

## **Accuracy, Pleasure, and Musicality: Poe's Influence on Elizabeth Bishop as Shown in "Edgar Allan Poe & The Juke-Box"**

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### **Abstract**

Elizabeth Bishop was an American poet renowned for her precise and restrained verse. Through a close reading of Bishop's poem "Edgar Allan Poe & The Juke-Box" and related poems from the posthumously published collection of the same title, this study aims to explore the formative influence of Edgar Allan Poe on Bishop's poetic philosophy. It focuses on three key aspects of Poe's impact: accuracy, pleasure, and musicality (rhythm). First, Poe's advocacy for precision in poetry is reflected in Bishop's meticulous and objective depiction of the physical world. Second, Poe's theory of poetic pleasure resonates with Bishop's emotionally subtle yet sincere expression. Finally, Poe's emphasis on rhythm and sound significantly shaped Bishop's approach to musicality and structural rhythm in her own verse. By examining these elements, this essay reveals a previously unexplored connection between Poe's poetics and Bishop's poetics, particularly in the integration of precision, emotion and musicality in her works.

**Keywords:** Elizabeth Bishop, Edgar Allan Poe, accuracy, pleasure, musicality

While Elizabeth Bishop's oeuvre was modest in size, her achievements garnered widespread acclaim, as evidenced by the numerous awards she received during her lifetime: the Neustadt International Prize for Literature/Books Abroad, the Pulitzer Prize for poetry, the National Book Award for poetry, Brazilian Order of Rio Branco, Houghton Mifflin Poetry Prize Fellowship, the National Book Critics Circle Award and Harriet Monroe Poetry Award. In numerous interviews prior to the 1950s, Bishop reflected on and mentioned several poets who influenced her poetry creation, including George Herbert, Gerard Manley Hopkins, Robert

Lowell, and Marianne Moore, among others. Summers (1994), in his article, examined the parallels between Bishop's poetic works and those of Herbert, highlighting the similarities in their thematic and stylistic approaches. Costello's (1984) research focused on the intimate friendship between her and Bishop, as well as the profound impact of Moore's poetry on her literary works. A substantial number of scholars (Kalstone, 1989; Merrin, 1990; Diehl, 1993) have investigated the close academic relationship between Bishop and her contemporary poets; however, only a small number have explored the influence of Edgar Allan Poe on her poetic views. Domestic scholars (Hu, 2013; Hu, 2014; Wu, 2016) have chiefly concentrated on the literary relationships existing between Elizabeth Bishop and such poets as Marianne Moore, Gerard Manley Hopkins and George Herbert. Hu Ying's (2013; 2014) research has been primarily focused on the literary lineage between Elizabeth Bishop and the poets Marianne Moore and George Herbert, examining how their thematic and stylistic approaches influenced Bishop's works. Meanwhile, Wu Yuanlin (2016) has explored the impact of Gerard Manley Hopkins on Bishop's poetry from three perspectives: the poetic text, poetic philosophy and religious thought. However, the influence of Edgar Allan Poe on Bishop's poetic views remains underexplored in domestic scholarship, despite its evident presence in her work. This gap presents an opportunity to explore the profound yet often understated connection between Bishop and Poe, particularly in areas such as precision, emotional expression, and rhythm.

In the late 1950s-60s, Bishop clearly stated three qualities she held in high esteem in her poetic practice: "Accuracy, Spontaneity, Mystery" (Bishop, 2008d, p. 703). Accuracy, for her, meant "something seen in a documentary movie," reflecting her commitment to precise and objective depictions of the world. Spontaneity was seen in a natural-sounding flow, akin to "a good attack, a rapid line, tight rhythm" (Bishop, 2008d, p. 704), embodying her focus on the immediate and spontaneous expression of emotions. In an early notebook entry, Bishop refers to rhyme as "mystical," and throughout her notebooks, her lists of end rhyme words

make it clear that she looked to rhyme to drive and refine her intuitive thinking, drawing upon the unfettered associations that rhyme yielded up (Bishop, 2006, p. 273). This emphasis on using rhyme to uncover deeper connections in her poetic process echoes Poe's own views on the relationship between music, rhythm, and emotion.

The kernel of *Edgar Allan Poe & The Juke-Box: Uncollected Poems, Drafts, and Fragments* derives from two notebooks dating, roughly, from 1937 to 1947, which she entrusted to a close friend, Linda Nemer, as she left Brazil in 1970-71 after what she later describes as “the fifteen happiest years of my life.” These early poems reflect her interest in allegory and her pressing need to explore the subject of love. These are followed by poems drafted on her travels to Ireland, France, and Spain, and a fragment jotted down on her first trip to Florida in December 1936. The title of the poem “Edgar Allan Poe & The Juke-Box” provides compelling evidence of this influence. Bishop's line “Poe said that poetry was exact” serves as a direct invocation of Poe's stylistic doctrine and echoes Poe's belief in the necessity of precision, the importance of rhythm, and the pursuit of beauty through the musicality of verse. This study argues that Bishop's poetic philosophy was shaped significantly by Poe's poetics, particularly in three key areas: the pursuit of accuracy, the role of pleasure and emotional expression in the structural combination of rhythm and sound. Through a close reading of “Edgar Allan Poe & The Juke-Box” and related poems from the posthumously published collection of the same title, this paper explores how Bishop internalised and subtly reworked Poe's legacy—crafting a poetic voice that is at once emotionally contained and technically masterful.

### **1. The Concept of Accuracy in Poetry**

Elizabeth Bishop arrived in Key West around New Year's Eve 1936 when she was 25 years old and still trying to find her way in the world. She rented her first apartment in Key West. Many drafts from the Key West notebooks are accompanied by the notation “Bone Key”

or “Key of Bone,” which Bishop evidently contemplated as a title for either a sequence or a collection of poems about Key West. The drafts include “From the shallow night-long graves....,” “The Street by the Cemetery,” “Florida Deserta,” “Edgar Allan Poe & The Juke-Box,” and “After the Rain,” which she continued working on after she moved to Brazil, writing to her editor at Houghton Mifflin in September 1953 that she intended to include it in her second collection.

On May 2, 1938, Bishop wrote to her college (and Walnut Hill School) classmate Frani Blough from Key West about her immersion in Poe: “I begin to wish I weren’t where I am, but I’m just going to stay here for a long time, I’m afraid. Lately, I’ve been doing nothing much but reread Poe, and evolve from Poe – plus something of Sir Thomas Browne, etc., -- a new Theory-of-the-Story-All-My-Own” (Bishop, 2006, p. 271). Poe’s theories propelled the creation of Bishop’s story “In Prison”. Her letters and journals of the period testify to the role Poe had in her thinking in the late 1930s, marking a crucial and transformative phase in Bishop’s poetic development. The very process of creating a “new Theory-of-the-Story-All-My-Own” signals Bishop’s engagement with Poe’s theories on poetry, which would inform both her narrative style and her approach to poetic form. Poe’s influence on Bishop during the late 1930s is reflected in her growing understanding of poetry as an “exact” art form. Poe’s theories on precision can be found in his famous essay “The Philosophy of Composition,” where he argues that “Truth, in fact, demands a precision” (Poe, 1984b, p. 17). He suggests that poetry must avoid excessive adornment or unnecessary embellishments, which would obscure the essence of truth.

In enforcing a truth, we need severity rather than efflorescence of language. We must be simple, precise, terse. We must be cool, calm, unimpassioned. In a word, we must be in that mood which, as nearly as possible, is the exact converse of the poetical. (Poe, 1984d, p. 76)

For Poe, the poet must be “cool, calm, unimpassioned,” working with a detached objectivity that allows for precision. This emphasis on emotional restraint directly influenced Bishop’s poetic sensibilities, as she began to understand poetry as a medium in which accuracy and precision were paramount. Bishop’s own reflections on her poetry reveal her recognition of the importance of emotional distance and objectivity in her work. She confesses that “my best poems seem rather distant, and sometimes I wish I could be as objective about everything else as I seem to be in and about them” (Harrison, 1993, p. 29). It aligns with Poe’s idea of objectivity in poetry, as Bishop sought to capture the subject matter with clarity and precision and often removed herself from the emotional immediacy of the scenes she described. Doreski (1993) also pointed out, “her appearance of simplicity depends upon a clarity of direct statement.” (p. 3) This detachment allowed her to achieve a sense of emotional depth while maintaining formal control, much like Poe’s approach to poetry.

The title poem, “Edgar Allan Poe & The Juke-Box,” is the last developed draft in the first of the notebooks. Many years after she left Key West, Bishop showed the poem to Robert Giroux, her editor from 1956 until her death, saying that she had envisioned it as the concluding one in her second collection. It is also biographically significant, pointing up the considerable anguish she was experiencing before her move to Brazil in 1951. The variation between the early draft title “Edgar Allan Poe—the Juke Box” and the final published version “Edgar Allan Poe & The Juke-Box” may seem minor typographically. Still, it reveals something more profound about her evolving poetic sensibility. The shift in punctuation, capitalisation, and spacing reflects her poetics of precision and aesthetic refinement. Bishop’s choice to insert the hyphen in “Juke-Box” in the final version reflects her belief in accuracy and visual balance. The hyphen unifies the compound noun visually, implying a deliberate fusion of modern technology and poetic tradition. For Bishop, structure is not decorative but constitutive of thought. In terms of the long dash in the early version of the title, it separates

Poe from the Juke Box. This punctuation visually and rhythmically marks a break, implying tension and interruption. In the final version of the title, Bishop removes the long dash, opting instead for a simple ampersand (&) and joining Poe and the Juke Box grammatically. This reflects an affinity rather than opposition—a merging of poetic tradition and popular culture. The capitalisation of “The Juke-Box” entirely elevates its status, paralleling the way Bishop blends the trivial and the profound qualities throughout the poem. The final title is more fluid, symmetrical and musical. As seen throughout her notebooks and drafts, she was intensely self-critical, often labouring for years over a single poem. This editorial habit embodies her core belief in poetic control, balance, and restraint.

Poe believes that the first step in writing should be to consider the length of the poem and further states that “If any literary work is too long to be read at one sitting, we must be content to dispense with the significant effect derivable from unity of impression...” (Poe, 1984b, p. 15). Bishop’s works, much like Poe’s ideal, are characterised by their brevity and precision, ensuring that each poem can be read at one sitting. Each poem effectively conveys its meaning within its limited scope. This poetic simplicity throughout her life can be seen as a poetic insight gained from Poe. The complete draft version of “Edgar Allan Poe & The Juke-Box” reads as follows:

Glowing in the dark—the awful music falls  
so easily in the dark & the love that falls [as]  
easily as the hands fall under the table, everything  
descending, descending (descent of love from the  
eye = our idea of it, anyway) everything descends  
falls, falls, the drinks down the throat, one  
down      beat

but not mechanical

alcohol

oh no & [is the ] horror here.

here. (Bishop, 2006, p. 272)

The beginning of the version presents a more immediate and direct expression of the poem's central theme of falling and descent. The final version opens with the image of a juke-box that "burns" through the darkened room, and Bishop's choice of words here reflects an almost mechanical precision:

Easily through the darkened room

the juke-box burns; the music falls.

*Starlight, La Conga*, all the dance-halls

in the block of honkey-tonks,

cavities in our waning moon,

strung with bottles and blue lights

and silvered coconuts and conches. (Bishop, 2006, p. 49)

This version, while similar in its use of descending imagery, is more elaborate in its descriptive detail, creating a vivid atmosphere with a rich sensory experience. The longer lines and more varied rhythm create a smoother and more fluid motion. In the previously mentioned version, the imagery of "everything descending" and "the descent of love from the eye" offers a direct, almost abstract representation of love's decline. The final version expands on this descent with more concrete images which build a narrative world, and it acts as the driving force for the development of the whole poem.

The juke-box, with its mechanical and predictable nature, represents a type of order in the chaos of life. The "music falls" in an almost systematic way, and the careful listing of

objects – “bottles and blue lights and silvered coconuts and conches” — mirrors the precision of Bishop’s language, as each detail serves to construct a vivid picture of the scene. The imagery in this poem is meticulous and precise, reflecting the influence of Poe’s call for clarity and simplicity in poetry. The repetition of the word “fall” appears throughout the poem, particularly in the following lines:

As easily as the music falls,  
the nickels fall into the slots,  
the drinks like lonely water-falls  
in night descend the separate throats,  
and the hands fall on one another  
[down] darker darkness  
under tablecloths and all descends,  
descends, falls,—much as we envision  
the helpless earthward fall of love  
descending from the head and eye  
down to the hands, and heart, and down. (Bishop, 2006, p. 49)

The use of “fall” and its synonym “descend” in these lines operates like a metrical device, imbuing the poem with a sense of “down” movement. Each repetition of these words carries both literal and metaphorical weight, guiding the reader’s emotional response in a structure, precise manner. Bishop’s focus on the precise nature of the physical world—the falling of coins, the drinks, the hands touching—indicates a similar attempt to bring order and clarity to the human experience. These images are precise and controlled. The falling of the nickels into the slots is an accurate and predictable action, which is similar to the mechanical nature of the juke-box experience. The similarly repeated actions, framed as mechanical processes, highlight the controlled and precise nature of the poet’s vision for the physical world.

It is worth noting that Bishop compares the mechanical fall of objects to the emotional descent of love. The metaphorical use of “fall of love” is presented with the same precision and detachment as the previous physical movements. By describing love as something that “falls” or “descends,” Bishop takes a traditionally emotional experience and frames it in terms of a controlled, almost mechanical process. The imagery of love “descending from the head and eye down to the hands, and heart, and down” mirrors the downward movement established earlier in the poem, reinforcing the inevitability of this emotional process. Thus, the emotional depth is conveyed indirectly through the precise, controlled imagery of descending, reflecting Bishop’s commitment to the emotional restraint that Poe advocated as well. The repetition of “fall” and “descend” mirrors the process of love’s inevitable decline, presenting it as something external and observable, much like the physical actions described earlier. In both the physical and emotional aspects of the poem, the downward movement is presented as something inevitable and mechanical. Just as the juke-box functions according to a set rhythm—coins falling, music playing, drinks being consumed—love too is depicted as something that follows a predetermined path. There is an undeniable sense of inevitability in the descent, whether it is the mechanical falling of objects or the emotional fall of love. This reinforces Bishop’s commitment to portraying reality with precision.

At the end of this poem, Bishop straightforwardly mentions Poe’s concept of precision as follows, “The burning box can keep the measure/strict, always, and the down-beat. (Bishop, 2006, p. 49)” The subsequent citation of Poe’s words — “Poe said that poetry was exact” (Bishop, 2006, p. 49) — reveals her adherence to the idea that poetry, like music, should maintain a strict and measured rhythm. The “burning box” is a reference to the juke-box, showing how Bishop agrees with Poe’s idea that a poem should be truthful and the poet also pays close attention to its structure and control. Bishop’s attention to the exactness of the juke-box’s operation serves as a metaphor for the controlled precision with which poetry should be

crafted. Just as the juke-box controls the tempo and emotional undercurrent of the dance-hall, the poet's task is to regulate the emotional flow within the poem. The "strict" measure in the juke-box is a metaphor for Bishop's careful and deliberate approach to managing emotional intensity through the form of the poem. By doing so, Bishop ensures that the emotional effect of the poem is measured, as Poe would advocate, rather than overwhelming.

In one entry from Bishop's post-college notebook from 1935, she pointed out the fact that anyone who can learn really to "face the facts," as they say, should have much more to write about, should hundreds of fresh things to say (Bishop, 2006, p. 273). For Bishop, precision is not merely a stylistic preference, but an essential means of engaging with reality. By carefully observing the world and articulating it with accuracy, a poet can uncover the "fresh things." In "Edgar Allan Poe & The Juke-Box," Elizabeth Bishop effectively incorporates Poe's concept of precision in her treatment of both physical and emotional movements. Bishop's work demonstrates that precision can enhance it by providing a clear and restrained framework through which emotion can emerge. In this way, this poem exemplifies how accuracy, influenced by Poe's theories, helps to create a powerful and evocative poetic experience.

In the collection of *Edgar Allan Poe & The Juke-Box*, Bishop employs various devices to depict what she comes across accurately and always captures both visual and auditory elements of the scene with remarkable clarity. In "Full Moon, Key West," "The town is paper-white" (Bishop, 2006, p. 59) immediately sets a clear, vivid image of the scene. The use of "paper-white" is an exact description that evokes the pale brightness of the moonlit town. The repetition of the phrase "flake on flake" in the next line also demonstrates Bishop's precise use of language. This choice of word, combined with "faint" in the next line, suggests the subtle effect of the moon's light. In addition to visual imagery, Bishop integrates sound with remarkable precision. The precision of this sound—like the precision in the description of the moonlit town—adds an element of realism to the poem, rendering the reader in the physical

experience of being in Key West. The accuracy of her language allows her to convey deeper meanings with minimal description.

## 2. Pleasure and Emotion in Poetry

Elizabeth Bishop's "Edgar Allan Poe & The Juke-Box" intricately intertwines precision, pleasure, and emotion, reflecting the profound influence of Edgar Allan Poe on her poetics. Notes on this poem appear in the notebook before the final draft: "pleasure is exact, though meretricious / & knows before exactly what it wants—" (Bishop, 2006, pp. 271-272). This notebook entry offers a valuable insight into Bishop's poetic development. The difference between the two versions— "pleasure is exact, though meretricious / & knows before exactly what it wants—" (the draft) (Bishop, 2006, pp. 271-272) and "But pleasures are mechanical/and know beforehand what they want/and know exactly what they want." (the final version) (Bishop, 2006, p. 49) show the way she manipulates language to achieve emotional precision. The term "meretricious" refers to something that appears attractive on the surface but is ultimately shallow and deceptive. This choice of this word indicates a critical attitude towards pleasure, suggesting that although pleasure may be precise or mechanical, it is superficial and unworthy. In the final version, "meretricious" is replaced with the more neutral and objective term "mechanical." Its tone becomes more clinical or detached, suggesting that pleasures are predictable without offering a moral critique. This shift in tone may indicate an evolution in Bishop's thinking. Rather than criticizing modern pleasures directly, she now accepts their inevitability and the mechanical rhythms of contemporary existence. The detached, almost observational tone of the final version may indicate her growing appreciation of the nuances of emotional response, and of how pleasure is experienced within the confines of modern life – even if it is predictable and calculated. By comparing the mechanical, controlled pleasure of the jukebox with the spontaneous and uncontrollable nature of love and emotion, Bishop appears to be exploring the tension between calculation and freedom, order

and chaos. The change in the description of pleasure—from “meretricious” to “mechanical”—reflects this ongoing tension. The focus is less on critiquing shallow pleasure and more on the inevitability of mechanical pleasure in modern life.

Above that notebook entry is a significant note on her poetic aims: “some surrealist poetry terrifies me because of the sense of irresponsibility & danger it gives of the mind being ‘broken down’ –I want to produce the opposite effect” (Bishop, 2006, p. 272). This comment reveals Bishop’s discomfort with irrationalism and disorder in poetic creation. Surrealist poetry, with its emphasis on automatism, illogical associations, and dream imagery, often seek to liberate the unconscious and disrupt rational order. What frightens her is not just the chaotic language, but the sense of mental disintegration— “the mind being ‘broken down’.” To Bishop, however, this “breaking down” of the mind was not liberating but destabilizing. However, unlike the Surrealists, who embrace radical experimentation and subconscious exploration, Bishop values language clarity and emotional restraint.

Although Bishop is deeply aware of the complex relationship between emotion and art, her thoughts on the emotional content of poetry reveal a subtle approach. As Bishop writes,

We have all had the experience of apparently escaping the emotional results of an event, of feeling no joy or sorrow where joy or sorrow was to be expected, and then suddenly having the proper emotion appear several hours or even days later. The experience could not really have been counted chronologically as having taken place, surely, until this emotion belonging to it had been felt. (Bishop, 2008c, p. 677)

As for Bishop, a poem is written out of certain emotion, subtracted from it and then the volume of emotion is reduced gradually, which resonates in Bishop’s poetry, particularly in “Edgar Allan Poe & The Juke-Box,” where the emotional undercurrent is conveyed with both restraint and precision, mirroring the controlled emotional release that she advocates in her artistic process. Poe’s essay offers valuable insights into his conception of poetic expression,

and provides a compelling perspective that invites further analysis:

A poem, in my opinion, is opposed to a work of science by having, for its immediate object, pleasure, not truth; to romance, by having for its object an indefinite instead of a definite pleasure, being a poem only so far as this object is attained; romance presenting perceptible images with definite, poetry with indefinite sensations, to which end music is an essential, since the comprehension of sweet sound is our most indefinite conception. Music, when combined with a pleasurable idea, is poetry; music without the idea is simply music; the idea without the music is prose from its very definitiveness. (Poe, 1984a, pp. 11-12)

Poe's idea that the immediate aim of poetry is to provide pleasure instead of truth offers an insightful starting point for analyzing how Bishop incorporates pleasure and emotion into her poetry. For Poe, the emotional impact of poetry is not achieved through the certainty of truth, but rather through the "indefinite sensations" evoked by the poem. This idea that pleasure is an ambiguous and fleeting experience is key to understanding how Bishop treats emotion in her poems. In "Edgar Allan Poe & The Juke-Box", the music played on the juke-box serves as a central metaphor for the emotional and sensory pleasure that poetry can evoke. The music, like the poem, falls with a rhythm, and its precise descent creates a sense of controlled emotional release. This repetition of "fall" and "descend" reflects Poe's view of pleasure as an experience that unfolds gradually, rather than immediately overwhelming the reader with an emotional surge. The music, the coins, and the drinks all fall predictably, reinforcing the idea that like emotion, pleasure is built gradually and methodically. This careful and controlled unfolding of sensations in Bishop's work is reminiscent of Poe's belief in poetry's ability to evoke pleasure through precise and deliberate structure. This concept of emotional delay and restraint is central to Bishop's practice, as she often subdues the emotional immediacy of her subjects, allowing the emotional response to unfold over time. In the "The Poetic Principle",

Poe asserts that

That pleasure, which is at once the purest, the most elevating, and the most intense, is derived, I maintain, from the contemplation of the Beautiful. In the contemplation of Beauty, we alone find it possible to attain that pleasurable elevation, or excitement, of the soul, which we recognise as the Poetic Sentiment, and which is so easily distinguished from Truth, which is the satisfaction of the Reason, or from Passion, which is the excitement of the heart. (Poe, 1984d, p. 78)

According to Poe, “Beauty” is not just a superficial element but the central force that elevates the soul. It is through the appreciation of beauty that poetry attains its highest form. This notion of beauty is especially significant in Bishop’s work, where beauty is often portrayed not only as an aesthetic experience but also as an emotional one that elevates the reader’s consciousness. In “Edgar Allan Poe & The Juke-Box”, beauty is not presented overtly but is embedded in the imagery of the scene. The description of the juke-box, the “lonely waterfalls” of drinks, “the darkened room”, “blue lights” and the “waning moon” all work together to create an atmosphere that is at once vivid and emotionally resonant. These sensory details are presented not only for visual or auditory pleasure, but also for emotional depth. The music of the juke-box, falling “easily,” reflects the effortless nature of beauty. The precision with which the music falls into the room, the nickels fall into the slots, and the drinks descend into throats creates a beautiful rhythm. Just as Poe believed that music, when combined with a pleasurable idea, is poetry, Bishop’s careful creation of these images gives them an emotional depth that enhances the scene. This idea of beauty as elevating is also echoed in Bishop’s college friend Harriet Thompkins Thomas recounts an upsetting dinner conversation in Paris in 1935, when Bishop felt she had to defend “the idea of beauty,” which for her (in her friend’s words) “was one of the eternal verities, the most important thing in life” (Bishop, 2006, p. 274). Bishop’s views on beauty were similar to Poe’s, and she found herself empathizing with him when she

reread his works. This philosophical stance on beauty is foundational to both Bishop's and Poe's poetic approaches, where beauty serves as a conduit for emotional and intellectual growth.

Bishop's engagement with the juke-box, a machine that "keeps the measure/strict, always, and the down-beat," (Bishop, 2006, p. 49) demonstrates a similar tension between precision and emotion in her own poetry. The mechanical nature of the juke-box must be exact in order to produce the correct emotional effect that "know beforehand what they want" (Bishop, 2006, p. 49). In this controlled environment, pleasure emerges predictably, not through excessive emotional expression but through the precise unfolding of the elements.

This line, "The helpless earthward fall of love / descending from the head and eye" (Bishop, 2006, p. 49) as one of the most emotionally charged in this poem, powerfully conveys the idea of love's inevitable decline. The use of "helpless" suggests that this fall is beyond control—love is presented as something that inevitably loses its higher, intellectual or idealized nature and sinks downward. The term "earthward" emphasizes the physical descent, suggesting that love moves from a higher, more spiritual or intellectual realm to a more grounded, human, and perhaps less idealized place. The phrase "descending from the head and eye" (Bishop, 2006, p. 49) highlights the shift from rationality (the "head") and perception (the "eye") to the physical realm, where love moves towards the heart and hands, which are symbols of emotion and action. This shift suggests a transition from an intellectual or idealized understanding of love to a more tangible, embodied experience. The repetition of the word brings to mind the earlier use in the poem, reinforcing the mechanical, inevitable nature of this emotional decline. Love, in this context, cannot remain pure or elevated forever; it must descend.

However, the image of music "pretending" to "laugh and weep" reflects that while the juke-box is mechanically precise, it also holds the potential to convey a range of emotional states, pleasure and sorrow. The passage from Bishop's commentary on Poe—"Is it not a cause for astonishment that his simple idea does not flash into everyone's mind: that progress (insofar

as there is progress) perfects sorrow to the same extent that it refines pleasures” (Bishop, 2006, p. 273)—ties directly to the exploration of pleasure and sorrow in her poem “Edgar Allan Poe & The Juke-Box.” This pretense is essential to the nature of the bar and the honky-tonks environment mentioned in the poem, where people often engage in activities that mimic or mask their deeper emotions—dancing, drinking, socializing—without confronting the underlying truths of their feelings. The music “pretends,” and in doing so, it evokes a surface-level emotional experience. The music, the falling of the nickels, the descent of the drinks, and the inevitable “fall” of love are all part of a preordained cycle, much like Poe’s description of pleasure as mechanical and “knowing beforehand what they want.” Pleasure here is not spontaneous or uncontrollable but is instead a carefully structured part of the poem’s rhythm and form. The emotions evoked by the juke-box cannot be easily defined; they are experienced subtly, over time, and in a controlled way.

The phrase “while it descends to drink and murder” (Bishop, 2006, p. 49) introduces a darker dimension to this descent. The music’s descent is no longer just an emotional fall but also a moral one. “Drink and murder” are potent symbols of excess and indulgence, as well as the darker side of human behavior. Drinking represents a temporary escape or suppression of deeper feelings, while “murder” adds an element of violence or destruction, suggesting that the pursuit of pleasure in this environment may ultimately lead to harm—both physically and emotionally.

In the last stanza, Bishop deepens the exploration of the mechanical nature of pleasure, emotions and their fleeting effects. The lines of final version are

Do they obtain that single effect  
that can be calculated like alcohol  
or like the response to the nickel?  
—How long does the music burn?

like poetry, or all your honor here? (Bishop, 2006, p. 49-50)

These lines raise questions about the nature of emotional and aesthetic experiences, challenging the distinction between calculated, mechanical responses and the more complex, elusive effects of poetry and beauty. The comparison to “alcohol” and the “response to the nickel” suggests a critique of immediate, predictable reactions. Alcohol is often used as a metaphor for easily accessible pleasure—quick, transient, and somewhat superficial in its effects. Similarly, the “response to the nickel” refers to the mechanical and predictable nature of the juke-box: a nickel is inserted and music plays, triggering a response that is both calculable and expected. By juxtaposing this mechanical process with the concept of poetry and its effect, Bishop posed the fundamental question of whether art and poetry should be viewed as the mechanical pleasure of the juke-box. In Poe’s sense, it is needless to demonstrate that a poem is such, only inasmuch as it intensely excites, by elevating, the soul; and all intense excitements are, through a psychal necessity, brief (Poe, 1984b, p. 15). This hints at the idea that emotional responses to art cannot be reduced to mere transaction and immediate gratification.

The phrase “How long does the music burn?” evokes an image of something intense and fleeting, something that burns brightly but quickly. The juke-box music can be likened to the transient pleasure of life’s quick, mechanical responses—quickly felt and gone soon. As a matter of fact, the question of how long it burns introduces the contrast between fleeting pleasures and the lasting effect of poetry. Honour, as a symbol of lasting value, contrasts sharply with the juke-box’s immediate pleasures. The final comparison between the juke-box’s “burning” music and poetry, along with the mention of “honour,” suggests that the true purpose of art is to create a lasting emotional and intellectual effect—something that transcends momentary pleasure. Poetry, unlike the mechanical and immediate pleasures of the juke-box, engages with the soul, elevating it in a profound, lasting manner. Bishop connects Poe’s

philosophy of art to her own vision of poetry by highlighting the lasting effect of beauty and art on the soul. Through the metaphor of the juke-box and its music, Bishop explores the tension between fleeting, mechanical pleasure and the enduring, elevating pleasure that poetry, beauty, and art can provide.

In the draft version of the last lines, the fragmented phrases are as follows,

down      beat

but not mechanical

alcohol

oh no & [is the ] horror here.

here. (Bishop, 2006, p. 272)

The draft version is totally different from the final one, especially the poetic forms, such as the line breaks and white spaces. These intentional gaps are not mere formatting choices, while they are burdened with certain volume of emotion at the heart of the poem's themes. The line "down beat" with a noticeable space between "down" and "beat" creates a pause and visually mimics the musical downbeat. The gap also creates a sense of distance between the action and its effect, reinforcing the mechanical, emotional detachment present in the juke-box's pleasure. The phrase "but not mechanical / alcohol" (Bishop, 2006, p. 272) is separated by a line break, which heightens the contrast between "mechanical" and "alcohol". The break between the two suggests that these types of pleasure cannot easily be reconciled because they are distinct entities that evoke different emotional responses.

These lines convey a sense of direct emotional disquiet. These phrases are abrupt and disjointed, introducing a heightened emotional intensity filled with a sense of horror and discomfort. The exclamatory "oh no" and the repeated use of "here" seem to evoke a sense of

immediacy and dread, possibly reflecting the poet's internal conflict about the mechanical and predictable nature of pleasure. The tone here conveys distress or revulsion, as if the speaker is reacting with horror or a sense of loss of control to the mechanization of pleasure, such as alcohol. The broken syntax emphasizes the emotional dissonance. In contrast, the final version of the poem presents the lines in a more measured, rhetorical manner. The questions in the final version reflect a reflective tone, as if the speaker is considering the implications of mechanized pleasure more calmly. The tone remains probing but is now more focused on understanding than on direct emotional reaction. The earlier draft uses a kind of stream-of-consciousness questioning ("oh no & [is the] horror here"), where the speaker seems caught in an immediate reaction to the mechanical nature of pleasure. The repetition of "here" emphasizes the momentary quality of this reaction. The pause after the first "here" creates a break in the flow, signaling that the speaker is grappling with the overwhelming nature of the horror in the current moment. The rhetorical questioning of the final version introduces a formal, contemplative structure that contrasts the earlier emotional fragmentation. The questions probe the nature of pleasure, its duration, and its relationship to poetry and honor. The fragmented phrases in the draft suggest a chaotic emotional reaction, as though the speaker is experiencing an emotional breakdown or mental disorder. The final version's more controlled phrasing like "strict" and "down-beat" reflects a more controlled emotional tone.

The central question in both drafts revolves around pleasure, its predictability and mechanization, and the ethical implications of these. The draft version's use of "alcohol" and "horror" links pleasure to addiction, control, and loss of agency, presenting it as a potentially dangerous force. The final version continues this exploration but adds "honor" as a counterpoint to the mechanized pleasure of the jukebox. The final questions seem to contrast the predictable, mechanical pleasure ("response to the nickel," "music burns") with higher, more abstract concepts like poetry and honor. By asking, "How long does the music burn? like

poetry, or all your honor here?”, Bishop suggests that pleasure can have different durations and impacts: it can be fleeting and mechanical, like the juke-box, or it can be sustained and meaningful, like poetry—or even embody moral integrity (“honor”). While the draft emphasizes emotional disruption and horror at the mechanization of pleasure, the final version focuses on philosophical reflection of the transient nature of pleasure and how it can contrast with higher ideals, such as poetry and honor.

In another poem “I had a bad dream,” the word “fall” is also arranged to carry certain emotional weight, implying the themes of loneliness and despair. The phrase “loneliness like falling on / the sidewalk in a crowd” (Bishop, 2006, p. 79) emphasizing the contradictorily emotional experience of loneliness on the grounds that loneliness arrives when surrounded by a crowd of people. The lines “The sidewalk rises / like absolute despair” (Bishop, 2006, p. 79) represent the unavoidable nature of despair. Typically, falling suggests a metaphor for deeper emotional decline. In the lines “that fills [one with shame], some/slow, elaborate shame” (79), the sense of shame stems from both the physical fall and the feeling of failure. Loneliness and despair are not just temporary feelings, but part of an emotional cycle that contributes to the poem’s overall melancholic mood.

### **3. Musicality and Rhythm in Poetry**

In a sonnet drafted in 1928, Bishop writes, “I am in need of music that would flow/Over my fretful, feeling fingertips,/Over my bitter-tainted, trembling lips,/With melody, deep, clear, and liquid-slow,” yearning for “the healing swaying, old and low,/Of some song sung to rest the tired dead” (Bishop, 2008a, p. 186). Bishop’s decision to pursue her musical studies after her graduation and the death of her mother in 1934. Writing to Frani Blough in 1935, Bishop had described her playing of the clavichord, which she had taken up, as being “quite suited to my needs” (Ree-Jones, 2019, p. 9). In 1937, Bishop made a practical commitment to her musical studies by commissioning her own clavichord from the Dolmetsch workshops, using

an inheritance after the death of her Uncle Jack, John Jr. Bishop. Since then, the clavichord becomes central to order and recovery: she mentions in a letter to Marianne Moore in 1950, as she sadly discusses the death of her psychoanalyst Dr Foster, that it is a pleasure for her that she has her clavichord with her again, although, she says, “she plays it wretchedly” (Bishop, 1994, p. 206). Apparently, Bishop had a keen interest in music from an early age. As stated by Ree-Jones, “References to music and song are integral to the development of her work” (Ree-Jones, 2019, p. 8), and Bishop’s “Edgar Allan Poe & The Juke-Box” is a prime example of how music influences the emotional depth and rhythmic precision of her poetry. It should be noted that “The Poetic Sentiment” mentioned by Poe may develop itself in various modes in Painting, in Sculpture, in Architecture, in the Dance very especially in Music and very peculiarly, and with a wide field, in the composition of the Landscape Garden (Poe, 1984d, p. 77). The poem itself explores the complex dynamics of mechanical pleasure, emotional restraint, and the fine line between structure and spontaneity—much like music. Poe directly pointed out, “good versifiers who happen to be, also, good poets, contrives to relieve the monotone of a series of feet, by the use of equivalent feet only at rare intervals” (Poe, 1984c, p. 45). Similarly, Bishop weaves music and rhythm into the fabric of the poem to evoke both emotional depth and formal control.

In her reflections on poetry, Bishop regularly emphasized the importance of rhythm and meter. During her time at the college, Bishop cultivated a profound interest in the rhythmic patterns of poetry, dedicating significant intellectual effort to the subject. In “Gerard Manley Hopkins-Notes on Timing in His Poetry” (Bishop, 2008b), she admires Hopkins and analyzes extensively in terms of his “sprung rhythm” in the poetry. It’s crucial for a poet to have a correct manipulation of the duration of sense and sound, which permits mechanical irregularities and preserves the unique feeling of timeless. Hopkins’s “sprung rhythm” is unified, mixed and flexible in the manner of rhythm because its stress is always falling on the first syllables of the

foot, and the foot may be monosyllabic or followed by one, two or three weak syllables (Bishop, 2008b, p. 661). In addition, she also points out Hopkins' abundant use of enjambed feet, rove-over, run-on lines, alliteration, repetition and inside rhymes in his poetry, which demonstrates how he manages and controls the timing in the harmonious flow of sound and sense. Bishop especially appreciates rove-over which scansion is continuous, not line by line, so the boundaries of the poem are set free and contribute to the movement of his poetry and the depiction of a mind thinking (Bishop, 2008b, p. 666). During the process of her own creation of poetry, Bishop inevitably emphasizes the rhythm all the time and frequently employs different forms. She also highlights that "The usage of rhyme can generate "the general effect of intense, unpremeditated unrevised emotion" (Bishop, 2008b, p. 667). Poe once contented himself with the certainty that Music, in its various modes of metre, rhythm, and rhyme, is of so vast a moment in Poetry as never to be wisely rejected is so vitally important an adjunct (Poe, 1984d, pp. 77-78). In "Edgar Allan Poe & The Juke-Box," the connection between the "burning box" and the "down-beat" shows a dual role for rhythm in the poem: it is both the driving force of the music and a metaphor for emotional control. The down-beat, the first beat in a musical measure, can be seen as a symbol of emotional grounding. In the poetry, a steady rhythm can keep the emotional tone, ensuring that the poem does not fall into excess or uncontrolled sentiment. By using a steady rhythmic structure in this poem, Bishop ensures that the emotional tone of the poem remains controlled and grounded. The line "the juke-box burns; the music falls" exemplifies the integration of sound and rhythm into the poem. The poem's regular rhythmic pulse, which is punctuated by repetitions of words like "fall," "descend," and "down," creates an effect that is both structured and emotionally charged. This careful control of rhythm and emotional tone echoes Bishop's broader poetic philosophy, as she believes that "the best poets set themselves some strict limitations" (Quindlen, 1996, p. 58). In "Edgar Allan Poe & The Juke-Box", the repetition of the word "fall" and its synonyms plays a central role

in creating both rhythmic continuity and emotional depth. These repeated words serve as rhythmic markers that give the poem its steady, predictable flow. They are not only structural elements but also emotional signals.

In a review of Marianne Moore's work published in 1948, Bishop noted that Moore and Edgar Allan Poe "are our two most original writers," and cited Poe's views on originality, noting that, for Poe, it is to be sought in "an extension of the application of the principles of rhyme and alliteration" (Bishop, 2008a, p. 684). In "Edgar Allan Poe & The Juke-Box", Bishop's use of rhyme and alliteration contributes to the emotional depth and musicality of the poem. Bishop believes that rhyme is clearly an essential component of poems, as it helps to structure the poem and create a musical experience for the reader. As Alice Quinn notes the "lists and lists of end rhyme words" in Bishop's notebooks (Bishop, 2006, p. 273), which suggests that she might have endorsed Baudelaire's remark that "any poet, who doesn't know exactly how many rhymes each word has, is incapable of expressing any idea whatsoever" (Bishop, 2006, p. 183). The poem employs subtle forms of rhyme and alliteration, even if they are not always overtly conspicuous. For example, the repeated sounds in phrases like "the burning box," "down-beat," and "descends, descends, falls" create a musicality that resonates emotionally. The alliteration of "darker darkness", "coconuts and conches" and the repetition of "fall" builds a sense of rhythmic intensity that enhances the emotional effect of the poem.

Poe asserted, "it is in Music, perhaps, that the soul most nearly attains the great end for which, when inspired with the Poetic Sentiment, it struggles the creation of supernal Beauty" (Poe, 1984d, p. 78). The combination of rhyme, repetition, and rhythmic precision in "Edgar Allan Poe & The Juke-Box" creates a beauty that is both emotional and intellectual. From the very opening, "Easily through the darkened room/the juke-box burns; the music falls" (Bishop, 2006, p. 49), the reader is ushered into a world defined by sound and movement. The juke-box, as a mechanical but emotionally charged object, becomes the symbolic and sonic center of the

poem. The repeated trochaic or iambic beats (“fall,” “slot,” “throat,” “down”) operate like drumbeats, reinforcing the structure and mood. These sonic patterns embody the idea that rhythm itself conveys meaning—despair, desire, mechanical rhythm. The musicality of the poem elevates its emotional impact because Poe once define, “in brief, the Poetry of words as The Rhythmical Creation of Beauty” (Poe, 1984d, p. 78). Bishop pays particular attention to the need to create adequate rhythmic structures, ensuring that the poem retains its emotional impact without becoming excess. The juke-box’s rhythm serves as a metaphor for the poem’s controlled emotional tone, with each element within a carefully structured framework. This includes the mechanical fall of the music, the descent of love, and the repetition of sound pattern.

In “Full Moon, Key West,” Bishop’s use of end rhyme and internal rhyme plays a key role in the rhythmic structure. The rhyme scheme in the first few lines is ABCCB and the structure of internal rhyme between “flake” and “faint” creates a sense of repetition and continuity. Those rhymes help to establish a steady flow with the mood of softness and calmness, connecting the poem’s visual imagery with its emotional tone. In the line “The island starts to hum / like music in a dream” (Bishop, 2006, p. 59) , Elizabeth Bishop uses simile and personification to evoke an atmosphere that blends the natural world with dreamlike qualities. This introduces a layer of mysteriousness to the scene. The connection to music in a dream suggests that this experience is not entirely real but exists in a space where reality and imagination blend. At the end of this poem, the imagery of “the long strings of / an instrument / laid on the stream, / a zither laid / upon the flood / of the glittering Gulf” (Bishop, 2006, p. 60) is a powerful metaphor for musicality, blending the natural world with the concept of sound and rhythm. The long strings of the instrument, being laid on the stream and the flood of the Gulf, suggest an undulating, rhythmic flow that mirrors the movement of water. The water itself becomes the medium through which the music is played, with its rhythm and flow interacting

with the strings to create a harmonious effect. The use of the adjective “glittering” to describe the Gulf adds an extra visual dimension of beauty to the musical image. By linking a musical instrument (the zither) to the natural elements of water (the stream and Gulf), Bishop suggests a profound unity between human creativity and the natural world.

As Bishop writes, “My belief in the peculiar cross-hatchings of events and people also amounts to a feeling for rhythm” (Bishop, 2008c, p. 679). This belief in the power of rhythm to shape both sound and sense is evident in her poem, where every rhythmic choice serves both an emotional and structural function. The rhythmic movements, whether steady or falling, carry a deeper resonance, embodying the very cross-hatchings of human experience that Bishop describes. Through her careful manipulation of rhythm and sound, Bishop achieves a harmonious blend of emotional intensity and aesthetic beauty, demonstrating the lasting influence of Poe’s poetics on her own work.

#### **4. Conclusion**

Although shaped by a variety of literary influences, Elizabeth Bishop’s poetic vision reveals a profound and often overlooked debt to Edgar Allan Poe. In “Edgar Allan Poe & the Juke-Box,” Elizabeth Bishop skillfully combines precision, pleasure and rhythm to create a deeply emotional poem. Bishop’s understanding of poetic accuracy reflects Poe’s assertion that “truth demands precision” (Poe, 1984b, p. 17) and that language must be “simple, precise, terse” (Poe, 1984d, p. 76). This insistence on restraint and objectivity is visible in Bishop’s controlled diction, structured syntax, and detailed observational style, which together create a unique literary voice. In the lines from “Edgar Allan Poe & The Juke-Box”, such as “the nickels fall into the slots” (Bishop, 2006, p. 49) and “drinks like lonely water-falls / in night descend the separate throats” (Bishop, 2006, p. 49), we observe her meticulous attention to detailed imagery and physical movement.

In this poem, Bishop captures fleeting pleasure, but simultaneously subjects it to

scrutiny. Bishop, like Poe, separates poetry from excessive sentiment, aiming to achieve a controlled and delayed emotional resonance. Through the use of rhythmic structures, Bishop conveys the inevitable emotional descent of love while maintaining a tight control over the poem's tone. This blend of musicality and emotional precision reflects the influence of Edgar Allan Poe, whose theories on poetry emphasized the importance of rhythm and sound in creating beauty through a controlled form.

One of the most striking aspects of Bishop's poem is her use of rhythm as a means of emotional grounding. The "burning box" (the juke-box) and its "down-beat" serve as metaphors for the precision and control necessary to maintain emotional stability. The repetitive use of words like "fall" and "descend" also plays a crucial role in maintaining rhythmic consistency while enhancing the emotional depth of the poem. The repeated falling of objects—nickels into slots, drinks descending into throats, love descending from the head to the heart—creates a rhythmic structure that mirrors the mechanical and predictable actions of the juke-box. Bishop's exploration of musicality also draws on the poetic principles of rhyme and sound, which are integral to the emotional and aesthetic power of the poem. By incorporating subtle forms of rhyme, repetition and alliteration, Bishop creates a musicality that enhances the emotional resonance of the poem. Much like Hopkins' flexible use of rhythm, Bishop's rhythmic control in "Edgar Allan Poe & The Juke-Box" allows her to achieve a balance between expressive precision and emotional spontaneity. The mechanical regularity of the juke-box's rhythm contrasts with the emotional spontaneity of the actions described in the poem, creating a tension that heightens the emotional intensity. Bishop uses rhythm not only as a formal structuring device but also as a means of creating the beauty of the music. In "Edgar Allan Poe & The Juke-Box", we see how Bishop interprets Poe's poetics through her own stylistic lens. She pursues expressive precision and control over emotional expression, employing musical rhythm in her poetry. These qualities form the core of her poetry, giving

her works with lasting value and profound revelation.

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