

Michaela Weiss
University of Opava

LIMINAL SPACES AND IDENTITIES IN ELIZABETH BISHOP'S POETRY

American culture is perhaps the most visibly and ostensibly on the move in terms of ongoing linguistic, spatial, and identity negotiations between (and among) minorities and the mainstream. While current categories of identities, place, and space already have their established literary readings through the optics of liminality and hybridity, especially in the context of ethnic or postcolonial literatures, concerns over borders and their both porous and potentially transformative nature are equally present in the writing of acclaimed mainstream American writers whose work was upheld as objectively representing the experience of American majority, as shall be demonstrated on the landscape poetry of Elizabeth Bishop (1911–1979), which was critically celebrated for its impersonal expression and conservative form.

The distanced effect of her production was largely promoted by Bishop herself, as she was known to discourage any critical attention towards her private life and distanced herself from the Women Movement. Victoria Harrison reads Bishop's poetry as a representation of conflicting urges between privacy and "intimate self-exposure" (67). Moreover, Bishop's life was geographically rich: after she lost her father, she spent her childhood with her grandparents from her mother's side in Great Village, Nova Scotia. The sense of alienation caused both by the dislocation and her troubled relationship with her mother is reflected in her autobiographical short story "In the Village" (1953). When Bishop was six, she was taken from Nova Scotia by her father's upper-class parents to Worcester, Massachusetts. She did not adapt well to the change and soon felt isolated and looked down upon, as she documents in another of her autobiographical short story "Country Mouse" (published posthumously in *Collected Prose*). Later Bishop moved to Brazil and after the death of her partner, returned to the United States. Her life is thus marked by a sense of exile and shifting landscapes, placing her into a long-term liminal position.

The indeterminacy and liminal aspects of reality, geography, and identity are distinctly manifested in Bishop's concept of place. She addresses her own life-long liminal negotiations between an outsider (or a tourist), and a local by placing her characters

into landscapes which are not only geographical but, more importantly, psychological, and spiritual. Many of her poems are set on an island, at the confluence of two rivers, or at a coastline, highlighting the liminal aspect of both the landscape and her speakers. The omnipresent, continual and essential fluidity is, however, not perceived as dangerous or harmful, but rather, as a creative sign of life.

In her poem “Santarém,” Bishop treats space, identities, and borders as analogical concepts. The text depicts a sightseeing cruise to the confluence of Amazon and Tapajós, where these powerful rivers flow alongside and then come together, in the ever-present moment of transition, forming a space that is in continuous making. The liminal state does not concern only the landscape but also the speaker of the poem who is visiting the place as a tourist, which itself can be considered a liminal state. According to Dean MacCannell: “Sightseeing is one of the most individualized, intimate, and effective ways we attempt to grasp and make sense of the world and our place in it. Sightseeing is psyche” (6). The journey the individual undertakes, or the protagonist’s quest, frees him from the everyday life and provides new landscapes, changes the social order and rules, and as such is potentially liberating and transformative, as due to separation from home and community, the place provokes the speaker to re-interpret and re-contextualize what is seen and experienced:

I really wanted to go no farther;
more than anything else I wanted to stay awhile
in that conflux of two great rivers (Bishop, *Complete Poems*, 185)

What Bishop evokes is not a moment of two rivers becoming one but of rivers coming together in a “conflux,” flowing alongside, both keeping their beauty and significance. Bret Millier claims that this poem “escapes its author’s commitment to accuracy and takes on an air of myth” (308). Yet Millier does not consider the concepts of liminality and indeterminacy of either space or identity, correlating fixed states with accuracy. Bishop’s depiction of landscape is geographically and perhaps ethnographically accurate, while at the same time expressing the speaker’s perception and cultural perspective.

The representation of liminal spatial quality in “Santarém” offers an image of a place that is constantly reinventing itself but at the same time, turns out to be a great source of freedom from fixed notions, stereotypes or ideologies:

I liked the place; I liked the idea of the place.
Two rivers. Hadn’t two rivers sprung
from the Garden of Eden?
No, that was four, and they’d diverged.
Here only two and coming together (Bishop, *Complete Poems*, 185)

The view of two rivers becoming one is not presented purely as a sight of natural beauty but Bishop upholds its symbolical value by highlighting the “idea of the place.” According to Löfgren, we shall “view vacationing as a cultural laboratory where people have been able to experiment with new aspects of identities, their social relations or their interactions with nature and also to use the important cultural skills of daydreaming and mind-travelling. Here is an arena in which fantasy has become an important social practice” (7). The representation and reading of the landscape are therefore significantly affected by the expectations and preknowledge of the seer. As Urry claims, “the tourist gaze is directed to features of landscape and townscape which separate them off everyday experience. Such aspects are viewed because they are taken to be in some sense out of the ordinary. . . with much greater sensitivity to visual elements” (3). The instability of the water mass and overwhelming view challenge the speaker to defy the structure and format of grand narratives. The speaker realizes the necessity to refuse biblical implications and replace them with insight that Emerson called for: “Why should not we also enjoy an original relation to the universe? Why should not we have a poetry and philosophy of insight and not of tradition and a religion by revelation to us?” (xi). The fluid space encourages critical thinking and provokes resistance to mainstream discourse:

Even if one were tempted
To literary interpretations
Such as: life/death, right/wrong, male/female
– such notions would have resolved, dissolved, straight off
in that watery, dazzling dialectic (Bishop, *Complete Poems*, 185)

In her portrayal of the Brazilian landscape, Bishop refuses duality based on opposites, as she considers them as imposing restrictions on her identity, experience, and more generally: nature and art. Instead, she evokes a sight that is absorbing and compelling, as well as interpretative. It is not only a coming together of water masses but also of cultures, beaming with houses, people, riverboats, and “everything bright, cheerful, casual – or so it looked” (Bishop, *Complete Poems*, 186). She creates an image of conflux of nature and culture that is constantly on the move: “people / all apparently changing their minds, embarking, / disembarking” (Bishop, *Complete Poems*, 186) and even the people are of mixed, or rather hybrid origins:

After the Civil War some Southern families
came here; here they could still own slaves.
They left occasional blue eyes, English names,
and -oars- (Bishop, *Complete Poems*, 186)

Their slave-holding legacy was dissolved as any other polarities that Bishop suggested above. The natural site and its idea provide a space for alternative understanding and

reading of the world. As Janet Atwill claims, such approach, this *techné* “deforms the limits into new paths in order to reach – or better yet, to produce – an alternative destination” (48). Such knowledge, as Marcel Detienne and Jean-Pierre Vernant observe, is “a type of intelligence and of thought, a way of knowing” that comes to life in “situations which are transient, shifting, disconcerting, and ambiguous . . . that do not lend themselves to precise measurement, exact calculation or rigorous logic” (3-4). Only by casting aside previous patterns of thought and habit, or the grand narratives (be it religion, culture, or science), can the irreducible complexity of reality and its constant fluidity be accepted: “Santarém *happened*, just like that, a real evening & a real place” (Bishop, *One Art*, 621). Bishop therefore reads reality as constantly liminal and considers such state natural.

The optics of liminality and the new *techné* enable the speaker to find beauty and freedom in places that others do not find appealing, or which remain invisible to them. As Emerson believed: “The eye is the best of artists. . . There is no object so foul that intense light will not make beautiful. And the stimulus it affords to the sense” (13). Bishop’s speaker indeed shares Emerson’s vision of the beauty in world, being the seer he called for. She is able to find true beauty in an empty wasp’s nest that she admired so much, a local pharmacist gave it to her. Liminal spaces reflect Turner’s claim that the transitory experiences are liberated “from structural obligations proper of the social order, where people ‘played’ with the elements of the familiar and ‘defamiliarized’ them. ‘Novelty emerges from unprecedented combinations of familiar elements’” (“Liminal to Liminoid”, 59). Her ability to find beauty even in common, though defamiliarized objects (especially one that would be considered useless and formerly dangerous rather than associated with beauty) is frowned upon by her fellow passenger Mr. Swan: “Dutch, the retiring head of Philips Electric / really a very nice old man,” who asked, “‘What’s that ugly thing?’” (Bishop, *Complete Poems*, 187). His preconceived notions and purpose of his trip did not allow him to alter his view of the world. For him, the journey and liminality did not turn out to be liberating but rather frustrating. Despite their disagreement, the speaker still views him as “a very nice old man,” confirming the claims of Jaimangal-Jones et al. that “rites of passage ‘transition’ phase could be applied to both travelling to events and to the actual events themselves, as in both these contexts normal social roles are suspended, *communitas* are developed and experienced and spiritual experiences can be gained” (262). As travelling leaves social order and norms behind, new experiences create space for new “*communitas*” or bonds that would not be formed under everyday circumstances.

The liminal position of a tourist is once more discussed in a poem “Questions of Travel,” though this time without the hint to fellow tourists. The landscape that is

introduced is depicted as almost unpleasantly brimming with movement and fluidity that is impossible to capture:

There are too many waterfalls here; the crowded streams
hurry too rapidly down to the sea,
and the pressure of so many clouds on the mountaintops
makes them spill over the sides in soft slow-motion,
turning to waterfalls under our very eyes (Bishop, *Complete Poems*, 93)

Jeffrey Grey observes how this abundancy “alienates and nauseates more than it excites” (41); the landscape and the tourist position did not match the state of mind of the speaker who interprets the sight and appropriates it by projecting her own mental struggle into it, depicting the water as “tearstains,” or perhaps referring to the struggle of the Amazonian region; the fast movement and the abundancy is so complex to absorb that the scene must be translated into known and smaller objects, such as “capsized ships”:

But if the streams and clouds keep travelling, travelling,
the mountains look like the hulls of capsized ships,
slime-hung and barnacled (Bishop, *Complete Poems*, 93)

After creating a mental connection to something graspable and familiar, the speaker then raises a series of questions, contemplating the potential benefits or losses of staying at home and voices the sense of “the awkwardness derived from the capacity for travel – the awkwardness of being outside, anthropologically, as it were, looking in” (Grey, 41). The speaker here adopts the collective identity of a tourist, of the “we” who questions the benefits as well as the right to travel that suddenly feels like an intrusion into somebody else’s life:

Think of the long trip home.
Should we have stayed at home and thought of here?
Where should we be today?
Is it right to be watching strangers in a play
in this strangest of theatres? (Bishop, *Complete Poems*, 93)

The speaker questions the necessity of travel, its ethical aspects, including the capacity to absorb so many new landscapes and sensations, summing up arguments for staying at home and imagine the other spaces and cultures. Still, the complexity and perhaps mental chaos such liminal experience can cause, offer multiple creative possibilities. As Turner believes: “Liminality can perhaps be described as a fructile chaos, a storehouse of possibilities, not a random assemblage but a striving after new forms and structures, a gestation process, a fetation of modes appropriate to postliminal existence” (“Dewey, Dilthey”, 42). After the speaker appropriates and domesticates the scene and its implications, she provides an alternative to imaginative travel, providing a list of experiences one would have missed and lost: “the trees along this road, really

exaggerated in their beauty,” “Wooden tune of disparate wooden clogs,” “the other, less primitive music of the fat brown bird,” “rain,” or the “golden silence” (Bishop, *Complete Poems*, 94). While arguing for the joys of travelling, the speaker mentions common objects and sounds (or lack of) that highlight the focused eye of the tourist who is taken out of his known surroundings that often makes him not see or hear the world around him, hinting on Emerson’s claim that “few adult persons can see nature” (7).

By providing a more distanced, external perspective, travel therefore serves as a means of renewal of the Emersonian insight, enabling the speaker to admire the imperfect craftsmanship of clogs, the beauty of a bird cage resembling “a bamboo church of Jesuit baroque” (Bishop, *Complete Poems*, 94). Moreover, the commonality of the depicted imagery leads to the concluding line: “Should we have stayed at home, wherever that may be?” (Bishop, *Complete Poems*, 93). Complicating not only the keen tourist gaze that is actively absorbing details of the new scenery but also the concept of home, the stable familiar center. The intent gaze of the tourist is defamiliarizing, yet at the same time, provides a deeper insight into the world, blurring the boundaries of here and there, home and abroad, tourist and local. The effect of such boundary blurring is manifested in her poem “The Sandpiper.”

Here Bishop uses the shoreline as her setting, the place that is unstable yet rich and habitable. This time, offering a closer, more detailed look, as she portrays the landscape from the perspective of a bird who is at home in the place, yet interpreting his behavior and world around him:

The roaring alongside he takes for granted,
and that every so often the world is bound to shake.
He runs, he runs to the south, finical, awkward,
in a state of controlled panic, a student of Blake (Bishop, *Complete Poems*, 131)

It is again the speaker, who reads the landscape and the bird’s way of life through the concepts of culture by suggesting, the sandpiper is the “student of Blake,” referring to William Blake’s “Auguries of Innocence”:

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 (490)

The sandpiper does not measure time and nor seeks stability or order. He is searching the grains of sand as they are thrust forward and rapidly pulled backwards. He does not understand the mechanics of the tide nor scientific theories, nor does he need them, his focus is on life:

The world is a mist. And then the world is
 minute and vast and clear. The tide
 is higher or lower. He couldn't tell you which.
 His beak is focused; he is preoccupied (Bishop, *Complete Poems*, 131)

Relying on instincts, he does not need to question the fact that his world does not have clear borders or features, he does not need cultural concepts to enable him to interpret his world. The size of the world is irrelevant, when a grain of sand contains all he needs. In his world, the size, tides or borders have no value. Similarly to "Santarém," in "The Sandscape" Bishop employs a liminal landscape to question the necessity and constraints of human interpretation of the world based on science, reason, or classification, and to foreground the natural state of change and fluidity.

Alternative strategy is used in the poem "North Haven," where the speaker does not comment on the constant motion of individual grains of sand but rather absorbs the whole landscape, which is presented as unchanged:

The islands haven't shifted since last summer,
 even if I like to pretend they have--
 drifting, in a dreamy sort of way,
 a little north, a little south, or sidewise--
 and that they're free within the blue frontiers of bay (Bishop, *Complete Poems*, 188)

The poem is commemorating the death of the poet and Bishop's friend, Robert Lowell. The reading of the landscape is therefore adopted from a different perspective than in the above-mentioned poems. Death of a friend makes the speaker wish for a visible sign, a physical or geographical mark indicating that the world is affected by human end. Death is contextualized within both the permanence and fluidity of nature, as the speaker returns to the island, this time alone and depicts its pastoral, dreamy atmosphere. While the landscape remains seemingly the same, nature, as well Lowell's creative process once did, is constantly changing: "Nature repeats herself, or almost does: / repeat, repeat, repeat; revise, revise, revise" (Bishop, *Complete Poems*, 188). The sparrows can change their song, yet North Haven is "anchored in its rock," the same way Lowell's poetry is now fixed on paper:

You can't derange, or rearrange,
 your poems again. (But the sparrows can their song.)
 The words won't change again. Sad friend, you cannot change (Bishop, *Complete Poems*, 189)

In terms of liminality, the memory of Lowell and his creative process of rewriting and constant recreating of his poems is analogically compared to the stable landscape that is, however, in flux and, as such, alive.

What is more important, while most studies consider temporariness to be of the essential features of liminality (see Turner, “Liminal to Liminoid”; Turner *Forest of Symbols*), in case of Bishop’s landscape, liminality is not understood only as a permanent state but as a condition of life. This perpetual fluidity of the world provides a space creating new contexts and sensibilities that are open only to those who can read it via discourses that discard grand narratives, as Blake’s mysticism or Emerson’s insight prove to be more aligned with life itself.

While Bishop’s landscapes are real, their characteristics are often emotionally colored or defamiliarized by the characters who inhabit them. She further explores the impact of culture, memory, and dislocation on reading of the landscape in another of her poems set on islands: “Crusoe in England.” The protagonist, old Robinson muses over his life after returning to England, rewriting his memories of his stay on his island. He feels his story was never represented and understood the way it happened: “None of the books has ever got it right” (Bishop, *Complete Poems*, 162). To tell his true story of exile, Crusoe exposes the liminality of this experience on the desert island by providing a mental map of his life there and contrasts it with his destination on another island: England, which in the end turned out to be even more solitary and barren. Crusoe depicts the changing nature and himself as the Adam, being one of a kind:

The sun set in the sea; the same odd sun
rose from the sea,
and there was one of it and one of me.
The island had one kind of everything:
one tree snail, a bright violet-blue
with a thin shell, crept over everything,
over the one variety of tree,
a sooty, scrub affair (Bishop, *Complete Poems*, 163-4)

He tries to understand his surroundings by biological taxonomy, which, however, does not bring him any closer to understanding of his new world. As Turner observes: “By verbal and nonverbal means of classification we impose upon ourselves innumerable constraints and boundaries to keep chaos at bay, but often at the cost of failing to make discoveries and inventions” (*The Ritual Process*, vii). As long as Crusoe struggles to impose external cultural or scientific order and meaning on both the island and his quest, the potential of personal growth and self-redefinition cannot take place, as his mind uses patterns from other discourses:

Well, I had fifty-two
miserable, small volcanoes
[...]
I’d think that if they were the size
I thought volcanoes should be, then I had

become a giant;
 and if I had become a giant,
 I couldn't bear to think what size
 the goats and turtles were (Bishop, *Complete Poems*, 162)

Crusoe is lost not only in terms of biology or geography, but also in terms of time. He hopes to understand his surroundings by applying his previous knowledge received from books. Such attempts, however, are doomed to fail as the external knowledge does not correspond to his current experience and perception. This discrepancy makes him feel disoriented, lacking any sign of proportion: like a Gulliver the size of the world around him is not a stable measurable value. Nature is defamiliarized by his own civilized, i.e., pre-learned standards.

He realizes his insufficiency, noting that: "The books I'd read were full of blanks" (Bishop, *Complete Poems*, 164). What he fails to accept is his lacking memory and inability to relate what he reads to his experience that makes him feel inadequate. Crusoe is quoting Wordsworth, claiming he remembers his poem (which is the way of Bishop's playful reminder not to take (his) memories as facts), yet not understanding that the text refers to "blissful solitude," while, ironically, it is solitude he detests.

Crusoe is recreating the world from his unreliable memory, projecting into the landscape his changing, liminal self and his sense of displacement. Yet his adapting to his new environment and uncalled-for quest for a new self does not come to him from nature automatically, as he seeks it in culture and in someone else's experience; with Bishop once again, alluding to Emerson's call for the individual connection with nature.

Crusoe is an outsider in the world, a man struggling to redefine himself. His knowledge as well as his memories are failing him. Relying on Darwin or taxonomy only leads him to further despair that enhances his alienation:

One billy-goat would stand on the volcano
 I'd christened *Mont d'Espoir* or *Mount Despair*
 (I'd time enough to play with names),
 [...]
 I got so tired of the very colors!
 One day I dyed a baby goat bright red
 with my red berries, just to see
 something a little different.
 And then his mother wouldn't recognize him (Bishop, *Complete Poems*, 165)

By coloring the baby-goat he turns him into an outcast as well that, however, does not bring him relief or understanding of the place. Moreover, he shows his incomprehension by imitating the beginning of the world: naming places. Yet, as he is bored, he is changing the names according to his emotional states, oscillating between "despair"

and “d’Espoir,” i.e., glimmer of hope (Bishop, *Complete Poems*, 165). The fruitlessness of his attitude and life is revealed to him especially in his dreams:

I'd have
 nightmares of other islands
 stretching away from mine, infinities
 of islands, islands spawning islands,
 like frogs' eggs turning into polliwogs
 of islands, knowing that I had to live
 on each and every one, eventually,
 for ages, registering their flora,
 their fauna, their geography (Bishop, *Complete Poems*, 165)

He feels trapped by his own endless urge to rationalize, personify and stabilize nature that keeps escaping and transcending his capacities. His view of his fate changed with Friday, as well as his use of language. Setting aside the naming games and self-pity, he depicts their relationship in plain words that finally appeal to him and regain their meaning: “Friday was nice. / Friday was nice, and we were friends” (Bishop, *Complete Poems*, 165). This transformant shift towards inner meaning is, however, interrupted, when both Crusoe and Friday are discovered and shipped to England.

While Friday dies of measles, old and bitter Crusoe is once again trapped on an island, yet this time, drinking “real tea” (Bishop, *Complete Poems*, 166). His meaningful human contact and the need for self-reliance vanished once his story became a best-seller, interpreting his life from the outside and turning himself into a celebrity of kind. One more time he feels alienated not only from other people but also from the objects that used to be essential to him:

The knife there on the shelf—
 it reeked of meaning, like a crucifix.
 It lived. How many years did I
 beg it, implore it, not to break?
 [...]
 Now it won't look at me at all.
 The living soul has dribbled away (Bishop, *Complete Poems*, 166)

Crusoe keeps projecting his state of mind into the objects he once loved and used, yet the real sentiment does not belong to the island or the once valued things, it is Friday he mourns, and the temporariness of human life. He also mourns the loss of perspectives and inability of language to depict reality fully: not only he states in the opening of the poem that “the books never got it right”, he repeats his sigh when introducing Friday “(Accounts of that everything all wrong.)” (Bishop, *Complete Poems*, 166). Crusoe was trying to rationalize and classify the constantly changing nature and his own identity,

yet his liminal experience left him alienated in his own home country, including the people, food, or objects.

By writing the otherness into a space, Bishop offers the readers a safe “elsewhere” enabling them to cast away preconceived readings of the world and recognize that the constant state of liminality both in nature and mind (though unsettling) can turn out to be transformative, creative, and liberating. As Preston-Whyte notes, liminal spaces are “intangible, elusive, and obscure. They lie in a limbo-like space often beyond normal social and cultural constraints. In these spaces can be found brief moments of freedom and an escape from the daily grind of social responsibilities” (350). For Bishop, such moments are not necessarily brief and as she demonstrates in her poems, their effects are lasting, and potentially permanent.

Bishop often writes in an in-between space, manifesting the analogical fluidity of both geographies and identities. She also portrays the creation of an idea of a place, depicting the types of relationships one can adopt with the world. In her poetry, liminality is not a brief state but an essential condition of life. She chooses liminal landscapes to demonstrate their unsettling qualities, associated with fear and isolation, as she manifested in her poem “Crusoe in England,” yet the same time, a creative potential and transformative powers as was shown in the poem “Santarém,” where the changing social geographies dissolved the former conquests or slavery. Encounter with liminal landscapes, as Bishop suggests, can develop a new, potentially subversive tactics, or *techné* of reading the world and remembering it. Such encounters turn out transformative, as the subject of the liminal experience cannot return to their former selves, the same way as Crusoe could not assimilate back into the civilized social structure. As an artist, Bishop puts herself voluntarily into a liminal position between a tourist and a local, projecting and writing her expectations and cultural background into her narrative landscapes, proving with her poetry the creative power of recognized and embraced liminality.

Funding Acknowledgement: This paper is a result of the project SGS/1/2020, Silesian University in Opava internal grant “Přístupy k textové analýze v 21. století” (Twenty-first Century Perspectives on Text Analysis).

Works Cited

- Atwill, Janet M. *Rhetoric Reclaimed: Aristotle and the Liberal Arts Tradition*. Cornell University Press, 2009.
- Bishop, Elizabeth. *The Complete Poems: 1927–1979*. Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 1983.
- . *One Art: Letters Selected and Edited*, edited by Robert Giroux. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1994.

- Blake, William. *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, edited by David V. Erdman. Anchor, 1988.
- Detienne, Marcel, and Jean-Pierre Vernant. *Cunning Intelligence in Greek Culture and Society*. Translated by Janet Loyd. University of Chicago Press, 1974.
- Emerson, Ralph Waldo. *Nature*. Boston: James Munroe, 1894.
- Harrison, Victoria. *Elizabeth Bishop's Poetics of Intimacy*. Cambridge University Press, 1993.
- Grey, Jeffrey. *Master's End: Travel and Postwar American Poetry*. University of Georgia Press, 2005.
- Jaimangal-Jones, D., Pritchard, A., & Morgan, N. "Going the Distance: Locating Journey, Liminality and Rites of Passage in Dance Music Experiences." *Leisure Studies*, vol. 29, no. 3, 2010, pp. 253–268.
- Löfgren, Orvar. *On Holiday: A History of Vacationing*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999.
- MacCannell, Dean. *The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class*. University of California Press, 2013.
- Millier, Brett Candlish. *Elizabeth Bishop: Life and the Memory of It*. University of California Press, 1993.
- Preston-Whyte, R. "The beach as a liminal space." *A Companion to Tourism*, edited by A. Lew, M. Hall, & A. Williams. Blackwell, 2004, pp. 349–359.
- Turner, W. Victor. "Liminal to liminoid, in play, flow, and ritual: An essay in comparative symbology." *Rice Institute Pamphlet – Rice University Studies*, vol. 60, no. 3, 1974, pp. 53–92.
- . *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors: Symbolic Action in Human Society (Symbol, Myth & Ritual)*. Cornell University Press, 1975.
- . "Dewey, Dilthey, and Drama: An Essay in the Anthropology of Experience." *The Anthropology of Experience*, edited by W. Victor Turner, and Edward M. Bruner, University of Illinois Press, 2001, pp. 33–44.
- . *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual*. Cornell University Press, 1967.
- . *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*. Cornell University Press, 1991.
- Urry, John. *The Tourist Gaze*. Sage Publications, 2002.

Abstract: The paper discusses the representation and understanding of liminal spaces and identities in the poems "Santarém," "Questions of Travel," "North Haven," and "Crusoe in England" by Elizabeth Bishop (1911–1979), focusing predominantly on her strategies of creating poetic landscapes that are not only geographical but more importantly, psychological, and spiritual. In her poetry Bishop reflects her own life-long liminal negotiations between an outsider (or a tourist), and a local. Many of her poems are set on the island, at the confluence of two rivers, or the coastline, highlighting the liminal aspect of both the landscape and her speakers. Yet the permanent fluidity, which forms the essence of the portrayed landscape is not portrayed or perceived as dangerous or harmful, but rather, as a source of a potential psychological transformation and creativity. Bishop's depiction of landscape is geographically and ethnographically accurate, yet at the same time, she highlights the necessarily cultural interpretations projected onto the place. The featured places as well as their observers are therefore forced to continually re-invent themselves. The analyzed poems feature a tourist or an outsider who is on a journey, or rather a quest that turns out liberating, as the speaker is freed from his/her everyday life and social structures. By observing and interacting with nature, the protagonist fulfils the Emersonian ideal of establishing original connection to nature, and often shed their preestablished notions, prejudice, or stereotypes, to adopt a new and fresh insight and relationship to the world. Only

by casting aside previous patterns of thought and habit, or the grand narratives (be it religion, culture, or science), can the irreducible complexity of reality and its constant fluidity be accepted and utilized. Travel is therefore portrayed as an essential human experience that enables the speakers to be in a distanced position of an outsider. Bishop uses liminal landscapes to question the necessity and constraints of human interpretation of the world based on science, reason, or classification, and to foreground the natural state of change and fluidity. The speakers who fail to recognize and accept the necessity of development and change, often rely on scientific classification or try to impose a cultural order on the landscapes, yet Bishop sees such patterns of behavior as fruitless and self-damaging, as she demonstrates in the poem "Crusoe in England." On the other hand, once the protagonists make a meaningful connection to the new sights and embrace the experience, the effects of their transformations are permanent. Liminality is therefore presented as a constant and potentially transformative process that is not only desirable, but above all, a sign of life.

Keywords: liminality, liminal landscape, Elizabeth Bishop, fluidity, Ralph Waldo Emerson, transition