

ENGL 310 Modern Poetry

April 27, 2007

Discussion Section: Elizabeth Bishop

Bishop on "A Miracle for Breakfast" and Sestina Technique

It seems to me that there are two ways possible for a sestina. One is to use unusual words as terminations, in which case they would have to be used differently as often as possible—as you say, "change of scale." That would make a very highly seasoned kind of poem. And the other way is to use as colorless words as possible—like Sidney, so that it becomes less of a trick and more of a natural theme and variations. I guess I have tried to do both at once.¹

Bishop on "At the Fishhouses"

At the last minute, after I'd had a chance to do a little research in Cape Breton, I found I'd said codfish scales once when it should have been herring scales. I hope they corrected it all right.²

Quite a few lines of "At the Fishhouses" came to me in a dream, and the scene—which was real enough, I'd recently been there—but the old man and the conversation, etc., were all in a later dream.³

Shklovsky, "Art as Technique" (1917)

Art exists that one may recover the sensation of life; it exists to make one feel things, to make the stone *stony*. The purpose of art is to impart the sensation of things as they are perceived and not as they are known. The technique of art is to make objects "unfamiliar," to make forms difficult, to increase the difficulty and length of perception because the process of perception is an aesthetic end in itself and must be prolonged. *Art is a way of experiencing the artfulness of an object; the object is not important.*⁴

¹ Bishop to Marianne Moore, 5 January 1937, in Elizabeth Bishop, *One Art: Letters*, ed. Robert Giroux (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1994), 54. Sir Philip Sidney's double sestina "Ye goat-herd gods" is in his *Arcadia*.

² Bishop to Joseph Holmes Summers, 24 August 1947, in Bishop, *One Art*, 149.

³ Bishop to U. T. and Joseph Summers, 18 July 1955, in Bishop, *One Art*, 308.

⁴ Victor Shklovsky, "Art as Technique," in *Russian Formalist Criticism: Four Essays*, ed. and trans. by Lee T. Lemon and Marion J. Reis (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1965), 5–24 (emphasis original).

Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition* (1979)

Simplifying to the extreme, I define *postmodern* as incredulity toward metanarratives. . . . Still, the postmodern condition is as much a stranger to disenchantment as it is to the blind positivity of delegitimation.⁵

What, then, is the postmodern? . . . It is undoubtedly a part of the modern . . . A work can become modern only if it is first postmodern. Postmodernism thus understood is not modernism at its end but in the nascent state, and this state is constant.⁶

The postmodern would be that which, in the modern, puts forward the unrepresentable in presentation itself; that which denies itself the solace of good forms . . . ; that which searches for new presentations, not in order to enjoy them but in order to impart a stronger sense of the unrepresentable.⁷

Of Modern Poetry: Us, 1/26/07

experimental form: (lack of) meter, rhyme experimental subject matter "make it new"
visual difference/brevity exposure of hidden desire self-consciousness adventurousness
freedom isolation pessimism difficulty/obscurity betrayal of tradition elitism allusiveness

⁵ Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), xxiv–xxv.

⁶ Ibid., 79.

⁷ Ibid., 81.