

## Bethany Hicok: On "Crusoe in England"

Loss is registered in the person of Friday. Crusoe took Friday "home" to England, and he died there. Certainly a tenuous connection can be made here, as [Lorrie] Goldensohn does, between Friday's death and [Bishop's Brazilian lover, Lota de Macedo] Soares's suicide, but leaving it there would ignore some of the complexity of her idea of "home." Her "home" in Brazil with Soares was perhaps the closest Bishop ever got to a sense of real belonging, and yet when she and Soares broke up, she found it more and more difficult to make a life there. Soares was her "home" in Brazil. Not the country itself or the house she had bought, however much she tried to make it so. Much like Crusoe in Defoe's account, Crusoe in Bishop finds a sense of purpose, of "home," when Friday arrives. The original title of the poem was "Crusoe at Home" (see Brett C. Millier, *Elizabeth Bishop: Life and the Memory of It* [Berkeley, U California P, 1993], p. 366), which suggests that Bishop had initially thought of the poem in terms of an investigation of Crusoe's relationship to the idea of "home," or at least an ironic commentary on ideas of "home." ?

In "Cruse in England," as in many of Bishop's stories and poems, we are presented with a circumscribed world in which a lonely individual or a societal misfit contacts another like himself and for a brief period finds a home. The circumscribed world of the island, like the prison, the boarding house or the communal house in [Bishop's early story] "Then Came the Poor," represents a landscape in which the poet, the woman, the orphan, or the lesbian can contact others like herself and form a community. ? Crusoe's phrase "I wanted to propagate my kind" cannot be interpreted simply as an expression of the biological urge of a childless poet to have children. Spoken by a character created by a lesbian poet wise to the homoeroticism of Defoe's original text, Crusoe's statement becomes a challenge to the biological determinism that hindered the careers of literary women of Bishop's generation. Crusoe's statement refers not simply to reproductive power but to productive power ? the power to write, to influence future generations and to build community.

From Bethany Hicok, "Elizabeth Bishop's ?Queer Birds?: Vassar, Con Spirito, and the Romance of Female Community, *Contemporary Literature* 40:2 (Summer 1999), 306, 307.

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