



The Filling Station

Elizabeth Bishop

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!

Father wears a dirty,

oil-soaked monkey suit

that cuts him under the arms,

and several quick and saucy

and greasy sons assist him

(it's a family filling station),
all quite thoroughly dirty.

Do they live in the station?

It has a cement porch
behind the pumps, and on it
a set of crushed and grease-
impregnated wickerwork;
on the wicker sofa
a dirty dog, quite comfy.

Some comic books provide
the only note of color—
of certain color. They lie
upon a big dim doily
draping a taboret
(part of the set), beside
a big hirsute begonia.

Why the extraneous plant?

Why the taboret?

Why, oh why, the doily?

(Embroidered in daisy stitch

with marguerites, I think,
and heavy with gray crochet.)

Somebody embroidered the doily.

Somebody waters the plant,

or oils it, maybe. Somebody

arranges the rows of cans

so that they softly say:

esso—so—so—so

to high-strung automobiles.

Somebody loves us all.

]

Vocabulary

- **Permeated** - deeply engrained, saturated
- **Translucency** – see through, clearness
- **Doily** - decorative napkin or mat, often laced
- **Taboret** - a stool or table to accompany a suite of furniture
- **Hirsute** - hairy
- **Begonia** - type of plant, often potted
- **Extraneous** - extra, out of place

Pre-reading task

- Think of a time you visited a ‘filling station’ or garage. What images or words come to mind?
- What expectations did the title create when you first read it?

Questions

1. What is the poet’s first impression of the filling station?
2. What descriptive words does the poet use that have a negative connotation?
3. How does the poet describe the people who live and work in the filling station?
4. What hints does the poet notice that suggest that someone else might live there?
5. Who do you think that person might be?
6. How does the poet’s attitude towards the filling station and its inhabitants change as the poem progresses?
7. How do you feel about the poet’s description of and attitude to the filling station and its inhabitants?
8. What signs of beauty or aesthetic sense does the poet notice amidst the clutter and dirt of the filling station?
9. The poem has a conversational quality. How does the poet create this effect?
10. Does the poet learn anything about herself by the end of the poem?

Overview

The poem captures a moment of revelation in the ordinary.

The poet uses her acute powers of observation to examine an everyday filling station in minute detail. She is initially repelled and fascinated by the dirt and grime of the place, her first comment being 'Oh but it is dirty!'.

This repulsion and attraction extends to the filling station's inhabitants who she describes in a detached manner, almost like a visitor to a zoo.

Amidst this deeply masculine space she notices traces of a sense of beauty; a lace doily and a potted plant, perhaps a woman's touch?

Her attitude to the filling station and its occupants softens and she sees them in a more positive light. Closer examination reveals the possibility of beauty in the ordinary.

Key Points

- Deeply Personal
- Detached
- Vivid Imagery
- Observational
- Moment of revelation
- Autobiographical
- Beauty in the ordinary

Word Bank Matching

- Create a bank of words you might use when writing about the poet's work.
- Some are provided for you.
- Add your own.
- You can write definitions of words you don't know.
- You can pick out suitable quotes to go with the words.

• Observational	
• Melancholy	
• Graphic	
• Personal	
• Autobiographical	
• Descriptive	
• Evocative	
• Realistic	
• Thought provoking	
• Challenging	
• Detailed	
• Detached	
• Snobbish	
• Conversational	

Past Questions

Honours

2019

2. Elizabeth Bishop

“Bishop makes skillful use of a variety of poetic techniques to produce poems that are often analytical but rarely emotional.”

Discuss the extent to which you agree or disagree with the above statement. Develop your response with reference to the poems by Elizabeth Bishop on your course.

2017

life's harsh realities in the poems you have chosen.
Justify your selection by demonstrating Bishop's skillful use of language and imagery to confront realities.
In your opinion, best demonstrate her skillful use of language and imagery to confront life's harsh realities.
From the poetry of Elizabeth Bishop that you have studied, select the poems that, in your

4. Elizabeth Bishop

2016

3. Elizabeth Bishop

“Bishop uses highly detailed observation, of people, places and events, to explore unique personal experiences in her poetry.”

Discuss this statement, supporting your answer with reference to the poetry of Elizabeth Bishop on your course.

2013

1. **Elizabeth Bishop**

“Bishop’s carefully judged use of language aids the reader to uncover the intensity of feeling in her poetry.”

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the above statement? Support your answer with reference to the poetry of Elizabeth Bishop on your course.

2009

4. **“Elizabeth Bishop** poses interesting questions delivered by means of a unique style.”

Do you agree with this assessment of her poetry? Your answer should focus on both themes and stylistic features. Support your points with the aid of suitable reference to the poems you have studied.

2006

3. **“Reading the poetry of Elizabeth Bishop.”**

Write out the text of a talk that you would give to your class in response to the above title.

Your talk should include the following:

- *Your reactions to her themes or subject matter.*
- *What you personally find interesting in her style of writing.*

Refer to the poems by Elizabeth Bishop that you have studied.

1. (a) Describe, in your own words, the scene at the filling station created by the poet in this poem. (10)
- (b) Identify a line or phrase from this poem that you enjoy and explain why you enjoy it. (10)
- (c) In your opinion, is Bishop mainly positive or mainly negative about what she sees at the filling station? Support your answer with reference to the poem. (10)

2. Answer **ONE** of the following: [Each part carries 20 marks]

- (i) Do you like or dislike this poem? In your response identify at least two aspects of the poem that influence your view. Support your answer with reference to the poem.

OR

- (ii) Imagine that you are one of the sons in the poem. Write a letter to Elizabeth Bishop in which you respond to what she wrote about your home and your family in the poem, "Filling Station". Refer to the poem in your answer.

OR

- (iii) Write a piece about the language in this poem, beginning with one of the following phrases:

- I find the language in this poem interesting and easy to understand ...
- I find the language in this poem challenging and unusual ...

Mind Map

