

THE ARION PRESS

announces the publication of

The Little of our Earthly Trust

poetry by

ELIZABETH BISHOP

selected and with an introduction by

HELEN VENDLER

and with twenty-four prints by

JOHN NEWMAN

PROSPECTUS

We are proud to announce an edition of the poetry of Elizabeth Bishop (1922 – 1979), selected and introduced by Helen Vendler, as the one hundred and eighth publication of Arion Press. In the years since Bishop's death, her stature has grown remarkably, as Vendler tells us in an introduction that begins by lauding the innovations of early twentieth century poetry:

“Ezra Pound, with his command "Make it new!" encouraged his contemporaries to break with tradition, and many seemed to join him in the effort, not least his friend and fellow-expatriate Thomas Stearns Eliot. E.E. Cummings brought typographical play into whimsical and satiric lyrics, flouting conventions of erotic propriety, while Frost—although asserting a rootedness in New England—had to go to London to be published, and drew on Latin lyric for his stoicism and epigrammatic force. Marianne Moore's poems were unsettling amalgams of satire, fable, and sermon, unwilling to observe generic borders.

“After the rebellious exhilarations of those modern poets, it seemed that any subsequent collection of poets might be a disappointing one. To everyone's surprise, the next American constellation was no less brilliant: Robert Lowell, Sylvia Plath, John Berryman, John Ashbery. . . . Against such contemporaries, Elizabeth Bishop seemed decorous, "feminine", "modest", hardly dangerous. Living in Brazil, and publishing at intervals of several years, she was not visibly part of the American cluster of poets. Although she was always esteemed by her fellow-poets, it was only in her latter years that she was understood and prized by the wider public. Since her death in 1979, she has become the most popular poet of her generation, in part because of her plain-spoken language but also because of her candor and depth of feeling.”

This is a selection of thirty-nine poems considered her most important and most representative by Professor Vendler.

THE INTRODUCTION

Helen Vendler is the A. Kingsley Porter University Professor at Harvard University. A commanding figure in the world of contemporary literature, she has been poetry critic of *The New Yorker* and a major contributor on poetry for the *New York Review of Books* and *The New Republic*. She has written books on Yeats, Herbert, Keats, Stevens, Shakespeare, Heaney, and Dickinson. The recipient of many awards, Vendler was selected in 2004 by the National Endowment for the Humanities to give the Jefferson Lecture, the highest honor of the federal government in the humanities. She has been elected as a scholar to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences and as a writer to the American Academy of Arts and Letters.

Helen Vendler first reviewed Elizabeth Bishop in 1973, and between that date and the present, she has written on Bishop's poetry, translations, poetic drafts, *Collected Prose*, and letters (both *One Art* and *Words in Air*, her correspondence with Robert Lowell). They became friends through Vendler's Boston University colleague, the poet John Malcolm Brinnin, and the friendship continued until Bishop's death in 1979. When Vendler was elected Second Vice President of the Modern Language association, Bishop gave her a tiny gavel, accompanied by a poetic squib recommending the acquisition of a “second vice”. That was typical, said Vendler, of her generosity and her humor.

[SAMPLE PAGE]

The Imaginary Iceberg

We'd rather have the iceberg than the ship,
although it meant the end of travel.
Although it stood stock-still like cloudy rock
and all the sea were moving marble.
We'd rather have the iceberg than the ship;
we'd rather own this breathing plain of snow
though the ship's sails were laid upon the sea
as the snow lies undissolved upon the water.
O solemn, floating field,
are you aware an iceberg takes repose
with you, and when it wakes may pasture on your snows?

This is a scene a sailor'd give his eyes for.
The ship's ignored. The iceberg rises
and sinks again; its glassy pinnacles
correct elliptics in the sky.
This is a scene where he who treads the boards
is artlessly rhetorical. The curtain
is light enough to rise on finest ropes
that airy twists of snow provide.
The wits of these white peaks
spar with the sun. Its weight the iceberg dares
upon a shifting stage and stands and stares.

This iceberg cuts its facets from within.
Like jewelry from a grave
it saves itself perpetually, and adorns
only itself, perhaps the snows
which so surprise us lying on the sea.

THE ARTIST AND THE PRINTS

The sculptor John Newman has long been a reader of poetry and Elizabeth Bishop is one of his favorite poets. When he was a student at Oberlin College he thought he might become a poet. Instead he became a sculptor after serving, for academic credit, as a studio assistant to Sol LeWitt, then went on for an MFA at the Yale School of Art. His father was a theoretical linguist, which may account for his fluent writings and interviews showing him to be very expressive about his own art and matters of life that would engage a poet. When Andrew Hoyem invited John to make art for an Arion Press selection of poetry by Elizabeth Bishop, he responded enthusiastically and mentioned that one of his works is entitled with a line from a Bishop poem, “We’d rather have the iceberg than the ship, although it meant the end of travel”. He cites the jazz musician Ornette Coleman and the artists Mel Bochner, Barry Le Va, Dorothea Rockburne, Eva Hesse, and Richard Tuttle as influences.

Newman says he found that “by using several component parts to make up a sculpture—and parts that are often far afield in terms of wildly diverse materials or methods of making—a condition is set up where the interdependence of these parts is just as crucial as the parts themselves”. Though his early work was large, he felt that intimacy was lacking from the then current lexicon of sculpture. So he began making small objects using many unusual materials that often had an abundance of color.

“These sculptures began based on the drawings I made while traveling. Drawings of ‘speculative sculptures’ rendered yet imagined sculptures that did not suffer from the exigencies of gravity, adhesion, or stance.” The drawings were never intended to be realized as three-dimensional forms, rather, he viewed them as travel notes. Thinking about the scale of objects he saw on foreign journeys, he was “impressed by the Japanese teacup, the Congo power god, the aniconic stone adorned with flowers in the center of an Indian village” that were small in size “but certainly not small in significance”. He has written, “size is calibrated; scale is felt”. Helen Vendler has said that John Newman’s smaller sculptures are “witty, inventive, almost convincing as new species”.

For this Arion Press artist book, John Newman has made twenty-four drawings of small sculptures made between 1998 and 2016, with a twenty-fifth for the cover. Reversing the process in his early sketches for objects-never-to-be-made, he has now depicted forms he has already

made, each from one point of view, as works of graphic art, flat on the page, in gouache, in black, gray, and white, on tan paper. These drawings have been transformed into relief prints and printed by letterpress from polymer plates on French mould-made paper. The titles and dates of creation of the sculptures are used as the titles for the prints, which appear on the facing page of poetry, below the running foot. The prints are arranged in chronological order and spaced at regular intervals throughout the poetry.

John Newman was born in Flushing, New York, and lives and works in New York City. He has had over fifty one-person shows and participated in numerous group exhibitions in galleries and museums throughout the United States, Europe, and Asia. His works are in public collections including the Museum of Modern Art, the Metropolitan Museum, the Whitney Museum, and the Tate Modern in London, among many others. He was Director of Graduate Studies in Sculpture at the Yale School of Art. He currently teaches at the New York Studio School and the School of Visual Arts in New York City.

THE BOOK

The book has been designed by Andrew Hoyem and produced at Arion Press. The format is octavo, 9-7/8 by 6-7/8 inches, 192 pages. The type is English Garamond composed and cast in Monotype for the text and large sizes for display handset. The type and the 24 relief prints in three colors from polymer plates were printed by letterpress. The paper is Magnani wove, Italian mouldmade, for the text and Canson Mi-Teintes, French mouldmade, for the prints. The binding is Smyth-sewn, with headbands, in a three-piece cover: a gray goatskin spine with titling, black cloth sides, with an inset additional print on the front cover. All copies are signed by the artist.

THE EXTRA PRINT

The artist John Newman has made an extra print to accompany thirty copies of the book, entitled "North and South", after the title of Elizabeth Bishop's first book. It is a hand-colored linoleum block print, 24 by 18 inches, on Rives BFK cream paper. The linoleum block was editioned by letterpress in sanguine ink at Arion Press, and the hand-coloring was done by the artist in his studio in New York City.

THE ORIGINAL DRAWINGS

The twenty-five original drawings by John Newman for the relief prints are available for sale to those who purchase the book. These are gouache drawings in black, gray, and white, done in 2016 for this project. The drawings are on tan paper, 13 by 9-3/4 inches. The price for each drawing is \$3,500, unframed, or \$3,750 framed. The images can be viewed on our website.

THE EDITION AND ORDERING

The edition of the book is limited to 300 numbered copies for sale and 26 lettered copies for complimentary distribution. The price of the book is \$1,200. The extra print is in an edition of thirty for sale, numbered 1/30 to 30/30, with five artist proofs, AP 1/5 to AP 5/5, and five publisher proofs, PP 1/5 to PP 5/5, signed by the artist. The price of the book with the extra print is \$2,700. A portion of the edition is reserved for Arion Press subscribers, who commit to purchase the annual series at a 30% discount. To order, or for more information about this publication or the subscription terms, contact:

THE ARION PRESS

1802 Hays Street, The Presidio, San Francisco, California 94129

Telephone: 415-668-2542

Email: arionpress@arionpress.com

Website: www.arionpress.com