Elizabeth Bishop is increasingly recognized as one of the twentieth century’s most important and original poets. Initially celebrated for the minute detail of her descriptions, what John Ashbery memorably called her “thinginess,” Bishop’s reputation has risen dramatically since her death, in part owing to the publication of new work, including letters, stories, and visual art, as well as a controversial volume of uncollected poems, drafts, and fragments. This Companion to Elizabeth Bishop engages with key debates surrounding the interpretation and reception of Bishop’s published and unpublished writing in relation to questions of biography, the natural world, and politics. Individual chapters focus on well-known texts such as North & South, Questions of Travel, and Geography III, while offering fresh readings of the significance of Nova Scotia, Massachusetts, and Brazil to Bishop’s life and work. With a chronology and guide to further reading, this volume explores the full range of Bishop’s artistic achievements and the extent to which the posthumous publications have contributed to her enduring popularity.

ANGUS CLEGHORN is professor of English and Liberal Studies at Seneca College, Toronto. Since 2004, he has served as the editor of the Elizabeth Bishop Bulletin for the Elizabeth Bishop Society. He has published articles on Bishop and Wallace Stevens, as well as the book Wallace Stevens’ Poetics: The Neglected Rhetoric (2000); guest-edited two issues of the Wallace Stevens Journal (1999, 2006); and co-edited the volume Elizabeth Bishop in the Twenty-First Century: Reading the New Editions (2012).

JONATHAN ELLIS is senior lecturer in American Literature at the University of Sheffield, England. He is the author of Art and Memory in the Work of Elizabeth Bishop (2006), as well as articles on Michael Donaghy, Paul Muldoon, Sylvia Plath, and Anne Stevenson. His next book, for which he received a British Academy Research Development Award in 2008, is on twentieth-century letter writing. He is currently editing a collection of essays on poets’ letters, Letter Writing Among Poets: From William Wordsworth to Elizabeth Bishop.

A complete list of books in the series is at the back of this book.
THE CAMBRIDGE COMPANION TO
ELIZABETH BISHOP

Edited by

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Seneca College

JONATHAN ELLIS
University of Sheffield
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ANGUS CLEGHORN is professor of English and Liberal Studies at Seneca College in Toronto. Since 2004, he has served as the editor of the Elizabeth Bishop Bulletin for the Elizabeth Bishop Society. He has published articles on Bishop and Stevens, as well as the book Wallace Stevens’ Poetics: The Neglected Rhetoric (2000), and he has guest-edited two issues of the Wallace Stevens Journal (1999, 2006) and co-edited the volume Elizabeth Bishop in the Twenty-First Century: Reading the New Editions (2012).

BONNIE COSTELLO is professor of English at Boston University. She is the author of numerous articles on modern poetry and five books, including Elizabeth Bishop: Questions of Mastery (1991). Her most recent books are Shifting Ground: Reinventing Landscape in Modern American Poetry (2003) and Planets on
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Tables: Poetry, Still Life and the Turning World (2008). She was the general editor for The Selected Letters of Marianne Moore (1997). Costello is currently at work on Private Faces in Public Places: Lyric and the First Person Plural, for which she was awarded a Cullman/American Council of Learned Societies fellowship for 2011–2012. She has been a Fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences since 2004.

Jonathan Ellis is senior lecturer in American Literature at the University of Sheffield, England. He is the author of Art and Memory in the Work of Elizabeth Bishop (2006), as well as articles on Michael Donaghy, Paul Muldoon, Sylvia Plath, and Anne Stevenson. His next book, for which he received a British Academy Research Development Award in 2008, is on twentieth-century letter writing. He is currently editing a collection of essays on poets’ letters, Letter Writing Among Poets: From William Wordsworth to Elizabeth Bishop.

Lorrie Goldensohn’s 1992 book, Elizabeth Bishop: The Biography of a Poetry, was nominated for a Pulitzer Prize and contained discussion of “It is marvellous to wake up together,” a previously unknown Bishop poem that Goldensohn discovered in Brazil. Goldensohn’s Dismantling Glory: Twentieth Century English and American Soldier Poetry received nomination for a Book Critics Circle Award in 2003, while Choice Magazine selected her anthology, American War Poetry, as one of their Best Critical Books of 2006. She has published articles, essays, and reviews in prominent journals for several decades. Grants have supported her literary criticism: two from the National Endowment for the Humanities, as well as two Fulbright awards, the latter both during and after her retirement from Vassar College.

Bethany Hicok is associate professor of English at Westminster College in Pennsylvania. She is the author of Degrees of Freedom: American Women Poets and the Women’s College, 1905–1955 (2008), which focuses on the poetry of Marianne Moore, Elizabeth Bishop, and Sylvia Plath. She is also co-editor (with Thomas Travisano and Angus Cleghorn) of a collection of essays, Elizabeth Bishop in the Twenty-First Century (2012). She is currently working on a book on Elizabeth Bishop in Brazil.

Barbara Page is professor of English (retired) at Vassar College, as well as the former acting dean of faculty. She is the author of essays on Elizabeth Bishop and the Bishop Papers at Vassar, including “Shifting Islands: The Manuscripts of Elizabeth Bishop,” “Off-Beat Claves, Oblique Realities: The Key West Notebooks of Elizabeth Bishop,” “Elizabeth Bishop and Postmodernism,” and “Elizabeth Bishop: Stops, Starts, and Dreamy Divagations.” She is co-author, with novelist and translator Carmen Oliveira, of a book in progress, Elizabeth Bishop in Brazil.

Siobhan Phillips is an assistant professor of English at Dickinson College and the author of The Poetics of the Everyday: Creative Repetition in Modern American
CONTRIBUTORS

VERSE (2010). Her poems and essays have appeared in PMLA, Twentieth Century Literature, Literary Imagination, Yale Review, Southwest Review, The Hudson Review, and other journals. She has degrees from Yale, Oxford, and the University of East Anglia, and she is a former junior Fellow at the Harvard Society of Fellows.

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KIRSTIN HOTELLING ZONA is the author of Marianne Moore, Elizabeth Bishop, and May Swenson: The Feminist Poetics of Self-Restraint (2002) and editor of Dear Elizabeth: Five Poems and Three Letters from May Swenson to Elizabeth
Contributors

Bishop (2000). She has published numerous essays on contemporary poets and poetics in journals such as Modernism/Modernity, Twentieth Century Literature, and ISLE. Her poetry has appeared in a wide range of journals and anthologies, including, most recently, the Cincinnati Review, the Southwest Review, Columbia, the Georgetown Review, the Mississippi Review, and Beloit Poetry Journal. Zona lives with her husband and two children in Maine and Illinois where she is an associate professor at Illinois State University. She is the editor of the Spoon River Poetry Review and co-host of Poetry Radio on WGLT, a local National Public Radio affiliate station.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Thanks to the contributors to this book for the good grace and patience with which they responded to two editors reading their work. We did not anticipate bringing Elizabeth Bishop’s “two looks” to life quite so literally. In addition to their contributions to this book, Steven Gould Axelrod, Sandra Barry, Susan Rosenbaum, and Thomas Travisano gave us invaluable advice on the Chronology and the Introduction. Moreover, we would like to thank Thomas Travisano for stimulating this book by organizing the conference sessions that brought us together where we originally discussed this project. The volume draws on and is indebted to the critical insights of at least two generations of Bishop scholars, many of whom are cited here. The book would not have happened without the enthusiasm of Ray Ryan and Louis Gulino at Cambridge University Press or the external readers who responded positively to our initial proposal.

Angus Cleghorn is grateful to students and colleagues at Seneca College and Trent University who have made valuable insights in lively discussions of Bishop’s writing. Thanks to Claire Moane in the School of English and Liberal Studies at Seneca College for supporting the travel grants to Brazil, San Francisco, and Boston to pursue research and dialogue. Many scholars and enthusiasts in the Elizabeth Bishop Society have broadened my knowledge since I began editing the Elizabeth Bishop Bulletin in 2004. Thanks to my wife, Julie, and sons, Andrew and Simon, for making life full and enjoyable.

Jonathan Ellis is particularly grateful to the British Academy for a research award that gave him time to begin thinking about this project and to the University of Sheffield for granting him research leave to finish it. Without Jamie McKendrick and Angela Leighton, I may never have found my way to Bishop in the first place. Katrina Mayson looked over the manuscript at a crucial stage. The enthusiasm and intelligence of literally hundreds of students have, I hope, also found a place in this book. Finally, my thanks, as ever, to Ana María Sánchez-Arce who gave me time to finish this book when
Acknowledgments

her own deadline was just as, if not more, pressing. She also suggested the perfect cover image.


Photo of Elizabeth Bishop on the steps of the Square Roof brothel in Key West. Copyright © James Laughlin. Reprinted by permission of Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, LLC.

Excerpts from unpublished notes by Elizabeth Bishop. Copyright © 2013 by the Alice H. Methfessel Trust. Printed by permission of Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, LLC on behalf of the Elizabeth Bishop Estate.

Quotations from the unpublished writings of Elizabeth Bishop are also used with the permission of Special Collections, Vassar College Libraries.

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NOTE ON ABBREVIATIONS

Unless otherwise indicated, poems discussed in this volume are from Elizabeth Bishop, Poems (London: Chatto and Windus; New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2011).


VC  Elizabeth Bishop Collection, Vassar College Library, Poughkeepsie, New York.

CHRONOLOGY

(Italics denote historical events)

1911
February 8: Elizabeth Bishop born in Worcester, Massachusetts, the only child of William Thomas Bishop of Worcester, and Gertrude May Bulmer (or “Boomer”) of Great Village, Nova Scotia.

October 13: Bishop’s father dies from Bright’s disease.

1914
June 25: The Great Salem Fire destroys more than 1,000 buildings. Bishop watches the fire with her mother from the Bishops’ summer home in Marblehead (see the posthumously published poem, “A Drunkard”).

1914–1918
World War I.

1915
April: Moves from Boston to Great Village, Nova Scotia, with her mother.

1916
June: Bishop’s mother admits herself to the Nova Scotia Hospital in Dartmouth. Bishop stays with her maternal grandparents in Great Village where she attends Primer Class.

1917
October: Bishop is taken to live in Worcester by her paternal grandparents. Begins to develop asthma. Decades later, in her story “The Country Mouse,” she recalls feeling as if she were being “kidnapped.”

December 6: The Halifax Harbor Explosion. Nearly 2,000 people die following a collision between two ships (one laden with wartime explosives) in Halifax Harbor. The Nova Scotia Hospital, where Bishop’s mother is living, is badly damaged.
Chronology

1918      May: Moves in with her aunt, Maude Bulmer Shepherdson, and uncle, George Shepherdson, in Revere, Massachusetts.

1919      August: Returns to Nova Scotia with her aunt, Grace Bulmer Bowers. Although Bishop never lives permanently in Great Village again, she continues to make yearly summer trips throughout her adolescence.

1926–1927      Attends North Shore Country Day School in Swampscott, Massachusetts, where she publishes her first poems and stories in *The Owl*. For several years, also attends Cape Chequesett on Cape Cod, a summer camp where she learns to sail.

1927–1930      Attends Walnut Hill School in Natick, Massachusetts. Publishes poems and other writings in school magazine, *The Blue Pencil*.

1930      Enters Vassar College. Intends to major in music, but switches to English. Contemporaries at Vassar include Mary McCarthy and Muriel Rukeyser.

1934      March 16: Meets Marianne Moore at the New York Public Library.

May 29: Bishop’s mother dies.

After graduation, Bishop moves into a small apartment in Greenwich Village, New York, and works briefly at a correspondence school that she later writes about in “The U.S.A. School of Writing.” On New Year’s Eve, home alone with a cold, she begins “The Map.”

1935      Marianne Moore chooses “The Map,” “Three Valentines,” and “The Reprimand” for the anthology *Trial Balances*. Moore’s brief introduction to the poems is the first published criticism of Bishop’s work.

Makes first trip to Europe and North Africa with Louise Crane. Meets Pablo Picasso.

1936–1939      *Spanish Civil War*.

1936      Robert Seaver, who had wanted to marry Bishop, commits suicide.

First trip to Florida with Louise Crane.
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Year</th>
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<tr>
<td>1937</td>
<td>Returns to Europe with Crane. They travel from Ireland to France where they are joined by another Vassar friend, Margaret Miller. In July, while they are traveling in Burgundy, Crane’s car is forced off the road. Miller loses her right arm in the accident.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1938</td>
<td>Buys 624 White Street in Key West, Florida, with Louise Crane (White Street is the first of Bishop’s “three loved houses” immortalized in “One Art”).</td>
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<tr>
<td>1939</td>
<td>Outbreak of World War II.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1940</td>
<td>Spends spring and summer in Key West. October: Disagreement with Marianne Moore over Bishop’s poem “Roosters.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>1941</td>
<td>Begins six-year-long relationship with Marjorie Stevens. December 7: Pearl Harbor attack. United States enters World War II.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1942</td>
<td>Travels to Mexico with Stevens. Meets Pablo Neruda.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1943</td>
<td>Bishop works for five days grinding binocular lenses in a U.S. Navy optical shop in Key West. Eyestrain and eczema force her to quit.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1946</td>
<td>July: Returns to Nova Scotia for the first time since 1930. On the bus journey from Great Village to Boston, the bus driver has to stop suddenly for a moose wandering down the road. Bishop takes twenty-six years to complete a poem (“The Moose”) about this experience. August: Publication of Bishop’s first book of poems, North &amp; South.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Begins treatment with Dr. Anny Baumann for depression, asthma, and alcoholism.

Travels to Cape Breton with Marjorie Stevens, a trip remembered in the eponymous poem.

1949  
September: Begins year-long appointment as Consultant in Poetry (now Poet Laureate) at the Library of Congress. Meets Robert Frost, Dylan Thomas, and William Carlos Williams. Pays regular visits to Ezra Pound at St. Elizabeths Hospital, where he was confined after a jury decided he was of “unsound mind” and thus unfit to stand trial for treason.

1950–1953  
*Korean War.*

1950  
Meets May Swenson at Yaddo writers colony.

1951  
Receives fellowships from Bryn Mawr College and the American Academy of Arts and Letters. Travels to Sable Island, Nova Scotia, where, according to family tradition, her great-grandfather had been lost at sea.

November 10: Travels to South America on Norwegian freighter S.S. *Bowplate*, intending to stop in Brazil for only a few weeks. While in Brazil, has an allergic reaction to the fruit of a cashew tree and is nursed back to health by her Brazilian friend, Lota de Macedo Soares. The two women fall in love and Bishop accepts Macedo Soares’s offer to build her a studio behind Macedo Soares’s Modernist house then being constructed at Samambaia in the mountains above Petrópolis.

1952  
Wins Shelley Memorial Award.

1953  
Publication of stories “Gwendolyn” (June 27) and “In the Village” (December 19) in *The New Yorker*.

1955  
July: Publication of *Poems* (a reissue of *North & South* with her new collection, *A Cold Spring*).

Edits and translates Henrique Mindlin’s *Modern Architecture in Brazil*.

1956  
Receives a *Partisan Review* fellowship and Pulitzer Prize for Poetry for *Poems: North & South – A Cold Spring*.

1957  
Receives Amy Lowell Traveling Fellowship.
Publication of her translation of *The Diary of “Helena Morley.”*

1958  
Aldous and Laura Huxley visit Bishop and Macedo Soares in Petrópolis. Bishop travels with them to Brasília, including a day excursion to see the Uialapiti tribe living on a tributary of the Xingo River.

1959  
*First American servicemen die in Vietnam.*

1960  
Travels down the Amazon, visiting Manaus, Santarém, Vigia, and Belém. Also visits Ouro Preto.

1961  
Macedo Soares begins work on Aterro do Flamengo on the Rio waterfront.

1962  
Publication of *Brazil* – written by Bishop, but considerably altered by the book’s editors for *Life’s World Library* series.

1964  
April 1: *The Brazilian military stages a coup to overthrow President João Goulart. Macedo Soares’s friend, Carlos Lacerda, conservative governor of the state of Guanabara (Rio), supports the coup.*

Becomes a Fellow of the Academy of American Poets.

1965  
*Beginning of U.S. ground war in Vietnam, which lasted until 1973.*

Purchases and then begins restoring a Colonial house in Ouro Preto. Bishop names it Casa Mariana in honor of Marianne Moore and because of its position on the road from Ouro Preto to Mariana.

November: Publication of *Questions of Travel*, dedicated to Macedo Soares.

1966  
Teaches at the University of Washington in Seattle where she begins a relationship with Roxanne Cumming.

November: Travels with Macedo Soares to England and Holland, but cuts trip short when Macedo Soares’s health deteriorates. Macedo Soares is hospitalized on her return to Rio.

Anne Stevenson publishes *Elizabeth Bishop* in the Twayne United States Author Series. It is the first critical book on Bishop’s poetry.
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<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<tr>
<td>1967</td>
<td>January: Macedo Soares’s doctor recommends a temporary separation. Bishop and Macedo Soares are reunited in the spring, but in June the doctor recommends another break. July 3: Bishop flies to New York. September: Against the advice of her doctor, Macedo Soares travels to New York to see Bishop. On September 19, she takes an overdose of Valium and goes into a coma. She dies at St. Vincent’s Hospital on September 25. Anny Baumann advises Bishop not to accompany the body back to Rio. November 15: Returns to Brazil to settle Macedo Soares’s estate. Many of Macedo Soares’s friends and family blame Bishop for her death. Almost all of Bishop’s letters to Macedo Soares are destroyed by Macedo Soares’s sister.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>Spends several months in Ouro Preto. Brazilian government awards her the Order of Rio Branco. August: Meets Alice Methfessel in Quito for a long-planned trip to the Galápagos Islands and Machu Picchu. Returns to Harvard for the fall term where she teaches a seminar on letter writing “as an art form.” Meets Octavio Paz.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1972</td>
<td>February 5: Marianne Moore dies.</td>
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March: Bishop and Lowell disagree over the latter’s decision to publish versions of Elizabeth Hardwick’s letters in The Dolphin.


Publication of An Anthology of Twentieth-Century Brazilian Poetry, edited with Emanuel Brasil.

1973
Four-year appointment as lecturer at Harvard begins.

1974
August: Purchases a condominium at Lewis Wharf on the Boston waterfront.

1976
February: Awarded Neustadt International Prize for Literature.

Travels to England where she visits Robert Lowell.

December: Publication of Geography III; receives National Book Critics Circle Award.

1977
September 12: Robert Lowell dies.

1978
Receives Guggenheim Fellowship.

1979
May: Bishop makes her last visit to Nova Scotia, to receive an honorary degree from Dalhousie University.

October 6: Dies suddenly of a cerebral aneurysm at Lewis Wharf.

1983

1984

1991
Elizabeth Bishop Society is formed.

1993
First exhibition of Bishop’s paintings is held at the East Martello Tower in Key West.

1994

Elizabeth Bishop Society of Nova Scotia is formed.

1996
Chronology


Publication of *Words in Air: The Complete Correspondence between Elizabeth Bishop and Robert Lowell*, edited by Thomas Travisano with Saskia Hamilton.

2011      The centennial of Bishop’s birth is celebrated by two new editions of her work, *Poems* and *Prose*.

Publication of *Elizabeth Bishop and The New Yorker: The Complete Correspondence*, edited by Joelle Biele.

An exhibition of artworks by Bishop and paintings from her personal collection is held at the Tibor de Nagy Gallery in New York.

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