

I got the idea for "Pale Country" while talking to a friend who asked me, "If you suddenly inherited a lot of money, what's the first thing you'd buy?" And I replied, "My childhood home." Whether or not I'd actually live in it, I would still want to own it, not just the idea of it but the physical place.

That got me thinking—what else would I buy back? My childhood landscape, my high school and the intellectual excitement I felt when opening a book or touching the human skeleton in a corner of the science room. The brief time I knew my father—an airline pilot and mathematician—before he passed away.

Of course, "buying back" any of these things is impossible and certainly an inadequate gesture. I see this poem as akin to Bishop's "One Art." I have to master the art of losing my childhood, my home, my father, and a list of other things that will accumulate as I get older. I will forge other relationships, set down my books and papers in other homes. Not only must I master loss, but I must also accept that loss is not disaster, and that the past is never really past: it is always alive in the nervous system, growing and changing with the body, mutable as the waterways leading to the Great South Bay.