

# **The Complete Poems, 1927-1979 Study Guide**

**The Complete Poems, 1927-1979 by Elizabeth Bishop**

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# Plot Summary

Elizabeth Bishop: The Complete Poems 1927-1979 is a detailed sampling of the iconic poet's work throughout her life, in the United States and abroad. Bishop claims to have been deeply affected by the transition from the U.S. to Nova Scotia when her maternal grandparents assumed guardianship. There are tributes to living in Nova Scotia, references to her grandparents whom she obviously loved a great deal, and the sea, which seemed to hold an endless fascination for Bishop. Remarkably, there is no clear reference to Bishop's mother, who entered a mental institution was Bishop was a child; nor to her deceased father. The poet's references to her grandfather are charming and sweet. Bishop somehow manages to maintain a childlike admiration of the man and his lessons.

There is a great deal of reference to nature in the poetry. Bishop is obviously enamored of the water in its various forms, including such bodies as the Atlantic Ocean off the coast of Nova Scotia and Florida, the Amazon and Tapajos Rivers, the Strait of Belle Isle, and The Seine. The ocean seems to hold the most interest for Bishop, a fact that may lead back to the poet's childhood in Canada. To Bishop, each body of water has a character, a history, and myriad mysteries just below the surface. The images painted when describing the ocean, the shore, and the surrounding rocks, caves and animals are incredibly vivid and the reader cannot help but see the location with one's own eyes.

There are some references to relationships, most of them platonic. The people mentioned range from a landlady to a tenant, friends, relatives and lovers. Although the poet does write about love in a few of the poems, she manages to convey thoughts, feelings and actions without showing a sense of melancholy or over-exuberance. There are clearly deep feelings present but Bishop chooses to be somewhat removed without spoiling the level of emotion involved.

A large portion of the book is dedicated to Bishop's travels, especially Key West and Brazil. The poet lived in both places for long periods of time and the familiarity with the individual cultures and landscapes shows Bishop's devotion to observation and memory preservation.

Bishop was well educated at Vassar and wrote with a flair for uncommon words, an effort made by many poets but achieved by few. Although Bishop was not rich by any means as she lived off of grants and fellowships for a large part of her life, the poet's mannerisms and poetry suggest a high level of refinement. This creates a strong juxtaposition with the culture of Brazil. Many of the places referred to by Bishop are slum-like and full of characters that are less than honest or enterprising. The poet speaks of poor conditions, sub-standard housing, thieves and squatters, yet Bishop chose to remain in Brazil for the better part of two decades.

The Complete Poems gives an intimate view of Bishop's life and thoughts on many subjects. Readers will feel the time stamp on the work in small ways but will find that the work remains as universal today as it did when it was written.



# Chapter 1

## Chapter 1 Summary

North and South spans the United States, Canada and Europe with a series of poems devoted to Bishop's observations, mainly pertaining to nature. Even in the poems that reflect the feeling and mood of a person, the work seems to maintain a sense of objectivity.

Several of the poems pay homage to the water, from Newfoundland to the United States to Paris. The waters seem to have a secret life, their colors and feelings never recorded quite right even if their location has been documented on maps for hundreds of years. The caves and shores on the water earn the same kind of reverence as if they were masterfully created by a great artist but left unseen by most. Bishop also speaks of an iceberg, a jewel-like thing that benefits the soul and is endlessly more interesting than the ship on which the author travels.

The Gentleman of Shalott is a fascinating piece about a man who stares into a mirror, comparing his half to that shown in the reflection. The two halves are exactly the same and create a whole person. If the glass should slip away, there will only be half a man, with one eye and one leg, yet the man believes that "half is enough."

There are poems dedicated to morning, including Loves Lies Sleeping, A Miracle for Breakfast, and Paris, 7 A.M. Each details a different aspect from waking, to riding on a train to observing the courtyard from an apartment window. While each person sees some of the same things, such as the dawn, it means something different to each, as do the emotions that come with a new day. In Roosters, the author discusses the first crowing at dawn and the unpleasant reaction of those who are forced to hear it.

Jeronimo's House is a striking poem describing in great detail a tiny house that contains vibrant color, flamenco music, and cheap decorations. The prose brings to mind a small cottage in Spain or Brazil and reflects Bishop's great love for things Spanish.

## Chapter 1 Analysis

North and South is an early collection of Bishop's poems. The subjects are varied but all have certain things in common, such as crisp, precise language and an extraordinary attention to detail regarding the subject. Bishop is transfixed by nature and often chooses to create vivid images through the use of metaphor and simile.

Bishop shows a sense of humor with The Man-Moth, a poem originally titled The Mammoth until a newspaper misprinted the name, changing the entire feel of the composition. The new title still works with the text, however, although it is difficult to see either a mammoth or a man-moth on a train.



In *The Colder the Air*, Bishop refers to the bitter winter wind as a huntress whose aim is true and who takes no consequence of people and creatures that stand in her way.

In *Large Bad Picture*, Bishop speaks of flying black birds in a striking way: "And high above them, over the tall cliffs' semi-translucent ranks, are scribbled hundred of fine black birds hanging in n's in banks."

There are various poems that refer to locales outside of New York, such as Florida and Paris. The selection of words Bishop chooses to use in these poems reflects not only the culture but also the feel of the people through their uncommon vocabulary.

*Songs for a Colored Singer* marries a refined use of language with the despair of a Colored Singer who decides to leave her husband who tends to drink too much and leaves her to be with friends. The woman thinks it is a dream but realizes that these dreams are too terrible not to be real.



## Chapter 2

### Chapter 2 Summary

Cold Spring is a collection of poems with a couple of running themes. At the Fishhouses tells of a woman who sits with an old man in a fishhouse, despite the stench and early morning. The man was a friend of her grandfather's and one who has spent his entire life fighting against the sea, with codfish and herring and boats that bring the catch of the day to Nova Scotia.

The second poem, Cape Breton, reflects a time next to the shore with the auks and puffins staring out to sea. There are sheep nearby and sometimes the airplanes confuse and frighten them so that they actually walk off the edge of a cliff. Despite what people do every day, while they go to work and perform mundane tasks, the birds continue to sing, the mist follows the sea, and there remains "an ancient chill" in the water.

View of the Capitol from the Library of Congress captures the essence of Washington D.C. as a brass band plays on the east steps of the Capitol building. Although the unnamed viewer can see clearly as the band in Air Force blue plays to the crowd, the music somehow gets lost on the way to the viewer's window.

Louise Crane and Marianne Moore are both a part of Elizabeth Bishop's world, particularly during the early days in New York. In Letter to N.Y., Bishop asks for details of Crane's life in the city. The poet wants to know every thing that her friend is doing, seeing, and the places she frequents. Bishop intimates that not knowing is torture and by hearing what Louise has seen and done, somehow New York becomes more real.

Bishop clearly shows reverence and a sense of friendship in Invitation to Miss Marianne Moore. The poet begs Moore to drive across the Brooklyn Bridge to "please come flying." There are many things the women can do together, from shopping to talking or perhaps just sitting down and weeping. Regardless of what is happening in the city on that day, Bishop has arranged for the weather to be nice and knows that all will be well when Moore crosses the Brooklyn Bridge.

Four Poems consists of four separate works: Conversation, Rain Towards Morning, While Someone Telephones, and W/O Breath. The poems retell of an argument between two lovers and the process the relationship requires to get through it, from arguing with one another to silence to patience, and finally, realization.

### Chapter 2 Analysis

Bishop shows a type of reverence toward the old man in the fishhouse, in part because of his lifelong devotion to the sea and the life of a fisherman. The old man is as much a fixture as the fishhouse itself and his accoutrements seem as much a part of him as the steeply peaked roof and acrid smell of codfish are to the building itself.



Bishop grew up in Nova Scotia and it is plain by the work that she spent a great deal of time by the sea. Each movement of the ocean seems to unveil a piece of mystery to the poet and it is clear that the author never grows weary of its ever changing landscape. There are superficial changes off shore, from yellow bulldozers to small white churches. No matter what happens off shore, the sea never really changes and the birds remain oblivious to anything but the water.

Louise Crane was a contemporary and former Vassar classmate of Bishop's and the women remained friends after graduation. The tone of Letter to N.Y. reveals a sort of intimacy shared by close friends, curiousness about the other's life and importance to know what is being experienced. This seems even stronger since Bishop is away from New York and is obviously suffering from a bit of homesickness.

Marianne Moore was an iconic poet almost from the onset of her career. Her position at the New York Public Library put the poet into contact with some of the most prestigious writers of the time. Moore developed an aura of quirky importance and enjoyed playing the part, which can be seen in her trademark tricorner hat. Elizabeth Bishop was a young woman when she met Moore, who eventually became a mentor, friend, and confidant. In Invitation to Miss Marianne Moore, Bishop exudes great eagerness to have Moore spend the day with her in the city and attempts to coax the woman to travel into Manhattan from Brooklyn. It does not matter to Bishop what activities they plan, it is enough that the poet will be able to bask in Moore's magical presence.

The Four Poems are an interesting piece because they address a serious argument between two lovers. The pieces are subjective yet removed, not showing anything beyond the apparent turmoil. The result makes the pieces more universal and can be applied to any type of relationship. The removal of self from this type of poem may reflect upon Bishop's lesbian lifestyle or perhaps the poet simply prefers the concise language.



# Chapter 3

## Chapter 3 Summary

Questions of Travel begins with Bishop's Arrival at Santos in January 1952. Arrival at Santos is a piece that details the poet's first experience with Brazilian scenery and culture. The scenery is "impractically shaped" and the landscape is dotted with small churches, warehouses painted pink or blue, and statuesque palm trees. Bishop realizes that her previous knowledge of Brazil is quite limited and upon seeing the country's flag admits she never knew Brazil even had a flag. The next eighteen days would be spent venturing into the interior of Brazil where unknown adventures lay ahead. Bishop seems excited but unworried as long as there is an ample supply of bourbon and cigarettes.

Part of Bishop's journey leads the poet to ponder what Brazil must have been like in the early 16th century, a topic which she addresses in Brazil, January 1, 1502.

The title poem, Questions of Travel is filled with questions a traveler may ask oneself in the midst of a long journey. Bishop wonders if people must travel to see what the world has to offer because of the lack of imagination. If one would be able to imagine the things one could not touch, there would never be a reason to leave home. Yet it would be a pity to be deprived of the things which are unknown to those at home, such as the uneven tone of wooden clogs, the primitive tune of the fat brown bird, the bamboo church in Jesuit Baroque style, or the rain that can be as relentless and long as a politician's speech.

Manuelzinho depicts the tale of a man who is half tenant, half squatter, one who is inherited rather than chosen. Although the poet tends to Manuelzinho and his family, the man's priorities are seemingly non-existent since he spends his time stealing, not feeding his family or pets, and irrationally spending money meant for his father's funeral. The family avoids the poet as if she is diseased yet is more than willing to accept money and candy. In the end, Bishop realizes that Manuelzinho, with his oddly painted straw hat, is incorrigible yet she loves him all the same.

The longest poem in the collection is The Riverman. The piece is based on Amazon Town by Charles Wagley and details the story of a man who desires nothing more than to become a sacca, a witch doctor who communes with water spirits. The sacca is particularly interested in Luandinha, a river spirit, and the pirarucu, a fish that weighs as much as 400 pounds.

The Burglar of Babylon details the story of Micucu, an inept burglar who manages to escape from prison for the third time. The burglar receives 90 years in the new penitentiary for these lesser crimes while the main charge is murder. There is no solid proof as to how many people Micucu has killed but he wounded two officers during his last escape.





Micucu's auntie is an upstanding, respectable woman who is chagrined by Micucu's activities. The auntie points out that her family is solid and Micucu's sister has a steady job. Even though the family lives in the Babylon slums, the auntie has raised them right. No one knows what happened to Micucu. The auntie gives him money to prevent the thefts but it does not deter Micucu.

Micucu is on the run and attempts to hide in the hills which are filled with houses and sheep. The Army nervously intervenes and the commanding officer ends up being shot by one of his own men. The troops venture on and finally track Micucu and kill him. Micucu is buried but the Army stays behind searching for two more that are wanted but not as dangerous as the Burglar of Babylon.

Manners is a charming tale of a girl and her grandfather who are traveling on a wagon. The grandfather's motto is to always be kind and speak to those you meet. The pair picks up a boy and his pet crow that travels along by perching from post to post along the way. Passersby are greeted heartily and when they reach the bottom of Hustler Hill they noticed that the mare was tired, so they got off the wagon and walked as was required.

Visits to St. Elizabeth's is a somewhat comical poem written in 1950. Each line builds on the last, depicting a soldier home from the war, a boy, a Jew in a newspaper hat and a crazy sailor who notes the time of a wretched man who still lies in a house in Bedlam.

## Chapter 3 Analysis

Questions of Travel was compiled in 1965 and details Bishop's travels throughout Brazil and other countries. The main focus is on Brazil and details Bishop's arrival in the country where she spends the next fifteen years of her life. Bishop's initial thoughts on the country were that of curiosity and some distaste with the oddly colored warehouses and hills crammed with tilted houses. The poem ends as the tour group drives toward the interior, leaving readers to wonder what captured Bishop's heart.

Brazil January 1, 1502 gives a glimpse of what the country must have been like in the early 16th century, with unspoiled hills and strange looking buildings. Bishop attempts to view the scenery from an explorer's point of view.

The title poem, Questions of Travel, is a list of meandering thoughts from Bishop. The thoughts appear to be those that occurred to the poet as the ship neared its destination. Bishop questions the need to travel, commenting that one must lack imagination to go through the rigors of travel instead of staying at home. Bishop realizes that there are many things which one cannot know about at home and rethinks her stance.

Manuelzinho shows Bishop's softhearted nature. The poet takes care of a half tenant, half squatter and his family, giving food and money while Manuelzinho fritters away the money and does not accept any food but cabbage stalk sandwiches. The wife is the protector of the family and manages to hold things together while avoiding Bishop as if



she has the plague. In the end, Bishop is fed up with Manuelzinho but then realizes that she loves him all the same.

The Burglar of Babylon is a classic tale of a man who is being raised by a solid and respectable auntie but manages to squander his life by becoming a thief and murderer. The auntie is dismayed and baffled as she explains that Micucu, the burglar, was raised to be honest and she does not know what has happened. In truth, Micucu is a terrible burglar and is facing charges on some or all of the six times he has been caught in the act. Micucu is also a known murderer who has escaped from prison for the third time, determined to elude the law rather than spend 90 years in the penitentiary.

The auntie's hands are tied as the Army searches for Micucu. The burglar escapes into the hills, certain he can elude police and the Army. As time goes on, the soldiers draw near and Micucu knows he is going to die.

Manners is a charming poem that details the strong relationship between a girl and her grandfather. The grandfather is a happy man with a good heart who is teaching the girl that all people deserve acknowledgment and respect, regardless of who or what they are. The girl adapts quickly to the concept and together, the pair travels into town. In the end, Bishop's humor shows through once again when the passengers get down off the wagon because the mare is tired and it would not be polite to make her work any harder than necessary.

Visits to St. Elizabeth's was written by Bishop in 1950. The poem talks of the house of Bedlam and the man who lives there. As each line builds upon the last, the reader gets a bigger and better picture of the man and those who come in contact with him as he lies in the bed. The structure is the same as the famous poem and song, There Was an Old Lady Who Swallowed a Fly.



# Chapters 4-5

## Chapters 4-5 Summary

Rainy Season; Sub Tropics begins with three poems regarding wildlife in the rain. The first is a Giant Toad who is full of self pity because of his size and lack of a pleasant façade. The toad seeks to avoid the rain but misjudges the height of a tree branch. A ledge provides cover and the toad holds its breath while the giant snail goes by. Then the toad lets out an echoing, angelic cry. The toad remembers another day when it was hard to breath. Two boys captured the giant toad and stuck a lit cigarette in his mouth. The poor toad was ill for days. The toad speaks of his big shoulders and how they are filled with poison. The crab should beware.

The Strayed Crab is wondering how he got so far from the water, so far from home. The dapper and elegant crab admires the wine color of his shell and the saffron yellow of his large and fearsome claws. The crab is aware of everything that goes on in the immediate area and assures the giant toad that while he could rip open the toad's belly, there is no need. The crab wishes that the Giant Snail would learn to cheer up.

The Giant Snail is as displeased with his image as the Giant Toad. The snail is the size of a dinner plate, heavy and slow. Withdrawal is the snail's nature and the creature's timidity keeps him from trying to climb unscaled rocks. The snail knows that his shell is big, white, gleaming and beautiful although it remains unseen. Still, the snail pities his size.

The Hanging of the Mouse, written in 1937, depicts the last hours of a mouse that is scheduled to hang. The militaristic beetles march the mouse to the gallows where the raccoon serves as executioner. A praying mantis performs the final rites and flees as the thought of execution is too much to bear. At last the mouse is hanged and the cat and her baby cry.

The House Guest is a melancholy seamstress who is visiting the poet's house for a month. Nothing can make the seamstress happy and her bedraggled appearance speaks nothing of the fact that her family is not poor. Every effort Bishop and her companion make to cheer the woman falls on deaf ears. The couple pays for buttons and anything else the woman wants. The poet wonders if the woman has any dreams beyond mediocre sewing. At last, Bishop realizes that the woman's month is up and wonders if it would be best to send her to a convent.

Geography begins with Bishop giving lessons on the topic, covering the most rudimentary aspects of maps, landforms, and topography.

In the Waiting Room, a seven year old Bishop waits for an aunt who is in the dentist's office. To bide her time, the poet picks up a copy of National Geographic and begins to read. Some of the contents are interesting while others are shocking, yet Bishop cannot



bear to put the magazine down. Tribal women with bound necks and hanging breasts horrify Bishop who has never seen anything quite like that. A small cry of pain comes from inside the dentist's office and then Bishop realizes that the sound had come from her own body. Would she have to look like the women in the magazine? What exactly was she supposed to be as the years waged on? Why would she have to be like the aunt or any other woman? Finally, the aunt returns and outside, the world is still living in 1918.

Night City is a poem that was written from an airplane. The lights make the city look as if it is on fire and no one could ever endure walking across the many broken bottles in the streets. The city seems to be in great despair.

The Moose is a large and fearsome creature in Canada and one that is often misunderstood. As Bishop's bus wends its way through the countryside of New Brunswick, passengers see small towns and villages, filled with farms, marshes, and a pervasive fog. The people discuss their lives as night falls and then a moose exits the woods to stand in the middle of the road. The moose is curious and sniffs at the hot hood of the bus. Most people are fascinated and the bus driver assures the passengers that the moose is completely harmless. The moose steps aside and watches as the bus drives away.

12 O'Clock News takes standard items on a writer's desk and formulates them into news stories. The goose neck lamp becomes the moon, a typewriter is a shadowed escarpment, and a scattered manuscript becomes a landslide. None is a complete disaster but curious to the news-seeking public.

Santarem is a remembrance of Bishop's evening visit to the confluence of the Tapajos and Amazon Rivers. The sun is casting a golden shadow onto the ground, people, and onto houses and boats as if they had been burnished on one side. Bishop wonders if this is the birthplace of civilization, then remembers that the Garden of Eden was located at the crux of four rivers. Perhaps this locale mirrors the literary opposites: man/woman, right/wrong, or life/death.

Pink Dog is a tribute to a poor sickly pup that has lost all its hair. People are afraid of it, thinking it may have rabies. Bishop pities it knowing that such a dog would not fit in at Carnival and suggests that it wear a costume.

## Chapters 4-5 Analysis

The stories of the Giant Toad, the Strayed Crab and the Giant Snail are revealing in their own way. The characteristics of the creatures are human to the point of being humorous. The Giant Toad has a severe inferiority complex. Even though it knows that its bulging eyes are its best feature, the flaws are much bigger and more pervasive. Despite its size, the Giant Toad is timid and fearful of trying new things. The Strayed Crab, however, is filled with self-confidence to the point of arrogance. The Strayed Crab appreciates its colorful and useful façade and is quick to point out that there is no time



to be bothered with the Giant Toad or the Giant Snail. The Giant Snail is also timid and self deprecating. While there are good things about it, such as its ornate and silky smooth shell, the Giant Snail bemoans its lack of speed, arms and feet.

The Hanging of the Mouse is a sad tale about a poor rodent that is being punished for some unrevealed crime. The Praying Mantis is severely affected by the imminent death as is the gathering crowd. The Raccoon that is in charge of the execution is only doing its job.

The House Guest deals with a hopelessly depressed woman who cannot or will not come out of her melancholia despite Bishop's efforts to lift her spirits. The woman devotes herself wholly to the task of sewing, the result of which is mediocre. At last, Bishop thinks it is time to give up, that the woman is a lost cause. The woman's time to depart has passed and perhaps the woman would benefit by going to a convent or anywhere else.

In the Waiting Room, Bishop reveals the first exposure to the tribal women of Africa in an issue of National Geographic. The pictures of the nude women are shocking, particularly to a seven year old. Although the girl can read, the explanations do not help quell the astonishment. Bishop suddenly realizes that as a female, she will look like that one day. The girl questions why this must be. The reader must wonder about Bishop's asexual leanings at that age of discovery, that this may have been the start of the poet's acceptance of lesbianism.

The Moose contains a surprising reaction to the appearance of such a large creature in the middle of the road. The bus driver's attitude is relaxed and the assurance of the animal's harmlessness is almost unnecessary. Perhaps the Canadians are used to the possibility of a moose's appearance. The crowd is pleased and amazed to see the animal and almost sad when the bus drives away.

12 O'Clock News is an interesting use of metaphor. The descriptions of a writer's tools as landscape or weather disturbances are rather clever. While the item is listed alongside the article, the actual article never reveals the origin of the tool at hand.

The Pink Dog is a sad creature that is feared by some and pitied by Bishop. Although it is hairless, there is no proof that the dog is rabid or ill in any way. Bishop's solution of wearing a costume to Rio's Carnival is comical and paints a vivid image.

Overall, these poems show Bishop's unerring attention to detail and humorous way of looking at life. The thought processes are definitely those of a creative mind that seeks to see beyond the norm.



# Chapters 6-8

## Chapters 6-8 Summary

The Uncollected Poems begin with *Pleasure Seas*, a work about the ocean off the Florida Keys and how it compares to the perfect flat surface of the walled off swimming pool.

While the swimming pool is fine, the ocean has much more character and is like a well ventilated ballroom filled with neon colors, weeds, fish, and light that makes the water glitter like tinsel. The people who are in the pool, on the plane or the yacht are happy together while the ocean is dancing happily all by itself.

*The Mountain* details the thoughts of a structure that has existed for an unrecorded amount of time. The landscape changes, the mist clogs its ears and the birds do not sound like they used to. Yet the haunting refrain from *The Mountain* is that it does not know its age and beseeches someone to tell.

*The Wit* is about a pause in a conversation that brings about images of Eve and Newton with their apples, Moses with the holy law, and Socrates who scratches his curly head. The person speaks and with a brilliant pun creates a "thunderclap of laughter."

*Exchanging Hats* describes a curious ritual in which men and women exchange hats. The trend is started by an unfunny uncle who insists on wearing a lady's hat. Although the humor falls flat, others repeat the action, with some feeling embarrassed. Bishop wonders why the aunts and uncles participate in such an odd activity and wonders even more at the person who decides to wear a paper plate.

*Lullaby for the Cat* is addressed to Minnow, a tabby that is fighting sleep. The poet assures the cat that good things will come if only it will allow sleep and dreams.

*Sunday at Key West* is a poem dedicated to Bishop's landlady. There are rocking chairs on the porch, taking on rapid motion and bringing a sense of joy to the watcher. The one who sits in the rocking chair fans herself and Bishop admires the palm leaf fan and encourages the woman to cry "Hail, all Hail!"

In *Lines Written in the Fannie Farmer Cookbook*, Bishop gives a nod to the famous cook and cookbook writer, Fannie Farmer. The cookbook contains all the reader will ever need to know from *Food and Keeping House* to dealing with a failed soufflé or damaged rice. The poet believes that Fannie Farmer is highly underrated.

The Poems written in *Youth* contain many nods to nature, including *To a Tree*, *Thunder*, *The Wave*, and *The Flood*. *To a Tree* finds Bishop expressing her kinship with a tree outside her window. The tree makes no demands on the poet, which only increases the affection between the pair.



In Sonnet, Bishop says that she is in need of flowing music that would trail over trembling fingertips and "bitter-tainted trembling lips." There is much comfort and magic made by melody creating a soothing and restful atmosphere conducive to sleep.

For C.W.B., is dedicated to an unidentified person who has captured Bishop's heart. Throughout the poem, Bishop names several places where they could live. The poet suggests living among the winter winds where reindeer go with small white rabbits and the ground looks like sleet-frosted wedding cake. The pair could live among the whispering trees of poplar, alder, aspen, and birch while singing prayers to a sea-green breeze. There is a place where twilight lives, filled with a drowsy blue, a stork, and a gnome who plays a willow flute.

A Word with You tells of a trip to see the animals, presumably at a zoo. While the people talk, the animals command attention. First, the ape is listening to the conversation until the poet says to be still until he passes and hopefully the ape will forget what he has heard. The poet's companion is urged to play with her ring and as predicted, the shiny object hypnotizes the animal. Monkeys and a cockatoo are also there, trying to be heard. Bishop wonders how anyone can see the animals and treat them poorly or disregard what they say.

Three Valentines is written in three parts. The first part relates how all people tend to fall victim to Cupid's bow at one time or another. People are not the only ones afflicted however, and robins struggle to hug one another, Venus pats her lover's curls, and amorous bugs may be tortured by unrequited love.

The second poem details a conundrum in which the poet does not know how love has grown with someone who was once was not a candidate for such affection.

The third poem compares love to a feathered bird, designed to keep one warm and safe while winds stir the nest.

## Chapters 6-8 Analysis

Uncollected Poems span a series of works during Bishop's career, ranging from 1927-1971. These are evidently favorite selections of Bishop's that were never published in any journal or collection previous to this one. There are some selections, such as Three Valentines, Sonnet, and C.W.B. that show a more personal side of Bishop, an item which was lacking in the other work. Bishop does not write in a cold fashion, simply attempts to be objective and universal.

The poet continues to write of the love of nature, water in particular. There is a sense of wildness in nature that eludes some civilized aspect of man. This can be seen clearly in Pleasure Seas. Many are content to swim, splash and play in the swimming pool that has a surface like glass. The poet prefers the ocean, with its waves, distinct personality, and colorful creatures. While those on the shore, in the plane or on the yacht seem to appreciate the ocean, it seems as if the poet feels no one is really looking or understands its complexity.



A sense of time is important to man yet does not seem to apply to such eternal structures as The Mountain. Although mountains cannot think, the poet believes it would be interesting to know what runs through the mind of something that has existed for longer than anyone can remember. The Mountain begs to know its age. The events that occur on and around the mountain make the structure feel old and tired. Knowing its age may help The Mountain to understand but it never finds out the number.

The Wit describes that perfect moment when something is so clever and unexpected that laughter bursts out and into the open.

Lullaby for the Cat reminds one of a child that fights sleep. If only the cat would give in, its melancholy would fade and dreams would bring new and happy experiences.

Sunday at Key West was a poem Bishop wrote for her landlady, a woman the poet was devoted to and admired. The poem was originally sent in a letter to Marianne Moore and contains a fondness that is apparent even when the topic is a rocking chair.

Fannie Farmer is one of the most well known cooks and cookbook authors in the world. The Fannie Farmer Cookbook was first published in 1896 and quickly became a culinary bible that also gave housekeeping tips to thousands, or perhaps millions, of people. Bishop gives kudos to Farmer and facetiously uses words and phrases that Fannie Farmer disliked, such as "gourmet" and "basic elements." Bishop ends the poem with this humorous postscript:

"Fannie should not be underrated;

She has become sophisticated.

She's picked up many gourmet tricks

Since the edition of '96."

In Sonnet, Bishop all but begs for comfort from a melody that could soothe the "tired dead" and lull the poet to sleep. Bishop believes there is a type of magic held in a melody, that it can cure all ills and bring about blessed sleep.

For C.W.B. reveals a softer, more vulnerable side of Bishop. While the name or gender of the person is not openly revealed, it is evident that the poet seeks the love and companionship of C.W.B. There are many places the couple could live but the location does not really matter as long as the pair is together.

A Word with You is both comic and heartfelt. The poet and a friend watch the animals in curiosity as the animals watch back. The animals crave attention often refused by most visitors who make fun and throw books at them. The poet and her companion, however, take the time to sit, watch, and entertain.

Three Valentines shows a hint of Bishops' soft side as the poet muses about all of the people and creatures that have been affected and perhaps afflicted by love.





# Chapter 9

## Chapter 9 Summary

The Translations chosen by Bishop are ones that celebrate many of the poet's colleagues and mentors. Many of the poems in Translations deal with death. In the first poem by Manuel Bandeira, Bishop translates Bandeira would like the last poem to be gentle and simple, ardent and beautiful, pure and full of passion like those who commit suicide with no explanation.

The second Bandeira poem is Brazilian Tragedy, which details the story of a man who rescues a prostitute from a horrible life. The woman is diseased and full of decay, dressed in rags, and living in squalor. The man saves her from that life and cares for her in the best way he can. As soon as the woman is well and clean, she takes a lover. The man who rescued her does so again and each time a new lover appears, the man takes the woman and moves away. Time after time, the man moves away. Finally, filled with frustration and despair, the man finally gives into the violence he abhors and shoots the woman six times.

Joao Cabral de Malo Neto writes From the Life and Death of a Severino about a man who has a common name as nearly everyone in the village is known by the name Severino. Each person must come up with another way to define his identity, such as Maria's Severino. As time goes on, there are other men named Maria's Severino and the descriptions get so lengthy that it becomes ridiculous. Joao spends a great deal of time trying to tell people of his name and family.

At one point in the story, Joao meets two Brothers of the Souls who are carrying a dead pauper across the land to be buried. There is a long discussion about the penniless man. Next there is a conversation in a doorway shortly after a baby is born. Even nature had paused to celebrate the birth—the tide did not go out that day.

Joaquim Cardozo also contributes two pieces that deal with death: Cemetery of Childhood and Elegy for Maria Alves.

There are several selections from Carlos Drummond de Andrade including the consoling piece entitled Don't Kill Yourself to the Seven Sided Poem. The most notable poem in the collection is titled Family Portrait. A twenty year old portrait hangs on a living room wall, the people and their faces stiff and fixed. The photograph cannot reveal a person's true character, showing that perhaps he is a thief or a liar. People who view this picture can no nothing more about the family than how the furniture was arranged.

There are four Anonymous poems that Bishop refers to as the Four Sambas. Bishop also pays homage to French poet Max Jacob by offering a translation of four of his pieces, including Patience of an Angel. In this poem, the angel in question is Lucifer.



Lucifer tells the poet that he may be beaten and people may try to do their worst but in the end, Lucifer is an angel and the patience of an angel will always prevail.

Jacob's Banks is a delight as the poet tells why he complains like a flute.

The final collection is translated from work by Spanish poet Octavio Paz.

Of the five poems included in the collection, Objects and Apparitions is the most poetic, taking common objects and morphing them into fantasy-like atmospheres.

## Chapter 9 Analysis

Bishop made some unusual choices in the poems for the Translations collection. A large number of them are bleak even when that is not the intention. There are many that speak of death, through one's own fault or by way of unfortunate circumstance. This is a strong theme throughout many works, particularly those based in and around Brazil.

Manuel Bandeira's Brazilian Tragedy is one that says a great deal about human nature. The man wants little from the prostitute and is willing to supply her with every need, including required healthcare and clothing. For three years the man expects some form of loyalty from the woman but instead is confronted time after time with a litany of boyfriends. The man is obviously gentle in nature and treats the woman better than anyone ever has; he does not beat or torture her. The woman has no conscience in respect to these actions and the man finally breaks.

Joao Cabral de Malo Neto's From the Life and Death of a Severino has an undertone of humor while that is clearly not the poet's intention. One imagines a village that is heavily populated with many members of the same family. The family, bearing the same ancestral name, must devise ways to distinguish oneself, from the name of the parents to the place where he lives, his occupation and so on until the description is incredibly lengthy.

There are many questions about the pauper who has died but the Brothers of the Souls seem to know little. The Brothers of the Souls are part of a Brazilian religious sect that is charged with burying the poor so they most often do not know much if anything about the deceased.

The tale about the birth of the baby is tender and the reader is left to imagine the sea waiting to hear news of the arrival.

Max Jacob's Patience of an Angel gives an interesting view of Lucifer as the devil reminds the living that he is still an angel and therefore maintains the same qualities and powers, albeit with different aims.

Overall, Translations gives the reader an opportunity to read selected poetry and prose from a different world; a different time and place.



# Characters

## Elizabeth Bishop

Elizabeth Bishop (1911-1979) was an American poet born in Worcester, MA. Basically orphaned at the age of five when her mother made permanent entrance into a mental hospital, Elizabeth went to live with her parents in Nova Scotia, an experience that shaped a great deal of her writing in later years.

Bishop attended Vassar College in 1929, a prestigious school even in those times. In 1933, she and three other Vassar students co-founded a literary magazine titled *Con Spirito*, which was considered to be a "rebel literary magazine." Bishop's first poems were published during this time and eventually led Bishop to make the acquaintance of legendary poet Marianne Moore. Moore immediately became a close friend and mentor to Bishop. In fact, it was Moore who dissuaded Bishop from attending Cornell Medical School to follow her literary dreams. Moore would continue to influence Bishop until her death in 1972 and was responsible for nominating her friend for the Houghton Mifflin Poetry Prize, which Bishop won.

Bishop relocated to New York after graduation but never permanently settled down in one place, although she spent many years in Brazil and Florida before returning to Massachusetts. Many people thought Bishop was wealthy, having spent many years traveling through Europe and South America. It is more reasonable to believe that Bishop's travels and lifestyle were funded primarily through grants, fellowships, and the generosity of friends such as Louise Crane, who housed Bishop in France for many years. Bishop returned to the United States and spent many years at various learning institutions including Harvard, New York University, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and the University of Washington.

Over the years, Bishop became friends and colleagues with many notable writers such as Ezra Pound, Octavio Paz, James Merrill, João Cabral, Flannery O'Connor, and Carlos Drummond, and Robert Lowell. Bishop's awards include two Guggenheim fellowships, National Book Award, a Pulitzer Prize, National Book Critics Circle Award, and she was the only American to ever receive the Neustadt International Prize for Literature. Bishop was also awarded the title of Poet Laureate of the United States for the years 1949-1950.

Bishop died in 1979 at her Boston apartment and is buried in Worcester, MA.

## Marianne Moore

Marianne Moore (1887-1972) was an American poet who was famous for her extensive body of works as well as her mentorship to such poets as Elizabeth Bishop, James Merrill, and Allen Ginsberg. Moore attended Bryn Mawr College and after graduation, attended Carlisle Commercial College in Carlisle, Pennsylvania. Moore also spent a



number of years teaching at the Carlisle Indian School before moving to New York in 1921.

Moore spent many years traveling through Europe before WWI and made the acquaintances of many famous writers such as T.S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, and William Carlos Williams. After the war, Moore returned to New York. During this time, Moore served as the editor of the literary journal *The Dial*, which allowed her the opportunity to mentor and perfect her own style and technique.

Moore's first book, *Poems*, was published by H.D., a contemporary, without the poet's knowledge. Moore's subsequent work earned her a number of prestigious awards including the Helen Haire Levinson Prize, the National Book Award, the Bollingen Prize, and the Pulitzer Prize, which was awarded for Moore's most popular work, *Collected Poems of 1951*.

Moore was known for her love of athletes and sporting events and was often spotted wearing her unusual tricorne hat and black cape at most outings. Since Moore was such a fan of legendary boxer Muhammad Ali, the poet wrote the liner notes for the fighter's spoken word album, "I Am the Greatest!"

Moore is best remembered for her reverence of nature and "vastness of the particular" in which observations of the common take on greater meaning and scope.

Moore died in New York City in 1972.

## **Louise Crane**

Louise Crane was a friend and fellow student at Vassar. Crane was responsible for housing Bishop in France for a number of years.

## **Octavio Paz**

Octavio Paz was a Mexican poet who influenced Moore's work.

## **Carlos Drummond de Andrade**

Carlos Drummond de Andrade was one of many poets Bishop met in Brazil and whose work intrigued the writer.

## **João Cabral de Melo Neto**

João Cabral de Melo Neto was a poet Bishop met in Brazil and whose work intrigued the poet.



## **Flannery O'Connor**

Flannery O'Connor was a well known southern writer for whom Bishop wrote an obituary.

## **Fannie Farmer**

Fannie Farmer was a highly influential woman known for her culinary skill. Farmer's book, *The Boston Cooking-School Cookbook*, became a household name and the basis for many books to follow.

## **Max Jacob**

Max Jacob was a notable French painter and poet and close friend of Pablo Picasso. Being Jewish, Jacob was forced to put his career on hold while hiding from the Nazis. Jacob was eventually captured and died in a concentration camp in 1944.

## **Vinicius de Moraes**

Vinicius de Moraes, also known as "O Poetinha" (the little poet), was a Brazilian poet, composer, and lyricist.

## **Manuel Bandeira**

Manuel Bandeira was a Modernist Brazilian poet and translator who is known for poetry revolving around his love for women, childhood and his long suffering bout with tuberculosis.



# Objects/Places

## New York City

New York City is the cultural and fashion capital of the United States and the heart of many literary revolutions. Home to some of the world's most prestigious and successful publishing companies, it stands to reason that many writers would flock to the city. New York became highly prominent in the 1920s with the birth of the Algonquin Table and influences of notable luminaries like Dorothy Parker. Marianne Moore also emerged around this time. Elizabeth Bishop also lived in New York City.

Marianne Moore came into notoriety after she took a position at the New York City Library and became acquainted with well known writers such as Ezra Pound and William Carlos Williams. The tradition continued from Harlem to Greenwich Village to SoHo, giving birth to the careers of notables Allen Ginsberg and Jack Kerouac.

New York remains a center of literary excellence and continues to draw talent from across the globe.

## Paris

Paris is the capital of France and home to some of the world's most notable museums and works of art. Paris is also known as being one of the fashion capitals of the world along with New York, London, and Milan.

Paris has long been known as a place of political unrest and unparalleled opulence. Many expatriates chose to move to Paris and remain there while creating varied works of art. The Latin Quarter was home to many writers, artists, musicians, dancers, and actors who took advantage of Paris' relaxed atmosphere.

Elizabeth Bishop accepted the offer of Louise Crane, a fellow Vassar student, to live in France for a number of years. Bishop took the opportunity to immerse herself in the liberal culture and perhaps also relished living away from the structured life in the United States. Eventually, Bishop would leave France but undoubtedly used those experiences to develop into a poetic icon.

## Quai d'Orleans

The Quai d'Orleans is located on The Ile Saint Louis, an island located on the Seine in Paris.



## **Brazil**

Bishop went to Brazil for a trip scheduled to last a couple of weeks. Having become entranced with the culture of South America, Bishop stayed for fifteen years and used her experiences as a basis for many poetic works.

## **Florida**

Florida is the southernmost state in the United States bordering the Atlantic Ocean. Bishop made a home in Florida for many years.

## **Cape Breton**

Cape Breton is an island located off the coast of Nova Scotia.

## **Sub-Tropics**

The Sub-Tropics are defined as an area located between the Tropics of Cancer and Capricorn which encompasses regions near the equator. Bishop's home in Florida was considered to be in the Sub-Tropics and was a source of joy and consternation.

## **North Haven, Maine**

North Haven, Maine is an island community located in Penobscot Bay. Many view it as a summer holiday location but Bishop and others chose to live in North Haven year-round.

## **Key West**

Key West is part of a group of islands off the coast of Florida. Bishop lived in Key West for a number of years with her lover, who eventually committed suicide.

## **Britannia**

The Britannia is one of a series of famous English Yachts commissioned by King Charles II in 1660.

## **Nova Scotia**

Nova Scotia was the location of the home of Bishop's grandparents and where the poet would be raised until moving to Pennsylvania.



## **Washington, D.C.**

Washington, D.C. is the capital of the United States and home to the Library of Congress.

## **Library of Congress**

Library of Congress, located in Washington, D.C., is home to all published literary works.

## **Vassar College**

Vassar is a private, prestigious college located in New York state close to the Hudson Valley. Vassar was attended by Bishop and was the launching pad for the poet's literary career.

## **Bryn Mawr College**

Bryn Mawr College is a private, highly selective college located in Pennsylvania. Bryn Mawr was attended by both Elizabeth Bishop and Marianne Moore.





# Themes

## Brazil

Brazil is a topic largely explored throughout Bishop's poetry and the Translations the poet has chosen to accompany her work. The country has a much different flavor than the places in the United States and Canada where Bishop spends her youth. The people are poorer, the streets and homes are often ramshackle and crowded. Yet Bishop finds something of interest in Brazil, enough that the poet remained in the country for nearly two decades.

The scenery took hold of the poet and Bishop takes great delight in sharing the vivid imagery of the water and landscapes of the country and its uneven hills and wild jungles. The Amazon holds great interest for Bishop as well, so much so that for a moment the poet thinks that the meeting of the Amazon and Tapajos Rivers are the site of the Garden of Eden. After a few moments Bishop remembers that there were four rivers, the Tigris, Euphrates, Pishon, and Gihon. Still, there is a sense of the same primitive magic that must have been present at the wellspring of life.

Bishop holds a deep fascination with the Brazilian people, mostly the downtrodden who existed by squatting, stealing or fishing. The lifestyle was more intimate than Bishop had seen due to the close living quarters. Despite the heat, bugs, and less than elegant conditions in some of the locations, Bishop found Brazil to be one of her true homes.

## Nature

Bishop's work shows a great reverence for nature even from the early years. This may be attributed to the childhood spent in Nova Scotia with her grandparents. The poet spent a great deal of time by the seaside watching boats, birds, tides, and the effect of each season on the great body of water. No matter how many times the poet stared out at the sea, there was always something mystical to be found and the glimpses of fish and other creatures below the surface allowed the young girl to dream, imagine, and create.

Nature, and particularly water, is a strong theme throughout Bishop's life and work. During the poet's years in Brazil and Florida, there is a great deal of reference to nature, from the sub-tropic weather to the beauty of a turbulent sea to the wilderness of the Amazon. In later years, Bishop spends a great deal of time on an island in North Haven, Maine, a year round community that undoubtedly reminded the poet of her formative years.

The poet even managed to be one with nature while living in New York City. In *Invitation to Miss Marianne Moore*, Bishop makes references to the flowing water, birds, and "white mackerel sky."



Although Bishop is known for her crisp concise form and style, nature will always play a large role in her legacy.

## Death

Death is a theme that runs through many poems in the collection, particularly in the Translations section. The descriptions and references of death are rarely maudlin, except perhaps for Bishop's tribute to Robert Lowell to whom Bishop laments that there will never be another opportunity to rearrange anything any more. The use of death in most poems is more matter of fact than gruesome. In *Burglar of Babylon*, Micucu dies after being shot by an Army soldier. Micucu had been sure that he could elude police in the hills of his village but never counted on the presence of an Army helicopter and soldiers trained well enough to traverse the rough ground. In Joao Cabral de Malo Neto's *From the Life and Death of a Severino*, the man encounters the Brothers of Souls who are in charge of burying the indigent. The task is not a pleasant one but something that is part of life and must be done. There is more curiosity about the man than there is grief.

There are references to the passion and despair surrounding suicide; those who have committed it and those who are considering it.

Overall, Bishop seems to have a fascination with death yet clearly is not obsessed. There is a reverence for life seen in her poetry, particularly in the wonders of nature.

# Style

## Point of View

A majority of Elizabeth Bishop's poems are written from the point of view of third person omniscient. The third person point of view allows the reader to have access to all information while reading the poem, a view that is particularly important when attempting to capture the whole essence of the grandeur of the sea, its whimsical and colorful creatures, the rocks, cliffs and caves, as well as the people who inhabit the seaside villages and slums in a land as foreign as Brazil. The third person point of view also allows the reader to comprehend life and times that are different enough that any other point of view would not be able to convey the actions of the characters in the stories.

The first person point of view is used in a number of circumstances, although the two points of view do not mix. Elizabeth Bishop uses this point of view in poems such as *At the Fishhouses* and *Four Poems* to convey emotion and thought that would be lost using some other method. In *Manuelzinho*, Bishop is able to express herself in regard to the man who squanders money and does not care for his family. The first person gives much needed insight into Bishop's logic and motivation.

## Setting

The settings used in most of Elizabeth Bishop's works are somewhere near the water, regardless of the country or season. The early poems tend to focus more on various locations throughout the United States and Canada, from Boston and Worcester, Massachusetts to Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, to New York City, New York to the wilds of New Brunswick to various towns and villages in and around Nova Scotia. In later works, the feel of some of Bishop's work begins to change due, in part, to the poet's physical location.

Some of the locations favored by Bishop throughout her life include North Haven, Maine where the poet kept a second home, New York City, Boston, Key West, Paris, and various locations throughout Brazil. The New York and Boston references have a lot in common, maintaining the typical northeastern flavor, although Boston tends to be more formal in many ways. Bishop makes Canada feel homey and Key West seems tropical and exotic, full of bouts of excitement and solitude. Brazil flavors many of Bishop's poems because of the length of time the woman spent in the country, from Rio de Janeiro to small towns and villages, as well as on the Amazon River.

Regardless of the setting Bishop uses in the work, it all has a common thread that ties it together, conveying the poet's unique style and taste.

## Language and Meaning

The Collected Poems are written in or translated into English by the author. In some of the Translations, the author of the poem assisted Bishop in translating the work.

Overall, Elizabeth Bishop seems to write with an air of formality that leads the reader back to the poet's early experiences at Vassar. The work is crisp and concise; rarely will the reader find the over use of common or ordinary language, even in the more whimsical or frivolous poems. There are some pieces that remain unclear despite Bishop's strong relationship with words but this is directly related to the artist's vision rather than to the choice of verbiage. The poems that seem unclear are few and far between.

There are strong indications regarding the time period in which the poems were constructed. The poet uses some terms that are dated, references to the way people lived that are no longer accurate, and often there are ethnic references that are no longer considered acceptable when once they were politically correct.

Although there are French and Spanish translations, the works translated from Brazil use different dialects of Spanish and Portuguese. The regionalisms of the characters alter the work by giving it more color. This appears to be more prevalent in the translated pieces than in the English versions, particularly when Bishop refers to a specific Brazilian culture or myth.

## Structure

Elizabeth Bishop Complete Poems 1927-1979 includes 276 pages (without the indices).

The shortest poem is one page, the longest is five pages, and the average poem length is two pages. The book is structured into nine separate sections:

Section one is titled North and South, a collection that spans North American from top to bottom. Section two is Cold Spring, a collection that together with North and South, presented Bishop's most celebrated work and also won the Pulitzer Prize in 1956. Section three, Questions of Travel, is separated into two sections: Brazil and Elsewhere. Section four is titled Uncollected Work (1969). These poems tend to fall into the prose category with such tales as The Hanging of the Mouse and House Guest. Section five is titled Geography III, and includes the tale of the Canadian Moose that pays a visit to travelers on a bus. Section six is a short selection of New Poems (1979), followed by section seven's Uncollected Poems, which also includes a category called "Occasional Poems." Section eight contains Bishop's Poems Written in Youth, which contains the larger part of Bishop's more revealing emotional works. Lastly, section nine is titled Translations. This section contains works from Manuel Bandeira, Joao Cabral de Melto Neto, Joaquim Cardozo Carlos Drummond Andrade and Vinicius Moraes, as well as several anonymous poems, all translated from Portuguese. Translated from French are

selected pieces by Max Jacob. The last set of translations are created from the works of Octavio Paz, translated from Spanish.



## Quotes

Think of the storm roaming the sky uneasily like a dog looking for a place to sleep in, listen to it growling.

Little Exercise, p. 41.

From a magician's midnight sleeve the radio-singers distribute all their love songs over the dew-wet lawns.

Late Air, p. 45.

In your next letter I wish you'd say where you are going and what you are doing; how are the plays and after the plays what other pleasures you're pursuing...

Letter to N.Y., p. 80.

Come with the pointed toe of each black shoe trailing a sapphire highlight with a black capeful of butterfly wings and bon-mots, with heaven knows how many angels all riding on the broad black brim of your hat, please come flying.

Invitation to Miss Marianne Moore, p. 82.

The strangest little things happen to you. Your cow eats a "poison grass" and drops dead on the spot. Nobody else's does.

Manuelzinho, p. 97.

Beware, you frivolous crab.

Rainy Season; Sub-Tropics, p. 139.

The pleasure yacht, the social being, that danced on the endless polished floor, stepped and side-stepped like Fred Astaire, is gone, is gone, docked somewhere ashore.

Song, p. 147.

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

Pink Dog, p. 190.

We gave a thunderclap of laughter.

The Wit, p. 199.

I heard an elf go whistling by,  
A whistle sleek as moonlight grass,  
That drew me like a silver string



To where the dusty, pale moths fly,  
And make magic as they pass;  
And there I heard a cricket sing.  
Behind Stowe, p. 211.

I am in need of music that would flow  
Over my fretful, feeling finger-tips,  
Over my bitter-tainted, trembling lips,  
With melody, deep, clear, and liquid-slow.  
Sonnet, p. 214.

Either above thee or thy gravestone's graven angel eyes I'll stand and stare.  
Three Sonnets for the Eyes, III, p. 224.

I complain like the flute,  
Always the same tune  
No rests in the water-cress  
The toad sounding "do"  
Would prefer the bassoon.  
Banks, p. 267.

## Topics for Discussion

Does Elizabeth Bishop's objectivity strengthen or weaken her poetry and prose? Explain.

Do you think that the poet would be as fascinated by the sea if she had not moved to Nova Scotia as a child?

Do you think that Elizabeth Bishop would have been as successful as a poet without the influence of Marianne Moore?

How might Bishop's work have changed if she had enrolled in Cornell Medical School?

Although Elizabeth Bishop was a lesbian who openly lived with two different lovers, do you think that the absence of the subject in her work was intentional? Explain.

Bishop was fond of dedicating certain types of poetry to colleagues and mentors. In North Haven, Bishop laments the death of Robert Lowell. Do you think that this lamentation affected the poet's work? Explain.

Bishop spent 15 years in Brazil after planning an 18 day excursion to the South American country. Did the immersion in Brazilian culture dramatically affect the poet's literary style? Explain.

The last section of the collection is devoted to Bishop's translations of other poets' work. Do you feel that the translation affects the work's cadence or tone? Explain.