and acknowledge its reality” (Norton, 2016, p. 16). So, the poem describes how the grandmother failed to communicate with her granddaughter appropriately. As shown through the poem, the old woman could not conceal her profound grief ensuing from the devastation of her daughter's family. Fast (1988) sees that this poem is meant to indicate the writer’s “reaction, and her maternal grand-mother's, to the mother's absence” (p. 17). The literary work also elucidates how the child had to adapt herself to the gloomy atmosphere in the house.

The failure of the grandmother and the child to communicate in a way which could help in dispersing the depression-laden atmosphere is the pivotal idea in "Sestina." Consequently, one dark rainy afternoon, the old lady and her grandchild were busy working inside the kitchen in their house. They were preparing tea. While they were waiting for the tea to get ready, they entertained themselves by reading the almanac. This book is a calendar presenting information about the weather together with significant dates. The grandmother was crying silently. She was doing her best to hide her tears. She felt deep sadness as a result of an agonizing event which she could never forget. The old woman was attempting to hide her feeling of grief from her granddaughter. Gradually, the two characters got emotionally separated from each other although they were physically in the same place. Each of them began to delve deep into her own imaginative world.
The major idea permeating the poem "Sestina" is mainly connected with the word 'tears' reiterated in all the stanzas. Accordingly, the first stanza ends with the grandmother's attempt to hide her tears from the child by pretending to be cheerful. She is depicted as a happy person "reading the jokes from the almanac, laughing and talking to hide her tears" (Bishop, 2011, lines 5-6). Even the sky itself, out of sympathy for the old woman, seems to be shedding tears in the form of rains. The integration of both the human and natural aspects helps to consolidate the idea discussed. Huang (2010) writes, “She [Bishop] often casually juxtaposes or incorporates human and non-human objects into her poems” (p. 4). Besides, light, which is a source of joy and merriment, starts to fade away paving the way for the descent of darkness. Thus, the elements of nature help in building the bleak atmosphere in the poem.

Furthermore, the idea of the overwhelming existence of the tears caused by sadness is concretely present in the second stanza in "Sestina." When the child notices the tears in her grandmother's eyes, she wonders why the old woman has them. The old lady lies to her and says that the tears have been caused by the effect of the weather. Just like the rains falling on the roof of the house, the woman's tears are the result of the effect of the weather. The grandmother could even read them in the almanac:

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. (Bishop, 2011, lines 7-10)

The old woman extends her attempt to conceal her sadness by making the child indulge in the routine daily work in the kitchen. The grandparent asks the little girl to get ready for the afternoon tea. The personification used by the author in 'the iron kettle sings' is significant. The kettle is likened to a kind-hearted person who is singing so as to help the old lady hide her profound feeling of melancholy. The same cause lurks behind the second personification in which the almanac is compared to a human being who agrees with the old woman and foretells that the rains and the tears will happen as a result of the weather. Norton (2016) argues, “The image of shedding tears provides an emotive release… where the residue of pain, as a bitter enemy, leaves a salty trace on the skin” (p. 13). In this way, both the kettle and the almanac seem to empathize with the grandmother and help her cover the real reason why she is crying.

The next four stanzas in "Sestina" draw attention to the most painful aspect in the experience to which Bishop had to adapt herself throughout all her childhood. She had to make herself believe that sadness, gloominess and pessimism were natural parts of her life as a child. All these negative feelings are symbolized in the poem with the lexical item 'tears.' In this manner, the drops of water condensed on the kettle are 'small hard tears.' So, while shedding tears, the kettle can dance just like the rains dancing on the roof:

. . . 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. (Bishop, 2011, lines 13-16)

In her isolation, the little girl begins to plunge into a fantasy world. The personification in which the condensed drops of water on the kettle and the rains falling on the roof are depicted as dancing human beings suggests how the child was trying to escape to an imaginative and happy realm created by herself.

Creating a realm of imagination continues when the grandchild begins fantasizing about the almanac hanging with a string fixed to a wall in the kitchen. Accordingly, she imagines the book as a bird flying over the child, the woman and even her cup of tea. Yet, once again, the lexical item 'tears' appears when the girl compares tea in the cup to dark brown tears. This depiction emphasizes how the features of grief and depression became an integral part of the child's normal life:

. . . Birdlike, the almanac
hovers half open above the child,
hovers above the old grandmother
and her teacup full of dark brown tears. (Bishop, 2011, lines 19-22)

The use of an anaphora in the above extract through repeating the word 'hovers' at the beginning of the second and third lines is meaningful. It alludes to the idea that, although the characters mentioned share the same place which is the kitchen, they are isolated from each other. Their unity is superficial. Despite the fact that the anaphora unites the two lines formally, the persons talked about in both lines have two different attitudes. The old woman is hiding her sadness from the child, and the latter has to live in her own unreal world.

Consequently, whereas the old lady and her grandchild share the same house, each lives in isolation. This was part of the tragedy of Elizabeth Bishop who, as a child, had to live almost as a stranger in some of her relatives' houses. As illustrated in the poem "Sestina," the two characters introduced could not communicate successfully. The narrator states that the grandmother, who is under the effect of melancholy and dejection, feels that it is getting cold. So, she inserts more wood in the stove. Simultaneously, the girl delves deeper and deeper into her imaginative world:

She [the grandmother] shivers and says she thinks the house
Feels chilly, and puts more wood in the stove.
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. (Bishop, 2011, lines 23-28)

Both the stove and the almanac are once more personified in the above verse lines. They turn into human beings communicating in the fantasy world of the child. They seem to be talking about the weather which has grown very cold. What is strange is that while such inanimate objects could speak to each other, the human beings living in the house lack this privilege. As a result, the girl has to personify objects in her isolated world because she lacks successful communication with
the real people around her. She even describes her grandparents' house as a 'rigid' place simply because of the harshness of life in it.

The end of the poem "Sestina" proves to be very pessimistic. The granddaughter now apparently believes that grief and hopelessness are going to be the dominant elements in her whole life. To explain this viewpoint, the word 'tears' is used again in this section of the literary work. The poet writes, "Time to plant tears, says the almanac,/ The grandmother sings to the marvelous stove/ and the child draws another inscrutable house" (Bishop, 2011, lines 37-39). Through the act of drawing, the girl tries to escape from her gloomy world. Logan (2006) thinks that the child’s “despair is half-suppressed beneath her playful manner” (p. 7). In a compound metaphor, the grandchild's life is compared to a field where tears, which are likened to plants, can grow. This image gives the impression that melancholy will be part and parcel of the child's future life. The lack of communication between the old lady and the child continues. While the former is singing to her stove, the latter begins to draw another mysterious house. This place could refer to the new house she may be obliged to move to in the future. This prophecy is simply uttered by the oracle-like almanac.

Likewise, Bishop's poem "Manners," published in 1965, was most likely based on a personal experience taken from the author's life. She wrote this work as a "tribute to her grandfather"(Carson, 2004, p. 181). Fountain and Brezeau (1994) comment:

According to her poem "Manners," when Elizabeth and her maternal grandfather rode in his wagon, he instructed her to greet everyone they passed on the road, to offer anybody a ride, and to walk up hills to give the horse a rest. (p. 6)

The time of the story told was the era of the First World War. The writer narrates what happened between herself as a child and her grandfather during one of their journeys on an old-fashioned wagon drawn by a horse. On their way, the old man begins teaching his granddaughter a lesson about good manners in dealing with people. "Manners" implicitly alludes to one of the problems which faced Bishop while she was still a little girl living with her maternal grandparents. There was a wide gap between the old generation of the grandparents and the new one to which Bishop belonged. During the time of the first global struggle, tremendous change was taking place in the whole world. This change in politics, industry and social affairs required the emergence of new views about life. However, the old man insisted on teaching his grandchild outdated manners which were becoming improper for the new age. Looking back at the time she spent with her old folks in Nova Scotia, the poet evaluates the experience mentioned above and deals with it sarcastically in "Manners."

In a narrative way, "Manners" reflects the author's satirical viewpoint about the grandfather's keenness on teaching his granddaughter an outworn code of etiquette. Spaide (2019) emphasizes the point that “The speaker of “Manners,” subtitled “for a Child of 1918,” carries her grandfather’s etiquette lessons to absurd, ebullient lengths” (p. 59). The poem starts with the scene in which the two characters are seated on a wagon during a journey. The old man decides to take
advantage of the trip in order to teach the child a lesson about his concepts about good social manners:

   My grandfather said to me
   as we sat on the wagon seat,
   "Be sure to remember to always
   speak to everyone you meet". (Bishop, 1965, lines 1-4)

Thus, the poem begins in a dramatic way. The writer presents two characters belonging to two different generations. While the old man represented the past, the child belonged to the future. The present represented the time of transition from the outdated manners to the new code of etiquette which was to dominate the post-war era in the western world. Furthermore, the direct speech mode used to convey the grandfather's advice to the girl clearly enhances the dramatic effect of the poem. The choice of the words uttered by the old man is significant. The lexical items 'Be sure' and 'always' emphasize the speaker's keenness on making the listener follow his advice strictly. Also, the wagon is symbolically used. This old means of transportation refers to the past time. It belonged to the pre-war era which was fading away with its old values and views. Besides, the advice given above is displayed ironically just like all other views expressed by the old man.

The satirical treatment of the grandfather's advice to the girl is quite evident through the literary work. Carson (2004) points out that, despite "the speaker's deferential tone" aiming to "patronize" the old man, the poem displays "a feeling that her grandfather's manners are not worthy of the moral respect he implicitly claims for them" (p. 181). In the above verse lines, for instance, the old man emphasizes the need of his granddaughter to speak to everyone they meet. Hoff (2008) comments, “It is a hard bit of advice for the bashful young speaker” (p. 577). Therefore, this piece of advice sounds to be somewhat absurd. It would be understandable if he asked her to greet the people whom they met. What is more ironical is that when both characters greeted a stranger and spoke to him, no sign of response on the part of that person was indicated.

Another example to show the meaninglessness of the outworn code of etiquette adopted by the grandparent is clarified in the third stanza. Advising his grandchild, the old man says, "Always offer everyone a ride; don't forget that when you get older" (Bishop, 1965, lines 11-12). Such a piece of advice is apparently inadequate. Even during the pre-war era, it could have been reasonable if the man advised the child to allow people whom she knew or old or handicapped persons to get into her vehicle. Yet, as pointed out in his words, the old man advised the girl to allow everyone to join her in her vehicle.

A third instance of the ridiculed vision of the grandfather about the good manners is shown in the sixth stanza. Bishop's grandparent expressed his admiration when Willy, the boy whom he picked up on his wagon, called back his crew by whistling and the bird flew back to him promptly. The old man commented by saying, "A fine bird,"... "and he's well brought up. See, he answers/nicely when he's spoken to" (Bishop, 1965, lines 20-22). This reaction explains how the grandfather admired the mechanical response of the bird. He even compared the bird to a human being. These views clarify how the old man wanted the girl to obey others automatically and
blindly without using her critical judgment. To him, blind obedience was a feature of good manners. Moreover, the personification of the bird in this situation hints at the inability of the grandfather to differentiate between the case of a bird and that of a human being as regards obeying orders. The doomed destiny of such outdated manners is clarified in the next stanza.

Because change is the ruling nature of time, the pre-war code of etiquette had to give way to the new set of manners belonging to the post-war period. Accordingly, there was no place for the grandfather's wagon which was a symbol of the old time. The period of the First World War witnessed the invention of automobiles which depended on engines. Such vehicles are symbolically used by the author to refer to the advent of the new age which had its own visions and manners:

when automobiles went by,
the dust hid the people's faces,
but we shouted "Good day! Good day!
Fine day!" at the top of our voices. (Bishop, 1965, lines 25-28)

This part of the poem elucidates how the changes happening as a result of the time progression represent an invincible power which often uproots the norms and customs of the past. The speaker states that automobiles surpassed the old man's wagon and threw a lot of dust on the faces of people in the street. Hence, passers-by became invisible to the girl and her grandparent. Dust separated the two characters from the world of reality just as the old man's views about manners made him unable to communicate with the real world of the post-war period. The iteration of the grandfather's words 'Good day!' in a loud voice despite his inability to see people around him ironically hints at his insistence on sticking to manners however meaningless they proved to be. To Eastman (2019), this situation displays that what is mentioned here is actually embarrassing. This point satirically refers to the futility of all the old man's views about the outdated manners of the past.

A year before her own death, specifically in 1976, Bishop published one of her most famous poems titled "One Art." This literary work represented her “well-known villanelle” (Cook, 2016, p. 27). Vendler (2010) illustrates, “The villanelle grimly describes a life punctuated by a series of losses from the trivial to the tragic, a life devoid … of any compensating gain” (pp. 107-108). Just as it is commonly said, wisdom comes with age. Consequently, this literary work sheds light on the author's wise reaction to the tragic events of her life as well as her submission to destiny. "One Art" obviously demonstrates the poet's belief in the inability of man to avoid the loss experiences in life with the ensuing feelings of melancholy and frustration. She actually reached the conclusion that human beings' losses had been predestined and unavoidable. She also saw that there was no need to feel that a loss in man's life could ruin it as a whole. Graf (2005) believes that this “elegy … does not try to subsume loss but figures it as an enabling quality of experience” (p. 88). Therefore, the poem emphasizes the view that no matter what tragic losses man may suffer from, life will go on.

Bishop herself was actually a clear example which proved her view about the inevitability of losing loved people or even valuable things in life as well as the necessity of overcoming the grief resulting from such dismal experiences. The biographic information about Bishop, indicated
above, clarifies that early in her life, she lost both her father and mother. The last loved person she lost in her mature life was her own partner who committed “suicide in 1967” (Norton, 2016, p. 16). In addition, the poet had to move from house to house most of her life. Despite all these tragic events, her life never stopped.

The idea that the poem "One Art" was written in the villanelle form was successfully used to sustain the theme discussed. This poetic mold was “inherited from the troubadours of the late Renaissance” (Benfey, 2008, p. 41). This kind of poems consists of five tercets (three-line stanzas rhyming ABA) followed by a final quatrain (a four-line stanza) rhyming ABAA. A villanelle should have two refrains but in Bishop’s poem there is only one refrain. The first line in the first stanza is used as a refrain in the next four stanzas. The same refrain is also employed in the last line but one in the final stanza. Shedding light on this point, Vendler (2010) explains, “The classic villanelle exhibits two recurrent lines, but Bishop repeats merely one line in its entirety” (p. 109). Through this traditional poetic form the poet attempts to give the impression that the tragic experiences of losing people's valuable things and loved ones are part of the nature of human life. Man should accept this fact as the act of loss has been doomed by destiny. Such saddening events will never interrupt the continuity of life. Besides, the noticeable form-related repetitions like the refrain, the regular rhyme scheme and the iterated tercets produce a lot of musical effects. This type of musicality coincides with poet's affirmation of submitting to fate and accepting contently whatever tragic events life may encounter. In this way, the harmony between the form and the content in the poem is obvious.

Therewithal, in “One Art,” Bishop attempts to prove her viewpoint about the inescapability of loss by giving examples taken from her own life. For instance, she begins by speaking about losing some of her personal belongings. She mentions the loss of her mother's watch. She also refers to the idea that she had to suffer from the lack of leading a stable life in one house after losing her parents. She even traveled from one country to another:

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

I lost two cities, lovely ones. And, vaster,
some realms I owned, two rivers, a continent.
I miss them, but it wasn't a disaster. (Bishop, 1976, lines 10-15)

Still, all these lost items could not be considered as a catastrophe.

In the above two stanzas, there are several significant artistic aspects. First, the choice of the word 'art' to allude to the ability of accepting loss and yielding to fate is meaningful. Art needs developing pertinent skills. The development of the needed skills, in its turn, requires a lot of practice. The ability to restrain the grief triggered by losing something or someone is compared to a kind of art. This metaphor encourages people to practice this sort of restraint because simply life will continue in spite of whatever saddening losses which may occur in their lives. Second, Vendler (2010) comments on the usage of the lexical item ‘disaster’ in the poem by stating that “For Bishop,
using the word “disaster” is conclusive, and she has … disdained to apply this hyperbolic noun to her life’s losses” (p. 108). Third, referring to Bishop’s mother’s watch is symbolical. The watch is a symbol of time. This point indicates how sad the speaker feels when she remembers the lost time she could have spent with her mother. As a child, she was deprived of the enjoyment of spending time with the mother. Fourth, the refrain used above emphasizes the message conveyed by the writer. She stresses that man needs to know how to control his or her passive feelings after losing precious objects or loved persons in life. These events will never make life stop no matter how tragic they are. Fifth, the lexical item ‘realms’ is metaphorically used. The poet compares what she lost in her life to realms or kingdoms. This image implies how big and tragic her losses were. Sixth, the use of the anaphora represented in repeating the words ‘I lost’ at the beginning of each of the fore-mentioned stanzas is significant. This linguistic aspect attracts attention to the idea that the speaker has started to count the items which she lost in her life in a way that seems to be similar to reading an inventory list. Seventh, there is an alternate use of the words ‘master’ and ‘disaster’ to end the above stanzas as well as all the other stanzas except the last one where the two vocabulary items are used to end the last two lines in the poem. This form-related feature is significant as it gives the impression that there is a struggle between the tragic events in the poet’s life and her endeavors to fight against the destructive and depressing feelings which may be triggered inside her. Vendler (2010) argues, “the whole poem is, in fact, a duel between the verb ‘master’ and the noun ‘disaster’” (p. 109). Thus, the above-stated stanzas pave the way for the speaker to move to the next stage at which she begins to deal with the loss of much more valuable items embodied in the loved people in her life.

Accordingly, the last stanza in the poem includes the author’s reference to a recent event through which she lost a cherished person, namely her partner. Bishop lived in Brazil for several years. There, she got acquainted with her lover, Lota de Macedo Soares who "was a brilliant, passionate and generous woman" (Costello, 2004, p. 603). The reason why the poet preferred to mention the loss of that person and not her father or mother in the under-discussion literary work could probably be that Lota’s death was a recent case and the ensuing feeling of grief needed more effort to restrain. In this manner, Bishop points out that although her lover’s suicide could appear to be a disaster, the writer was sure that she would overcome her sorrow:

-Even losing you (the joking voice, a gesture
I love) I shan’t have lied. It’s evident
the art losing’s not too hard to master
though it may look like (Write it,) like disaster. (Bishop, 1976, lines 16-19)

The usage of the dash to start the aforementioned extract is meaningful. Sircy (2005) argues, "This dash …[signifies] a sigh" (p. 243). This sigh serves to pave the way for discussing the writer's most depressing loss represented in her lover's death. It is noticeable that Bishop directs her speech in this stanza to her dead partner using the pronoun ‘you.’ This lexical choice creates what is known as an apostrophe. This figure of speech suggests that the memories about the dead person were still fresh in the author’s mind. She found considerable difficulty in forgetting this kind of loss. This idea is strengthened in two ways. First, the speaker mentions one of the features of her partner which she certainly loved, namely, the joking voice of that person. Bishop (1976) places this
remark in brackets. Second, the speaker states that this loss could possibly seem to be a real disaster. Third, Fan (2005) stresses that the usage of “the exclusive unnamed ‘you’… underlines an intimate experience of pain” (p. 47). Nonetheless, the use of the noun phrase ‘the joking voice’ is significant for it hints at the speaker’s attempt to mix a happy memory with a sad one so as to have the power to overcome her grief. It seems that Bishop is trying here to attract attention to the double-sidedness of life and how sadness and happiness replace each other continuously in life.

Trousdale (2019) elucidates, “The ‘joking voice’ Bishop adopts in "One Art” shows how pain and joy… are not just simultaneous but mutually constitutive” (p. 78). Sircy (2005) supports this view by illustrating that, in the poem, "Bishop appears … to have constructed an admittedly bittersweet,, philosophy of survival" (p. 242). Hence, she has the firm intention of forgetting her losses and letting life go on.

Conclusion

To conclude, Bishop's life witnessed several tragic events which affected the themes handled in her poetry. Although her poetic production was not noticeably abundant, the poet published many remarkable poems which drew readers' attention and made her a noted literary figure. Through her poetry, the author succeeded in making good use of her works to reflect on the saddening experiences she underwent either as a child or an adult. Using the Biographical critical approach, the researcher attempted to shed light on the connection between these events and a number of important poems written by Bishop. Actually, the poet managed to immortalize the unhappy events she went through in her poetry.

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