

## CAMILLE ROMAN

### WASHINGTON DC, 1949-1950

#### Bishop on WWII & the Cold War



Elizabeth Bishop—from her attic office at the Library of Congress during her year as poetry consultant in 1949-1950—could literally see the Capitol every work day as the national government began to formulate the Cold War and to commit the nation to the Korean War in 1950.<sup>1</sup> She therefore had a “privileged” insider’s view of the Cold War’s “arrival” in, or invasion of, daily US life. Official Washington rhetoric overflowed with visions of the postwar nation’s power to vanquish Communism and to save the world. The US international news magazine *Time* reported an example of this emerging dominant national discourse in its May 29, 1950 issue as it quoted a government spokesman on Cold War “containment” policy:

It is the only war in history where the question of destruction doesn’t enter into it at all. Everything we are doing is building up. We have rebuilt Europe, not destroyed it. . . . Now, if we carry on a smart, resourceful, cold war, the kind of war free people can carry on, Russia will be contained. . . . All we have to do is carry on intelligently, and at extremely low cost, the political, economic, military and informational measures already under way. (1)

While official Washington saw itself in mythical proportions and persuaded most of its citizens, as well as much of the world, to view it this way, it is not surprising that Bishop was not among the supporters in spite of her “insider’s” government post. She had dissented with US militarism in WWII. This placed her in opposition to the goals of the federal government,

which was appropriating WWII's victory narrative to legitimize a Cold War narrative. As Cold War scholar Tom Engelhardt contends, "the immediate war story within which Americans, from the president on down, still generally cared to live was that of World War II" (11). Bishop, in contrast, found little in the WWII "story" to justify such emulation. In this essay I want to explore two related questions about her political positioning on militarism and war: How did Bishop respond to the WWII-Cold War victory narrative being developed during 1949-1950? How might we understand why she turned to these rhetorical strategies? I will begin by framing the discussion with her reaction to WWII and then focusing especially on her previously unpublished and unexamined archival fragment about V-Day. I will move on to the private resistance recorded in her correspondence, her unpublished and little examined journal of 1950, and her one public statement in the published poem completed at this time entitled "View of the Capitol from the Library of Congress." Then I will reflect upon her rhetorical decisions as strategies of dissent. My goal is not to provide an authoritative, comprehensive, or exhaustive view of this period in her life and writing, but to suggest an "entry" into it. In addition, I want to emphasize that while I read Bishop in relation to militarism in the WWII-Cold War narrative here, I view the war story as one national discourse among many competing national discourses and not as a single governing cultural paradigm. This view is informed by Antonini Gramsci's general cultural theories of "hegemony" in which the dominant culture is never without contestation (see *Selections from Prison Notebooks*) as well as Milton Bates' identification of the Cold War competing national discourses of territorial expansion, race, class, gender, and generational difference in his *The Wars We Took to Vietnam*.

Bishop's well-known poem "Roosters" published in the April 1941 issue of *The New Republic* placed her anti-militarism and anti-totalitarianism in WWII on public record. By her own admission in a letter to her poetry mentor-sponsor and friend Marianne Moore, her depiction in the poem of the roosters who "command and terrorize . . ." was meant as an attack on the baseness of all militarism:

I want to emphasize the essential baseness of militarism. In the first part I was thinking of Key West, and also of those aerial views of dismal little towns in Finland and Norway, when the Germans took over, and their atmosphere of poverty. . . . (I also had in mind the violent roosters Picasso did in connection with his *Guernica* picture.) (*One Art* 96)

Then she fell publicly silent after this, just as so many poets became more active than before in writing war poetry (i.e., her friends and mentor/sponsors Moore and Robert Lowell). Thomas Travisano has observed correctly that “the case can be made that the war daunted her creatively: she published nothing at all in either 1942 or 1943 and her production during the war was limited by even her own standards” (*Elizabeth Bishop* 73).

Does this mean that she changed her ideology? Quite the contrary. This silence seems more like a strategic rhetorical move when one considers, for instance, Bishop’s many appearances in the leftist *The Partisan Review* until this time. As Victoria Harrison has pointed out, “Unbeliever” and “Quai” were published in the August-September 1938 issue alongside Leon Trotsky’s “Art and Politics” and Victor Serge’s “Marxism in Our Time”; and “The Fish” followed Stephen Spender’s war chronicle “September Journal” in the March-April 1940 issue (77). Margaret Dickie speculates that in her WWII silence Bishop may have wanted to avoid tension with such poetry mentors and allies as Lowell and Moore who were writing war poetry (106). Lorrie Goldensohn, in contrast, offers another perspective: that Bishop may not have wanted to compromise on her anti-militarism and preferred silence instead (157). I think that Bishop was concerned with both.

Private correspondence during the period of public poetic silence reveals an interrogating and resistant Bishop. On April 2, 1942, for example, she wrote Charlotte Russell about her anger over military appropriations of civilian Key West and her political action against it:

Marjorie [Stevens] and I are leaving for Mexico on the fifteenth. . . . It is impossible to live here any longer. The Navy takes over and tears down and

eats up one or two blocks of beautiful little houses for dinner every day. . . . And the point is that it is *unnecessary*. . . . Key West will be more ruined than ever— nothing but a naval base and a bunch of bars and cheap apartments. Pauline [Hemingway] and I are now conducting a campaign to write [Senator] Pepper about it. . . . I don't want to be unpatriotic about it. . . . but it *is unnecessary*, I'm sure. . . . Spring is coming, interwoven with the constant sound of airplanes. . . . (*One Art* 106-107)

Bishop also realized, however, that her lack of explicit war poetry during this time brought ramifications in the literary and cultural marketplace. In a letter dated January 22, 1945, she asked her publisher Ferris Greenslet at Houghton Mifflin to explain her silence when it published her poetry collection *North & South*: “The fact that none of these poems deal directly with the war, at a time when so much war poetry is being published, will, I am afraid, leave me open to reproach” (*One Art* 26). She then goes on to apologize for this, saying that she works very slowly (26). But correspondence with her friend, the poet Lloyd Frankenberg, dated June 29, 1942, provides another contradictory perspective. It indicates her concerns about the potential complicitous role of poetry in war. Discussing his statement of conscientious objection to the war, she writes: “I only wish poetry hadn't had to be brought in at all— but then I suppose there's no use in trying to protect it, either . . .” (*One Art* 112).

A barely decipherable handwritten poetry fragment entitled “V-Day August 14th, 1945” in the Vassar College Archives further reveals that Bishop had not in fact changed her anti-militarist views about WWII and thus needed to position herself not only in relation to her own conscience but also in relation to the national politics of war that interrelated with the literary and cultural climate and marketplace. In fact, this archival fragment indicates that Bishop would hardly have been considered part of the “faithful female nation” waiting for the return of the victorious WWII military if the fragment had been known. When the war ended and the US returned as winners, thousands on V-Day cheered in the ticker-tape parades like the widely photographed parade held in New York City. Bishop was not

one of them. She writes in her fragment about standing at a “window-sill”:

(— of the paper.)

streamer  
floated upright, drifted slowly, clung & then  
wing its — sighed & rocked  
fell despairing

torn bit  
(like flake in —  
turned like a flock of birds  
*blinked* quarried

A.M.

at 7 o'clock the imitation maypole & the  
boys & girls with *sparklers* in the dim light  
watching (box 75, folder 3a, p. 73, VC)<sup>2</sup>

Instead of evoking the parade streamers of the “victorious” and “saved” national hegemonic war narrative in which women and families greeted the honorable returning US soldiers, Bishop’s “despairing torn bit” of “wing” that “clung” reminds one of the remnants of civilian human skin and clothing reported at Hiroshima and Nagasaki following the atomic bombings as well as the remains of bombed planes. Indeed the imagery of “torn bit” and “quarried birds” recalls imagery evoked from an earlier window sill at “the gun-metal blue window”—in “Roosters” with its imagery of roosters (or fliers and planes) who are seen as doomed:

and one is flying,  
with raging heroism defying  
even the sensation of dying.

And one has fallen . . .  
his torn-out, blooded feathers drift down. . . .  
(*Complete Poems* 37)

This national ceremony of a victory peace parade thus is intertwined with war's violence in her poetry fragment. The nation's demonization and feminization of Japan in WWII as an enemy that must be "mastered" and "controlled" lest it attack US women and children had resulted in allied and enemy military casualties as well as the unprecedented large-scale targeted deaths of thousands of enemy civilians. So when Bishop broke her silence at least in private to witness the "peace," she offered only the barest kind of "piece" in an impoverished, stripped-down, "quasi-invisible" rhetoric that contrasted sharply with the public bravado of the victory culture's discourse. Indeed, in relation to Bishop's own fully fleshed-out poem of "Roosters" about the view from a window sill, this fragment offers a kind of linguistic/visual depiction of a world and language left in tatters.

In her anxieties about the new emerging US postwar era she was not alone. Her poetry friends Randall Jarrell and Robert Lowell were attacking in their poetry not only the air bombings of such cities as Dresden, Germany, but also the atomic destruction of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. By 1950 a conclave of leading clergymen on the federal Dun Commission issued the statement: "War is the culture of our age and the culture is war" (Boyer 348).

Yet Bishop was publicly silent in general about the victory culture while in the poetry consultant's office at the Library of Congress. Indeed her tenure has been read as an unimportant period in her writing by Dickie and biographer Brett Millier (Dickie 112; Millier *Elizabeth Bishop* 219-227). Her public silence, however, at a time when the nation was returning to war seems too deafening to overlook. Her very absence from the public site/sight of "speech" when she was at the center of its cultural power in Washington asks us to ponder and probe what might be behind it, to consider more closely what might be omitted from the "received" mainstream history and national memory of this period, and to search out what has been submerged. What did she need to negotiate as a poet, for example, in the public spotlight for the first time—and in her first nine-to-five job (Millier, "The Prodigal: Elizabeth Bishop and Alcohol," 60)? In other words, what was the "received" historical context of this period in her life? From her private world in Key West, Bishop found herself at two major centers of cultural power and confronted with the thorny issue of what Cary Nelson has described

as the possible debasement of the public space of poetry in time of war (42).

First of all, the holder of Bishop's poetry consultancy office probably would have been expected to produce public patriotic poetry. Archibald MacLeish had set a precedent for this when he spearheaded WWII propaganda efforts among writers while he held the poetry consultant's office at the beginning of the war and then became director of war information. Edna St. Vincent Millay, who became known as the ideal patriotic woman poet in WWII with her major propaganda poem *The Murder of Lidice*, reappeared prominently in the public eye as the Cold War's ideal patriotic woman poet. She was the focus of the feature article "Poet's Kitchen" in the February 1949 issue of *The Ladies Home Journal*; and she appeared again in the November 1949 issue with the publication of her famous sonnet "An Ancient Gesture" about the Western classical war figures of Penelope and Ulysses (Taber 56-57, 183-185; Millay 89).

In addition to negotiating these patriotic expectations based on her office, her writing profession, and her gender, Bishop also confronted a fresh uproar around the issues of state patriotism and treason in both her Library of Congress post and her residency at the prestigious Yaddo Colony for artists and writers. As is well-known, her friend Robert Lowell arranged for her poetry post and supported her Yaddo residency; so she was greatly indebted to him for bringing her to these centers of cultural power in the poetry world. However, he also was largely responsible for the two well-documented major incidents about patriotism and treason. He, along with Flannery O'Connor, his future wife Elizabeth Hardwick, and others at Yaddo, accused the director Elizabeth Ames of Communist involvement shortly before Bishop arrived there (Hamilton 143-145; 152). Bishop was nervous enough about Yaddo that she told Loren MacIver in a letter: "... I'm scared of writing Cal about where I am ..." (*One Art* 248). After she received his approval for her stay, she wrote MacIver again to say "he was glad I was at Yaddo, so that's a relief— however I really feel Mrs. Ames will never get over his attack on her and he shows absolutely no remorse about that" (*One Art* 260). As these two letters indicate, Bishop was very anxious about negotiating an amenable position in relation to Lowell's politics. Moreover, by the time that Bishop took over

the poetry post, the Bollinger Prize that her office had administered was no longer housed there because of another well-known incident involving Lowell. A joint congressional committee had transferred the award to Yale University's administrative oversight as a result of the furor created by Ezra Pound's receipt of it while he was incarcerated at St. Elizabeths Hospital on treason charges for his pro-fascism. Lowell had played a major role in the award selection.

Given these explosive historical contexts, where could the Bishop who had written the "V-Day" unpublished poetry fragment position herself in the public arena? Or had her thinking about militarism between V-Day and 1949 changed? A 1949 letter to her trusted friend Pearl Bell Kazin reveals that Bishop's anti-militarism had not abated. To the contrary, it indicates just how treasonous Bishop would have sounded if she had expressed her views publicly. With Kazin she deflates official Washington's power of ideological representation through her derision of its architecture. Her use of the letter—a personal and private form of writing—indicates the extent to which she felt the need to express herself, but in a way that did not place her under scrutiny and at risk:

Washington doesn't seem quite real. All those piles of granite and marble, like an inflated copy of *another* capital city someplace else (the Forum?). Even the Lincoln Memorial, which I went to see, affected me that way. . . . (*One Art* 194)

Instead of viewing Washington's architecture as the stirring patriotic site of the unique savior-nation of the world in Cold War "containment" mythology, Bishop sees it, first, as merely "piles of granite and marble," drained of any inherent patriotic "romance" to stir the hearts of US citizen-patriots. Second, her image of "piles of granite and marble" evokes cemetery markers, the deadly reality behind the bravado of Cold War militarism. Then she tosses the city with the unique "messianic" Cold War mission aside as an "inflated copy" of a "someplace else" that she cannot quite place. Even the Lincoln Memorial fails to stir her.

As I am arguing with this example, her major challenge in her tenure at the Library of Congress, then, was to find covert ways of expressing such high-risk viewpoints during the nation's most intense era of political surveillance in recent history. The year's public silence cannot be taken at face value as only the result, as Dickie and Millier have argued, of the fact that she did not respond to Washington architecture as she had earlier to Paris architecture, or that the year provided many personal and medical problems (associated, for instance, with her alcoholism), but few "subjects for poems" (Dickie, 112; Millier, *Elizabeth Bishop* 219-227 and "The Prodigal: Elizabeth Bishop and Alcohol" 54-76).<sup>3</sup> Indeed, I find it uncanny that Bishop spent so much of her time in withdrawal or on the sidelines in the two poetry "hot spots," politically encumbered by anyone's analysis at both Yaddo and the Library of Congress. In today's terms, the historical contexts of both poetry centers would be described as the sites of stress-induced illness resulting in the need for abundant medical leave. Bishop's medical record bears out this analysis, even if we allow for the importance of her other long-standing physical and medical issues. She spent time in 1949 in a sanatorium for alcoholism, missed many days in her poetry post due to asthma attacks and alcoholic illness, and underwent treatment during Christmas Week in Saratoga Hospital (Millier, "The Prodigal: Elizabeth Bishop and Alcohol," 59-61).

In spite of the many difficult political and personal issues, I think that Bishop succeeded in finding several covert ways to articulate her emerging views on the Cold War during her year in Washington that reveal that the basic shape of her resistance to it was formed during 1949-1950. Her handwritten unpublished diary of 1950 at the Vassar Archives records several of her experiences and thoughts during this year, with many of the entries written in the same tone on topics similar to what we find in her letter to Bell. This journal holds the drafts of "A View of the Capitol from the Library of Congress," the only poem officially completed in 1950, revealing that she commented upon the capitol building lengthily and muted her politically charged views in the published version of the poem. In addition, the diary includes remarks about Bishop's private life and her female-centered circle, a risky rhetorical move given the era's conflation of Communism with homosexuality while she held public office

and the government's penchant for the surveillance and private investigation of government employees (see Bérubé and Edelman). In more concrete terms, new anti-homosexual activity took place in Washington almost weekly beginning in February 1950. From a dismissal of an average of five homosexuals each month, the rate grew to more than sixty per month (Bérubé 266, 269).

"View of the Capitol from the Library of Congress" offers Bishop's ideological critique of both militarism and her equally important concern about military domination of the homefront and private citizens. The poem can be read as simply an amusing anecdote on the ways that the trees block the sound of the Air Force band playing at the Capitol— and indeed it has been generally overlooked in published Bishop scholarship. Bishop's playfulness in the poem possesses a "fairy tale" tone that presents a kind of heightened "romantic" response to the music. In a first scanning, one might interpret the poem as one listener's enthralled rapture with the patriotic music attempting to woo citizens into war support and national solidarity:

I think the trees must intervene,

catching the music in their leaves  
like gold-dust, till each big leaf sags.

....

Great shades, edge over,  
give the music room.

The gathered brasses want to go  
*boom— boom.* (*Complete Poems* 69)

But as one begins to re-read the text, one realizes that Bishop finds the trees, not the band, magical. Indeed the national patriotic music cannot be heard clearly so its courting or persuasion among the citizen-listeners falters. Millier's and Dickie's recent assessments that the published poem represents Bishop's skeptical perspective on military life are quite correct. As Dickie argues, Bishop seems to criticize the Air Force band's "feeble"

efforts to “declare its own glory or even assert its military presence” (Millier 223; Dickie 112-113).

Bishop’s fragments and working drafts to this poem in her diary for 1950, together with her correspondence during her 1949-1950 year in Washington DC with her good friends, the artist Loren MacIver and the poet Lloyd Frankenberg, support anti-militarist readings of the poem as a whole. She enclosed the final poem in a letter dated only as Sunday morning in October 1950 with the comment, “I’ll wind up this spiel by sending you a little number I turned out the other day.” She had apparently agreed to send them postcards of the Washington sights/sites while she worked as poetry chair and hoped the poem would suffice as a substitute for a card (*One Art* 210).

Her preoccupation with the patriotic and political sights/sites of the national capitol during 1950 indicates the extent to which she was studying the city from her writing desk, documenting the arrival of the Cold War—and the Korean War—just as she had observed the arrival of the Navy in WWII in Key West from her writing room overlooking the harbor. She described Washington to Frankenberg in a letter dated August 21, several weeks after the US troops arrived in Korea, as though it had been invaded and overtaken by the military. An Air Force base seems to have suddenly sprung up and obliterated the spring landscape. Indeed her depiction recalls her letter during WWII to Charlotte Russell describing a spring, “interwoven with the constant sound of airplanes.” Her description to Frankenberg masculinizes the metallic apparatus of militarism and suggests the feminization of nature more explicitly through her depiction of spring as beautiful, but also fragile:

Washington seems composed of equal parts of air-  
planes, starings, electric drills, and thick, oily storm.  
The beautiful spring lasted exactly one week. (21  
August 1950 VC)

Because of the way that the poem grows out of her observations during 1950, I want to focus primarily on its intertwined development with Bishop’s other commentary in the diary on national patriotism and politics. She began the poem on January 13, recording her fascination with the mossy facade of



While the images of the light, Capitol dome, and horse remained in the published version of the poem, the most caustic statement about this military-dominated Washington DC in this fragmented piece of writing did not. In a strong, direct sexual language atypical of her, Bishop personifies the national Capitol dome as the food source for the military. Bishop calls the dome “an elaborate sugar-tit for a nation that likes sugar.” Moreover, the “airplanes” settle themselves gingerly “down” so near the “Dome” in her working draft that it looks like the airplanes are trying to land on the “sugar-tit.” The image suggested here by the airplanes with their wings is of bees—pursuing their nectar or sugar from the dome, the metaphorical flower with the petals down and “tit” exposed in full view. Is this a fanciful observation by Bishop, or political commentary? When one considers that the military draws its “sugar” or “food source” from Congressional financial appropriations, it is difficult to see this as mere whimsical imagery. The Congress—as represented by the Capitol dome—functions not only as the Cold War nation who remains faithful and welcomes home her troops wholeheartedly, but also as the “good faithful patriotic mother” who nourishes her military forces:

(Washington airplanes always setting themselves gingerly  
poem) down  
Dome — also an elaborate sugar-tit for a  
nation that likes sugar (box 77, folder 4, p. 4, VC)

Bishop’s January 27 entry indicates her desire to remove the flag, the nation’s major patriotic symbol, from the scene altogether:

. . . put the flags away  
. . . pull down the flags (box 77, folder 4,  
p. 5, VC)

But by February 17 the flags were reinserted and remained permanently in the poem, conveying a meaning similar to that of the discarded “sugar-tit”:

The flag flows worryingly into the air

flags flow  
feeds its stripes into the air (box 77, folder 4,  
p. 12, VC)

While Bishop had removed the “sugar-tit” image from the poem, she retained her interest in suggesting that the nation, as represented by the red and white stripes of the flag, still “feeds” into the air. The red and white stripes remind one of candy canes being fed into the air, where Air Force planes come and go.

On February 23, she was still preoccupied with the flags. With March winds, she wrote, “flags going at higher speed.” She then critiqued their use on holidays:

On Washington’s Birthday the trolley-cars had 2 small flags stuck on either side of the front, on top—they fly them on most holidays. The flags are very small and the effect is rather silly, “cute”—or manifestation of the same sort of decorative impulse that the Romans used when they decorated. (box 77, folder 4, p. 14, VC)

Several months later, on June 23, she returned to the poem and added in the band, describing it as “unreal” as the architecture she had deplored to Pearl Kazin in an earlier letter. In addition, her image of the band with its “short burst” and “vol. or volume/volley” links music to gunfire and cannon volley in war, for patriotic music is used both to mobilize and direct soldiers against the enemy and to mask the horrifying sounds of actual warfare:

The band playing on the steps of the Capitol—it sounds unreal, a sort of *imagined* band, in short burst, Vol. There isn’t any wind, and looking out one has the sensation that this effect is being caused by the great masses of the trees between the band and here. (box 77, folder 4, p. 16, VC)

Bishop’s June 24 entry records the poem’s title for the first time in a complex sketch that reveals that she will combine her derisive views of the patriotic architecture with those of the

patriotic music played by the military band. Patriotic or nationalistic music is supposed to achieve its wooing of its citizens through group identification with the music, not brute force; but Bishop sees the band's desire to coerce fully with its "boom-boom" war-like sound:

View of the Capitol from the L of C - title  
on the steps, the military band uniforms  
imagine any such thing,  
since there is no haze  
trees —

Great shades the small eye on the capitol  
Big trees, big shades, edge over  
give the music room I think the band is wanting  
to  
go more *boom-boom*  
to go boom-boom

I think it wants to go  
more boom boom boom.  
(box 77, folder 4, p. 16, VC)

On June 25 she records the final fragment of the poem-in-progress. It continues to focus on the music, which wants to exert its military strength in warlike sounds, indicating that the trees block and overpower it. The reference to the fact that music "must do" this as well as "wants to do" it ("boom: boom:" or "umpty-umpty") gives it a masculine and highly sexually charged edge, to which the feminized "trees" must yield. The parallel between this masculine/feminine binary and the Cold War militarism's conquest of the private feminized citizen sphere is uncanny:

great shades, edge over, let the band come through  
give the music room let the music through  
to — umpty-umpty if that's what it wants to

do

to go *boom: boom:*  
if that's what it must do  
(box 77, folder 4, p. 17, VC)

It is significant that Bishop interweaves discourse about her personal life between the prose and poetic passages of the poem. She notes, for example, in her January 13 entry with the poem's first fragment that her Key West and travel companion and lifelong friend "Louise Crane just called—I'm seeing her tomorrow." Then on June 23 as she adds the band into the poem, she records "Going to Jane D's this afternoon, thank goodness." She spent much of her time relaxing at Jane Dewey's home in Maryland while in Washington and inscribed her poem "A Cold Spring" in the 1955 volume *A Cold Spring*, for which she won a Pulitzer Prize, "for Jane Dewey, Maryland" (*Complete Poems* 55). Then she records a highly private emotional moment of turbulence and insight:

I think when one is extremely unhappy— almost hysterically unhappy, that is— it is one's time to lie down. All that long stretch— several years ago— it wasn't just a matter of not being able to accept the present, that present, although it began that way possibly. But the past and the present seemed confused or contradicting each other violently and constantly, and the past wouldn't down.  
(box 77, folder 4, p. 17, VC)

In the final June 24 entry she describes Jane's party for the writer John Dos Passes with its thunderstorm and fireflies that become part of the poem "A Cold Spring." As these sporadic entries indicate, Bishop intertwines her discourse of the intimate with writing destined to become public, thereby inscribing her subjectivity as a lesbian into her dialogue with the nation's Cold War "containment" narrative.

While the subject position of the journal writer is identified readily as female and as lesbian by those who know about Bishop's life-text or biography, the published poem's speaker bears nonspecific or universal social markings, a visible complicity with dominant Cold War culture's denial of social differentiation (see May). Yet the reader tends to refer to the poem's speaker as female, drawn into this identification by conflating the speaker's gender and sexual coding with the poet's and/or coding

the poem's language ("one small lunette," "gold-dust," "little flags," and "great shades") as feminine by following tradition mid-century views of language put forth by such linguistics scholars as Robin Lakoff that describe this kind of language as "talking like a lady" (280-291).

Lesbian concerns are present as well in the published poem, however, in spite of the fact that this culture marginalized homosexuality— or, in the words of lesbian theorist Terry Castle, tried to render it invisible (7). In the poem the speaker listens to impotent patriotic music that "doesn't quite come through" in spite of being played "hard and loud" by an all-male Air Force band:

the Air Force Band  
in uniforms of Air Force blue  
is playing hard and loud (*Complete Poems* 69)

Apparently the sound does not carry because the feminized landscape of "the giant trees stand in between" and "must intervene" by "catching the music in their leaves . . . till each big leaf sags." In contrast to the power of the trees to absorb the weight of the music, the "little flags / feed their limp stripes into the air, / and the band's efforts vanish there." Because "the gathered brasses want to go / boom— boom," a reference to the military commanders or "brasses" who want to go to war as well as a caustic comment on the infantilism of war in the use of "boom—boom," the speaker urges the "great shades" to "edge over" and "give the music room," a physical impossibility. Equally important, the speaker says that it's "queer" that the music does not come through. Moreover, the word "queer" flanked on two sides by dashes— the only instance in the poem— appears visually in stanza two to block the music.<sup>4</sup> Given the Cold War ostracism of lesbianism from the "body politic," it is not surprising that the poem's speaker has difficulty hearing the patriotic music designed to "court" her citizen loyalty.<sup>5</sup>

Other important readings of this blockage of the music must be considered as well. The military music— like the fascist roosters in "Roosters"— is intent on "capturing" its own citizens. Under the guise of "courting" patriotic music is the harsh reality that the "brasses want to go boom-boom" into the citizen crowd.

In other words, the patriotic music camouflages a kind of warfare against citizens. The patriotic wooing is clearly rebuffed—or resisted—by the private citizen speaker and listener in the poem as well as by the trees representing the feminized private sphere of the nation.

What makes this poem an even more forceful anti-militarist statement about the dangers of the nation's "courting" of its citizens is the juxtaposition of the visual discourse against the aural discourse. What one sees is not what one hears for the listener can see the band playing but not hear the music clearly. This seems an apt cultural representation of the citizen-listener who ostensibly listens to the patriotic music and thus conforms to the image of a patriotic citizen. Simultaneously, however, the music fails to penetrate the ear and thus to enter into the citizen's body. Moreover, this juxtaposition highlights the duplicity in Cold War militarism's patriotic music. The music camouflages and sanitizes the unseen grim reality of war and suffering.

So how can we understand her rhetorical decisions about the WWII-Cold War victory narrative as strategies of dissent and not simply consent when it appears that she was publicly silent and censored herself, that the ultimate result is apparent visible collusion? In other words, is she really like the citizen at the concert in her poem who sits—and outwardly complies—but remains untouched by the patriotic music? I think that the evidence presented in this essay supports reading her writing as a conflicted doubling in which consent and dissent are intertwined. She interweaves both the complicitous and oppositional together so finely that one can not easily detect "which was which," to use some of her own memorable poetic language elsewhere.

Yet it is difficult to interpret this. Like so many of my academic contemporaries, I have been trained to define political resistance in terms of the explicit and open protest poetry of the Vietnam era and to overlook the less easily discernible strategies of dissent. The dominant interpretation of Bishop's anti-militarist poetry reflects this problematic directly because she has earned her well-known place in the history of war poetry with the openly antimilitarist "The Roosters" before Pearl Harbor in WWII and the Vietnam-era "12 O'Clock News" in the early 1970s.

Balanced against this training in reading Bishop's political protest, however, is the longstanding construction of Bishop as a brilliant rhetorical strategist capable of speaking multivocally and contradictorily within a given text by feminist, lesbian, and culturally focused readers, scholars, and critics of Bishop. It is a commonplace that Bishop employs a wide range of subversive tactics in her writing. As Travisano has suggested accurately in his essay "The Elizabeth Bishop Phenomenon" tracing the rise of Bishop's poetic reputation, her contradictions and complications "might function in the context of a broader examination of [her] as a poet of history, culture, and politics." His citation of the following strong tradition of treating Bishop's rhetorical complexity supports his perspective:

Adrienne Rich's reading of Bishop as an "outsider," Lee Edelman's reading of a poet who "rips the fabric of the cultural text," Jackie Vaught Brogan's and Adrian Oktenberg's readings of Bishop as a "conscious resister," Harrison's reading of a "double point of view," and Barbara Page's reading of her "unofficial and unstable positionings." (226)

In addition, Lynn Keller's and Cristanne Miller's 1984 essay, "Emily Dickinson, Elizabeth Bishop, and the Rewards of Indirection," set the stage for interpreting Bishop's related rhetorical strategies of complication and subterfuge such as camouflage and indirection; and Dickie's *Stein, Bishop & Rich* has drawn attention to universalized heterosexual dominant texts and lesbian subtexts in Bishop's work (85). Finally, Bishop's interrogation of the duplicity of language has received much attention from readers like Keller and Mutlu Blasing (*Remaking It New* 12; *Politics & Form* 88).

I am indebted to the thinking of Michel de Certeau in chapter six of his *The Practice of Everyday Life* for providing a useful framework for helping me to consider Bishop's anti-militarist politics. Not surprisingly, his articulation of strategies of dissent fit in with dominant Bishop scholarship on her rhetorical prowess. He points out here that a writer or cultural producer can openly struggle with politics in a climate of free discussion. This was the general tenor of the historical "moment" when Bishop

published the well-known “Roosters.” The nation was in the midst of national debate about whether or not the US should enter the war on the side of the Allies. The poem was positioned fortuitously, then, in a national “moment” of openness, in sharp contrast to the wartime period of stringent pressure to produce war propaganda that followed the bombing of Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941 and the nation’s official entry into the war as well as during the intense political surveillance of the early Cold War period. Crucial for understanding her resistance to the nation’s WWII-Cold War victory narrative of militarism, then, is Bishop’s private and unpublished writing because this allowed her to express concerns that risked public censure.

As de Certeau goes on to state, writers must search out other subversive strategies for dissent during suppression that are difficult to observe but not completely hidden (quasi-invisible). These strategies include: 1) rewriting or parodying earlier poems, songs, newspaper clippings, or reporting on specific historical and cultural events, thereby creating “readerly” poems; 2) writing but not publishing in order to preserve the “moment” of suppression for a later, more open “moment” and audience; 3) multiple codings of published texts; 4) strategic self-censorship; and 5) silence. So if readers are to interpret subversion more fully, they must draw upon a different conception of open speech, subversive language, and silence.

Bishop’s rhetorical decisions, as I have presented them here, anticipate de Certeau’s framework and are clarified by an appropriation of it as an interpretive lens. “A View of the Capitol from the Library of Congress” offers a good example. It reports on a specific historical event—an Air Force band concert, thereby creating a “readerly” poem. Yet Bishop also codes this published text so that the “readerly” poem does not yield its subversion readily. Indeed the published poem “View of the Capitol from the Library of Congress” offers such a fanciful tone that readers, including most Bishop critics until recently, have treated it as a minor “occasional” poem in Bishop’s canon. At the 1997 Elizabeth Bishop Conference in Worcester, Massachusetts, for example, several participants who heard my paper briefly treating this poem and my discussion of Dickie’s treatment of it in her book *Stein, Bishop, & Rich* said that they always had found the poem “quirky” and “unimportant.” This so-called

“readerly” poem on one level, then, is “reader-resistant” on another.

And while in the post-Cold War 1990s we can discern the poet’s resistance as well as consent in the published poem, the diary of 1950 offers a companion text, creating an intertext with it, that reveals that Bishop censored herself. She muted her resistance for the purpose of publication during this troubled “moment” but left behind several substantive poetry drafts and journal entries in her archives that delineate her ongoing, quasi-invisible dissent with WWII and the early Cold War. While Bishop did not revise her poem later, she obviously wanted to hold onto these drafts for later generations to read, thereby assuring them an eventual, “more open” audience and possible publication.

Another strategy of dissent, silence—longterm silence—surrounds this poem. One might say the silence between publications of anti-militarist poems lasts from pre-Pearl Harbor “Roosters” to the 1950 “A View of the Capitol from the Library of Congress.” This silence draws our attention, as I discussed earlier, to questions about what else might be occurring that cannot be brought to the foreground without high risk and leads us into the surviving archival writing and poetry fragments, the journal entries, and correspondence. It is here that one finds the expression protected by the public silence—the halting “V-Day” fragment that breaks down so that we can see not only what she did write against the victory-day parade but her fall into silence as her ultimate response to the horror of atomic warfare.

Bishop’s fall into silence!—this “moment” keeps recurring before the horrific realities of militarism and war. First, we have the fall into silence after “Roosters.” Then, we read in “V-Day” the attempt to break the silence, only to find cultural representation collapsing into fragments. This is followed by more silence with episodic speech in journal entries and correspondence until “A View of the Capitol from the Library of Congress.” Then here we have watched how she silences herself attempting to speak, once again revealing silence as her ultimate response to the new emerging Cold War culture personified by atomic warfare. Silence about her politics, then, was often her language of dissent, surrounding and nearly overpowering the moments of representation, reminding us that the “said” must be

read together with the “not-said” if we are to read more fully her poetic narrative about the WWII-Cold War victory narrative. ☺

## Notes

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2. Excerpts from the unpublished writings of Elizabeth Bishop are used here with the permission of her estate, ©1998 by Alice Helen Methfessel and with the permission of Special Collections at Vassar College Libraries. I begin here to use VC to refer to Vassar College archives.
3. I do not wish to oversimplify the complexity of Bishop's life situation at this time by arguing that everything can be traced to her anti-militarism or political anxieties. However, I do not think that her politics has been considered sufficiently in examining the pressures of her life during this period.
4. I wish to thank Thomas Travisano for encouraging me to continue interrogating this aspect of the poem.
5. For a reading of Bishop's lesbianism in relation to Canadian and US nationalisms, see David Jarraway's "‘O Canada!': The Spectral Lesbian Poetics of Elizabeth Bishop."

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