

Elizabeth bishop essay sample

[Life](#), [Childhood](#)



There are many reasons why the poetry of Elizabeth Bishop would appeal to the modern reader. I would consider Bishop's concern with everyday objects to be one of the most appealing attributes of her poetry. Bishop takes objects that everybody can relate to and understand, and through poems like 'The Fish' and 'The Filling Station' she gives these objects a wonderful and powerful significance. This technique allows the reader to see the world in a new light. Another reason that Bishop appeals to the modern reader is her characterisation of childhood, especially the loss of childhood innocence. This loss is clearly evident in such poems as 'In the Waiting Room' and 'Sestina'. Both poems here remind us of what happens when the innocence of childhood and reality collide. Finally the issue of 'place' is another key question in the appeal of Bishop's poetry. In the poem 'Questions of Travel' Bishop deals with the idea of a sense of place or a sense of belonging somewhere. Bishop's poetry appeals to the modern reader because it shows us how wonderfully interesting the world around us is if we stop and pay attention to what is going on around us.

One of the key issues in relation to Bishop's poetry is that even though her poems were written over fifty years ago each subject that she addresses is still pertinent today. It is her keen eye for detail that shows us how the world can be if we stop to take it in as 'The Fish' and 'The Filling Station' clearly shows. Bishop's ideas on childhood and the complexities of growing up are as relevant today as they have ever been. Also throughout life we move to find our place of belonging and it is this struggle that Bishop cleverly shows in her poem 'Questions of Travel'. I believe that Bishop's poetry does appeal to the modern reader as we consider what it is that makes us want to see

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Background

Father died when she was eight months old

Mother spent the next five years in and out of hospital until she was permanently institutionalised. Moved between grandparents. The grandparent in this poem is her father's mother Poem

Stanza One

Gloomy atmosphere created in the opening with the rain. This is enhanced by the 'failing light'. The imagination of the child is shown when she

personifies the almanac and the stove. The child knows there is grief but does not fully understand why in lines five and six. Stanza Two

Negative/gloomy atmosphere as the child sees tears everywhere “ equinoctial tears” and the continuation of the “ rain that beats on the roof”. The child knows that there is something wrong even though the grandmother tries to act normal “ cuts some bread”. Stanza Three

The Grandmother continues to try and act as normal as possible “ It’s time for tea now”. However the child continues to project an unknown sadness on the objects in the house “ teakettle’s small hard tears”. The rain again continues the sense of gloom. The reference to the ‘ clever almanac’ looks at as something that predicts the future maybe this predicted Bishops unhappy future. Stanza Four

The almanac hanging over the child ‘ Birdlike’ can look at a bird of prey and hovering over Bishop suggests the prediction of an unhappy future. Again the child’s sadness is emphasised by attaching tears to objects ‘ teacup full of dark brown tears’. Stanza Five

The opening suggests an understanding that Bishops future is destined to be sad. Like any child Bishop escapes into the world of imagination to express her grief by drawing a house. The ‘ buttons like tears’ shows this picture to represent sadness.

Stanza Six

Again we have the grandmother trying to act normal ‘ busies herself about the stove’. The ‘ little moons fall down like tears’ on Bishops ‘ flower bed’ can again emphasise that Bishop sees this as a prediction of a life of unhappiness growing with the flowers. Stanza Seven

‘ Time to plant tears’ again looks at the idea that Bishop believes it was predetermined that she would have an unhappy life. Points to note:

Bishop’s unhappiness began at childhood.

Belief that her life was destined to be sad ‘ almanac’.

No hope shown for the future ‘ Time to plant tears’