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Poetry – Elizabeth Bishop

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Elizabeth Bishop – Brief Biography

[illegible] death caused Bishop’s mother to have a mental breakdown. When Bishop was five her mother was [illegible] was never reunited with her daughter. Bishop’s maternal gran[illegible] However, her father’s family [illegible]

[illegible] English literature at the exclusive Vassar college in New York. Bishop’s father had left her a sum of [illegible]

[illegible] Rio de Janeiro until Lota’s death in 1967. Bishop moved back to the United States when Soares [illegible]

[illegible] focus on her personal life in the same way that many of her contemporaries’ work did. She did not [illegible]

The Fish

venerable: old, and worthy of respect

homely: ugly, plain, unattractive

entrails: guts

swim-bladder : fish's gas-filled buoyancy bladder

*peony: large, attractive flower

*iris: circular, coloured part of the eye

*isinglass: thin sheets of mica used instead of glass. Another meaning of isinglass is a gelatinous ingredient in cookery made from the swim-bladder of a fish

*crimped: wavy

*bilge: dirty water that collects in the lowest part of the boat

*bailer: bucket for bailing water

*thwarts: seats in the boat

*oarlocks: hold the oars onto the side of the boat

Background

Summary and analysis

scribes the fish as 'venerable'. This word is used to describe an elderly person who deserves our

[illegible]

Theme

[illegible]

Tone

[illegible]

[illegible]

Short Questions

Answer ALL of the following: [Each question carries 10 marks]

[illegible]

[illegible]

[illegible]

[illegible]

[illegible]

[illegible]

Long Questions

Answer ONE of the following: [Each question carries 20 marks]

[illegible] examined, and then released by the fisher? Write down the fish's thoughts. [illegible]

[illegible] Write Elizabeth Bishop's diary [illegible]

[illegible] Does the ending of the poem come as a surprise? Why do you think the speaker 'let the fish go'? Explain your answer by reference to the [illegible]

The Prodigal

*odor: odour or smell

*sty: pigsty

*snouts: pigs' noses

*sow: female pig

*two-by-four: length of timber

*aureole: a halo around a saint's head

Background

[illegible]

[illegible]ing her family's farm in Nova Scotia and was offered 'a drink of rum, in the pig sties, at about nine in the morning.' This experience, combined with her psychoanalysis, led to Bishop's writing 'The Prodigal'.

[illegible]

Summary and analysis

[illegible]he time in the Prodigal Son's life before he came home. It deals with his d[illegible]

[illegible]

[illegible]

[illegible]

to life. There is something both wonderful and horrible in the description of the wall 'plastered [illegible]th dung.' The pigs may be filthy and revolting – [illegible]ne of the sows 'a[illegible] ways ate her young' – [illegible] description of the pigs' eyes 'light[illegible]ashed' and their 'cheerful stare' shows that the [illegible]

[illegible]

the ‘burning puddles seemed to reassure’. Still, it is sad that the only warmth and beauty in the Prodigal’s life comes from temporarily shining muddy puddles; and the

surroundings, but this also leads him to feel that perhaps he can ‘endure / his exile yet another year more’. He is not yet rea

The word ‘But’ at the opening of the second section signals a change of mood. There is, for the first

viewpoint. A star is personified as it comes ‘to warn’ the Prodigal that he is on the wrong path.

Prodigal is not quite ready to do that yet. It will be ‘a long time’ before he attains enough wisdo

farmer’s lantern leaves a circle of light on the mud that is like a saint’s halo or ‘aureole’, and the a

those on Noah’s ark.

farmer’s lantern vanishes, leaving him in the dark once more. The pigs are unaffected by t

The Prodigal’s awful situation is emphasised by the fact that he carries a bucket ‘along a slimy board’ and is moved by ‘shuddering insights’ as he senses the bats flying around him. The bats’ flight is ‘uncertain’ and ‘staggering’, reflecting the poet’s drunkenness and his stumbling through

aware, the Prodigal’s decision to go home does not come

Theme

Like 'The Fish', this poem focuses on the strength of the human spirit and our ability to recover

Tone

Short Questions

Answer ALL of the following: [Each question carries 10 marks]

'But it took him a long time / finally to make his mind up to go home.'

Long Questions

Answer ONE of the following: [Each question carries 20 marks]

two

'The Prodigal is a poem about the endurance and strength of the human spirit.

Filling Station

[illegible]
[illegible]
[illegible] *oil-permeated: soaked through with oil*
[illegible]
[illegible] *translucency: shine/gloss*
[illegible]

[illegible]
[illegible] *monkey suit: overalls*
[illegible]
[illegible]
[illegible]
[illegible]
[illegible]

[illegible]
[illegible]
[illegible]
[illegible]
[illegible]
[illegible]
[illegible]

[illegible]
[illegible]
[illegible]
[illegible] *doily: decorative cloth put under bowls to protect the table*
[illegible] *taboret: small stool*
[illegible]
[illegible] *hirsute: hairy* *begonia: flowering plant*

[illegible] *extraneous: unnecessary*
[illegible]

*daisy stitch: type of design in crochet

*marguerites: daisies

Summary and analysis

[illegible]

[illegible]ne, ‘Somebody loves us all.’

[illegible]

[illegible]doily ‘heavy with gray crochet’. [illegible]

[illegible]

Theme

[illegible]

Tone

[illegible]

[illegible]

Short Questions

Answer ALL of the following: [Each question carries 10 marks]

[illegible] [illegible]

[illegible] *'Somebody loves us all.'*

[illegible]

[illegible]

[illegible]

Long Questions

Answer ONE of the following: [Each question carries 20 marks]

[illegible] 'Good poetry creates vivid pictures in our minds.' In your opinion, is this true of *Filling Station* [illegible]

[illegible]

[illegible]

[illegible]

- [illegible] *Life is full of surprises*
- [illegible] *Everyone needs love*
- [illegible] *We shouldn't judge by appearances*

[illegible]

[illegible]

First Death in Nova Scotia

[illegible]

chromographs: an old way of reproducing pictures

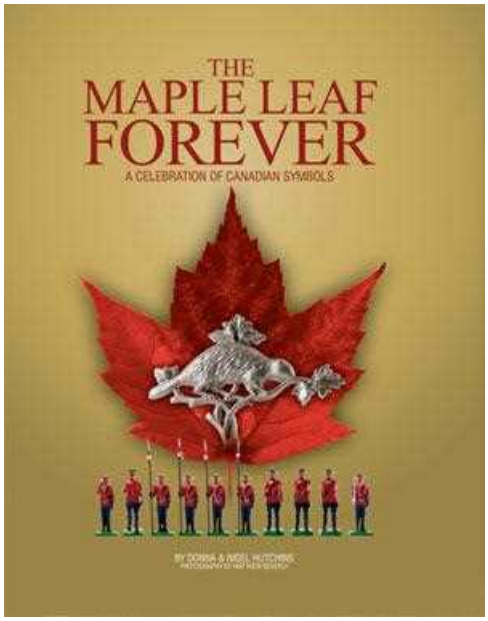
loon: a type of water bird

[illegible]

[illegible]

[illegible]

[illegible]



ermine: white fur from the stoat's winter coat

Background

This poem was included in Bishop's third collection of poetry *Questions of Travel* – g to come to terms with events in her early childhood. 'First Death in Nova Scotia' is an elegy for her young cousin Arthur (his real name was Frank) who died

Summary and analysis

[illegible] room in which the young boy's body is laid out is described as being a 'cold, cold parlour'. The repetition of the word 'cold' and the broad assonance of the long 'o' sound in 'cold, cold' and 'chromographs' underscores the solemnity of the mood.

[illegible] et's eye for detail is evident, even at a young age. Although the language is simple and childlike, as befits a poem written from a child's perspective, the observant little girl notes the [illegible] like her little cousin. The child's attention is not focused on the dead body, but is caught instead by the other objects around her, particularly the 'stuffed loon' shot and killed by the dead boy's father.

[illegible] calling it 'he' instead of it. In this way, it is linked to her dead cousin. The bird 'hadn't said a word' [illegible] 'he kept his own counsel' suggests that he does have something to say, but chooses not to share it. [illegible] coldness of the room is reinforced by the description of the bird on the 'marble [illegible] table' as being 'on his white, frozen lake'. The bird is a metaphor for the dead boy, who is similarly [illegible]

[illegible] breast is both 'cold and caressable', and his red eyes are 'much to be desired'. The loon's eyes are the only mention of any colour other than white in the poem. Their redness may be linked to the redness of the mourners' eyes when they are weeping [illegible] the dead child. Even when focusing on the bird, the dead boy is always in the small girl's mind.

In the third stanza, the silence and stillness is broken by the child's mother speaking directly to her. It is significant that Bishop's mother is only broug [illegible] memories of her mother are linked to absence and loss. The little girl's mother has to lift her up to [illegible] death for the first time. (The title of the poem 'First Death in Nova Scotia' tells us that this is the poet's first experience of death.)

The little girl places a small lily of the valley in her dead cousin's hand. The lily of the valley is a [illegible]

[illegible] a little frosted cake' and she imagines that the 'red-eyed loon' wants it for himself. The loon seems slightly frightening now as he looks covetously [illegible]

[illegible] 'frosted cake' – and imagining the loon's feelings on seeing it, she tries to bring [illegible]

The fourth stanza describes the little boy in his coffin. The imagery here is childlike: Arthur is 'like a doll, that hadn't been painted yet'. In her in[illegible] says that the dead boy is like a doll who hasn't been 'painted yet': the word 'yet' suggesting that she [illegible] the stanza, she imagines Jack Frost dropping his brush and leaving Arthur white 'forever'. In contrast to the word 'yet', 'forever' shows us that there is a part of the child's mind that is now [illegible]

As she mentions the maple leaf, the child's mind drifts away for a moment. She connects the maple [illegible] for a long time. The word 'forever' is used twice in this stanza, reinforcing the permanence and [illegible]

[illegible] ending for Arthur. Perhaps the royal couples will take Arthur to be a knight in waiting, 'the smallest page in court'. It is interesting that there is no notion of heaven here. However, th[illegible] eyes are tightly shut 'and the roads deep in snow'. [illegible] sadness is underscored by the use of the words 'smallest' and 'tiny'. By ending the poem on a [illegible]