The Fish.

I caught a tremendous fish
and held him beside the boat
half out of water, with my hook
fast in a corner of his mouth.
He didn’t fight.
He hadn’t fought at all.
He hung a grunting weight,
battered and venerable
and homely. Here and there
his brown skin hung in strips
like ancient wallpaper,
and its pattern of darker brown
was like wallpaper:
shapes like full-blown roses
stained and lost through age.
He was speckled with barnacles,
fine rosettes of lime,
and infested with tiny white sea-lice,
and underneath two or three
rags of green weed hung down.
While his gills were breathing in
the terrible oxygen—the frightening gills,
fresh and crisp with blood,
that can cut so badly—
I thought of the coarse white flesh
packed in like feathers,
the big bones and the little bones,
the dramatic reds and blacks
of his shiny entrails,
and the pink swim-bladder
like a big peony.
I looked into his eyes
which were far larger than mine
but shallower, and yellowed,
the irises backed and packed
with tarnished tinfoil
seen through the lenses
of old scratched isinglass.
They shifted a little, but not
to return my stare.
—It was more like the tipping of an object toward the light. I admired his sullen face, the mechanism of his jaw, and then I saw that from his lower lip
—if you could call it a lip—grim, wet, and weapon like, hung five old pieces of fish-line, or four and a wire leader with the swivel still attached, with all their five big hooks grown firmly in his mouth. A green line, frayed at the end where he broke it, two heavier lines, and a fine black thread still crimped from the strain and snap when it broke and he got away. Like medals with their ribbons frayed and wavering, a five-haired beard of wisdom trailing from his aching jaw. I stared and stared and victory filled up the little rented boat, from the pool of bilge where oil had spread a rainbow around the rusted engine to the bailer rusted orange, the sun-cracked thwarts, the oarlocks on their strings, the gunnels—until everything was rainbow, rainbow, rainbow! And I let the fish go.

Source: (“The Fish Poem by Elizabeth Bishop - Poem Hunter,”)
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. 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?

The shadow of Newfoundland lies flat and still. Labrador's yellow, where the moony Eskimo has oiled it. We can stroke these lovely bays, under a glass as if they were expected to blossom, or as if to provide a clean cage for invisible fish. The names of seashore towns run out to sea, the names of cities cross the neighboring mountains - the printer here experiencing the same excitement as when emotion too far exceeds its cause. These peninsulas take the water between thumb and finger like women feeling for the smoothness of yard-goods.

Mapped waters are more quiet than the land is, lending the land their waves' own conformation: and Norway's hare runs south in agitation, profiles investigate the sea, where land is. Are they assigned, or can the countries pick their colors? - What suits the character or the native waters best. Topography displays no favorites; North's as near as west. More delicate than the historians' are the map-makers' colors.

Source: (“The Map Poem by Elizabeth Bishop - Poem Hunter,”)