**The poetry of Elizabeth Bishop appeals to the modern reader for many reasons.**

1. Intro
2. *The Bight*

The descriptive, vibrant language of Elizabeth Bishop transcends through time to appeal to every reader in all of her poems. In “The Bight”, she uses a vast array of descriptive words to convey her message. “Crumbling ribs of marl that protrude and glare” are used to signify the imperfection of the bight. Bishop appears to relate to the unconventional and unattractiveness bight. She uses several metaphors and similes to convey the disorder of the poem – “like torn-open unanswered letters, the Bight is littered with old correspondences”. Bishop is using the combination of both a metaphor and a simile to conjure the image of an untidy desk in our minds and then likens the bight to it. Her determination to reinforce the feeling of chaos in the poem becomes obvious in the last line – “Awful but cheerful” displays her enjoyment of the disorder in life and in her mind.  She is so comfortable surrounded by “untidy activity” that her life is untidy as well – her alcoholism – but the poem also serves to offer the realisation of the beauty within the discord of the bight. How this relates to a modern audience is very simple: everyone experiences disorder and disarray in their own lives. Elizabeth Bishop highlights that chaos is not always a bad thing and, most importantly, that an untraditional beauty lies within.

1. *Sestina*

“Sestina” is a poem carefully crafted with themes that appeal to a diverse market of people. The seemingly restrictive layout of a sestina poem follows a theme of control leading on from the disorder of “The Bight” but the main theme dealt with in “Sestina” is that of secrecy and hiding. “The old grandmother sits in the kitchen with the child … laughing and talking to hide her tears.” Is what starts the suspicion that something is amiss in the poem’s world. These sorrow-filled feelings seem at odds with the homely routines the grandmother embarks upon, caring for the child. Towards the end of the poem, the theme of secrecy takes a different turn. The grandmother is busying herself with tasks about the kitchen when, almost behind her back, the world is changing. “Little moons fall down like tears” is a symbol of disorder turning to chaos, of something fixed and set in the world behaving unnaturally. This new world leaves the grandmother with no power to influence it; she is just an ornament in the new world. The appeal here is similar to what I outlined in the first paragraph but with the added theme of trying to control the chaos. The fixed, set pattern of a sestina gives the impression that Bishop begins with the intention to control the world, to dictate what happens but towards the end, the world falls apart and leaves her powerless and upset.

1. *Filling Station*

Disorder plays a large part in Elizabeth Bishop’s poetry and the descriptive insight of “Filling Station” doesn’t differ. The “Filling Station” however expands on her views of controlling the chaos. “Somebody waters the plant… Somebody arranges the rows of cans” indicates that there is someone behind the scenes cleaning and caring for the filling station, someone we don’t see in the poem. This may be linked to Bishop’s personal life in that she lost her own mother and is longing for a caring mother figure in her life, or, at least, in her life as a child. The poem begins with a sense of disarray – “Be careful with that match!”. The Filling station is unclean, untidy, “oil-soaked” and “oil-permeated”. The realisation that the mother isn’t to be seen happens gradually as we see that it’s a family filling station and that there is wicker furniture, a woman’s touch surely, but then the epiphany floods Bishop in the sixth stanza when  she repeats the word “somebody” again and again. The repetition of “somebody” appears to be a method of ignoring who this person might be even though the association is obvious. Bishop seems to be hiding from the realisation, reinforcing the thoughts that this is about her own lack of a mother. The appeal to the modern audience here is how Bishop is coping with the reminders of loss and the release of control that comes along with it.

1. *The Fish*

“The Fish” treads a different road than the other poems I’ve explored. In this poem, the themes still relate to life but the order and disarray come in the form of expectations versus outcomes. The poem begins with Bishop catching a fish she’d set out to do – “I caught a tremendous fish and held him beside the boat”. She had expected to catch the fish but as the poem goes on she begins to explore the life of the fish more, scrutinise over its detail. The first suspicion arises from “he didn’t fight, he hadn’t fought at all”. She had expected resistance from the fish but it had never arrived. This drives her to look at the fish more closely, realising he’s “venerable” and haggard. The irony of the poem – that she releases the fish after setting out to catch it – ties in with the theme and really emphasises that the appeal of this poem lies with the fact that what we expect may not always be what comes from it.

1. Conclusion

In conclusion, Elizabeth Bishop’s poetry appeals to the modern reader through the exploration and insight into life and how we deal with it. Her own life seeps into all of her poems, making the poems seem more alive and real to her audience.