

Primitive Originals:

Pablo Neruda in Elizabeth Bishop's "Invitation to Miss Marianne Moore."

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Enough has been written on the literary relationship between Elizabeth Bishop and Marianne Moore to fill a substantial book. In a nutshell, Moore mentored Bishop, and, circa the publication of Bishop's poem "Roosters," Bishop started to find ways to express her indifference to Moore's advice. Translation has also been written on to a huge extent, and often in an exposition-definition mode: *what is a translation?* The answer can be theoretical—a set of parameters—or it could be more literal, and describe everything which has been thrown into a text's "melting pot." How many texts can fit into one English translation? One of Bishop's forays into translation territory is the 1948 "Invitation to Miss Marianne Moore." The poem, which was printed in the 1955 *A Cold Spring*, is *after* "Alberto Rojas Giménez viene volando," ("Alberto Rojas Giménez, Come Flying") an elegy by the Chilean Nobel laureate, Pablo Neruda. Giménez had instructed Neruda in the archaic and primitive as parts of the Santiago avant-garde. Giménez was the leader of a poetic enclave in Santiago, the Agu poets, who wrote with a mixture of primitive and bohemian identities. In "Invitation to Miss Marianne Moore," the Neruda poem ciphers Bishop's American engagements with the Primitivist aesthetic. This article unpacks some of these engagements from the seemingly principal engagement with Pablo Neruda.

As a translator of Neruda, Elizabeth Bishop has a Kepler Problem based on textual displacement. Through interaction framed by a greater theoretical effect, two bodies are changed. This principle applies to the poems, Bishop's and Neruda's, and to the normative idea "translation." With "translation" affected, each of the poems is made to have further levels of what may be called *poems*, textual beings with an involvement larger and more diffuse than "quotation" or "influence." The "Invitation to Miss Marianne Moore" does not include the name "Pablo Neruda" or overtly credit a non-English *source*. In doing so, Bishop indicates to those aware of the Neruda, American readers of Spanish, and so likely interested in translation, that her poem is in some way a reconsideration of what a translation is.

That the "Invitation" does not mention Neruda suggests that Bishop considers one of the strategies available to the translator is an act of withholding. The idea of "withholding" can be also applied to the Primitivist aesthetic and its resistance to definition. Primitive myth is an attempt to satisfy desires for originary stories by referring to extra-human and ex-tropian sources. Alongside Bishop's use of the aesthetic, Neruda's own Primitivist poem is withheld from the explicitly designated

audience: Marianne Moore. There are, effectively, *two* poems in “Invitation to Miss Marianne Moore”: the nice one which Moore read and enjoyed, and the critical one which indicates limits perceived in Moore’s method. By refraining from telling English-speakers and Moore about the poem’s link to Neruda, Bishop has the English text become a paratextual double. A translation’s “original,” which would normatively be thought of as the second / other part of a doubling is displaced from such a role. In the Bishop, Neruda’s elegy to Giménez ciphers the sensibilities disjunct from Moore’s editing gaze. These sensibilities include Klee, Neruda (who is a cipher for Neruda) and Surrealism. As a geographic pun, these translations are territorial. If “limits” are “boundaries,” this is at least a triple entendre. In a 1942 letter written to Moore from Mexico, Bishop had aligned Neruda with Surrealism and indicated Moore would be best avoiding these writers.

We haven’t found a Spanish teacher here yet, but I hope to soon. I bought Pablo Neruda’s poetry (he and his wife have been very nice to us) and I am reading it – with the dictionary, but I’m afraid it is not the kind I – nor you – like, very, very loose, surrealist imagery, etc. I may be misjudging it; it is so hard to tell about foreign poetry, but I feel I recognize the type only too well. (108)

The Neruda poems Bishop refers to are the first two *Residencia en la Tierra* collections. *Residencia III* was not published until 1947.

Neruda’s poem was published in the 1935 *Residencia en la tierra II* (“*Resident on Earth 2*”). Each of the stanzas, which are between four and five lines long, ends *vienes volando* (“come flying”). Sitting at the end of each stanza, the phrase appears a refrain (the only time the phrase enters the “body” is the poem’s final stanza: lines one, three and five include the phrase). The speaker observes Giménez flying “between,” “under,” “beyond,” “further,” and “above” the physical world. Drowned, Giménez is in a position of being which is beyond the speaker’s existence. He flies changed into a different form of man *con traje nuevo y ojos extinguidos* (“with new clothes and extinguished eyes”) (284).

Giménez led the Santiago Agu poets, and this group is one of Neruda’s main engagements with Primitivism. The Agu group’s activities, and their magazine, *Claridad*, followed “man’s first cry, the newborn infant’s first poem” (Neruda, *Memoirs* 39). “Agu” can be read as an onomatopoeic word rather than a word using normatively established cultural / formal mechanisms to generate meaning. The “Agu” word appeals to the formless, and to the poet’s ability to engage with an aesthetic which goes beyond the normative orderings of reality and being. Considering darkness-as-change and as a pre-tradition, Neruda’s mentor Giménez flies bringing the indefinable meaning, a part of the Primitivist aesthetic:

El viento negro de Valparaíso
abre sus alas de cabron y espuma
para barrer el cielo donde passas:
viene volando. (285)

(“The black wind from Valparaíso opens its sea-spit and charcoal wings to sweep the sky as you pass: come flying.”)

Primitive myths have an extensive focus on the healing / changing power of darkness. With a stress on aetiology, the darkness caused by Giménez's flight is a further layer of indigenous reference and quotation. Darkness is important to Neruda's early writing in Santiago, and "*Alberto Rojas Giménez viene volando*" shades the trope's importance. Upon arriving in Santiago, Neruda ingratiated himself with "Agu" and became an editor of the group's review, *Claridad*, in 1922. Officially, *Claridad*, was the journal of the Student Federation of Chile but heavily pronounced its association with the literary Agu and Vremia groups. Neruda referenced the darkness trope with the title of his first book, *Crepusculario* ("*Twilight Collection*"), which was published by the related *Ediciones Claridad*. Jerome Rothenberg, in his *Pre-faces* prose collection, and his 1968 Primitivist anthology *Technicians of the Sacred*, notes that "*Alberto Rojas Giménez viene volando*" takes its refrain from the Navajo tribe's "Night Chant" (*Pre-Faces*, 202-204).

The "Night Chant" is a healing chant wherein the priest's singing will summon a dark being "come to us soaring" to treat the patient. Rothenberg uses Clayton Eshleman's translation of "*Alberto Rojas Giménez viene volando*" to demonstrate the connection to the Navajo tribe's "Night Chant." In "*Alberto Rojas Giménez viene volando*," the dead Giménez is a dark being with a hidden presence in all superficial reality. Rothenberg cites Washington Matthews' translation of the "Night Chant" to stress darkness as integral to the Chant: "With the far darkness made of the dark cloud over your head, come to us soaring" (202). Darkness is not a harmful state; it is attached to indefinable and non-sourced aestheses which are curative. In Neruda, the weather's darkness is associated with Giménez's literary work and used to introduce the idea of the other-worldly Giménez healing the art.

The speaker's willing disconnection from contemporary considerations of worldly being is recurrent in Neruda. The extent to which the disconnection recurs and becomes tropic in Neruda suggests that Giménez is co-opted as a figure into Neruda's schematic of being. The elegy contests the recorded nature of the universe; thematically, this contestation is present in "*Galope muerto*" ("Dead Gallop"), "Walking Around" and "*Melancolía en las Familias*" ("Melancholy in the Families"), among others in the three *Residencias*. Prominent among the others, but lesser known in English, is "*Trabajo frío*" ("Cold Work") from the first *Residencia en la tierra*. The third stanza explicitly receives stimuli from an ex-tropian source: "*Secas sales y sangres aéreas ... el testigo constata.*" ("Dry salts and airborne blood ... shaking the observer"). Neruda shows obsession with the presence of the dead as a way to show the buried and obscured presence of true being. This is an approach which recurs in a figure whom Bishop would make important to her poem, the "Blue Rider" artist Paul Klee. The true being takes a healing role, but is disconnected from the artist bound to experiential tangible reality. In "*Alberto Rojas Giménez viene volando*" Neruda writes:

Allí está el mar. Bajo de noche y te oigo
venir volando bajo el mar sin nadie,
bajo el mar que me habita, oscurecido:
vienes volando. (286)

("There is always the sea. I go at night and hear you come flying alone under the sea, obscured underneath the sea that I inhabit: come flying.")

Eshleman's translations of *Residencia en la Tierra* were printed in a short run by the San Francisco Amber House Press in 1962. Nowadays, the only authorised translation of the books is Donald Walsh's, issued under an exclusivity deal by New Directions Press. A small industry has built up around hiding "*Alberto Rojas Giménez viene volando*" from North American readers. In an essay printed in *American Poetry Review* 2.3 (1973), Robert Bly writes on the problems faced by Lewis Hyde when trying to publish translations of the *Residencia* books. Bly castigates New Directions' lawyers for not following James Laughlin's intentions in founding the publishing house. Through Hyde, the translations of the *Residencias* have spread to support other literary communities which are not expressly focused on Neruda studies. Unable to publish a stand-alone book of Neruda translations, Hyde has allowed his versions of Neruda to diffuse through the little magazine *The Lamp in the Spine* (rare) and in his prose work *The Gift*.

Eshleman's own writing budded from an encounter with Neruda's work in the 1960s, and has since progressed to translating "poetry written in extremis" and giving guided tours of prehistoric caves (Eshleman has written a memoir of translating Neruda, published in the 2005 Soft Skull Press edition of his *Conductors of the Pit*). Some may argue that Neruda is a catalyst for Primitivism. As Eshleman's memoir makes clear, Neruda is only generative in English when related to the language's extant praxes; in Eshleman's case they are given as the praxes of Robert G. Kelly, Cid Corman and Paul Blackburn. Kelly is a Joyce scholar, Corman the inventor of "livingdying" Minimalism and Blackburn enamoured with the hermeneutics of process. Eshleman is a clear example that, to translators, Neruda does not often cipher *Neruda* but rather *Neruda+English influence*.

The Grove Press editions of Neruda, published as translations by Ben Belitt, go further away from figuring solely Neruda. Belitt's version of "*Alberto Rojas Gimenez viene volando*" was published in the September 1961 *Poetry: A Magazine of Verse* (98.6). Belitt's translation is far from literal. The version printed in *Poetry: A Magazine of Verse* is not popularly read as a rejection of cultural authority invested in literal translation so much as an abuse of the expectation of literality in translation which bestows cultural authority upon the text. These readings may be attributed to Belitt's claims of accuracy in his collected essays, *Adam's Dream*. Bill Knott, better known as St. Gerard, writes to Robert Bly's magazine *The Sixties* that "'Anything American is better than anything furrin.' Bellit doesn't have to translate Neruda because Neruda is only a Spic" (34). You could say similar things about Bly's own translations of Neruda, Rilke, Ponge and so on, but replace "American" with "Jungian."

When Bishop wrote "Invitation to Miss Marianne Moore," the only English version of the *Residencias* available for purchase was Angel Flores' New Directions issue. This version, which was later replaced by the Walsh text, was criticised by the anthologist Dudley Fitts for omitting the poems "which best represent the harsh, obsessed, violent aspect of Neruda" (151). Flores' translations of Neruda (but not "*Alberto Rojas Giménez viene volando*") were included in a Whit Burnett volume later issued by the Moore-led Dial Press. Without realising the extent of the jostle, Moore and Bishop were jousting each other over the (most) correct English Neruda. Bishop's "Invitation to Miss Marianne Moore" uses Neruda as part of a "harsh, obsessed, violent" poetics which bucks against the editing advice Moore (and her mother, Mary Moore) proffered Elizabeth Bishop.

In her letters to Moore, Bishop used “violence” as a point of distinction between the style she wished to write in and the style the Moores were attempting to impose. Bishop used the “violent” aesthetic in her interpretation of Primitivist artists, including the German / Swiss painter Paul Klee. Chronologically, Bishop encountered Klee before she did Neruda. Bishop’s engagement with Klee’s work occurs in 1940. Bishop first discussed Neruda’s writing in 1942. However, it is likely that Bishop first encountered the “Night Chant” independently of Neruda’s writing, through the New York Museum of Modern Art. Bishop’s links to MoMA through Margaret Miller are well-documented. The museum gave an exhibition of Navajo sand-painting and healing chants in March–April 1941. Speaking on “these rituals” exhibited, Joseph Campbell records they “are of one night, three nights, or nine nights” (36). “Night Chant” is the sole nine-night Navajo ritual. Through MoMA, “Night Chant” had entered Bishop’s milieu. For Bishop, “Night Chant” and Primitivism are associated with MoMA’s New York avant-garde. In this schema, “Night Chant” and “*Alberto Rojas Giménez viene volando*” are independent concerns for Bishop, and the translation of Neruda is a link to an already-present Primitivist aesthetic. With Klee adopted as an influence, Primitivism and the rituals of autochthonous peoples are associated with a “violent” poetics.

The “Invitation to Miss Marianne Moore” is, among many modes, a rewrite of an invitation, which was sent October 1940, to an exhibition of Klee’s paintings. The letter of invitation makes reference to ritualistic travel (“mesmerized”) across the Brooklyn Bridge, the mesmerism of the travel which became a major point of Bishop’s 1948 poem. The Klee exhibition was held at the Buchholz Gallery, October 9th to November 20th, 1940, and a catalogue was produced by the gallery’s German-born operator, Curt Valentin. Eight years before the poem’s composition, in October 1940, Bishop wrote to Moore with a forerunner of the “Invitation to Miss Marianne Moore.” The letter confirms that Neruda has been co-opted by Bishop’s aesthetics rather than receiving a self-sustaining being in English from an act of translation. Bishop wrote to refuse Moore’s editing advice for the poem “Roosters”:

I know that esthetically [sic] you are quite right, but I can’t bring myself to sacrifice what (I think) is a very important “violence” of tone - which I feel to be helped by what *you* must feel to be just a bad case of the *Threes*. It makes me feel like a wonderful Klee picture I saw at his show the other day, *The Man of Confusion*. I wonder if you could be mesmerized across the Brooklyn bridge to see it again with me? (96-97)

The cantabile values of the “Night Chant” refrain are blatant formalism—similar to the overt *terza rima* of Bishop’s “Roosters.” “*Alberto Rojas Giménez viene volando*” is used as an evocation of the “violence” of such overt formal corrals. Following, my argument is that Bishop has used “translation,” in her role as mentee, to turn the healing “Night Chant” into an act of violence directed toward Moore. The “violence” is symptomatic of Bishop’s desire for an individuated poetics. Bishop’s 1940 letter indicates a conflation of form and tone, predicated on the appearance of the poetics. Instead of following a normative form, say iambics, or an intricate construction, say Moore’s syllabics in “A Carriage from Sweden,” Bishop presents a poetic practice that is an outright dismissal of Moore’s advice. (W. D. Snodgrass points out that the syllabic arrangement in “A Carriage from Sweden” is an evocation of iambic tetrameter; syllabics of course grant freedom to emulate standardised forms, but the intention of using the form is somewhat altered. Snodgrass’s

discussion is found: “The Use of Meter” in *Southern Review* 35.4 (1999)). Bishop takes a non-normative form which is dependent on the line, and not the interlinear arrangement of syllables. “Invitation to Miss Marianne Moore” is a palpable rejection of Moore’s mentoring, and Klee enters as the one Surrealist Bishop has made available to Moore; Neruda is unannounced. That the poem seems to describe Moore in such detail indicates an intended apposition and opposition between Moore and Klee.

Bishop engages Primitivism to imply her preference for a Surrealist aesthetic and to lend weight to her future use of the style. With Bishop having labelled Neruda a disjunct from Moore’s tastes in the letter of 1942, the English poem corrupts what it seems to be praising. This corruption, in line with the aims of “Night Chant,” is an ironic “healing” of Moore’s poetics. In this instance, translation is used idiosyncratically as a means of breaking away from a mentor. And Neruda is used as a cipher for a mode of Surrealism in English which is predicated on works by artists using continental European languages. The Primitivism is used to displace Moore from a position as poetic source. *Real* expression is delimited as separate from Moore’s modes, with Bishop preferring the vagueness which, using Primitivism, she has attached to her own reworking of translation. In doing so, Bishop locates Moore among traditions of English-language sensibility and expressivity. Bishop’s encounter with the Primitive aesthetic is not intended to bring something into *that* English, but to advance an idiosyncratic English with a series of indefinable limits. In such a regard, translation is not between the limits of languages, but also between the limits of experience and expression.

Bishop is content to keep her mode of translation disjunct from American English. To the monoglot, she does not reveal “Invitation to Miss Marianne Moore” is a translation of several Primitivist associations. In the best Latin American tradition (according to US cinema), a great deal of shady stuff is imported into the US whilst the powers that be are kept unaware. The disjuncture is a separation from Moore’s editorial purview. There is a role-reversal wherein Bishop assumes the mentor role over the “mesmerized” Moore. Bishop invites Moore to Surrealism to lead her away from properness, and to express her personal dissatisfaction with the sensibility. In this regard, the poem’s association may be with Neruda’s Rojas Giménez before Elizabeth Bishop / Dudley Fitts’ Neruda. In his memoir, *Confieso que he vivido: Memorias* (“*I Confess that I Have Lived: Memoirs*”), Neruda recalls that “Mimicking me, in gentle fun, he helped me get rid of my melancholy tone” (39). Kathryn Kent writes on Bishop’s ambivalence toward the Moores, Marianne and Mary:

In “Efforts of Affection,” Bishop explicitly connects these negative constructions to Mrs. [Mary] Moore’s use of language: “Waiting for the conclusion of her longer statements, I grew rather nervous; nevertheless, I found her extreme precision enviable and thought I could detect echoes of Marianne’s own style in it: the use of double or triple negatives, the lighter or wittier ironies – Mrs. Moore had provided a sort of ground base for them” ... In using the term “negative,” Bishop clearly alludes to what she refers to elsewhere as the “over-fastidious” moral prescriptions enforced by Moore and her mother. (188)

The descriptions Bishop gives of Moore's writing are to the order of mimicry. The poem, which is a *double* insofar as a translation is in two languages, doubles on the level of "invitation" and "rejection." In "Invitation to Miss Marianne Moore," Moore's affectations resolve to agency and opportunity denied: "We can sit down and weep; we can go shopping, / or play at a game of constantly being wrong / with a priceless set of vocabularies" (83). Bonnie Costello, the Moore scholar, asks "Is this Bishop's reminder about the limits of art? ... Bishop again sees the corrupt world seething underneath compelling surfaces" (147). "Priceless" is, on one level, literalised, as meaning *without price* because Moore is unaware of these translated vocabularies. Bishop's translation, a ciphering of Surrealist modes, is intended to indicate the Moores' restrictive artistic taste is naïveté toward the actual being seething below.

Spurred by the Moores, Bishop's translation of "*Alberto Rojas Giménez viene volando*" is a refraction of Paul Klee's influence on her work, and so distinct from an attempt to bring (solely) Neruda into English. The oft-repeated point that Moore objected to Bishop including the word "water-closet" in "Roosters" is repeated to indicate a puritanical bent in the Moores' editing. In the same passage of "Efforts of Affection" that Kent cites from, Bishop notes "I was scolded for having used 'water closet' in a poem, but by then I had turned obstinate" (130). "By then" is the 1940s and, following the October 1940 letter, Klee is then presented as an influence opposed to Moore's. "Invitation to Miss Marianne Moore" is a melting pot of Bishop's influences, but one which distances the writer from the eponymous subject. The poem reflects ambivalence towards Moore which runs as an undercurrent through Bishop's writing. As a means of disguising intentions, translation could be made to fit around Bishop's praxes. Further, the translation of Neruda is not an attempt to reconcile the influences Bishop claimed and that, as is reflected in her prose writing, were felt to be trying to claim Bishop. Klee is associated with a tonal "violence," and, by Bishop, associated with Neruda's violent stylistic which Angel Flores excised. Here, Primitivism benefits Bishop by allowing for the authoritative use of unconventional forms. The Klee painting *Man of Confusion* is one authority among artworks which represent influence's power to divide the artist. One stratum of "Invitation to Miss Marianne Moore" is a response to the division she noted in the Klee.

Bishop's October 1940 letter to Moore connects *Man of Confusion* as a parallel to the "violence" of "Roosters" meter. The picture shows a male figure separated into component parts and scattered across the picture plane. In *Deep Skin: Elizabeth Bishop and Visual Art*, Peggy Samuels connects this separation to a poetics of lines broken up and separated by the three-step-stanza. The "Invitation to Miss Marianne Moore" goes slightly further by separating the parts of Moore's poetics into distinct divisions, each marked off from the other by the end line "please come flying." Samuels identifies one of these divisions—"grammar that suddenly turns and shines"—as the crux of *A Cold Spring*. The line from "Invitation to Miss Marianne Moore" is superficially in reference to Moore's use of multiple negatives and the way a negative clause may be twisted, repeatedly, to the affirmative. The multiple negatives are identified as something to be "healed" by the use of "Night Chant," wherein the turning and shining is in the recognition of another aesthetic: Bishop's. Samuels writes that different linguistic codes "'turn' at nodal points, examples of these points are metaphors or visual images, so that layers can cross into one another or surfaces can unfold outward from other surfaces or drop into depths" (131). Each of the line-based divisions which Bishop

employs in resistance to Moore's editing principles is a turn to the pluralised voices present in the text: Neruda, Navajo and Klee.

One "unfolding" from Klee is the avowal of the seriousness and public relevance of Primitivism. Bishop's intention for the art is a fresh appeal to the roots, the *Uranfänge*, that Primitivism aligns with pre-tradition. Klee associated his own work with Primitivism and Bishop, a noted consumer of artists' books, was aware of the association made by and made of Klee. Klee wrote:

Es gibt nämlich auch noch Uranfänge von Kunst, wie man sie eher im ethnographischen Museum findet [...] Alles das ist in Wahrheit viel ernster zu nehmen als sämtliche Kunstmuseen, wenn es gilt, die heutige Kunst zu reformieren. (Erwin, 285)

("Namely, the roots of art are [now] more often found in ethnographic museums ... All of this is to be involved, rather, far more seriously in weighting [both "heaviness" and "evaluation"] deepnesses of the truth in art museums, [used] in reforming the present art.")

We can elucidate Klee's goal in using the *Uranfränge von Kunst* from the inscription of his tombstone (Klee's son Felix was responsible for selecting the inscription, which was claimed to be his father's credo). Klee makes death motific for the hidden and unreachable, for him and for German Late Romanticism (e.g. Walter Benjamin's monolithic authoritative text "*Die Aufgabe des Übersetzers*" ["The Task of the Translator"]) an idealised goal, and so fitting the way that a translation naming a "source" may be critiqued as a continual collapse in on itself attempting to find anchorage in the intertextual. Primitivism contemporary to Bishop is more concerned with attempting to "drop anchor" than attempting to *find* anchorage. Klee's tombstone:

Diesseitig bin ich gar nicht fassbar.
Den ich wohne grad so gut bei den Toten.
Wei bei den Ungeborenen.
Etwas näher dem Herzen der Schöpfung als üblich.
Und noch lange nicht nahe genug.

("I can't be grasped in the here and now because my presence is among the dead, as one yet unborn, a little closer to creation's heart than usual, but still not close enough.")

Death is one clue about the way Klee's work stresses that figures in extra-human positions are more easily reconciled with the intentions an artist may have. To become extra-human is a disavowal of tradition, and a deliberate regression to a time when myth was reality lived. In such a schematic, a translation does not *tell* about a foreign work, but *lives* it as though for the first ever time. Bishop fits the outline of Neruda's poem to her position as mentored-by-Moore to live the mythic Neruda text as experienced reality. In this way, Bishop's translation is a denial of any "source" which could position her text as secondary.

Bishop's bringing Primitivism into contact with the theoretical side of Modernist translation is largely unprecedented, but the movement from "myth" to "reality" is a well-established aspect of Primitivist thought. Bronislaw Malinowski's 1926 study, *Myth in Primitive Psychology*, situates the so-called "primitive" society as the foundational and grounding point of myth. Malinowski's

writing allows for twentieth century Primitivism to be read as a reconfiguration of “tales told” into “reality lived.” Tales, which are predicated on the experience of reality, shape reality.

The myth in a primitive society, i.e. in its original living form, is not a mere tale told but a reality lived. It is not in the nature of an invention such as we read in our novels today, but living reality, believed to have occurred in primordial times and to be influencing ever afterwards the world and the destinies of men. ... These stories are not kept alive by the vain curiosity, neither as tales that have been invented nor again as tales that are true. For the natives on the contrary they are the assertion of an original, greater, and more important reality through which the present life, fate, and work of mankind are governed, and the knowledge of which provides men on the one hand with motives for ritual and moral acts, on the other with directions for the performance. (Jung and Kerényi, 7)

Primitivism is a reassessment of modern reality lived. The primitive society Malinowski discusses positions myth as reality. Language-based myth is intrinsic to experience and so, in Primitivism, is notably *experienced*. The “original, greater, and more important reality” is, in relation to Elizabeth Bishop’s writing, an indefinable but authoritative aesthetic. This is, to belabour the point, the aesthetic that Bishop attempts to achieve and to define by invoking Paul Klee in her poetry and letters. The aesthetic is defined only sparingly in Bishop’s writing; part of the aesthetic is the freedom from enforced fidelity to stringent delimitations. Bishop’s essay in memoriam the painter Gregorio Valdes gives the public thrust of her engagement with “primitive” artists of the twentieth century. The 1939 essay is printed in *The Collected Prose*. In Bishop, the style is glossed as Valdes’ “peculiar and captivating freshness, flatness, and remoteness” (58). “Primitive” is a tag which is applied to a certain “class of painters,” so it is not necessary to claim that all Primitivists, for Bishop, have the same “flatness” or “remoteness.” Bishop’s interest lies in the peculiarity of these artists. More than anything for Bishop, Primitivism in translation is a strategy for self-individuation.

In an image both connoting Giménez’s death and the fluctuating surface plane of translations, Bishop writes “the waves are running in verse this fine morning” (82). In Neruda’s poem, “*Allí está el mar.*” (“There is always the sea.”) There is the metaphysical “healing” associated with “Night Chant,” but there is also the blunt approach: a mentor being in the position of a dead person. The Primitive, following Klee, is used by Bishop as an authority alternative to Moore. Klee employs Primitivism to engender a complete and essential creation. Bishop’s letters show fascination with this, but an inability to describe it. (Bishop, *Words in Air* 250) As Samuels writes of Bishop, “Klee’s paintings moved her because of their ability to express the dismemberment caused by the invasion of a force from outside that enters the self and severs its integrity” (57).

The translation of Neruda is an aggressive disavowal of the mentor’s self-integrity. The Primitivist interpretation of essentialism is less useful than a constant poetics of opposition against mentor figures. “Invitation to Miss Marianne Moore” uses the Navajo form as exemplified by Neruda to spread Moore’s literary activities into constituent parts. The *Man of Confusion* is applied to Moore; if she will not travel to the exhibit then Bishop will bring the works to her. The many images of Moore—flying, writing, lion-leading and weeping—are separated by the “Night Chant” refrain. In doing so, the Navajo form is used to impose an analogue of *The Man of Confusion’s*

dismemberment on a presumed monist stability in the writing of the mentor.

Elizabeth Bishop gestures toward a poetics of translation predicated on hierarchically divisible component parts. Klee is an influence which led to “Night Chant” which led to Neruda, etc.. The degree to which the components are separate is less important than their plurality. The intention of such a poetics is the plural coding of a single text: “Invitation to Miss Marianne Moore” presents a list of Moore’s qualities liked by Bishop but is more a coding of Bishop’s aims for aesthetics distinct from Moore’s sole influence. This coding is hugely reliant on Bishop withholding the name “Neruda” from her poem in publication. The poem appears a reconciliatory reaction to Moore’s criticism of “Roosters” and the subsequent *Man of Confusion*-aesthetics Bishop attempted to bring Moore to. That Neruda comes *following* Klee is a layering of the signification process affected by a translation. The urge to read the poem biographically, as Moore herself fell prey to, is used as a surface aesthetic and so a component part of the surface-separation schema which is manifest as a plurality of modes in all translation.

Whether “Invitation to Miss Marianne Moore” may be called a translation really depends on what relation is necessary between a text and an “original.” Does a translation have to come from a singular text? Can the translation be a response to the encounter with a text, or a textual tradition, in another language? Or the same language? Is “translation” a process for literary alchemy and, if so, why does one writing have to represent one other? “Invitation to Miss Marianne Moore” codes a potential response, bound up in Surrealism, to an extant poetics felt to be represented by Moore. The end result, predicated on Surrealist responses to Primitive art, is a mass of pictures contained within a single artwork: polyptychism. So, the translation is not of a past writing, nor a historic author, but of a response to the development of English writing in the future. Elizabeth Bishop’s motivation for excising the name “Neruda” finds motivation in the resistance to tradition- and history-based translations: instead of translating something that has already been written, Bishop translates what she would like to write in the future.

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Unless otherwise noted, the translations included in this piece are my own.