

THE FILLING STATION

Elizabeth Bishop

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Audio file

THINK OF THE POEM AS
BEING LIKE A PHOTO

THE FIRST VERSE
IS LIKE A WIDE SHOT



THE SECOND VERSE
ZOOMS IN FOR
A CLOSER LOOK



EACH VERSE TAKES
A CLOSER LOOK



HOW DOES THE POET'S ATTITUDE
TOWARDS THE FILLING STATION AND
IT'S INHABITANTS CHANGE AS THE
POEM PROGRESSES?

THE FILLING STATION

- Initially an attitude of disgust? Disdain? Revulsion? Fascination?
- ‘Oh but it is dirty’
- ‘oil-soaked, oil-permeated’
- ‘disturbing, over-all black translucency’



- She turns her attention to the human inhabitants but describes them in a derogatory manner
- A detached tone - almost like a commentator on a nature programme
- 'Father wears a dirty, oil-soaked monkey suit that cuts him under the arms'
- His family are described as 'quick and saucy and greasy sons'
- The alliterative 'its a family filling station' may be an ironic allusion to an advertising slogan
- The poet describes the family as being similar to the filling station in that they are also 'quite thoroughly dirty'



- Almost despite herself she becomes curious about the family and their home
- ‘Do they live in the station?’
- She notes the homely touches of the ‘wicker sofa’ and accompanying dog but has to mention that one is ‘grease-impregnated’ and the other ‘dirty’, although she acknowledges that it is ‘quite comfy’



- As the poet looks closer she sees beyond the dirt and grease of this masculine bastion.
- She acknowledges with grudging approval some colour in the scene, even if only from 'comic books'
- She notices and wonders about the 'extraneous (unnecessary) plant' and a 'doily' (like a tablecloth) ... 'embroidered with marguerites'
- Are these signs of a feminine touch amongst the male dominated space of the garage?
- Are they a hint that someone has an aesthetic sense, an eye for beauty amongst the squalor of the filling station?

- The poet wonders about this absent, unseen figure, this ‘somebody’ who ‘embroidered the doily’, and ‘waters the plant’.
- She notices that this ‘somebody’ arranges the ‘rows of cans so they softly say; ESSO-SO-SO-SO-SO’, the soft sibilance of the repeated ‘S’ appealing to the ear as well as the eye.
- Who is this ‘somebody’ who ‘loves us all’?

