

# **Elizabeth Bishop Society of Nova Scotia**

P.O. Box 138, Great Village, Nova Scotia B0M 1L0

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NEWSLETTER

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## **Editorial**

Gratitude is the undercurrent of this *Newsletter*. Without gratitude and its companionate emotions of delight, admiration and what Hazlitt (and Marianne Moore) called *gusto*, writing about poetry is only a laying on of dead hands. The latter is always true when the writing is driven by opportunisms of a social or political kind which invariably make poetry secondary to dogma.

Poets are not immune to opportunism, especially in modern times when a poem without some kind of discursive handle is widely regarded as unpleasantly awkward to lift off the shelf. But in the long run, over several generations, the poets have the living hands; and it is they who accurately decide what poetry of the past survives changeable fashions of fame or neglect. Good poetry becomes its posterity. Bad poetry extinguishes itself by requiring compromises which become increasingly unlovable as time passes, mainly because they require readers to confirm the value of the poet's egotism without direct experience of the transient ethos which made that egotism appear laudable.

The main article in this *Newsletter*, Brian Bartlett's "As If You Might Be Here": Poems Addressing Elizabeth Bishop," finds several contemporary poets about their proper business of distinguishing Bishop's work as something extraordinarily lovable. For all that it is prose, Brian's article should also be read as part of that business. Author of *Planet*

*Harbor* (1989), *Underwater Carpentry* (1993), both published by Goose Lane Editions, Fredericton, New Brunswick, and of *Granite Erratics* (1997, Ekstasis Editions, Victoria, British Columbia), he is one of the most respected Canadian poets of his generation. He is also a professor of English, teaching creative writing and literature at Saint Mary's University in Halifax. His article was first presented in slightly different form at the Elizabeth Bishop Conference held in Ouro Preto, Brazil, in spring, 1999. Like the poems it discusses, Brian's article is also an act of gratitude.

Peter Sanger

## **News and Information**

The Elizabeth Bishop Society of Nova Scotia has held two meetings since the publication of the last *Newsletter*. The first was on December 11, 1999; the second, on May 20, 2000. At the first meeting, concern was expressed about the number of lapsed or unpaid memberships. It was decided to circulate strongly-worded reminders. At the second meeting, Anne Marie Duggan and Sandra Barry were pleased to report that the current membership list is now up-to-date and continuing to increase in size. The Society is most grateful for the loyalty and continuing tangible support of its members.

At both meetings there was considerable discussion of future Society projects. Among them is the publication of a new brochure

concerning Elizabeth Bishop and Great Village which will contain a more accurate and extensively annotated map than the one previously circulated by the Society. The text of the new brochure will also combine, correct and extend the texts of several earlier Society publications. The Society also discussed the possibility of inviting another Bishop scholar, to deliver a Bishop Memorial lecture in June, 2001. Many Society members will recall that Thomas Travisano delivered the first Memorial Lecture in Great Village in June, 1995.

In the May meeting, Peter Sanger and Sandra Barry reported on the progress of the publication of the Acadia University Bishop *Symposium Proceedings*. They have been assured by Professor Gwen Davies (who is shortly to leave Acadia to take up the position of Dean of Graduate Studies at the University of New Brunswick) that proofs of all the Symposium papers will be sent to their writers in June-July, 2000. The *Proceedings* will very definitely appear in the early spring of 2001.

At the May meeting Angus Chisholm and Brian Robinson agreed to serve on a Nominating Committee which will propose officers for the Society at an Annual General Meeting to be held in 2000. Angus Chisholm also made an annual Treasurer's report. The Society's bank balance stands at \$3,567.56.

Among coming events the Society looks forward to is the presentation of an illustrated account of their visit to Ouro Preto in May, 1999, to be given by Ann Marie Duggan, Brian Robinson and Sandra Barry following the Society's Annual General Meeting. We are also delighted to report that a new, extended version of Donna Smyth's play about Bishop will be presented by The Ship's

Theatre Company in Parrsboro, Cumberland County, Nova Scotia (not far from Amherst, Nova Scotia, close to the New Brunswick border). Readers of the *Newsletter* may recall a review of Donna's play, *Running to Paradise*, in the last issue. The new version is entitled *Sole Survivor*. It is in two acts, with nine characters. The play will occupy approximately two hours. Among the actresses and actors are Martha Irving, playing Bishop; Sherry Lee Hunter; Elizabeth Richardson; Jarrod MacLean; and Joseph Wynne. Martha Irving is familiar to many because of her recent performance in *The Memory of Water* in Halifax and from episodes of the television series *Black Harbour* and *Pit Pony*. The play will run from August 4 - August 27 inclusive. Booking may be made by phoning 1-800-565-SHOW (toll free). Further information appears in an advertisement printed at the end of this *Newsletter*.

**"As If You Might Be Here":  
Poems Addressing  
Elizabeth Bishop**

by  
Brian Bartlett

**A. "Please Cable a Verb"**

During the months before the Elizabeth Bishop conference and *celebraçã*o in Ouro Preto, Brazil, in May 1999 — where writers, readers, critics, and translators addressed one another in many ways — I became intrigued by one aspect of responses to Bishop. Alongside the poetry written by her, a body of poems addressed to her has been growing. These poems' testaments to friendship, their gratitude for poetic excellence, and their allusions to Bishop's lines and images are striking; and the sheer number of them is getting to be remarkable. My summary of

these poems was written in my house in Nova Scotia and presented in Brazil, so it now seems fitting, in the way things circle back home, that I report back to the Elizabeth Bishop Society of Nova Scotia on the observations presented so far south of here. For the *Newsletter*, I've chosen to present my research and thoughts as an informal annotated bibliography.

Do some bodies of poetry more than others have the effect of encouraging addresses? Do Bishop's suspicion of the grandiose, her artful casualness, and her use of conversational self-interruptions make talking to her more likely than talking to, say, Yeats or Rilke or Plath? Despite her famous humility and reticence, we shouldn't oversimplify Bishop, or speak as if she only had only one outlook on her readers. Gradations of welcoming, and of the humbling of grand aspirations, vary in her writing. But it's safe to guess that her suspicion of high talk, and her poems' blending of reticence and openness, poise and spontaneity, pained honesty and hard-won cheer, have helped evoke the many poems that are, in reality, broadcast to an immeasurable public, yet create the illusion of speaking one-on-one to her.

Before listing the poems addressed to Bishop, I should mention the poems she herself addressed to other poets. They include her late elegy for Robert Lowell, "North Haven", which sounds more like him than her poems usually do, and her early "Invitation to Miss Marianne Moore," the most high-spirited piece in her second collection. With its dozen uses of the phrase "please come flying," its Chagall-esque extravagance and whimsy, and its characterizing of Miss Moore as good witch, musician, mild censor, natural hero, acute listener, and exquisite grammarian, that poem is an invigorating example of address as

invitation. Playfulness is also found in an incomplete poem written from Petropolis around 1960 and now housed in the Vassar College Library archives. "A Letter to Two Friends," addressed to both Lowell and Moore, is in part a good-natured grouse — about the weather, a soon-to-expire visa, a troublesome car, and, above all, difficulty in getting poems done. Brett Millier includes some of this draft in her biography of Bishop, but leaves out lines where Bishop suggests that someone throw Sammy, her toucan, a piece of meat. Bishop continues after these lines, as quoted by Millier: "Marianne, loan me a noun! / Cal, please cable a verb! / Or simply propulse through the ether / some more powerful meter." The leap from the toucan needing a snack to the poet needing a noun and a verb is the poem's comic highlight, a deflation of a writer's complaint. Here we have no on-bended-knee call to the Muse; instead, an unusually direct, nuts-and-bolts call to friends for poetic help. There's irony in Bishop's modesty: while she asks Cal (Lowell) for a verb, her choices of the verbs "cable" and "propulse", and of the off-rhyme between "ether" and "meter," hardly suggest she needs anyone else's words.

### **B. Addresses from Bishop's Friends**

Before exaggerating elements in Bishop's poetry that might encourage address, we should note that for some poets the desire to address her in poems is rooted in the extensive correspondence they maintained with her. Such, indeed, is the case with the first three poets I will consider. Long before writing their poems addressed to her, Bishop's friends Lowell, May Swenson, and James Merrill were all used to exchanging letters with Bishop.

Robert Lowell. "Water." *Life Studies and For the Union Dead*. New York: Farrar, 1964. 3-4.

---. "For Elizabeth Bishop (twenty-five years) I. Water"; "For Elizabeth Bishop. 2. Castine Maine"; "For Elizabeth Bishop 3. Letter with Poems for Letter with Poems"; "For Elizabeth Bishop 4." *History*. New York: Farrar, 1973. 196-98.

Lowell's many attempts, false starts, and frequent rethinkings of how to talk to and about Bishop in his poetry (outlined in David Kalstone's *Becoming a Poet*) suggest he didn't find it easy to know how to deal with Bishop in his work. "Water," the opening poem in *For The Union Dead*, nowhere identifies Bishop as its addressee, yet in light of the two poets' biographies it's hard to omit Bishop from our minds, especially since a letter by Bishop provided "Water" with the detail of her dreaming about "a mermaid clinging to a wharfpile," and since Lowell used the new title "For Elizabeth Bishop (twenty-five years) I. Water" when the chiselled quatrains of "Water" were stretched into the sonnet-like structures of *History*. While addresses in poems are hardly the same as addresses in spontaneous prose letters, the lines begin to blur when we consider poems such as Lowell's and Swenson's, which quote from or adapt their own letters. Obviously, Lowell's poems aren't the same as his "private" prose, but ignoring the historical records of his friendship with Bishop is difficult if not impossible once known. (An in-depth exploration of letter poems and their relationship to "real letters," so far as I know yet to be written, could explore these and other poems by Lowell.)

While "Water" is a poem of ambiguous friendship that hardly acknowledges the two friends as poets, the fourth of four consecutive

poems for Bishop in *History* is very much an address about Bishop's writing. In asking her if she has "seen an inchworm crawl on a leaf, / clinging to the very end, revolve in air, / feeling for something to reach to something?" Lowell chooses a small creature reminiscent of those that populate her poems — snail, toad, sandpiper (yes, I've conveniently left out the moose). Unlike new painters with their "rushed brushstrokes," Bishop is a model of meticulousness and patience. "Do / you still," Lowell asks, "hang your words in air, ten years / unfinished, glued to your notice board, / with gaps or empties for the unimaginable phrase — unerring Muse who makes the casual perfect?" The praise tips over into hyperbole — "unerring...perfect" — unusual even in the context of tributes to fellow poets. (A characteristic Bishop mention of perfection, from "The End of March," is "perfect! But — impossible".) Also unusual is Lowell's identification of Bishop with the capitalized "Muse," which she may have found troubling, both because that can misleadingly fix her identity as inspiration to others more than as creator and because the grandness of "Muse" sounds contrary to her aesthetic.

May Swenson. *Four Poems and a Letter to Elizabeth Bishop*. n.p.: Bear River Press, 1997. N. pag.

Three years ago, the literary estate of May Swenson allowed the printing of this small chapbook. An afterword says that between 1950 and 1979, the two women exchanged over 260 letters. One of the two poems addressed to Bishop, "In the Bodies of Words," from the week after Bishop's death in October 1979, may be unique as the only published address poem to Bishop written in the immediate aftershock of learning about her death. It would be wrong to insist that all

addresses to Bishop should show signs of her style, but Swenson's poem is jarring in the wide gap between much of it and Bishop's poetry. The melodrama and the whiff of clichés — "Omens. . . / Distortions," "Smash of heavy waves. Wind rips / the corners of my eyes" — seem oddly inappropriate in an elegy for Bishop. Swenson also uses the word "vision" six times in the poem, in passages like "But vision lives!", "Your vision lives," and "Vision, potent, regenerative"; a reader may resist such overuse of that word, which Bishop had explicitly rejected in "Poem": "visions' is / too serious a word — our looks, two looks."

The fifty-four lines of Swenson's earlier, more successful "Dear Elizabeth" are almost equally divided between alternating quotations from a Bishop letter to Swenson (about small Brazilian birds called *Bicos de Lacre*) and Swenson's responses to those quotations. For e-mail users in the year 2000, reading this poem can be uncannily like reading an e-mail message in which the respondent highlights passages from the other's message and comments on them one by one. Several times in the poem, similarities between Bishop and Swenson surface. Swenson's lines about having to watch cats' ears to note the birds' voices complement Bishop's lines about needing reading glasses to appreciate the birds' feathers. When Swenson writes, "It rarely hatches in captivity, you mean — / but we could hope!" her off-the-cuff "you mean" and her exclamation are reminiscent of Bishop. From urban North America, Swenson's vow that "here, I'd / build them a little Brazil" is rather like Bishop's saying that she was "re-creating a sort of de luxe Nova Scotia" for herself in Brazil (quoted in Millier, 428). Swenson finishes the poem with three lines quoted from Bishop. Yes, says Swenson, send a pair of the birds, "especially as in your P.S.

you confess, / 'I have already two unwed female wild / canaries, for which I must find husbands / in order to have a little song around here.'" In quoting that final passage, Swenson may be joking, unearthing a perhaps unwitting implication in Bishop's words: if the two poets are seen as "unwed female wild canaries," the analogy hilariously breaks down, for while male birds may be the primary singers the two women aren't the least reliant on male company to create their songs, their poems. (In 1962, when Lowell was planning to visit Bishop in Brazil, she wrote to him about a popular impression in Brazil that female poets were primarily male poets' mistresses [Kalstone, 200].)

**James Merrill. "Overdue Pilgrimage to Nova Scotia." *A Scattering of Salts*. New York: Knopf, 1995. 87-89.**

James Merrill, in his final collection, published what must be the most multi-toned, entertaining, and supply allusive of all tribute-addresses to Bishop. Structured like five consecutive sonnets, "Overdue Pilgrimage to Nova Scotia" narrates details of a trip Merrill made to Great Village years after Bishop's death. Pilgrimage poems about visits to sites associated with beloved writers form a longstanding subgenre. (Earlier examples include Keats's "On Visiting the Tomb of Burns" and Rossetti's sonnet inspired by the room in which Blake died.) Merrill's poem overflows with enough wit and observational richness to warrant a whole essay. For now, I'll only mention a few of its features: its passage about a well-mannered, soft-spoken tour-guide who'd never heard of Bishop but "knows these things you would have known by heart / And we, by knowing you by heart, foreknew"; its allusion to "At the Fishhouses" and to Bishop's mother with its images of a wharveside shack

whose shingles are "Silver-stitched to a visionary grain / As by a tireless, deeply troubled inmate, / Were Nature not by definition sane"; its discussion of how Bishop's art "Refused to tip the scale of being human / By adding unearned weight," then this self-deflation: " — but there, I've done it, / Added the weight"; and the decorum and retreat from "heaviness" in its final couplet: "We're off — Excuse our dust! With warm regards, / Gathering phrases for tomorrow's cards."

In "Overdue Pilgrimage," Merrill adopts several devices familiar to readers of Bishop. She seems to be looking over his shoulder as a guiding spirit as he exclaims, "Look, those were elms!", or when he leaves a sentence incomplete ("Or that car — "), or when he uses italics and parenthesis together: (of the ESSO man in Great Village) "(*can* he have read / 'Filling Station'?)." The phrase "knowing you by heart" in the first stanza implies something beyond memorizing. Merrill's poem demonstrates how Bishop's poems have become so rooted in his consciousness and his "heart" that, while honouring her and speaking to her years after her death, he can echo her almost as naturally as breathing. The poem's first line, "Your village touched us by not knowing how," might be expanded to imply that Bishop herself "touched" fellow poets by not knowing how — that is, by unknowingly serving as a mentor who was neither doctrinaire nor domineering, yet deeply influential.

**Heaney, Seamus. "A Hank of Wool." *Times Literary Supplement* March 7 1980: 261.**

Seamus Heaney taught at Harvard during the final year of Bishop's life, as we know from two references to him in *One Art* ("nice and very Irish"; "I like his poetry a lot", pp. 630

and 632). In the spring after her death Heaney published in the *T. L. S.* "A Hank of Wool," with the note "in Elizabeth Bishop." This poem by no means represents Heaney at his strongest; a much more substantial tribute is his Oxford lecture about Bishop, later revised and reprinted in *The Redress of Poetry*. Still, the poem is noteworthy for being a tribute to Bishop hinting at links between her childhood and the addressing poet's; and, like Lowell's and Swenson's poems, it is also noteworthy for quoting Bishop herself — in this case (according to a recent letter from Heaney to Nova Scotian Brian Robinson) from the one letter Heaney received from her. The first lines of Heaney's poem go: "Hank? I hear you say, / all tact and masquerade. / 'Sounds like a name for a cowboy.' / But didn't you hold the wool — / shop wool, ticketed bought wool — until your shoulders ached?" The quotation sparks with personality, through its play with words, its bemused humour, and its "masquerade" that Bishop didn't know very well about hanks of wool. Heaney goes on to say that in childhood he "used to sit like a hermit / with my two arms held out / to stretch the hank between them." The bond between her childhood and Heaney's grows from the help with knitting they both gave to women of an earlier generation. The second section of the poem begins as an invitation — "To unwind it, Elizabeth, / come back in a cardigan / knitted grey or brown." While on the poem's literal surface Heaney is asking the recently deceased poet to return and help "unwind" the hank that was once stretched between his arms, the deeper desire is for her to share "our tranquil recollections / of those supple mysteries, / *knit one, drop one, slip one.*" Like its beginning, the poem's ending cites memorable commentary by Bishop herself, ending, like Swenson's "Dear Elizabeth," with Bishop's words rather than the addressing

poet's. Heaney tells her to "say goodbye" to a number of things, including "the doll's afghan / in different coloured squares / your grandmother who 'knitted things for soldiers'/ taught you to do, with little sermons." Then Heaney concludes with this Bishop quotation: "But I resented this. / So then I would unravel lots of rows — and I've never knitted since." In Bishop's memory as recorded by Heaney, she resisted her grandmother's didacticism ("little sermons"), and her childhood resentment produced a stubborn "unravel[ing]" at the time and a failure to knit ever since. If the knitting is connected to that of the classic Fates, then Bishop, like anyone else, finally failed in trying to unravel what They had knit.

**McPherson, Sandra. "For Elizabeth Bishop." *The Spaces Between Birds*. Hanover, NH: Wesleyan UP / UP of New England, 1996. 23.**

As records of her later life make clear, Bishop felt uneasy and awkward as a poetry-workshop instructor in Seattle and Cambridge. No doubt she alienated some students with her deep-seated dedication to craft and her resistance to many of the day's poetic fashions, and it would be wrong to suggest she couldn't be vehement in her dislikes and likes. Yet she was a vital teacher and long-lasting presence for others, who later honoured her through their own poems. Sandra McPherson, a student from Bishop's first teaching experience at the University of Washington, has published a short, moving poem simply called "For Elizabeth Bishop," which begins: "The child I left your class to have / Later had a habit of sleeping / With her arms around a globe / She'd unscrewed, dropped, and dented." McPherson, like Merrill, shows how Bishop's poems infused her consciousness and helped

shaped her own perceptions and language. Those first lines and the ones following — "I always felt she *could* possess it, / The pink countries and the mauve / And the ocean which got to keep its blue" — bring to mind Bishop's "The Map" and the quotations from "First Lessons in Geography" at the start of *Geography III*. McPherson's poem itemizes objects — a "black madonna" Bishop brought from Brazil, a "small flipbook / Or partners dancing" and the "ring / With a secret whistle" she later gave to McPherson's daughter; then it shifts into the elegiac tone of "All are / Broken now like her globe." That transition can bring to mind Bishop's villanelle "One Art," with its recitation of things cherished and lost. In the poem's final three lines — "Your smaller admirer off to school, / I take the globe and roll it away: where / On it now is someone like you?" — McPherson implies that Bishop was inimitable and irreplaceable. It's as if McPherson becomes her own daughter, learning the hard lesson that she could not "possess" the globe. Bishop remains transformed in memory to be addressed in a poem, but she's no longer found on the familiar earth.

**Spivak, Kathleen. "Ping Pong Sestina: For Elizabeth Bishop." 1980. *The Worcester Review* 18 (½) (1997): 133-34.**

When Kathleen Spivak wrote this poem in 1980, a few months after Bishop's death, her choice of the sestina form was especially appropriate, acknowledging Bishop's brilliant two-time accomplishment with that form. Spivak's poem celebrates her mentor's achievement while depicting her as a cheerful loser at ping-pong, a "wheezing," "aching," and "aging" woman, and the grown-up version of a child who "sensed [she] had something dark to play / out, a despairing intelligence behind that winning // little person." Together

with the poem, *The Worcester Review* printed a memoir by Spivak about her friendship with Bishop.

*C. Addresses by Other Poets*

**Sanger, Peter.** "A Sensible Horizon: For E.B." *Elizabeth Bishop Society of Nova Scotia Newsletter* 22 (1995). N. pag.

Not every poet addressing Bishop knew her or corresponded with her. The Canadian poet Peter Sanger has lived for several decades less than a half-hour drive from Great Village, so it's appropriate that his address to Bishop should talk about her mother's family, her split between North and South, and an abandoned graveyard "one watershed away from Great Village," where Bishop once said she should've been buried. Sanger's poem begins: "Your friend rang up from Florida / as if you might be here, / escaping the death which fetches us / together by flying back / to late imperial Canada." While the poem asserts connections at several points ("Your friend rang up...", "Like you I trust...", "I've also watched..."), it acknowledges the distance between the two in time and space, best indicated in the double distancing of "as if you *might* be here" (not even "as if you were here"). Though much of Sanger's style is distinct from Bishop's (multisyllabic-word combinations more frequent than in most of her poems: "accurate tautology," "consummate reflection," "continuing insistently," "recollection, expulsing"), his poem echoes several moments in Bishop's poetry — "The Weed," "Cape Breton," *North & South*. By the poem's end, Bishop has become not just memorialist and insistent artist but also like the river near the graveyard, "resolved...to one uncertain element, / chillingly dark, anciently unfree." With its images of "rooted heart," "frost,"

"shallow / river," and "white caps of ice," Sanger's is the most northern and wintry of the addresses to Bishop, one in which she seems to have merged with her poems but also with one of her earliest favoured landscapes.

**Reibetanz, John.** "Touching in Detail: A Glosa for Elizabeth Bishop." *Mining for Sun*. London: Brick Books, 2000 (originally in the same issue of *EBSN* as the Sanger poem).

In his poetic address another Canadian poet, John Reibetanz, uses the glosa, a medieval Spanish form that has become surprisingly popular in Canada in the past half a decade, largely through readings of *Hologram*, a 1994 collection of glosas written by one of the country's supreme senior poets, P. K. Page. The glosa inherently involves tribute, in that it's structured around four consecutive lines quoted from another poet, each of those lines concluding a ten-line stanza in the new poem.

Reibetanz's address to Bishop, which chooses four lines from "Poem," starts with a few lines imagining a hypothetical link to Bishop. Once again, as in Merrill's poem, the combination of parenthesis, italics, and casual idioms are reminiscent of some Bishop poems, such as "Poem" itself: "I never knew *you*, never even met you / (although — who knows — we might have shared the same / subway car once in Brooklyn, strangers: you / paying a visit to Miss Moore, and me / a kid riding home from a visit to the zoo.)" That first sentence concludes: "when I think of you, the sight of *him*, / comes to mind." Then, curiously, for much of the poem the main figure becomes not Bishop but an old man, a stranger or perhaps a family member, whom the poet met "just once" but feels a connection to, because both were fond of a country place with an old

orchard and a springwater-fed well. We're left in suspense for many lines about the connection between Bishop and the old man. Unlike most address poems to Bishop, Reibetanz's doesn't so much talk to her about herself as share with her something of other lives. He describes picking a windfall apple off the ground and hearing the old man say he'd probably "picked a great grandparent of that apple." The link between finding that apple and reading Bishop's poetry becomes clear in the final lines of the poem (the last of which is the fourth line quoted from Bishop): "And you? I see him when I think of you / because your art is also a prized windfall / you — dust now, exotic — touched me through, over / our years apart. How strange. And it's still loved." One of the most densely concentrated phrases in those lines is "dust now, exotic," which combines the levelling effects of death along with its capacity to render people distant, foreign, exotic. Reibetanz may be pointing to the mix of ordinariness and extraordinariness in Bishop, a mix observed by her friends. Like Merrill's poem for Bishop, Reibetanz's celebrates the value of Bishop's work as a treasured inheritance, and its ongoing affective power to "touch" readers. Reibetanz's "touch me through" parallels Merrill's "touched us by not knowing how," but his wording makes its own suggestion of inwardness with the preposition "through," and it comments wonderingly "How strange" on the ability of art to cross the bridge of "years apart" between creator and appreciator.

**Jenny Haysom. "Visit to Elizabeth."** *Quarry Magazine* 45.1 (1997): 60.

This poem is written by the youngest poet of the Bishop-addressers I could discover. Haysom, a British-born Nova Scotia poet currently living in Ottawa, speaks of visiting

Great Village with "ear to the sky." While addressing Bishop, Haysom seems uncertain of any lingering presence: "Dear Elizabeth, / do you...hang above / this village?" The poem concludes, rather than begins: "I have come for the child, / a lost Elizabeth, the one your low tide / left behind."

**J. D. McClatchy. "Three Dreams About Elizabeth Bishop."** *Ten Commandments*. New York:Knopf, 1998. 99-102.

The lucidly fantastic first part of McClatchy's poem, published in his most recent collection, is a semi-comical yet subtly moving narrative in which Bishop lies at her long-postponed funeral "like Lenin / Under glass, powdered, in power blue / But crestfallen," then opens her eyes and now and then speaks up, adding to the mourners' conversation. Even in the casket her passion for details survives: she points out "it was a blue, a mimeograph blue / Powder the Indians used, and stuck cedar pegs / Through their breasts in the ghost dance--." (Unfortunately I haven't been able to determine if McClatchy befriended Bishop; it could be this poem belongs in the earlier section of this bibliography.)

**Robert A. Kelly. "From Purgatory Mary Flannery Tells Elizabeth Bishop."** *The Antigonish Review* 1 (1992): 81-82.

Kelly's poem represents a special case of the address poem: one imagined in the voice of another writer. In this poem, with both women in an afterlife, Flannery O'Connor imagines Bishop having a child with Lowell, speaks of her own exile in Iowa writing letters home to her mother, and builds up to the grisly image of using "an electric prod" to teach "a chicken / To walk backwards." "Now forward motion is impossible / Until they open the closets / In

Andalusia and Great Village, / And let the past  
tumble out — ."

**Peg Boyers. "Reading Elizabeth Bishop."  
*Boston Phoenix*, forthcoming.**

In another poem imagined spoken by another artist, Peg Boyers writes in the voice of the painter Natalia Ginsburg, who disagrees with Bishop's curiosity about the exotic in "Questions of Travel" and, after speaking only of Bishop, addresses her in the poem's last nine lines, protesting that "knowledge is a rock, / never flowing, never flown."

D.

The variety of approaches among poetic addresses to Bishop suggests the many-sidedness of her own poetry, the power of her work to generate personal rather than merely critical responses, and the degree to which she has been valued by a particular group of readers: other poets. Reading these poems, we're far from the kind of address Wordsworth uses when, speaking across the centuries, he calls out: "Milton! thou should'st be living at this hour"; from the Oedipal peacemaking of Pound in "A Pact," where he tells Whitman: "I come to you as a grown child / Who has had a pig-headed father; / I am old enough now to make friends"; and from the kind of address Louise Glück describes in considering a poem by Milosz addressed to Robinson Jeffers: "a particular species of reproach: giant to giant." None of the poets I've looked at addresses Bishop as one who is needed, as the grand representative of an earlier time, to bring wisdom to a troubled world. Nor do any of them, struck down by anxieties of influence, address her as a towering poetic ancestor they needed to combat and contradict in their youth. Bishop may not be a poet who will ever receive those kinds of addresses, though it's

too early to say for sure. For all we know, maybe a couple of centuries from someone *will* say in a poem the equivalent of "Bishop! though should'st be living at this hour."

*Thanks to several correspondents — Sandra Barry, Lloyd Schwartz., Jane Shore, and Thomas Travisano — for help in tracking down some of the poems listed above. Some quotations and facts in the survey come from Elizabeth Bishop, One Art: Letters, ed. Robert Giroux (New York: Farrar, 1994); Louise Glück, Proofs & Theories: Essays on Poetry (Hopewell, NJ: Ecco, 1994); David Kalstone, Becoming a Poet: Elizabeth Bishop with Marianne Moore and Robert Lowell (London: The Hogarth Press, 1989); and Brett C. Millier, Elizabeth Bishop: Life and the Memory of It (Berkeley: U of California P, 1993).*

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Membership in the Elizabeth Bishop Society of Nova Scotia is available for \$8 per year or \$20 for three years (Canadian funds). Either membership entitles the holder to take full voting part in the Society's deliberations and to receive the Newsletter for free.

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Donna E. Smyth lives on an old farm in Hants County, NS. As well as publishing numerous short stories, poems and non-fiction pieces, Donna E. Smyth has published three novels: *Quilt* and *Subversive Elements*, and a young adult novel, *Loyalist Runaway*, which won the 1992 Dartmouth Fiction Award. Her previous plays include *Giant Anna* and an adaptation of *Alice Through the Looking Glass*.

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