

“Blossoming” Under a Glass: Interpreting the Sensory Depiction of Elizabeth Bishop’s “Poetic Map” from the Humanist-geographical Perspective

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Abstract. Elizabeth Bishop (1911-1979) is arguably one of the most outstanding American poets in the 20th century, with a fetish about maps and landscapes as her *poetica*. In her literary mapping of the poetic landscapes, a clever operation of human sensorium is notable. To examine the specific roles senses, play in the construction of Bishop’s “poetic map”, this article analyzes the depiction of three couples of senses—sight and hearing, movement and touch, smell and taste—in six of Elizabeth Bishop’s representative poems under the framework of Yi-fu Tuan’s humanist geography. By interpreting in the three main sections the metaphorical relationships between maps and different senses, it penetrates into the natural, spatial, and humanistic attributes of Bishop’s “poetic map”, and finds out that while feeling about geographic scenery with her outer senses, Bishop contemplates in her inner sensation in a humanistic way, and keeps questioning human being’s meaning in the environment. Based on these analyses, this paper adds a sensory perspective into the spatial/geographical study on Elizabeth Bishop, and tries to respond to the topic of man-environment relationship in the nature writing in contemporary literature.

Keywords: Elizabeth Bishop; Senses; Literary Map; Humanist Geography; Man-environment Relationship.

1. Introduction

Peter Turchi once asserted, “To ask for a map is to say, ‘Tell me a story’” [1]. Robert T. Tally Jr. also states that writers are like map-makers that chart their fictional worlds in a metaphorical level, and raises in his monograph *Spatiality* the term “literary cartography” [2]. Among all these “literary cartographers”, American poet Elizabeth Bishop (1911-1979) is arguably an outstanding one. She not only names some of her most important poetry collections in geographic terms such as *North and South* (1946) and *Geography III* (1976), but also lives a life that parallels with the rise and development of literary geocriticism: The poet was born in the early 20th century when the academia’s focus started to turn from temporality to spatiality. In the year of 1946, the groundbreaking book *Literary Geography* was published together with the birth of the namesake term, while in the same year, Bishop finished her first collection *North and South*. From the mid to late 70s, Yi-fu Tuan published two of his most important monographs, *Topophilia* (1974) and *Space and Place* (1977), marking the establishment of his humanist geography; and in the last year of that same decade, Bishop passed away, three years after the publication of her last anthology *Geography III*. It is no exaggeration to say that Bishop was a geography poet born in just the right time, no wonder the poet’s series of geography/map-featured poems (what constitutes her “poetic map”) have won such fame even during her lifetime.

Established by her early piece “The Map” (1934), Bishop’s “poetic map” features a fetish about natural scenery and landscapes, and an artistic mapping of her imaginary world. To perceive the geographical scenery and map her fictional world in the poetry, the poet manipulates human senses (such as sight and touch in “The Map”) as her tools. This generous use of sensory depiction is internalized into a muse over man-environment relationship through her distinctive style of insightful observations, precise descriptions, marvelous imaginations and restrained emotions, which renders her poetics a classic research object of geocriticism.

In existing Bishop scholarship, the poet's spatial/geographical poetics as such is a major focus. In "Days and Distances: The Cartographic Imagination of Elizabeth Bishop", Jan B. Gordon shows an early awareness of Bishop's interest of space, and uses the metaphor of "map-making" to summarize her artistic activity [3]. Susannah L. Hollister elaborates on Bishop's "geographic feeling" and how it functions as the cartographic tool of her "poetic map" [4]. Meanwhile, Bishop's spatiality is also studied under the paradigms of some geography-related theories. From Lee Edelman's perspective of feminist geography, Bishop's geographical depiction serves as the outlet of her gender experiences and feelings [5]. In Yin Xiaofang's paper, the scholar interprets Bishop's reflection on the colonialism in her travel under the paradigm of post-structuralist criticism, suggesting that cultural colonization has torn apart the boundaries of human geographical space [6].

Compared with spatial/geographical study on Elizabeth Bishop, "sensory study", or the study of human senses used in the poet's works, has not yet contributed much to the lofty building of worldwide Bishop study. Existing scholarship centers on perceptions rather than senses, in other words, "senses" of an inner scope, such as vision, dream, memory, imagination, and cognition. In "Vision and Mastery in Elizabeth Bishop", Bonnie Costello suggests that vision remains for Bishop in a state between memory and expectation, where "everything is deteriorating or becoming" [7]. Carol Frost explains the role of Bishop's "mind's eyes" and its cooperation with the poet's real eyes in her composition [8]. Only a few papers on Bishop place their emphases on a certain human sense, yet they are of limited scopes: among all the senses, only one (such as sight) is covered; and within the scope of that sense, only a single aspect (such as colors) is discussed.

Though being an often-studied object from the angles of either geography or senses, Bishop's works have not yet been discussed at the intersection of these two perspectives. However, to better understand the man-environment relationship in Bishop's poems, a concern of both geographical and humanistic perspectives is of great significance. To interpret her poems both spatially and sensually, humanist geography can serve as an eligible theory. As an important branch of cultural geography, this discipline sheds its light on human being's experiences and interactions with the environment, and its founder, American-Chinese geographer Yi-fu Tuan, is regarded as a humanist largely insofar as he values human senses as both our "potential" and "destiny" [9]. Tuan's humanist-geographical thoughts about senses are included mainly in his monographs *Topophilia* (1974), *Space and Place* (1977) and *Humanist Geography* (2012), where he defines senses as human being's biological basis of experience [9]. Geographically speaking, the use of sensory organs has three functions: enriching human being's geographical perception, evoking their ecological responsibility, and helping with the accumulation of their spatial experience and formation of spatial awareness [9, 10]. Strikingly, all of these three geographical functions of senses are embodied in Bishop's poems. With a generous use of sensations (both outer and inner ones), Bishop constructs her geographical experiences and keeps probing and questioning human being's position in the geographic environment, which largely resonates with the subtitle of Tuan's *Humanist Geography*: "Individual's Search for Meaning".

Considering the texts and theory aforementioned, it is pertinent to interrogate what specific roles do human senses play in the construction of Elizabeth Bishop's "poetic map". Therefore, by means of interpreting the symbolic significance of human senses in geographical experiences and feelings, the following three sections respectively analyze the depiction of three couples of senses in Elizabeth Bishop's poems from the perspective of Yi-fu Tuan's humanist geography. The discussion starts from sight and hearing, the two dominant human senses and their compound functions and positions as basic elements in Bishop's "poetic map". After that, motion and touch used in Bishop's poems are interpreted, with their spatial functions in the poet's geographical experiences. In the last segment, smell and taste is analyzed as a whole to illustrate how it contributes to the humanist color of the poet's geography-featured works. Through the complete analysis of senses, the natural, spatial and humanistic attributes of Bishop's "poetic map" are unfolded in this paper.

2. Sight and Hearing: Basic Mapping Elements

Map, by definition, is a drawing of (a part of) the earth's surface that provides information such as the shapes and positions of different borders, natural features, and artificial features. Sight and hearing, two of the predominant human senses, are the artificial apparatus to perceive the nature and construct the natural elements on a map. Just like appreciating a painting, to understand the meaning of a map, one should start with the use of their visual sense, namely, to look at its boundaries, colors, and symbols or the map legend. On a classical world topographic map, the distinction between sea and land is represented clearly in blue and green, and the altitudes in different areas are marked with different hues or shades of colors, dark blue for deep sea and light for shallow. Meanwhile, an indispensable element on a map is its legend. Often lying on the margins of the sheet, it explains the connotations of the symbols appear on the topographic drawing through words and language to assist people's understanding of the map. In Elizabeth Bishop's "poetic map", these basic elements for mapping are presented through the speaker's eyes and ears. Bishop carries out her literary activity of cartography by virtue of gazing at scenery and listening to ambient sounds, and visual coupled with auditory sense contributes to the natural attribute of her "poetic map".

With the help of her sharp sight, Bishop incorporates the natural scenery into objects to be gazed upon, and traces the lines and colors of her "poetic map". Sight in Western tradition enjoys a privileged status over all the other human senses. Holding also this ocular-centrist point of view, geographer Yi-fu Tuan underscores the biological and spatial importance of visual sense in his humanist geography by stating that human being is "predominantly a visual animal" [11], and human sight is "the most discerning spatially" inasmuch as it helps largely in a map-maker's sense of directions and control over scales [10]. In the mapping of literature, the irreplaceable role of sight is also verified. According to Tuan, if the eyes rest on a certain "space", it will turn into a "place", which is rendered the literary object of story-telling or narrative [10]. This rest of eyes is not any causal look, but what the cultural critics define as "gaze", a way of looking that carries in itself the power operation which brings oppression on the viewed and incorporates it into the object of the viewer [11]. In Bishop's "poetic map", gaze serves as the major apparatus to objectify and internalize the landscape and chart her imaginary world. To some degree, the poet's habit of careful gazing has been formed in her childhood gaze at the paintings in her old house.

From Bishop's poem "Large Bad Picture", this childhood influence of appreciating landscape paintings on mapping landscapes is verified in a large part. The piece is a description of a landscape picture drawn by her great uncle in his younger days. The "large bad" picture, hung on the wall of the poet's Nova Scotia residence, presents the scenery of the coastline near the Labrador Sea where she spent several years of her childhood. Through Bishop's refined description, similarities between painting and mapping manifest. For one thing, through the composition of the picture, we can see how the layout of a map is carefully designed. The delineation starts from the top of sky downwards to the cliffs and then the bay which is just "masked by the perfect waves", and the fleet of ships sits right in the middle, motionless, like having been planned [13]. The spatial arrangement of different landscapes in the painting presents a picture of order and harmony, resembling that of the geographical elements in a map. For another, both the painting and a topographic map use colors in a distinct and bold way which blurs the real weight distinction in the physical world and thus integrates the reality and the artistic map. In the painting portrayed by Bishop, the sky is colored "flushed" red while the cliffs "pale blue", which, according to Yi-fu Tuan's theory of colors, harmonizes the sky and land in the painting [11].

The amateur painter, with his orderly composition and bold yet naive choice of colors, paint the scenery of the "Strait of Belle Isle" more of an artificial product than a natural design, just like what a map-maker does when he / she tries to abstract landscapes and seascapes into flat color blocks and symbols. This presumably accounts for Bishop's addressing the picture in the title as "bad"; whereas the poet does express her affection to it, largely because it not only nurtures her habit of gazing, but also evokes her muse over the relationship between life and art, or reality and illusion. Foremost, the visual memory of the painting is imprinted in the little girl's heart, like the "small red sun",

perpetually “rolling” and “consoling”, deeply influenced her life-long gazes at the transcendent world of poetry. Meanwhile, in the last and also topic sentence of the piece, “It would be hard to say what brought them there, / commerce or contemplation” [13], “commerce” symbolizes the real life while contemplation, the imaginary art. This ambivalence between presentation and representation in artistic composition parallels with the activity of map-making.

If “Large Bad Picture” records Bishop’s early awareness of gazing and mapping, then “The Map” (1934) marks the beginning of her literary-cartographic practice. As the introductory piece in her very first collection *North and South*, it establishes the basic characteristics of Bishop’s “poetic map”: the depiction of the imaginary geography and the discussion of the complicated relationship between human and nature. Again, gaze plays a dominant role in the poet’s cartographic activity. In the poem, Bishop starts her gaze at the scenery or the imaginary map from the colors and contours:

Land lies in water; it is shadowed green.
Shadows, or are they shallows, at its edges
showing the line of long sea-weeded ledges
where weeds hang to the simple blue from green. [13]

Like an experienced topographer, the poet shows her keen sensitivity to the edges and the green / blue distinction of land and sea. What differs Bishop from those map-makers is her sharp eyes—the eyes of an insightful poet. For one thing, more details and ambiguity than necessary for map-making are taken in through the poet’s eyes, such as the tangle of the sea-weeds and the hesitation between shadows and shallows. For another, the literary map-maker not only transforms the space of land and sea into the natural elements on her “poetic map”, but also incorporates them into the familiar objects of her narrative, or what Tuan defined as a “place” [10]. By doing so, Bishop tries to intimate the subtle tentativeness in man-environment relationship, or more specifically, “poet-environment” relationship. On the one hand, poets keep a reticent and respectful distance from the nature, so that they can realize an effect of defamiliarization in their composition. On the other hand, they are also obsessed by a strong desire of trying to approach the nature and capture it in their words. This vacillation between strangeness and familiarity with the reality is Bishop’s way of literary mapping.

From the second half of the second stanza, Bishop’s visual focus turns from the scenery on the imaginary map to the map itself. Gazing at a freshly made map, she is “experiencing the same excitement” with a printer or a cartographer, who, instead of feeling cheerful for finding her way with the map, expresses strong gladness over the exquisitely arranged layout and the beautifully colored blocks of lands and seas. At this moment, “when emotions too far exceed its cause”, the accuracy of a map seems to matter no more [13]. Instead of orienting herself in the real or transcendent world, Bishop charts her map to get lost in the beauty of map itself, the same way she gets lost in the “large bad picture”: be enchanted through her own sight.

In addition to the dominant visual sense, auditory sense can also arouse spatial impression and thus plays an irreplaceable part in Elizabeth Bishop’s poetic mapping. Compared with visual images, sounds are located more vaguely, but convey also a strong sense of size (volume) and of distance, which verifies its usefulness in spatial and geographical experiences [10]. Moreover, it is noteworthy that hearing has a closer relation to language and words. According to Tuan, the effect of auditory sense is amplified in the wake of human being’s master of language [9]. That is to say, hearing enables people to transform sound into information to help with the understanding of their surroundings; and when these sounds become language, even subtler and more complicated information is allowed into our brains for deciphering. Given the obvious kinship between language and words, the geographic symbols on the picture, along with the map legend that annotates them, can be viewed as the map-maker’s or the map’s own language. Consequently, in Bishop’s “poetic map”, sounds from the surroundings are encoded into the map’s language, annotating the poet’s imaginary world of geography.

In the piece “Over 2,000 Illustrations and a Complete Concordance”, the ambient sounds and noises depicted by the poet serves as the sources of the making of her “concordance” or index on the “poetic map”. By means of continual changes of travelling spots, the poet parodies some classical

Christian illustrations such as the Annunciation and tries to index them in a poetic language, offering “a collection of framed scenes, juxtaposing distant places” [4]. The first half of the poem stays reticent, until “[e]ntering the Narrows at St. Johns”, an assortment of sounds and noises starts to be heard: from “the touching bleat of goats” to the blow of wind at St. Peter’s, from the footsteps of the marching collegians to the giggles of the little prostitutes, the speaker painstakingly captures all she can hear during her pilgrimage-like travel [13]. Here the sequential hearing of sounds parallels with a deliberate juxtaposition in language, like what Bishop elucidates in the poem, “[e]verything only connected by ‘and’ and ‘and’” [13]. These simple juxtapositions of sounds and of language embody an underlying characteristics of illumination index or map legend, namely, their attempt to conceal the complexity of the earthly phenomenon under a form of simplicity and order, and the apparatus used to fulfill this idealist expectation is exactly her hearing. This poem “Concordance” corresponds to Bishop’s mannerism of mere description and no resolution, but it still stands out in all her “map poems” insofar as it shows how the speaker’s usually restrained emotions grow unquenchable by the end of the narrative. As the environment humming, the jukebox playing, and the people murmuring, the narrator feels an increasing disquietude as if a tempest is looming. When encountering a holy grave in the end, she becomes emotionally overwhelmed and said: “I saw what frightened me most of all” [13]. As Tuan once put, human beings are more touched by what they hear than by what they see, partly because they cannot close their ears as they can their eyes [11]. The sounds and furies the speaker endures during her trip functions like an emotion trigger, arousing her awe of history and nature, thus adding to the beauty of Bishop’s “poetic map”.

Hearing, combined with sight, contributes to the basic components such as pictures and words on Bishop’s “poetic map”. These two senses together realize a compound effect in the poet’s mapping activity, building a bridge between real map and imaginary map, and underlying the naturalness of Bishop’s *ars poetica*.

3. Movement and Touch: Metaphorical Spatial Construction

Apart from the most common five senses such as sight and hearing, Yi-fu Tuan discusses also in his monographs another sensation: the kinaesthesia, the sense that enables one to feel the position and movement in his / her body [9]. Both kinaesthetic and the more familiar tactile senses are human being’s method to perceive space through their limbs. If pictures and words, arose out of sight and hearing, constitute the basic elements of a map (whether real or metaphorical), then the beacon and scale symbolized by human movement functions to construct the geographical space inside the map. Meanwhile, some topographic maps use uneven surfaces to represent different altitudes of the landscapes, wherein touch can help readers of the map to figure out the boundaries between waters and lands, or mountains and plains. In Elizabeth Bishop’s map poetry, the role of these two limb-based senses is indispensable. The poet’s ability to construct space in her imaginary world takes roots in kinaesthesia, while the subtler perceptions of boundaries and liminal spaces comes from her touch on the surface: together, the two senses contribute to the spatial attribute of Bishop’s “poetic map”.

As a wander and traveler, Bishop perceives directions and locations during her wandering and travelling, measuring her “poetic map” with her own footsteps. One of the most humanistic features of Yi-fu Tuan’s geography lies in the fact that he considers human beings as the measure of their surrounding space: “Man is the measure. In a literal sense, the human body is the measure of direction, location, and distance” [10]. This idea is embodied in Bishop’s life and art. In her naming of her first poetry anthology *North and South*, the two nouns of locality are not directions in general, but refer specifically to the places that the poet has once lived at: “North” stands for Massachusetts and Nova Scotia where she spent her childhood, while “South”, Florida and Brazil, after her graduation from Vassar College. By moving from place to place, Bishop gradually established her sense of space, for according to Tuan, movements are often directed toward or repulsed by places, and hence “space is given by the ability to move” [10].

“From the Country to the City” is one of the pieces that significantly exemplifies Bishop’s construction of her poetic space through the movement of body. The clown appears in the poem is a geographical landscape himself, with the “satin-stripes on [his] trousers” as the roads linking the country and the city [13]. This is a pertinent analogy, for human body contains spatiality in itself. *Wer*, the linguistic root of “world”, connotes the meaning of “people”, for “the world” is not a totally inanimate concept, but contains both human beings and the environment they live in [10]. Hence the harlequin’s “long, long legs, league-boots of land” helps with the speaker’s measurement of her drive to the city [13]. Through the constant movement of the car along the clown’s trousers, Bishop experiences different directions and distances in her imagined geographical environment, showing a humanist-geographical view of the unity of world and man.

If kinaesthesia is what Bishop uses to measure the geographical space on her “poetic map”, then tactility enables her to go deep into it. With the help of imaginary touching and stroking, the poet blurs and melts the boundaries between terrains, and constructs liminal spaces that carry her emotional attachment. In Tuan’s theory of humanist geography, touching can arouse people’s feelings of pleasure and “exquisite refinement” towards the “textual world” [10]. This pleasant and subtle feelings of touching the scenery on a fictional map can be observed in “The Map”.

In this namesake poem, one of the poet’s methods to chart her “poetic map” is to touch the imaginary bight, to stroke “[a]long the fine tan sandy shelf” [13]. Bishop is enamored of the boundaries between terrains, especially between water and land, and this accounts for the frequent appearance of geographical extremities such as peninsulas, bights and straits in her poetry. She imagines herself caressing the “lovely bays, / under a glass as if they were expected to blossom”, or taking “water between thumb and finger / like women feeling for the smoothness of yard-goods” [13]. For Bishop here plays the role of a map-maker, this cutaneous proximity with the surface of a map just resembles how a mother lovingly soothes her baby in her arms, or how the God proudly strokes His creation.

Apart from the poet’s stroke of the geographical boundaries, the piece also delineates the touch and tug between the land and the sea:

Or does the land lean down to lift the sea from under,
drawing it unperturbed around itself?
Along the fine tan sandy shelf
is the land tugging at the sea from under? [13]

This tension between the two terrains blurs the distinction of “shadows” and “shallows”, and reinforces the fluid nature of the edges between land and sea. When the geographical conditions grow unstable and boundaries uncertain, a liminal space is generated on the map. “Liminality”, developed from its Latin etymon *limen* (meaning “threshold” in English), refers to a state of ambiguity or in-between. Accordingly, a liminal space can be defined as a metaphorical boundary or marginal zone of instability and fluidity, where thoughts and memories exist in a state of transition [14]. Meanwhile, back in the Mediterranean Bronze Age, “lmn” in “liminal” means “bay”, the boundary between land and sea [15]. Therefore, the generation of this liminal space not only results from the poet’s fetish about boundaries and margins, but also dovetails her vagrant life and her longing for a fixed homeland. Due to her family misfortune and relationship changes, Bishop has been moving among America, Canada and Brazil for her entire life, almost restlessly. Therefore, the construction of transcendent liminal space on her “poetic map” is not only a product of spiritual displacement, but also the poet’s way to place her displaced attachment to a real homeland.

Kinaesthesia and tactility, albeit both sensory organs on limbs, evoke humans’ spatial feelings and experiences in different dimensions. Movement, being a subjective measure of directions and distances, helps one to form a sense of the geographical space in the real world; while touch, as a personal pleasure, enables one to construct his / her own spiritual space in the transcendent world. Both kinaesthetic and tactile senses are used in Bishop’s literary map-making, reinforcing the spatiality of her “poetic map”.

4. Smell and Taste: Intimate Geographical Experience

If sight and hearing are defined as “long-distance senses” which are able to sense objects and places far away, movement and touch as “short-distance senses” by the same token, then smell and taste must be “minus-distance senses”, for it is not until the odor or food come into one’s nose or mouth will the process of sensation happen. This special biological feature renders the experience of smelling and tasting a far more intimate one than seeing or hearing. When it comes to the activity of map-making, the cartographer’s smell and taste are relatively useless, for they are obviously the least geography-related senses. Nevertheless, in either Yi-fu Tuan’s theory or Elizabeth Bishop’s poetry, these “minus-distance senses” are as important as the other four members of the sense family. The four senses aforementioned represent the environment objectively, for they are shared by nearly all functional humans (for example, except the color-blind, everyone see red as red); while smell and taste are more subjective, with different individuals having different sensual experiences faced with a same odor or taste (for example, some are capable to endure spicy food while others not). Therefore, the generous use of olfactory and gustatory senses softens the calm objectivity in the ocular-centrist geographic writing, promotes the intimacy between the poet and the landscapes her mapped, and consequently, merges a humanistic attribute into Bishop’s “poetic map”.

Compared with other sensory organs, the two “minus-distance senses” function inside human body on the soft and highly sensitive nasal and oral mucosa, and thus are most likely to invoke people’s direct emotional experience. Since human being’s nose and mouth share a proximity in distance and certain parts of their physiological structures, the two corresponding senses are hard to be discussed separately. The following paragraphs discuss two “house poems” written by the poet--“Jerónimo’s House” and “At the Fish Houses”, for both of them involve a combination of smell and taste in their constructions of Bishop’s “poetic map”.

At the very beginning of the poem “Jerónimo’s House”, the topic of a small old house is brought out through lines of enjambment: “My house, my fairy / palace, is / of perishable / clapboards with / three rooms in all” [13]. Through the poet’s microscopic description, the picture of a “children’s dream house” (what Tuan would call it) unfolds, with all the worn-out decorations inside [16]. Here Bishop expresses her nostalgic feelings and intimacy towards old, juxtaposed objects. Technically, by cutting the long sentences short into lines and starting most of them with prepositions and conjunctions, the poet creates a musical effect of lingering melancholy, as if there is always more to say and even more not to. In terms of diction, she uses many carefully-selected words to intimate the passing of time, for example, the “perishable” clipboards, the “calendar” on the wall, and the “repainted” French horn she plays “each year” [13]. When it comes to the use of senses, the assortment of familiar odors in the house triggers the poet’s feelings about the past. Odor has, according to Tuan, “the power to evoke vivid, emotionally-charged memories of past events and scenes”, for children’s noses are endowed with higher olfactory sensitivity, and human being’s cortex to store memory evolved from the part of the brain which originally concerned with smell [11]. The poet’s childhood dream house is filled with odors of food in Southern style, such as the “fried fish” with “burning scarlet sauce” and the “hominy grits”. The smells of the dishes might not be tempting, but provide the poet with a sense of intimacy, for they come from her personal memories of the past, and by smelling them, she can feel herself back in those good old days.

In this poem, again, the speaker’s longing for a spiritual homeland reappears. For one thing, “with red and green / left-over Christmas / decorations”, the poet specifically mentions Christmas, the classic symbol of family reunions [13]. What is noteworthy here is her use of enjambment: she wraps the line after “Christmas” and before “decorations”, leaving the former alone modified by “left-over”, which indicates the hidden emotions of homesickness behind her ostensibly emotionless descriptions of objects. For another, she addresses her Jerónimo’s house as “shelter from the hurricane” in the last sentence of the piece, but only on the assumption of “when I move”, intimating her lifelong displacement with a yearning for homeland deep down. Bishop has never been in Mexico for her entire life, but she gives her dream house a Mexican name, which dovetails the futility of her home-

coming. Just like this imaginary house, the homeless poet's sweet memories of the home sweet home are nothing more than an illusion.

The piece "At the Fish Houses", however, delineates a different type of houses from the poet's childhood paradise. The whole poem is about the speaker's conversation with an old fisherman ("a friend of my grandfather") and about her watching him fishing. Filled with a mixed odor of dried-blood-like rust, "Lucky Strike" cigarette, and codfish that "makes one's nose run and one's eyes water", the fish houses display an air of archaic gloom and opaque, again evoking the poet's feeling of nostalgia [13]. Etymologically, "nostalgia" in Ancient Greek contains both meanings of "return" and "pain", indicating the fact that musing upon the past brings physical pain to people like when their skins are burnt [17]. Bishop in this poem identifies with this burning pain of nostalgia: "If you should dip your hand in, / your wrist would ache immediately, / your bones would begin to ache and your hand would burn" [13].

In addition to nostalgia, what also burns is the acquisition of knowledge, for it is often coupled with a feeling of tasting something pungent. "Savour" in English shares the same root with "savoir" (meaning "know") in French, demonstrating an etymological kinship between eating and studying [10]. In the end of the poem, Bishop's description of the "dark, salt, clear, moving, utterly free" imagination of knowledge tallies with this analogy: "If you tasted it, it would first taste bitter, / then briny, then surely burn your tongue" [13]. This discussion of the relationship between taste and knowledge manages to add the poet's inner sensory experiences into her contemplations over the outside world, thus underlying her intimacy with her "poetic map".

Both the two poems are about "houses", whereas personal residences were not supposed to appear on traditional paper maps at least until the invention of HD satellite ones. This seemingly unnecessary appearance of "houses" on Bishop's "poetic map" is suggestive of the aforementioned uselessness of emotion-loaded smell and taste in cartography. However, it indicates "the usefulness of uselessness": Using the "useless" senses to chart the "useless" elements on her "poetic map", Bishop's "useless" emphasis on human life in her literary map-making echoes with the humanistic quality of Tuan's geography. That is, instead of focusing on natural phenomenon such as topography, it aims to elucidate the relationship between human beings and the geographical environment around them. Consequently, it is pertinent to conclude that Bishop's operation of smell and taste plays the role in contributing to the humanistic attribute of her "poetic map".

5. Conclusion: Mapping Senses, Sensing Maps

Elizabeth Bishop's "poetic map" refers to a series of her poems that feature a literary mapping of her imaginary landscapes. In these map-like poems, the poet's use of multi-senses is notable. Through a humanistic-geographical reading into six of her pieces as such, this paper analyzes the depiction of three couples of senses in Bishop's "poetic map", penetrating into its natural, spatial and humanistic attributes. This analysis concludes that senses and map display a relationship of co-existence and inseparability in Bishop's poetry.

For one thing, the human senses are not only Bishop's cartographic tools in a metaphorical sense, but also indispensable components in her "poetic map". First, sight is the colors and shapes and hearing symbols and legend, together constituting the basic and natural elements of the imaginary map. Second, while movement acts as the beacon and scale to identify directions and distances, touch embodies the map-maker's muse over boundaries and liminal spaces. Third, smell and taste are the intimate geographical feelings left on a map by the map-maker, adding a stroke of humanistic color into the "poetic map".

For another, maps for Bishop embodies significance beyond the mere space for aesthetic creation: it becomes the aesthetic object itself. With the combined help of the six senses, the poet feels heart and soul for the colorful sheet "under a glass", as if it was "expected to blossom". Through the artistic depictions of the beauty of maps, she transforms her outer sensory experience into inner

contemplation over geography itself, showing her concerns about human beings' position in the natural environment.

Just like in Yi-fu Tuan's humanist geography, Bishop places human beings as the underlying center on her "poetic map". This is because people are the subjects of operating sensory organs and sensing the environment. In Bishop's "poetic map", the man-environment relationship achieves a subtle harmony. The environment she delineates wavers from personal to impersonal, and the human in that environment lingers between presence and absence. Their operation of outer senses (seeing, hearing, moving, touching, smelling and tasting) and inner senses (thinking and feeling) merges them into the environment and enables them to perceive the nature as part of the nature: Humans are the resident of environment, but also, the environment itself.

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