



"Queer temporality and refutation of linear time in "In the Waiting Room" & "Sestina" of Elizabeth Bishop with insights from the theory of Queer Time by Halberstam."

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Abstract in English

This research will interpret the poetry of Elizabeth Bishop as resisting linear time in its structures, scenes, and affects for "In the Waiting Room" and "Sestina" to illustrate the truth of Jack Halberstam's formulation of "queer time". According to Halberstam, "queer time" refers to an alternative to linear modes of temporal existence that structure subjectivity and world-building. It resists narratives of progress that move from childhood to adulthood and toward other developmental or normative endpoints. Through this analysis, I will argue for the existence of "queer time" within Bishop's poetics as one of halted childhood perception and recursive time, where "In the Waiting Room" mediates temporal dislocation as an aftereffect of a moment of shock experienced by a child subject and "Sestina" codifies temporal dislocation as an effect of "queer time" typified by Jack Halberstam's notion of "alternative chronologies". I will argue finally for the thesis that despite predating the definition of "queer time," the poetry of Elizabeth Bishop exemplifies "queer time" as one of halted childhood perception and temporal recursively and dislocation as in "Sestina" as one that refuses linear times and linear temporalities as ordered by dominant narratives of childhood and adolescence and adulthood as those defined by heteronormative futurisms and by developmental and continuous paradigms of normalcy and normal development and times to come.

Paper Info

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Introduction

Scholars have long been drawn to Bishop's subtle examinations of identity and perception, as well as her persistent preoccupation with memory and loss. As Bonnie Costello observes, Bishop's style is shaped by a "reticent lyric intelligence," a mode in which surface clarity coexists with deeper ontological uncertainty (Costello 4). Her poems reveal a keen attentiveness to the smallest details of landscape, sound, gesture, and movement, while simultaneously exposing the ongoing struggle to situate the self within the world—geographically, psychologically, and temporally (Gill). Throughout her work, recurring themes of fragmented memory, adolescent trauma, and experiences of alienation underscore Bishop's inclination to unsettle conventional expectations of temporal order and causality.

Two poems are exemplary in regard to the complex temporal vision of Bishop: "In the Waiting Room" and "Sestina." In both cases, time refuses to unfold linearly, prohibiting any conclusive trajectories that might proceed from the past to the present or from childhood to adulthood. Instead, the poet creates temporal loops, pauses, or psycho-emotional intervals in which the ego-consciousness of the speaker finds itself detained or unraveled.

This research will demonstrate that "In the Waiting Room" and "Sestina" will trace queer temporalities through the use of non-linear narrative, repetition and recall, suspended childhood experience, the subversion of familial chronology, and the rejection of developmental narratives tracing Bishop's poetic resistance to linear time and normalized developments towards maturity. In both, time resists the logics of succession and sequence: experience recurs, fragments, stagnates, and recurs again. Recursive narratives tracing temporal spirals rather than linear trajectories: 'In the Waiting Room' spirals back through memory and bodily knowledge, while 'Sestina' echoes the repetition of words marking the movement of clock hands tracing the same contracted space, ever circling, never progressing. Childhood experience resists becoming the starting point of a linear progression toward a fully realized identity. Instead, it remains suspended and unsettled, revealing how a childhood perspective disrupts narratives that move from confusion to clarity, from immaturity to maturity, and from girlhood to womanhood. Familial chronology resists providing any coherent or inherited mechanism to the narratives instead subverting to discontinuity: the sister's cry, the grandmother's tears, the child's fear-working to disrupt the notion of a fluid passing through generations of familial time. In rejecting normative developmental narratives, the two texts instead trace queer forms of development, queering the very notion of becoming and resisting trajectories oriented toward reproductive futurism or the achievement of heterosexual maturity.

Thus, Bishop's poetry syncs with Halberstam's conceptual framework in unexpected ways. Although Bishop's poetry antedates the queer conceptual framework of temporality by several decades, it strangely previews the key insights of this conceptual framework: time is not temporally neutral, and identity and emotion are not linear. In these regards, it does not aim to biographically and historically declare Bishop as a queer poet, but instead, her queer poetic structures, experiences, and times are observed. According to Susan Rosenbaum, "Bishop's poetry. opens imaginative space for alternative identities and subjectivities". In light of these, Bishop's poetic endeavors

have a pertinent relation with contemporary theoretical debates about time, identity, and affect. In the following discussion, I elaborate on these allegations with privileged theoretical perspectives and close reading analyses regarding how Bishop's poems queer time in aesthetic, emotional, and philosophical ways.

The Theoretical Framework

Queer temporality is a name for a set of critical concepts that intervene in, and challenge, reigning assumptions on how time ought to pass, particularly in regard to a developing, progressive, and telos-driven life trajectory marked by a universal, necessary, and proper sequence of developmental milestones culminating in reproductive adulthood. Traditional, or chrononormative, time, Elizabeth Freeman defines, "synchronizes individual life spans with social institutions like marriage, procreation, inheritance, and retirement. This is how we, socially, think about life, anticipating its social fulfillment through a predetermined sequence of developmental milestones that culminates in reproductive adulthood. Chrononormative time is a social institution, one that temporalizes individual life through a developmental, progressive, and predetermined life sequ

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Chrono normative, traditional, or normal time assumes a progressive, linear trajectory from past to present to future, with value placed on forward, productive momentum and significant, socially approved milestones. Queer temporality, on the other hand, emphasizes non-linear, disjunctive, cyclical, or otherwise non-progressive temporal experiences that refuse, challenge, or subvert this straight, progressive, past-to-present-to-future temporal logic.

Jack Halberstam provides the foundational framework for theorizing queer time in *In a Queer Time and Place*, where he argues that queer time unfolds not through normative chronological expectations but through "delay, deviation, and detour" (6). For Halberstam, queer temporality is marked by temporal ruptures that refuse teleological progress, producing meaning through recursive rather than accumulative patterns. These ruptures appear in delays between conventional life stages, deviations from expected trajectories, and repeated returns to moments that resist narrative integration (103).

Halberstam also proposes childhood as a potentially queer temporal formation. Whereas chrononormative ideology treats childhood merely as a step toward reproductive adulthood, Halberstam argues that childhood operates through fluidity, repetition, and presence—qualities that form an alternative temporality incompatible

with developmental or procreative timelines. In this sense, queerness and childhood both privilege atemporality and recurrence over linear progress.

Halberstam's concept of queer time offers a flexible lens to study Elizabeth Bishop's poetry. It highlights non-linear, recurrent, or disruptive temporal patterns, suggesting that her work may resist conventional chronological expectations, who writes with this queer temporal structure decades before the theoretical work of Halberstam. In "In the Waiting Room," for example, the unity and identity of the young speaker's experience will not resolve and suggest an identification with a growing towards maturity and an adult identity. On the contrary, the experience creates a temporal disruption where the boundaries of time itself seem to flow into the immediate presence of the speaker and suggest an overwhelming recognition of co-incident experiences: "Why should I be my aunt, or me, or anyone?" (Bishop 63-4). This temporal structure will suggest not the progression towards identity or understanding based on the assumption of a youth adult transition towards an integrated and whole identity but instead propose an identity melted into the affective time of the present and the simultaneous presence of an overwhelming array of experiences.

Bishop, Queerness, and Time: A Critical Context

Over the past decades, critical studies of Bishop have increasingly approached her as a queer writer, emphasizing a poetics that resists heteronormative identity and linear conceptions of time. In recent years, more attention has turned towards the queer correspondence between Bishop's writing and her biography: both as lived extension and deep connection. As D.A. Miller suggests, queer artistic expression has traditionally required "indirection, innuendo, and code. The Bishop impulse that is both most distinctive and stylistically queer is clearly a device or strategy of deferring overt claims about identity in favor of its affective presence.

Queer interpretations of Bishop might see her as having a fluid poetic identity that moves away from the unitary subject position of the confession poetics. Heather Treseler argues that the Bishop poems "produce emotional knowledge through the intervention of temporal positioning, narrative fracture, and tonal instability." These are already signs of a departure from narrative, and thus a queer temporality, as posited by Halberstam.

In fact, it was Angus Cleghorn who was the first of the critics to take the queerness of Bishop's poetry so centrally, finding in her landscapes the fact of their being "eroticised topographies that refract desire, shame, and longing" as opposed to simply descriptive topographies. Subsequent critics take this point and follow it in seeing the poetry of Bishop as one of displacement and distance in relation to Bishop's poetics of time itself. Peggy Samuels suggests her poetry follows the principle of "recurrence rather than resolution" to create a structure which follows the queer temporality of repetition. (Samuels, Peggy 2010).

Recent scholarship by Michelle Gil-Montero identifies Bishop's notion of self as one that is conditional upon a "poetics of delay" where self is only provisionally asserted by deferral (Gil-Montero 91). Likewise, Jonathan Ellis observes that Bishop is particularly fond of depicting circumstances where self is constituted by "fragment,

echo, and repetition," where self indicates time as an expansive and repetitive process rather than linear developmental episodes (Ellis 117).

In terms of important scholarship on queer Bishop studies, there is Jennifer Chang, who argues that Sullivan's description of female body writing in Bishop's poetry "In the Waiting Room" "destabilizes normative chronology" by equating childhood experience, adult remembering, and mythic time at once. In other words, "capable of temporal suspension without paralysis" is a poem tuned to the refusal of developmental progress implicit in queer time.

Bishop's message explore her relationships with women, and in *One Art: Letters* she notes, "I am always between places, never settled" (Bishop 224). Millier interprets this as "a queer sensual experience of time and space, one that resists arrival or completion" (Millier 301).

This frame can be expanded upon by theorists such as Patterson and Wilson, and later by Victoria Harrison, to incorporate a cognitive dissonance between external and internal perception to describe a temporal ambiguity comparable to queerness, inaccessibility (Harrison, 277). Similarly, I would like to suggest that these same elements are present in "In the Waiting Room" and "Sestina".

Perhaps we might transform an existing interpretation of Bishop's hesitation to assert identity openly, as emotional secrecy, into a queer defiance of categorical constitution. As Lorrie Goldensohn suggests, Bishop's "schedule of reticence" is deeply queer, "neither silence nor confession, but a linguistic statement of desire, one that circles its subject rather than naming it" (Goldensohn 92). This circling is literally instantiated by the sestina form, such that Bishop's repetitive final words circle rather than line up along a timeline.

Bonnie Costello goes on to elaborate that Bishop's depiction of childhood "enacts this awareness of difference without attempting to resolve it or synthesize it." childhood, if anything, is not used in this manner as a developmental precursor to adulthood but rather something else entirely different; childhood becomes this suspended temporal state. Thomas Travis asserts that the speaker in Bishop's "In the Waiting Room" fixes themselves within this temporally ambivalent state of identity, child and adult simultaneously, within "an identity crisis articulated by queer time rather than by developmental narrative."

Queer temporality challenges linear, developmental time, emphasizing repetition, simultaneity, and non-normative sequences. Trauma temporality, by contrast, reflects disruptions in memory caused by traumatic events, producing non-linear, fragmented narratives without necessarily critiquing social or normative temporal structures.

Bishop's life was marked from an early age by displacement and loss, experiences that profoundly shaped her sense of temporality. Her father died before she reached the age of one, and her mother was shortly thereafter committed to an asylum. Consequently, Bishop spent her childhood moving between relatives' homes in Nova Scotia and New England, an experience she later described as "all geography and grief" (Bishop as qtd. in Travis 138), equating mental turmoil with geographical dislocation.

This biographical context illuminates what critics describe as the queerness of her temporality: rather than unfolding linearly, her experience of time is fragmented, overlapping, and recursive. Trauma scholars such as Cathy Caruth have argued that trauma often produces “nonlinear structures of time, in which past events erupt into the present... one might coexist with those events” (11). In Bishop’s poetry, this coexistence is enacted vividly, as in “*In the Waiting Room*” and “*Filling Station*,” where childhood experience, adult memory, and mythic or spatial time converge, destabilizing chronological order and challenging normative temporal narratives.

Childhood, as a concept in Bishop’s art, is non-teleological and durational. It is a queer time, to be sure, first of all because the subject is sexually non-normative, but also because childhood is a time that resists becoming past. Halberstam goes so far as to say that “queer time is time lived outside the logic of development” (Halberstam 16). Bishop’s child subjects anatomize these parameters: they are without becoming.

However, the aspect of displacement, or the Bishop’s physical existence in terms of space, also contributes to another experience of time disorientation. Bishop spent most of her adult years in Brazil, physically located outside the national and cultural environments which constituted the lives of Americans back in America. Harrison says, “Exilic experience did enable Bishop to formulate a self separate from genealogical narratives, a queer self unattached from the familial narrative’s requirement for normalcy and coherence” (Harrison 281). This is supported by another scholar who says Bishop, an exile poet, “is a poet of middles—past and present, here and elsewhere, child and adult” (Samuels 147).

This is expressed in terms of the chronology of the poems. In “*In the Waiting Room*,” say, what happens is that there is a collision between “war news”, National Geographic’s women, an aunt’s scream, and the speaker’s notion of herself, and it is in terms of observing all of this that the speaker experiences time. This is because there is no linear experience of time, but instead an overlap between time and time, and world time and world time. This overlap is nothing short of what Halberstam Tester:

Temporality in Bishop’s works represents the categories of both formal and existential philosophy. With Bishop, “temporality itself” becomes pressed, says Goldensohn, and so “a space opens for trauma and sexuality” to create a world of Bishop’s poetry, a world “where nothing follows from anything” (78). Temporality in Bishop’s world is not a ladder but a tidal wave, unpredictably flooding the subject back in time. Finally, the rejection of reproductive futurity in the bishop’s work puts it in dialogue with the queer critiques of futurism, including those offered by Lee Edelman. Indeed, the bishop’s poetry tends to eschew the future; instead, it remembers, recurs to, and stays in the past. As Fogarty points out, “The child in the bishop’s poetry is never future-oriented; she is a figure of presentness, of suspended time” (Fogarty 207). This is also reflected in Halberstam’s definition of queer time: Halberstam writes, “Queer time emphasizes the here and now rather than the future” (Halberstam 2).

Therefore, the queerness of Bishop’s work—the formal, textual, affective, and biographical quality of her queerness—remarks itself first and foremost as a temporal condition. This indicates that the poetics of Bishop’s work demonstrate the nonlinearity of time itself and the nonsequentially based nature of identity and memory. Instead,

what marks this poetics is the existence of a queer modernism that precedes and extends the notion of queer time into the twenty-first century.

"In the Waiting Room" and Queer Temporalities

In "*In the Waiting Room*," Elizabeth Bishop performs childhood memory as a non-linear, disjunctive, and dislocating space where the construction of the self is predicated not on developmental logic, but on dislocation, interruption, and disidentification. The poem depicts an incident anomalous to the conventionally linear trajectory of childhood memory, setting memory as a repetitive, rather than representational or historical, space, in which the self is dislocated rather than fully formed. This approach aligns with Halberstam's assertion that queer temporalities are "imagined not in continuity but in the break, the delay, the refusal" (In a Queer Time 6). Bishop's formal choices—narrative pace, fragmented perspective, and subjective perception—reinforce a temporal experience that is protracted, simultaneous, and resistant to conventional sequencing, thereby interrupting the "coming-of-age" trope and repudiating adult futurity.

Compared to formalist interpretations, which often emphasize Bishop's precise diction, structural symmetry, and narrative coherence as mechanisms of aesthetic control, this queer reading shifts focus from form as representation to form as temporal intervention. While formalist critics celebrate the poem's orderly arrangement and rhythmic balance as evidence of mastery, a queer temporal reading interprets these same features as strategies that stage temporal disjunction and highlight the contingency, multiplicity, and recursive nature of memory, emphasizing experience over developmental progression. In this way, Bishop's work can be seen as anticipating queer temporal theory, using form not merely to depict but to perform an alternative, non-linear temporality.

This queer temporality is underpinned by the poem's interior framework: it is embedded within an adult narrative about childhood but is strictly contained within the present experience of that childhood. Rather than working between levels in time, Bishop collapses these levels together. The speaker declares, "I was six and a half" (Bishop 40), but this is not an index that fixes the speaker in developmental time; it is the provisional nature that follows. She remembers not the progression from childhood into adulthood but the violent disruption within the experience of being a child. "Time seems to stop," or at least distort beyond recognition, "when I confronted this macabre knowledge of self," when the speaker faces an "uncanny realization about the nature of self," "And I said to myself: three days / and you'll be seven years old" (84-85). This is the poem's most straightforward "marking the progression from the third past the first noun," that is, the passing days leading up to the celebration of the speaker's birthday. Of course, this straight-line progression is immediately subverted by the affective use of this progression. Instead of marking continuity, it is made one with shock. The progression from days is made inconsequential and makes the arrival at the speaker's birthday shocking and even menacing.

"The self-address, 'I said to myself,' emphasizes fracture rather than unity: a child speaking to herself as if she were already split away from herself." This sudden realization of reaching the age of seven disrupts any feelings of euphoria related to this milestone:

‘you are an Elizabeth,’”
“You are one of them.” (89-90)

However, instead of becoming even more firmly who she is, she disappears into plurality—one among “them,” the women in the waiting room, the National Geographic women, the others that throng her mind. This poem refuses the speaker the privilege of situating herself within the framework of a normal and proper developmental narrative. Instead, by queer time, Bishop marks the moment of the self that is no different from the other. According to Halberstam, queer time unsettles “the coordinates of past and future” by erasing the boundaries of identity, and thus produces “a temporal horizon of simultaneity rather than sequence” (Halberstam 13). This simultaneity is perfectly realized in Bishop’s text where all of history, all of womanhood, all of global identity, burst in all at once, not in sequence, but in layers.

The speaker's temporal shock is amplified through her experience with National Geographic, which is a text that opens up not a future but a world that is impossibly present, immediate, and chilling. This is because the horrific image—“black, naked women, with necks wound / round and round with wire” (51-52)—surges into the speaker’s mind with the moment she hears her aunt cry out, which is a moment of bodily recognition, terror, and time all at once. Rather than situating childhood as a time prior to or prelude to adulthood, the speaker replays the child back into awareness of gender, mortality, history, and pain, with no temporality separating them. Thus, childhood is not prior to or antecedent to adulthood; rather, childhood is co-contained with adulthood, with history and death. By such means, Bishop subverts the traditional experience of childhood as a developmental antecedent, replacing linear time with recursive time. Halberstam’s explanation of this point as queer time: “Queer time appears most forcibly in gaps, dislocations, and ruptures that disrupt the smooth trajectory of identity” (5).

Indeed, the defining moment in the poem is just that—a rift or disconnect that suggests an experience through which time is realized to be non-linear and disjointed. This experience disrupts the link between the past and the future; instead, the act sieves the moment to freeze it in suspended animation:

“What took me so long
completely by surprise
was that it was me” (70-72).

This is not merely recognition; this is the destruction of the self. The shock does not lead to understanding but to the destabilization of the boundaries of self and non-self, of past and future. The recognition of “it was me” is identical with the recognition of “I was one of them”—not different, not distinct, not growing towards a fixed sense of self but melting into social and temporal plurality.

Nor is the temporal expansion suggested in the poetry reinforced in terms of form. Bishop stretches out the pause in the story far beyond what might be considered necessary in order to relate this memory. While the memory itself takes only minutes, this poetry stretches out that time in an almost epic manner. There is nothing “happening” in terms of the story during this time; rather, there is a thickening of time itself. According to Heather Treseler, this “poetics of duration” allows “memory” in

this poetry “to be suspended inside itself” as opposed to being measured against progress (Treseler 58). There is a rejection in queer temporality of teleological progress.

Not even the last lines of the poem offer closure, nothing is resolved:
"Nothing is resolved.
"The waiting room was bright
and too hot. It was sliding
beneath a big black wave." (95-97)

The world is never solved; rather, it incessantly returns as overwhelming and chaotic. Time does not begin anew. The child does not grow up. No lessons are learned, nor is there any progress toward adulthood or storytelling of achieved selfhood. The gap in time is thus left open. The open-endedness of this scenario immediately disrupts chrononormativity—the expectation of bodily movement through socially approved temporal signifiers: birthdays, puberty, adulthood, and reproduction—that Elizabeth Freeman describes. Bishop frames the birthday itself as a point of discontinuity: three days to be turned seven, yet the clock stands still. The future is so intolerable as to embody developmental necessity. Turning seven would signify a movement towards adulthood, towards womanhood, towards all the normed expectations associated with female maturation. The shock of the voice here is not merely existential; it is also temporal. The voice resists progress.

This stance is consistent with Halberstam’s assertion that “queer temporality opposes adulthood as the normative implication of childhood” (Halberstam 153). Rather, “queer time is a mode of embodied experience that exists in a perpetual state of presentness” (Halberstam 153) and is thus a condition of time itself, a quality of “duration” (Sontag 155) rather than a process of development through time. Bishop builds this quality of duration through form, as the poem is more time than narrative, more pause than event itself. Even the title, “In the Waiting Room,” is a placeholder signifier, a signifier of a temporal space of suspension, a space defined by pause and ambiguity itself.

Waiting rooms are temporal spaces of suspension, a space of happening-but-not-happening, of arriving-but-not-arriving. The child narrator disidentifies with the normalized temporality not by repudiating womanhood but by being confronted with its terrifying simultaneity, rather than sequentiality. In Elizabeth Bishop’s “*In the Waiting Room*,” “The speaker sees the women in the magazine, and the aunt's cries, the speaker doesn't think of becoming an adult woman; rather, she embodies womanhood, which is already there, queerly non-sequential, inescapable. The moment 'you are one of them' is not developmental but queerly collapsing.”

Moreover, its historical reference to February 1918 fixes the speaker’s memory within the world of war, marking the impossibility of childhood innocence as a stage of development with its own distinct temporalities. The world of war eradicates futurity; it exists instead as a mode in which futurity becomes impossible, in which the future becomes illegible through heteronormative logics because, according to Halberstam, “the future can no longer be imagined through heteronormative logics” (2). The world of Bishop’s wartime experience contains this knell within its own logics of childhood, identity, history, and fear.

Therefore, instead of charting the construction of a fixed identity, what Bishop illustrates here is the disintegration of identity before the presence of temporal simultaneity. Trauma theorists like Cathy Caruth have defined trauma: “The experience of trauma consists in the inability to assimilate the memory of an event into a meaningful temporal order: the past becomes the unassimilable remainder.” This remainder is what happens “too soon, too unexpectedly, to be fully known” (Caruth 4). Though not traditionally traumatological “In the Waiting Room” is nevertheless a good example of this temporal looping process whereby the event itself will not fall into the temporal order of the narrative—instead remaining caught in a perpetual present. This midpoint of “In the Waiting Room,” “What took me completely by surprise,” illustrates the transition from an orderly temporal progression into an experience.

Instead of propelling itself into the future, the poem turns inwards. Instead of clarifying confusion, the poem stirs it up and deepens it. Instead of telegraphing its future as identity, the poem undermines identity. This is not an atypical failure of development; rather, this is a refusal of development with its own queer temporality. Queer time is realized most fully in the poem through the process of disidentification by the speaker. This is because Bishop refuses to position herself within the realms of womanhood, adulthood, or historical identity but rather distances herself from them all. “The temporal crisis is the crisis of becoming.”

The child refuses to accept the notion that she will somehow metamorphose into the adults surrounding her:

““Why should I be my aunt,””
“Or me, or anyone?” (63-64)

“No” is existential; “no” is temporal. “No” challenges the most fundamental notion of the development of identity: that there will be a continuation of the child into an adult incarnation of herself. Rather, the speaker repudiates the notion of one’s continuity over time. There will not be a future. Halberstam emphasizes that the standards and values of queer temporality demand a reconsideration of conventional notions of time. In particular, queer time “is a way of experiencing time that is not governed by linear progression towards a normalizing future” (Halberstam 7), challenging the assumption that personal or social development must follow a predictable trajectory toward heteronormative adulthood.

“In the Waiting Room” is not a poem of childhood. It is a poem of queerness and temporality. In its childhood viewpoint, time is paused and identity is shattered and teleology is disrupted. In waiting rooms, time is no longer space and progress is eliminated, and so is future, and thus time is without continuity and so is personality. “Bishop’s Temporal Crisis” is far from resolved, nor should it be. The strength in this piece lies in its resistance. Instead of progression, there is simultaneity; instead of development, disidentification; instead of adulthood, queer time.

Queer Temporality in “Sestina”

“Sestina,” shows how the form and the theme may combine to provide the experience of a non-linear and non-narrativized temporality. Highly formalized in its sestina structure—a linked set of repeated final words—the poem immediately begins with its closed temporal logic that is constantly returning to the same representation and the same feelings. By its rhythmic repetition, rain imagery, and domestic scene

symbolically representing loss and absence, “Sestina,” in its operating temporality, resists reproductive futurity and the normative narrative of the family and engages with the queer temporality Halberstam identifies. This “deviation, delay, and non-teleological repetition,” Halberstam asserts for the queer temporality, “is the model for an escape from the narrative dreams of sexuality,” where the narrative of the structured sexuality begins with “the expected sequenced progression” (Halberstam 6), and this is precisely the way the poem here structures itself formally.

The poem itself—and specifically its structural necessities—imposes a logic of return. The sequence of end-words, house, grandmother, child, stove, almanac, tears, forms a gridwork of interlocking images, such that the pattern itself imposes the passage of time. The end-words do not represent a series of new actions. They represent a return to the same environment. The manner of repetition, as Helen Vendler points out, is such: “it does not move forward but circles inward, enfolding the reader into a pattern of recurrence that is itself affective” (“Vending Poetry” 112). The effect is the creation of a circular motion, such that the reader is returned, again and again, to the static limits of home.

The opening stanza by Bishop introduces rain as a theme of temporal and emotional stasis. Rain comes “like tears from a new baby’s eyes” (Bishop 1), but the simile defies the typical emotional link; rather, the simile refers to a cycle that binds both nature and emotion, but never resolves them. Rain in the poem by Bishop is not a signal for something new to occur, as in the pastoral or romantic tradition, but rather marks the continuity of an undecidable state. The rain imagery is reiterated in the poem to emphasize that temporal experience in the poem is a matter of duration rather than telos. It is not the movement through time that leads the speaker to a storybook end but the presence in the situation, which is unchanged.

The echoing of the grandmother “darning socks” (Bishop 2) also supports the circular movement. Repair is endless: more sock mending is required, more thread will be broken, and so on. Interestingly, while the grandmother is physically repairing the socks, her thoughts are actually focused on tears. It is evident that the grandmother’s mind “was on the tears” (Bishop 3). There is a smooth transition from sock repair to tears, accounting for how the act of repetition within “Sestina” is more than its literary element.

The interior world within “Sestina”—the stove, grandmother, and child within the house—is neither warm nor nourishing, nor indicative of constructive activity; rather, it is permeated with the images that reverberate within the poem, indicative of absence and unresolved temporalities. This stove “Was black and made / An ambush of shadow / When the wind was whispering” (Bishop 5-7), but it lacks the warmth associated with stoves; instead, it casts shadows, making the interior world eerie rather than warm and welcoming.

Moreover, this whispering of the wind imagines an outside presence that invades interior realms, blurring boundaries between inside and outside, between emotional and physical spaces. This negates the normative understanding of interior world-mediated concepts of time, which tend to be marked by confidentiality and domesticity. The reiterated motif of tears, and the fact that these are suppressed by the grandmother, further complicates this domestic scene. The grandmother’s emotional

unavailability is an absence that pervades the poem—a presence made by absence, as she is physically there but not emotionally available, and whose silence resonates through the repeated refrain of this sestina. The grandmother's sucking "her teeth" (Bishop 34) in the last stanza is a sign of a lack of involvement in the emotional space of the poem—a response not of "tears" but one that is non-committal and acknowledges nothing and everything through its lack of involvement. The protagonist of this poem is in a similar state of suspension about emotional involvement—the protagonist draws "a rigid house" and "a winding pathway" (Bishop 10-11) but in doing so initiates nothing through this drawing, so it is a house without actual experience, a pathway without end or progression towards anything.

In this regard, the "Sestina" suggests trauma-mediated temporality, which Dominick LaCapra associates with the failure of memory and affect to organize experience in a narrative manner, instead persisting in a spiral of returns (LaCapra 44). Thus, the traumatic experience resists the integration of experience, erupts, repeats itself, and continues to be present even when the subject would move ahead in time. The Bishop's rain, stove, and tears do not represent any lingering consequence of a *jouissance* experienced in the past, which would move away from the present of memory to become more remote from the present of the experience itself; instead, they represent the reality of the present which resists the movement ahead toward the future itself. The refusal of resolution of the poem suggests Halberstam's theory of queer time, which resists the typical objectives of hetero-normativity to organize experience in the timeline: reproduction and the continuity of the family: "Queer time does not lead outward toward a reproductive future; it loops inward, across repeating patterns of feeling and experience" (Halberstam 88)."

Conclusion

This paper highlights how Bishop's "In the Waiting Room" and "Sestina" enact queer time by disrupting linear chronology and teleological expectations. Through hesitation, repetition, and temporal fracture, the poems create a non-linear, suspended temporality that aligns with Halberstam's concept of queer temporal topologies, showing how Bishop's poetics anticipate and perform alternative, non-normative experiences of time.

The implications for the study of Bishop are immense. A queer temporality reading of Bishop provides an entirely new level of critical engagement with Bishop's approach to childhood, memory, and interiority—not simply nostalgic or diary-like, but radical from an aesthetic and philosophical perspective. Bishop's poems subvert the conventional assumption that queerness in literature necessarily expresses itself within the bounds of sexual identity, preferring instead the expression of queerness in terms of form and temporality. "Bishop's non-linear approach to poetics expands the definition of resistance in queer theory from the refusal of closure to the logic of return," the "prioritizing affect over chronology," and the "separation between identity formation and reproductive futurity."

However, further research might follow upon this line of thought into Bishop's oeuvre, tracing how she is concerned with queering futurity through poetic means not of reproduction, but of transformation, or how she might be understood to be working within affect theory through representations of affective states that overtake discrete

points in time. Alternatively, one might consider how her work speaks to a new materialist temporality, for which temporality is a question of duration, embodiment, and environment. Bishop's poetry ultimately demonstrates that queering is not a feature of theme, but is a structural, poetic, and epistemological fact. To live in non-linear time is to live in queerness.

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المستخلص:

سيقوم هذا البحث بتحليل شعر إيزابيث بيشوب باعتباره مقاومًا للزمن الخطي في بنياته ومشاهده وأثره النفسي، من خلال قصيدتي "In the Waiting Room" و" *Sestina" ، لتوضيح صحة صياغة جاك هالبرستام لمفهوم "الزمن الكويري". وفقًا لهالبرستام، يشير مصطلح "الزمن الكويري" إلى بديل عن الأشكال الخطية للوجود الزمني التي تشكل الذاتية وبناء العالم. كما يقاوم السرديات التقدمية التي تنتقل من الطفولة إلى البلوغ، وصولاً إلى نهايات تنموية أو معيارية أخرى.

من خلال هذا التحليل، سأجادل بوجود "الزمن الكويري" في شعر بيشوب، كمفهوم يتجلى في وعي الطفولة المعلق والزمن المتكرر، حيث تقوم "In the Waiting Room" بتوسيط الاضطراب الزمني كنتيجة لاحقة للحظة صدمة عاشها الطفل المتحدث، في حين تُرمز "Sestina" الاضطراب الزمني كأثر لـ"الزمن الكويري"، كما يوضحه هالبرستام في مفهومه عن "الجدولات الزمنية البديلة".
