

Lecture 24 Elizabeth Bishop

A constant process of adjustment is going on about the past--every ingredient dropped into it from the present must affect the whole. Now what Mr. Eliot says about the sequence of works of art [in "Tradition and the Individual Talent"] seems to be equally true of the sequence of events or even of pages or paragraphs in a novel. . . . but I know of no novel that makes use of this constant readjustment among the members of any sequence. ---Elizabeth Bishop, "Dimensions for a Novel," 1933

Some authors do not muse within themselves; they "think"---like the vegetable-shredder which cuts into the life of a thing. Miss Bishop is not one of these frettingly intensive machines. Yet the rational considering quality in her work is its strength---assisted by unwordiness, uncontorted intentionalness, the flicker of impudence, the natural unforced ending. ---Marianne Moore commenting on "The Map" and two other poems by Bishop that Moore had chosen for publication in *Trial Balances*, 1935

"Their purpose (the writers of Baroque prose) was to portray, not a thought, but a mind thinking. . . . They knew that an idea separated from the act of experiencing it is not the idea that was experienced. The ardor of its conception I the mind is a necessary part of its truth."---Bishop, quoting the critic M. W. Croll, in a letter to Donald Stanford, November 20, 1933

A sentence in Auden's *Airman's Journal* has always seemed very profound to me ---I haven't the book here so I can't quote it exactly, but something about time and space and how 'geography is a thousand times more important to modern man than history'---I always like to feel where I am geographically all the time, on the map,---but maybe that is something else again. ---Elizabeth Bishop, draft of a letter, 1948

But in her web she still delights  
To weave the mirror's magic sights,  
For often through the silent nights  
A funeral, with plumes and lights  
    And music went to Camelot:  
Or when the moon was overhead,  
Came two young lovers lately wed;  
'I am half sick of shadows,' said  
    The Lady of Shalott.

---Alfred Lord Tennyson, "The Lady of Shalott," 1832

To see a world in a grain of sand,  
And a heaven in a wild flower,  
Hold infinity in the palm of your hand  
And eternity in an hour.

---William Blake, "Auguries of Innocence," c. 1800