

## Renée R. Curry: On "Filling Station"

. . . in certain poems such as "Filling Station," Bishop seems incredibly aware of the relationship between her privileged white position and her aesthetic creations. In these poems, she actually interrogates the negative attitudes toward Others that her whiteness imposes upon her and affords her.

"Filling Station" situates a "disturbing" blackness in the beginning stanza of the poem:

Oh, but it is dirty! ?this little filling station, oil-soaked, oil-permeated to a disturbing, over-all black translucency. Be careful with that match!

At first the omniscient narrator's attitude seems harshly judgmental but the following stanzas highlight the determinedness with which this narrator looks into the translucency in order to see the humanity existing at the filling station. Five stanzas later, the narrator comes to an understanding about love and potentially about God. Clearly, we can surmise, via Bishop's aesthetic design in this poem, that her imagination proves capable of transcending certain white racist and classist attitudes.

Importantly, however, if we read this poem as a replica of the ideological structure of at least one transformable white racist the first stanza makes it clear that the foremost thought expressed will be that of disturbance and that of a negative attitude toward blackness. As well the first stanza's last line implies fear of the explosiveness of too much blackness. It then takes five times as much processing, equivalent to the five succeeding stanzas, for the white imagination to come to a transformed place. The process of change, at least according to this poem, requires no intervention or action on the part of the Other, but rather the white person must observe, question, and transcend. What she will observe includes one human being, a family associated with that human being, the work situation of the family members, a pet who looks "comfy," some domesticating accoutrements, and the recognition that "someone" chose to decorate this place to make it livable and comfortable. This recognition is stimulated by a string of questions beginning with "why": "Why the extraneous plant? / Why the taboret? / Why, oh why, the doily?" (Complete Poems 127). Upon having recognized the particular someones and their particular choices, the observer reaches a place of transcendence, a position that accepts love as one of the ultimate levelers of humanity.

Regarding white discourse, white ideology, and the white imagination, "Filling Station" looms as an epiphanic and, ultimately, unsustainable moment in the Bishop oeuvre.

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