

Concise Dictionary of American Literary Biography

Broadening Views,  
1968-1988

Concise Dictionary of American Literary Biography

# Broadening Views, 1968-1988

A Bruccoli Clark Layman Book  
Gale Research Inc.  
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## Plan of the Work

The six-volume *Concise Dictionary of American Literary Biography* was developed in response to requests from high school and junior college teachers and librarians, and from small- to medium-sized public libraries, for a compilation of entries from the standard *Dictionary of Literary Biography* chosen to meet their needs and their budgets. The *DLB*, which comprises over ninety volumes as of the end of 1987, is moving steadily toward its goal of providing a history of literature in all languages developed through the biographies of writers. Basic as the *DLB* is, many librarians have expressed the need for a less comprehensive reference work which in other respects retains the merits of *DLB*. The *Concise DALB* provides this resource.

This series was planned by a seven-member advisory board, consisting primarily of secondary school educators, who developed a method of organization and presentation for selected *DLB* entries suitable for high school and beginning college students. Their preliminary plan was circulated to some five thousand school librarians and English teachers, who were asked to respond to the organization of the series and the table of contents. Those responses were incorporated into the plan described here.

### *Uses for the Concise DALB*

Students are the primary audience for the *Concise DALB*. The stated purpose of the standard *DLB* is to make our literary heritage more accessible. *Concise DALB* has the same goal and seeks a wider audience. What the author wrote; what the facts of his life are; a description of his literary works; a discussion of the critical response to his works; and a bibliography of critical works to be consulted for further information: These are the elements of a *Concise DALB* entry.

The first step in the planning process for this series, after identifying the audience, was to contemplate its uses. The advisory board acknowledged that the integrity of *Concise DALB* as a reference book is crucial to its utility. The *Concise DALB* adheres to the scholarly standards established by the parent series. Thus, within the scope of major American literary figures, the *Concise DALB* is a ready reference source of estab-

lished value, providing reliable biographical and bibliographical information.

It is anticipated that this series will not be confined to uses within the library. Just as *DLB* has been a tool for stimulating students' literary interests in the college classroom—for comparative studies of authors, for example, and, through its ample illustrations, as a means of invigorating literary study—the *Concise DALB* is a primary resource for high school and junior college educators. The series is organized to facilitate lesson planning, and the contextual diagrams (explained below) that introduce each entry are a source of topics for classroom discussion and writing assignments.

### *Organization*

The advisory board further determined that entries from the standard *DLB* should be presented complete—without abridgment. Their feeling was that the utility of the *DLB* format has been proven, and that only minimal changes should be made.

The advisory board further decided that the organization of the *Concise DALB* should be chronological to emphasize the historical development of American literature. Each volume is devoted to a single historical period and includes the most significant literary figures from all genres who were active during that time. Thus, the volume that includes modern mainstream novelists Saul Bellow, Bernard Malamud, and John Cheever will also include poets who were active at the same time—such as Allen Ginsberg, Lawrence Ferlinghetti, and John Berryman—and dramatists who were their contemporaries—such as Tennessee Williams, Arthur Miller, and William Inge. It should be noted that the volume of the *Concise DALB* that includes these authors comprises thirty-six entries, while the volumes in the standard *DLB* covering the same period include some four hundred author biographies. The *Concise DALB* limits itself to major figures, but it provides the same coverage of those figures as the *DLB* does.

The six period volumes of the *Concise DALB* are *Colonization to the American Renaissance, 1640-1865*; *Realism, Naturalism, and Local Color*,

1865-1917; *The Twenties*, 1917-1929; *The Age of Maturity*, 1929-1941; *The New Consciousness*, 1941-1968; *Broadening Views*, 1968-1988. The sixth volume will also contain a comprehensive index by subjects and proper names to the entire *Concise DALB*. (As in the standard *DLB* series, there is a cumulative index to author entries in each *Concise DALB* volume.)

#### *Form of Entry*

The form of entry in the *Concise DALB* is substantially the same as in the standard series, with the following alterations:

1) Each entry has been updated to include a discussion of works published since the standard entry appeared and to reflect recent criticism and research of interest to the high school audience.

2) The secondary bibliography for each entry has been selected to include those books and articles of particular interest and usefulness

to high school and junior college students. In addition, the secondary bibliography has been annotated to assist students in assessing whether a reference will meet their needs.

3) Each entry is preceded by a "contextual diagram"—a graphic presentation of the places, literary influences, personal relationships, literary movements, major themes, cultural and artistic influences, and social and economic forces associated with the author. This chart allows students—and teachers—to place the author in his literary and social context at a glance.

It bears repeating that the *Concise DALB* is restricted to major American literary figures. It is anticipated that users of this series will find it advantageous to consult the standard *DLB* for information about those writers omitted from the *Concise DALB* whose significance to contemporary readers may have faded but whose contribution to our cultural heritage remains meaningful.

Comments about the series and suggestions about how to improve it are earnestly invited.

## A Note to Students

The purpose of the *Concise DALB* is to enrich the study of literature. In their various ways, writers react in their works to the circumstances of their lives, the events of their time, and the culture that envelops them (which are represented on the contextual diagrams that precede each *Concise DALB* entry). Writers provide a way to see and understand what they have observed and experienced. Besides being inherently interesting, biographies of writers provide a basic perspective on literature.

*Concise DALB* entries start with the most important facts about writers: What they wrote. We strongly recommend that you also start there. The chronological listing of an author's works is an outline for the examination of his or her career achievement. The biographies that follow set the stage for the presentation of the works. Each of the author's important works and the most respected critical evaluations of them are dis-

cussed in *Concise DALB*. If you require more information about the author or fuller critical studies of the author's works, the annotated references section at the end of the entry will guide you.

Illustrations are an integral element of *Concise DALB* entries. Photographs of the author are reminders that literature is the product of a writer's imagination; facsimiles of the author's working drafts are the best evidence available for understanding the act of composition—the author in the process of refining his work and acting as self-editor; dust jacket and advertisements demonstrate how literature comes to us through the marketplace, which sometimes serves to alter our perceptions of the works.

Literary study is a complex and immensely rewarding endeavor. Our goal is to provide you with the information you need to make that experience as rich as possible.



## Acknowledgments

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# Contents

Plan of the Work.....	vii	Norman Mailer (1923- ).....	162
A Note to Students.....	ix	Larry McMurtry (1936- ).....	184
Acknowledgments.....	xi	Toni Morrison (1931- ).....	200
Elizabeth Bishop (1911-1979).....	2	Joyce Carol Oates (1938- ).....	216
Ray Bradbury (1920- ).....	16	Philip Roth (1933- ).....	242
Robert Cormier (1925- ).....	34	William Styron (1925- ).....	260
James Dickey (1923- ).....	52	John Updike (1932- ).....	276
Joan Didion (1934- ).....	68	Kurt Vonnegut, Jr. (1922- ).....	298
E. L. Doctorow (1931- ).....	86	Alice Walker (1944- ).....	320
Ernest J. Gaines (1933- ).....	96	Robert Penn Warren (1905- ).....	336
Ken Kesey (1935- ).....	110	Contributors.....	361
John Knowles (1926- ).....	120	Cumulative Index.....	365
Ursula K. Le Guin (1929- ).....	136		



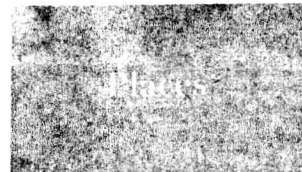
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## Elizabeth Bishop

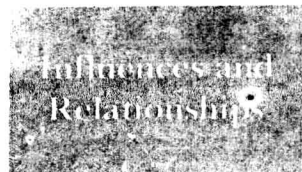
*This entry was updated by Brett C. Millier (Middlebury College) from the entry by Ashley Brown (University of South Carolina) in DLB 5, American Poets Since World War II.*



Nova Scotia  
Paris

Florida  
Brazil

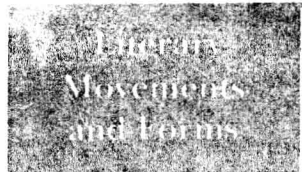
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Marianne Moore  
Robert Lowell  
May Swenson

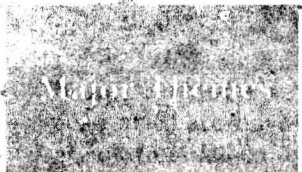
George Herbert  
Wallace Stevens

Gerard Manley  
Hopkins



"Closed Form" Poets

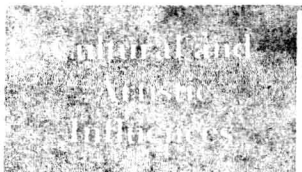
The Elegy



The Interaction of  
Man and Beast

Geography  
Moral Choice

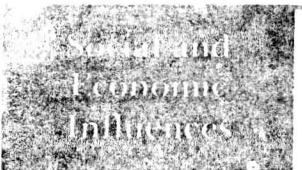
Dislocated Perspective  
' Loss



Jazz / The Blues  
Impressionist Painting

Brazilian Music  
and Culture

Portuguese Language  
Protestant Hymns



Political Unrest  
in Brazil

The Presidency of  
John F. Kennedy

Poverty

**BIRTH:** Worcester, Massachusetts, 8 February 1911, to Gertrude Bulmer and William Thomas Bishop.

**EDUCATION:** A.B., Vassar College, 1934.

**AWARDS:** Houghton Mifflin Poetry Award, 1945; Guggenheim Fellowship, 1947; Consultant in Poetry (Library of Congress), 1949-1950; Lucy Martin Donnelly Fellowship (Bryn Mawr College), 1951; National Institute of Arts and Letters Award, 1951; Shelley Memorial Award, 1953; *Partisan Review* Fellowship, 1956; Pulitzer Prize for *Poems: North & South—A Cold Spring*, 1956; Amy Lowell Fellowship, 1957; Chapelbrook Foundation Fellowship, 1960; Academy of American Poets Fellowship, 1964; LL.D., Smith College, 1968; National Book Award for *The Complete Poems*, 1970; Order Rio Branco (Brazil), 1971; LL.D., Rutgers University, 1972; LL.D., Brown University, 1972; Harriet Monroe Poetry Award (University of Chicago), 1974; *Books Abroad* / Neustadt International Prize for Literature, 1976; National Book Critics Circle Award for *Geography III*, 1977.

**DEATH:** Boston, Massachusetts, 6 October 1979.

**BOOKS:** *North & South* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1946);

*Poems: North & South—A Cold Spring* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1955; London: Chatto & Windus, 1956);

*Brazil*, by Bishop and the editors of *Life* (New York: Time / Life World Library, 1962; London: Sunday Times, 1963);

*Questions of Travel* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1965);

*Selected Poems* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1967);

*The Ballad of the Burglar of Babylon* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1968);

*The Complete Poems* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1969; London: Chatto & Windus, 1970);

*Geography III* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1976);

*The Complete Poems, 1927-1979* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1983);

*The Collected Prose*, edited by Robert Giroux (New York: Farrar, Straus, & Giroux, 1984).

**OTHER:** Alice Dayrell Brant, *The Diary of "Helena Morley,"* translated, with an introduc-

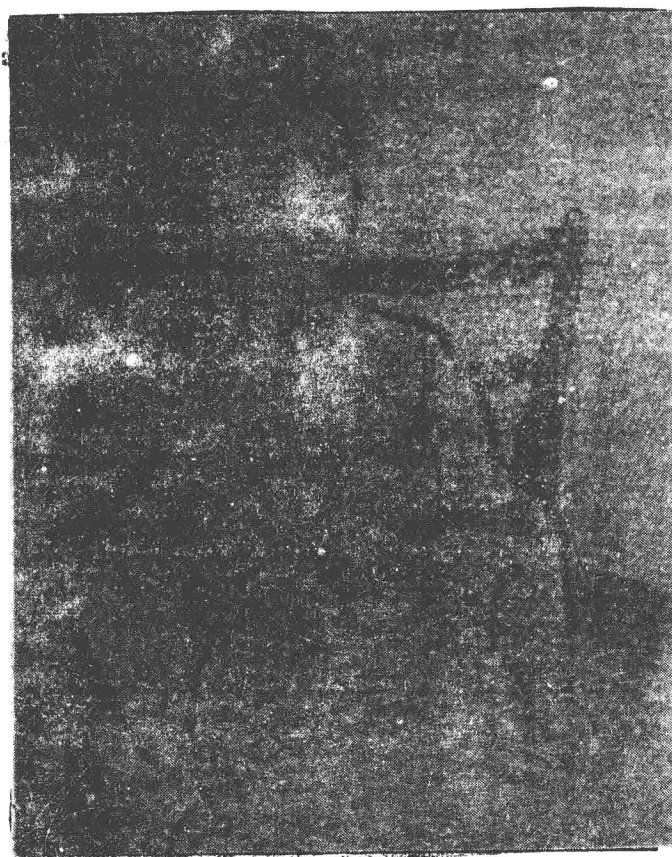
tion, by Bishop (New York: Farrar, Straus & Cudahy, 1957; London: Gollancz, 1958);

*An Anthology of Twentieth-Century Brazilian Poetry*, volume 1 edited by Bishop and Emanuel Brasil, contains translations by Bishop (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1972).

Elizabeth Bishop started publishing poems in the mid 1930s, but her reputation as one of the best American poets has emerged rather slowly. She never rushed into print, and only in her last years did she give public readings of her work. One can think of few other writers who so steadily refused to exploit their "personalities", yet in her poems a very distinctive voice and attitude can always be sensed. She was honored in several ways, and in 1976 she was the first American writer and the first woman to receive the *Books Abroad* / Neustadt International Prize for Literature, chosen by an international jury of writers who convened at the University of Oklahoma. And in the following year the poet Anthony Hecht, writing in the *London Times Literary Supplement*, said that "Hers is about the finest product our country can offer the world; we have little by other artists that can match it. . . ."

Elizabeth Bishop was born in Worcester, Massachusetts, on 8 February 1911. Her parents, Gertrude Bulmer and William Thomas Bishop, were of Canadian descent; her father's family was from Prince Edward Island, her mother's from Nova Scotia. Because her father died when she was eight months old, she was brought up by her mother and then her maternal grandparents, who lived in Nova Scotia. Her mother was placed permanently in a mental institution when the child was five years old. Many years later Miss Bishop wrote a story, "In the Village," about her mother's collapse. But in that version the event takes place among the many vivid details of a summer day; an entire community is evoked; and the mother's scream that hangs over the village is only the focal point of a complex human situation, a domestic tragedy that is recollected in tranquillity. (The story, originally published in the *New Yorker* in 1953, eventually became the centerpiece of Miss Bishop's 1965 collection of poems, *Questions of Travel*, and is included in *The Collected Prose* [1984].)

Although she continued to spend her childhood summers in Nova Scotia, a place to which she often returned in her poems, Miss Bishop lived most of her childhood in Boston and had



*Elizabeth Bishop (Gale International Portrait Gallery)*

her formal schooling at Walnut Hill School, Natick, Massachusetts, between 1927 and 1930. By that time she had already given herself something of a literary education through her wide, haphazard reading. In an interview conducted in 1965 (*Shenandoah*, Winter 1966) she recalled some of the books of her girlhood:

I was crazy about fairy tales—Anderson, Grimm, and so on. Like Jean-Paul Sartre (as he explains it in *Les Mots*), I also read all kinds of things I didn't really understand. I tried almost anything. When I was thirteen, I discovered Whitman, and that was important to me at the time. About that time I started going to summer camp and met some more sophisticated girls who already knew Emily Dickinson and H.D. and Conrad and Henry James. One of them gave me Harriet Monroe's anthology of modern poets. That was an important experience. (I had actually started reading poetry when I was eight.) I remember coming across Harriet Monroe's quotations from Hopkins, "God's Grandeur" for one. I quickly memorized these, and I thought, "I must get this man's work." In 1927 I saw the first edition of Hopkins. I also went through a

Shelley phase, a Browning phase, and a brief Swinburne phase. But I missed a lot of school and my reading was sporadic.

Elizabeth Bishop's years at Vassar College (1930-1934) marked the beginning of her literary career. Her fellow students included Mary McCarthy, Eleanor Clark, and Muriel Rukeyser, all of whom would soon begin to publish poems or stories in the best little magazines of the period and who would all become well-known writers. In 1934 she met Marianne Moore through the Vassar College librarian and began a friendship that was to last almost forty years. Miss Bishop's poetry has sometimes been compared to Moore's, and undoubtedly there are resemblances—the extraordinary gift of observation, the "understated" wit, even certain subjects. But Miss Bishop's range is larger in that she has more kinds of approaches to her subjects; Marianne Moore was only one of her influences.

In 1935, having finished college, Miss Bishop began the travels that were such an important part of her life. She first went to Brittany and then stayed on through the winter in Paris.

The next year she traveled in North Africa and Spain, and in 1937 she visited Key West for the first time. After another period in Europe she settled temporarily in Florida and eventually bought an old house in Key West. This was to be home for the next several years. Meanwhile her poems began appearing in *Partisan Review*, *Poetry*, and other periodicals, and by 1941 she had already published about twenty-five, enough to compose a small book. But there was no urgency about her work, and during the years of World War II her production was small. She spent most of 1943 in Mexico, where she happened to meet the Chilean poet Pablo Neruda, and added Spanish to her languages. Most of these places—Paris, North Africa, and especially Key West—provided occasions for her poems. It was not till 1946, however, that she brought out her first collection, *North & South*.

The book was published by Houghton Mifflin as part of its first annual poetry award. It was also very well received. Randall Jarrell, who was the best reviewer of poetry in those days, put her book in a category with new works by William Carlos Williams and Robert Graves, and he drew special attention to "The Fish" and "Roosters": "two of the most calmly beautiful, deeply sympathetic poems of our time. . . ." Indeed, "The Fish" is still the most frequently anthologized of her poems, partly because of Jarrell's enthusiasm. "She is morally so attractive," Jarrell wrote, "because she understands so well that the wickedness and confusion of the age can explain and extenuate other people's wickedness and confusion, but not, for you, your own."

There is a kind of general movement from North to South in the book, and the first poem, "The Map" (1935), although it is mainly concerned with maps as aesthetic objects, not just guides to geographical locations, almost inevitably presents a part of the world familiar to the author:

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.

This poem, which so obviously has the "calmly beautiful" quality that Jarrell mentions, uses the most natural kind of word order. Elizabeth Bishop always insists on the same order of words in poetry that one would use in a good sentence of English prose (she follows Marianne Moore in

this procedure), and she uses a capital letter at the beginning of a verse line only if a sentence begins at that point.

The earliest poems in the book, including "The Map," are mostly in the mode of wit or ironic fantasy—the author seldom brings herself directly into them—but their indirection of method does not mean that they lack a human subject of great interest. "The Man-Moth," for instance, started out from a newspaper misprint for the word *mammoth*. The printing error suggested a strange creature that Miss Bishop used as a way of apprehending the eerie life of the modern city, such as the experience of riding the subway:

Each night he must  
be carried through artificial tunnels and dream re-  
current dreams.  
Just as the ties recur beneath his train, these under-  
lie  
his rushing brain. He does not dare look out the win-  
dow,  
for the third rail, the unbroken draught of poison,  
runs there beside him. He regards it as a disease  
he has inherited the susceptibility to. He has to  
keep  
his hands in his pockets, as others must wear muf-  
flers.

This fantasy—some would call it almost Kafkaesque—has a special poignancy among the early poems. No wonder that the poet herself continued to cherish it, and in 1962, when asked to contribute a favorite poem to an anthology (*Poet's Choice*, edited by Paul Engle and Joseph Langland), she offered this one with a brief comment about the misprint that got her started: "An oracle spoke from the page of the *New York Times*, kindly explaining New York City to me, at least for the moment."

Miss Bishop was alert to the different kinds of poetry being written during the 1930s; by this time an American poet could go off in several directions. Having lived for a year in the Paris of André Breton, she was well aware of surrealism, a literary and artistic mode that was practiced there more successfully than it usually was in England and the United States. It is not surprising that several of her poems with Parisian settings (such as "Sleeping on the Ceiling" and "Cirque d'Hiver") are to some extent surrealist. Her real triumph in this mode is "A Miracle for Breakfast" (1937), a strict sestina that deploys the end words through six different arrangements in as many stanzas:



At six o'clock we were waiting for coffee,  
 waiting for coffee and the charitable crumb  
 that was going to be served from a certain balcony,  
 —like kings of old, or like a miracle.  
 It was still dark. One foot of the sun  
 steadied itself on a long ripple in the river.

This poem, which at first seems mostly artifice and which certainly carries through an elaboration of method, is about a real subject—hunger. It is written from the point of view of the hungry, and the reader who attends carefully to the details of language (for instance the variations on “the charitable crumb”) will see that the strict sestina form is precisely what builds up the effect of hallucination. This is a poem with a social conscience, in its own way a response to the Depression of the 1930s, but it is not like any other American poem of the period. In some ways it resembles the early films of René Clair, such as *Le Million*, which Miss Bishop would have seen in Paris or New York, but its manner, its voice, is hers. Had she wished to, she could have practiced the surrealist mode at length—it seemed to come rather easily to her—and about this time she published several stories that bear out her interest in it. But she had other ways of presenting her subjects.

Miss Bishop's years in Key West were rewarding. In her 1965 interview she looked back on them with some pleasure:

I can't say Key West offered any special advantages for a writer. But I liked living there. The light and blaze of colors made a good impression on me, and I loved the swimming. The town was absolutely broke then. Everybody lived on the W.P.A. I seemed to have a taste for impoverished places in those days. But my Key West period dwindled away. I went back for winters till 1949, but after the war it wasn't the same.

At least six poems from this period seem to have had their inception in Florida, beginning with the poem of that title (“The state with the prettiest name, / the state that floats in brackish water . . .”). This group alone would illustrate something of Miss Bishop's range; it includes “Roosters,” “Jerónimo's House,” “Seascape,” “Little Exercise,” and “The Fish.”

“Jerónimo's House” is very much a Key West poem. The speaker, in what might be considered the author's first dramatic monologue, is a member of the poor Cuban colony on the island; his fragile house is hardly even a shelter from

the hurricanes that will batter the place. But out of his poverty he builds up a quiet “rage for order” (to borrow Wallace Stevens's phrase from a famous poem about Key West). The homeliest details contribute to this state of mind, which is what the poem is finally about: the “little / center table / of woven wicker / painted blue,” the “little dish / of hominy grits / and four pink tissue- / paper roses.” The speaker says with charming modesty:

Also I have  
 hung on a hook,  
 an old French horn  
 repainted with  
 aluminum paint.  
 I play each year  
 in the parade  
 for José Martí.

Miss Bishop was also being modest when she said that she had “a taste for impoverished places in those days.” There is something humane, even compassionate in her treatment of the subject; Jerónimo is neither idealized nor patronized. It may be that her few years at Key West, when it was still an isolated place difficult to approach except by sea, gave her a sense of community that she had not found in the great cities where she had lived temporarily. To go from “The Man-Moth” to “Jerónimo's House” gives one this impression.

“Jerónimo's House” is a new kind of poem in another way: its versification. Miss Bishop now began to practice a kind of controlled free verse (there is no other term for it) that descended from a few early poems by Wallace Stevens, such as “The Snow Man” and “The Death of a Soldier.” (There is a brilliant discussion of this topic in Yvor Winters's *Primitivism and Decadence*, 1937.) The norm is usually a set number of stresses in each line; in “Jerónimo's House” there are usually two stresses (sometimes the stresses are light); the number of unstressed syllables is variable. This system, if one can call it that, allows for a high degree of “naturalness” in the rhythm, but the movement is always controlled. A good place to see how this works is “Roosters,” the most ambitious poem in *North & South*.

This poem is a kind of mini-epic of Western history as it was formulated by Hegel: ancient, medieval, and modern. But the form is cyclical because we start with some real roosters (probably in Key West), whose “uncontrolled, traditional cries” are gradually presented in a mock-heroic

way, and before long we are back in the world of the *Iliad* and its late Bronze-Age warriors. When the fighting subsides, we move to the long stretch of the Christian era in which "St. Peter's sin," his denial of Christ, is symbolized in the traditional way by the crowing of the cock. The presentation of the subject on an "old holy sculpture" is one of Miss Bishop's most brilliant passages. As intense religious belief gradually plays out, the rooster survives as a symbol on weather vanes. Then we return to the backyard where we started; the roosters are replaced by the sun, "faithful as enemy, or friend."

Miss Bishop has sustained her subject through forty-four stanzas. Her formal model was a secular poem by the baroque poet, Richard Crashaw, called "Wishes to his supposed mistress." Crashaw's stanza form must have been his invention, and it starts out thus:

Who e'er she be,  
That not impossible she  
That shall command my heart and me;

The pattern, although unusual, perhaps unique, is altogether regular: triplets in which iambic lines move from dimeter to trimeter to tetrameter. The effect of the triplet, which could be somewhat heavy in English verse, is softened by the varying length of the lines. Crashaw's poem is a splendid exercise in late Renaissance poetics. Miss Bishop's adaptation of the stanza form is by way of controlled free verse: lines of two, three, and four stresses:

Christ stands amazed,  
Péter, two fingers raised  
to surprised lips, both as if dazed.

Winters in *Primitivism and Decadence* explains that the scheme of free verse can be somewhat varied in its pattern; not every line has to conform. Occasional secondary stresses, inevitable in an accented language like English, certainly occur. The philosopher John Dewey said of "Roosters" when it was first published in the *New Republic* in 1941, "Well, Elizabeth, you've got these rhymes in threes very well." The rhymes are occasionally half rhymes, according to well-established modern practice. The poem is altogether a stunning performance, in which "wit" in the seventeenth-century sense is carried forward in a twentieth-century idiom. Marianne Moore, her mentor at this time, objected to the stanza form and actually rewrote the poem. For the first time the

younger poet began to refuse Moore's heavy-handed suggestions, and the two became friends and equals.

In a rather different manner is the suite of four poems called "Songs for a Colored Singer" (1944), the first of which was admired by Jarrell when he reviewed *North & South*. Anne R. Newman (*World Literature Today*, Winter 1977) has made the observation that "the four poems make a fine statement of what we now call the black experience." Certainly they are one of the most authentic renditions of black idiom written by a white author; they can be set beside a few stories by Flannery O'Connor and Eudora Welty for comparison. Miss Bishop divulged, in her 1966 interview, that she was thinking of a specific singer when she wrote the poems: "I think I had Billie Holiday in mind. I put in a couple of big words just because she sang big words well—'Conspiring root,' for instance." That comment surely explains the exquisite humor of these lines in the second poem:

I'm leaving on the bus tonight.  
Far down the highway wet and black  
I'll ride and ride and not come back.  
I'm going to go and take the bus  
and find someone monogamous.

It is also likely that these very American poems—the blues idiom adapted to the printed page—were suggested by a group of poems by W. H. Auden, "Four Cabaret Songs for Miss Hedli Anderson," which Miss Bishop would have known from his volume *Another Time* (1940). Hedli Anderson, who married the poet Louis MacNeice, may have suggested some details of the poems by her manner of singing, but Auden's songs (which were set to music by Benjamin Britten) were almost parodies of popular song idiom to begin with, just as English popular song of the 1930s was already a kind of imitation of American. Auden gradually let his "Cabaret Songs" go out of print, and one can easily make the claim that Elizabeth Bishop's "Songs"—at least the first two—are superior. Auden was just playing with the idiom.

After *North & South* was published, Miss Bishop gradually consolidated her position as a leading poet of her generation. In 1947 she was awarded a Guggenheim Fellowship. In 1949-1950 she was the Consultant in Poetry at the Library of Congress, and the year after that she was awarded a fellowship by Bryn Mawr College. In November of that year, 1951, she started on



PINK DOG

4.

The sun is blazing and the sky is blue.  
Umbrellas clothe the beach in every hue.  
Naked, you trot across the avenue.

Oh, never have I seen a dog so bare!  
Naked and pink, without a single hair...  
Startled, the passersby draw back and stare.

Of course they're mortally afraid of rabies.  
But you're not mad. You have a case of scabies,  
~~a terminal one, I'd say. Where are your babies?~~

~~/In what slum have you hidden them, poor bitch,--~~  
A nursing mother, by those hanging teats,  
In what slum have you hidden them, poor bitch?

Didn't you know? It's been in all the papers,  
To solve this problem, how they deal with beggars!  
They take them out and throw them in the tidal rivers.

Yes, idiots, paralytics, parasites,  
go bobbing in the ebbing sewage, nights,  
out in the suburbs, where there are no lights.

If they do this to anyone who begs,  
~~drunk, drugged, or sober,~~ with or without legs,  
what might they do to bare, four-legged dogs?

In the cafés and on the corners  
the joke is going round that all the beggars  
who can afford them, now wear life-preservers.

In your condition you would not be able  
to ~~get away~~ even to dog-paddle

this time of year.

Ash Wednesday's coming; Carnival is here.  
What samba will you dance? What will you wear?

That Carnival's of ~~course~~ degenerating  
-radios, Americans, or something,  
have ruined it completely. They're just talking.

Carnival is always wonderful!  
A depilated dog will not look well.  
Get dräsed! Get dressed and dance at Carnival!

very hot on the shore the  
bitch?  
a - - - - -

very hot  
at least intelligent. What are the  
in the?

it's  
white  
of you. into -  
for out 2 frogs  
in the air of you into -  
a little in

drugged, drunk or sober,

moddy

even to float, much less to dog-paddle

you are a little bit X

he a  
fatia

fatia

Corrected typescript for one of Bishop's poems inspired by her travels in Brazil (courtesy of Alice Methfessel)

what was to be her longest and perhaps most important voyage, around the world. Her ship's first stop was Rio de Janeiro, where she visited a friend, Lota de Macedo Soares, and stayed for sixteen years.

Meanwhile she continued to write poems and occasionally prose, sometimes based on visits to Nova Scotia or childhood memories of that locale. Outstanding among these is "At the Fishhouses" (1947), which might be put beside Paul Valéry's "Le cimetière marin" or Stevens's "The Idea of Order at Key West" or (to name a neglected American poem) Howard Baker's "Ode to the Sea." All of these meditations move slowly in the grand manner toward a large statement about existence or knowledge. Miss Bishop builds up her statement and her manner very gradually. Indeed she is almost disarmingly informal at times, and midway she introduces herself thus:

One seal particularly  
I have seen here evening after evening.  
He was curious about me. He was interested  
in music;  
like me a believer in total immersion,  
so I used to sing him Baptist hymns.  
I also sang "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God."

Like the other great marine poems, "At the Fishhouses" is based on an opposition between land and sea. It is accordingly arranged in two large sections of forty lines and thirty-seven lines: a setting on land, from which there is a glimpse of the sea, and then the sea itself. Between these sections is a short stanza of six lines in which the transition from land to sea begins. Starting with these facts, one could make a rather extended analysis of the rhetoric of the poem. For instance, the first section is written entirely in the present tense. Although the experience is authentic—Elizabeth Bishop revisiting a decaying fishing village in Nova Scotia—the author carefully suppresses the pronoun *I*, though she is clearly present. The old man repairing nets is, like a character in a poem by Wordsworth, the focus of attention. Then, in the passage about the seal quoted above, the author briefly introduces herself as she makes the transition to the past tense. But this episode lasts only a dozen lines before she moves back to the present. As the large statement begins to emerge in the last part of the poem, the characteristic pronoun becomes *you* or *we*; that is, the reader is drawn into the statement. But at the same time the mood becomes subjunctive ("If you should dip your hand in, / your

wrist would ache immediately"). Only at the end of the poem, when the statement rounds it out, does the mood return to indicative:

It is like what we imagine knowledge to be:  
dark, salt, clear, moving, utterly free,  
drawn from the cold hard mouth  
of the world, derived from the rocky breasts  
forever, flowing and drawn, and since  
our knowledge is historical, flowing, and flown.

The grand manner of the poem (written in the language of the times as Miss Bishop would naturally use it) is thus secured by traditional rhetorical devices, especially the deploying of tenses and grammatical moods. Miss Bishop, who studied both the old poets and the moderns, was altogether aware of these things, and in her 1965 interview she said:

the use of the present tense helps to convey this sense of the mind in action. Cummings does this in some poems. Of course poets in other languages (French especially) use the "historical present" more than we do. But that isn't really the same device. But switching tenses always gives effects of depth, space, foreground, background, and so on.

In 1955 Miss Bishop assembled seventeen poems (including "At the Fishhouses") under the heading of *A Cold Spring* to add to her first collection, and her new book was published as *Poems: North & South—A Cold Spring*. It was awarded the Pulitzer Prize in 1956. By this time she had settled into her life in Brazil, and, having learned Portuguese, she began to take an interest in the literature of the country. Much of her activity during the next decade or so was devoted to translating and introducing certain Brazilian writers to the North American public. She worked on and off for three years translating a book called *Minha Vida de Menina* (*My Life as a Little Girl*), a diary kept in the 1890s by a young girl who called herself "Helena Morley." She was still living, as Senhora Alice Brant, in Rio de Janeiro when Elizabeth Bishop first went there, and indeed the translator was acquainted with her author, who is described in the introduction to the American edition. The book had been published in Portuguese in 1942 and became a kind of classic (it is still widely sold), especially after it was recommended to the public by the French novelist Georges Bernanos, a refugee in Brazil during World War II. It presents the day-to-day life in