

PORTRAIT OF TIME
SEA DRIFT

BOOKS OF POETRY BY
ELIZABETH BARTLETT

Poems of Yes and No, 1952

Behold This Dreamer, 1959

Poetry Concerto, 1961

It Takes Practice Not to Die, 1964

Threads, 1968

Twelve-tone Poems, 1968

Selected Poems, 1970

The House of Sleep, 1975

In Search of Identity, 1977

Dialogue of Dust (a one-act play in verse), 1977

A Zodiac of Poems, 1979

Address in Time, 1979

Memory Is No Stranger, 1981

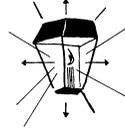
The Gemini Poems, 1984

Candles, 1987, 1988

Around the Clock, 1989

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Established 1975



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Cover: original acrylic painting by Elizabeth Bartlett
Title page: Illustration by Elizabeth Bartlett accompanying the poem “Tima” in *A Zodiac of Poems* by Elizabeth Bartlett

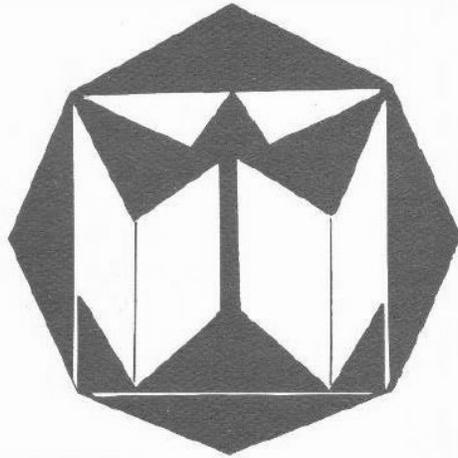
AUTOGRAPH EDITIONS

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PORTRAIT OF TIME
SEA DRIFT

A facsimile of the original manuscript



by
ELIZABETH BARTLETT

Foreword by
STEVEN JAMES BARTLETT

AUTOGRAPH EDITIONS

FOREWORD

Steven James Bartlett

American poet Elizabeth Bartlett (1911–1994) possessed an exceptional memory. As her son, I was astonished even when I was a child how vividly and in great detail she was able to recall events, people, conversations, and experiences from many years ago. As an adult, I came to recognize that her memories did not involve purely factual occurrences, but laced through them were also her thoughts and feelings she had experienced at the time, often long ago. In *Portrait of Time: Sea Drift*, Elizabeth Bartlett’s sensitive and prodigious memory creates a richly elaborated recapturing of a remembered childhood of a kind seldom found in autobiographies.

...

When Elizabeth Bartlett died, she left behind an enormous collection of her literary papers and correspondence, copies of her many publications of poetry, short stories, essays, literary criticism, translations, and book reviews; as yet unpublished manuscripts; as well as original award-winning works of art in a variety of media, including scratchboard, brush and ink, pen drawings, wax painting, cut paper, and collage. As her literary executor, it fell to me to place these works in permanent collections, which are now to be found in the [Archive for New Poetry](#) maintained by the Mandeville Department of Special Collections at the University of California, San Diego, and in the [Rare Books Archives and Special Collections of the University of Louisville](#).

In addition to these materials, I put aside for my personal reference and enjoyment a number of her manuscripts not published previously. During the more than 30 years that have passed since then, one book manuscript in particular has frequently drawn me back to it. It stands apart from the work for which Elizabeth Bartlett became well-known, i.e., her poetry, her creation of the twelve-tone form, and the establishment by her of the international non-profit organization Literary Olympics, Inc., whose purpose is to honor and award celebrated poets in juried international competitions coinciding with the Summer Olympic Games.

The unpublished manuscript to which I’ve returned again and again is *Portrait of Time*. The copy in my possession, as far as I am able to verify, may be the only one in existence. The book is distinctive in a variety of ways: First, it is an autobiographical account, yet is told in the third person, and in an unusual way that I’ll describe. Second, it is a recreation through Elizabeth Bartlett’s remarkable memory of her childhood in the New York City of long ago. The book spans the time when her earliest memories were formed, until her late childhood, at about the age of 12. Third, the book is innovative in its style, portrayed through the eyes and by means of the language of the child she once was, recreating a sensitive and original mind with the vibrancy of remembered

experience. Fourth, for an autobiographical account of a childhood, the book is long. The manuscript that is now before me on my desk consists of some 550 typed pages or more than 205,000 words. I will add a few notes later about the manuscript itself.

During my childhood, my mother and my father, who was also an author and artist, would often share with one another and me their literary work in progress. In the evenings, my mother frequently would read aloud to my father and me from her poetry, from her short stories, and from my father's works of fiction and non-fiction. She was an inspiring and dramatic reader who brought to our ears not only her own and my father's writing, but also numerous short stories and full-length novels by other authors. These were days without the intrusion and distraction of television; instead, our family of three explored the world of literature.

Sometimes, though very seldom, with years in between, my mother would mention in passing that she was once again re-working her manuscript of *Portrait of Time: Sea Drift*. She may have begun writing the book before I was born. If my memory is not mistaken, she first had the title *Heresy in Steel* in mind, which my father and I liked very much. If this was the book's initial title, when and why she changed it, I do not know.

As I've mentioned, *Portrait of Time* is autobiographical yet written in the third person. This is uncommon among autobiographies, but is not unknown. Among poets, in India the widely known Tamil poet Muthiah Sathappan Chettiar (1927-1981), most often known as Kannadasan, also employed this approach in recalling his early life in one short chapter, "My Childhood," in his *Gnana Maalika (Garland of Wisdom, 1971)*. Also born in India, Urdu Hindi poet Nida Fazli (1938–2016) wrote his 2005 autobiography in the third person, *Deewaron Ke Beech (Between the Walls)*, Volume 1, and *Deewaron Ke Behar (Beyond the Walls)*, Volume 2.

Among other authors whose autobiographies avoided use of the first person "I," there is Salvador Dali's *The Secret Life of Salvador Dali* (1942), in which he refers to himself as "Salvador Dali"; Henry Adams' *The Education of Henry Adams* (1907), in which he similarly refers to himself by his name; and Gertrude Stein's *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* (1933), written in the first person as though by Alice B. Toklas.

Elizabeth Bartlett's *Portrait of Time*, however, makes use of a different variety of third person narration: Although the book begins with a straightforward autobiographical "I," it quickly shifts to third person by investing the author's identity in the character she calls "Beatrice Berger." Other members of her family, friends, and neighbors are also renamed. Why she chose to do this, I never learned and can only conjecture. Perhaps, as Oscar Wilde once remarked, "Man is least himself when he talks in his own person. Give him a mask, and he will tell you the truth" (in his essay "The Critic as Artist," 1891).

Alternatively and more poetically, when looking into the mirror of memories, what one sees is oneself as another. When one looks in an everyday mirror, the image is not as others see one, but the image is of course reversed: If you part your hair on the left, others do not see you as you see yourself; for them to see you as you do in the mirror, your part would need to be on the right. Somewhat in parallel, when you remember your past, the you whom you remember is from the perspective of you today, who is in some respects, perhaps important ones, no longer the person you were. A remembered self is, so to speak, a self mirrored back in the form of memories; they portray someone as another

than the person you are now. If one wished and if it serves an author's literary purpose, that person might be given a different name. Perhaps something like this may have been Elizabeth Bartlett's purpose. She had a complex and reflective mind.

Or the name changes we find in *Portrait of Time* may reflect the emotional distance that its author may have gained, permitting her to offer a narration as though by an external observer. Or perhaps, we could further conjecture, the style she chose may have provided a greater narrative distance to introduce some elements of fiction, a distance from her real identity at the time she wrote.

Given these alternatives and others that are possible, it is not clear whether *Portrait of Time* is wholly a non-fiction autobiography, or is what has become known as an autobiographical novel or fictive memoir that blurs the line between fact and fiction, or is an experiment with so-called depersonalized self-narration (as in Gertrude Stein's, *Everybody's Autobiography*, 1937).

Whatever Elizabeth Bartlett's motivation, *Portrait of Time* portrays, as a phenomenologist might express this, the life-world of a child in the New York City of the second decade of the 1900s. The chief interest of the work may lie in the insight it offers into the character and childhood of Elizabeth Bartlett as a poet, in its richly detailed descriptions of childhood from her point of view as a child, and in its descriptions from a perceptive and sensitive young person's point of view of tenement life in the New York City of more than a century ago.

Many of the experiences, people, and events recounted in *Portrait of Time* are, I believe, not fictitious, but factually based. My mother would occasionally recount to me many of her memories of the very same experiences, people, and events. These independent, repeated, and confirming recollections are, for most of us, then commonly judged to refer to real events and people, rather than fictions. Beyond this belief, what I can attest with certainty is that she lived a life in the service of beauty and of truth as she knew it.

About the manuscript

A facsimile of a manuscript seeks to replicate the source material as accurately as possible in terms of the appearance, scale, condition, and pagination of the original. Following this Foreword, readers will find a facsimile of the manuscript of Elizabeth Bartlett's *Portrait of Time*, which reproduces its pagination, including the author's occasional annotations, corrections, and hand-drawn diagrams. The manuscript was typed on standard-size 8½ x 11 paper, but the typescript is not the top copy, but rather a carbon copy on gossamer-thin, extremely lightweight, and now very fragile onionskin paper. I have no knowledge of what happened to the top copy or why my mother remained in possession of only the carbon copy. As a carbon copy, it is generally quite readable, but the passage of time, the yellowing of the paper, and its translucency have made the reproduction of a facsimile a challenge.

This manuscript was bound in leather with cloth-tipped corners. The binding was, as I remember, done as a gift to my mother from my father during one of the periods when

they lived in Mexico. I cannot provide a date, but the manuscript was certainly bound more than fifty years ago. The fact that it was bound as a gift for my mother and that, as I remember, she was pleased made clear that she valued its contents and saw the binding as a way of preserving the work.

Why did I choose to publish a facsimile of the manuscript itself rather than create a standard modern typeset equivalent text? There are several reasons: First, as one who is dedicated to the conservation of literary works, I wished to reproduce as far as possible the original typescript; it is perhaps, as I've said, the only copy of the book in existence. Second, readers may share my experience that having a facsimile of the original typescript before their eyes brings them into closer contact with its author who sat in thought typing for many long hours at a machine that is now a collector's item. Third, there is my own practical reason: the realistic expedience which the inevitability of aging with the passage of time brings with it. Now in my 80s and with some of my own writing projects still to care for, offering a facsimile of the original manuscript was a realizable project that I could complete within a limited period of time. Here, I trust the reader will forgive the need to bow to the forces of time which one does one's best to ignore, but in the end, alas, cannot.

It is my hope that *Portrait of Time: Sea Drift* will find its way into the hands of interested readers, lovers and students of Elizabeth Bartlett's poetry, and scholars, historians, and literary critics wishing to know more of her life and thought, and of a child's experience growing up in New York City more than a century ago. I further hope, through the efforts of others dedicated to the task, that a standard typeset edition will someday be published. The licensing for this facsimile has been chosen to open the door with this end in view.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Elizabeth Bartlett, c. 1962

Elizabeth Bartlett (1911-1994) was an American poet and writer noted for her lyrical and symbolic poetry, creation of the new twelve-tone form of poetry, founder of the international non-profit organization Literary Olympics, Inc., and known as an author of fiction, essays, reviews, translations, and as an editor. She is not to be confused with the British poet (1924-2008) of the same name. For more detailed information about Elizabeth Bartlett's life, work, and critical commendations, see the [Wikipedia entry](#).

Bartlett's most notable achievements include:

- Creation of a new form of poetry, "the twelve-tone poem," adapting Arnold Schönberg's musical system to the verbal, accented sounds of language. Called "the Emily Dickinson of the 20th Century," Bartlett's concise lyrics have been praised by poets, musicians, and composers alike.
- Publication of 16 books of poetry, a group of edited anthologies, and more than 1,000 poems, short stories, and essays published, for example, in *Harper's*, *Virginia Quarterly*, *New York Times*, *North American Review*, *Saturday Review*, *Prairie Schooner*, and in numerous international collections.
- Recipient of many fellowships, grants and awards, including NEA, PEN Syndicate, fellowships at the Huntington Hartford Foundation, Montalvo, Yaddo,

MacDowell, Dorland Mt. Colony and Ragdale, travel grants, and honors for introducing literature as part of the Olympics.

- Founder of the Literary Olympics, to restore literature, specifically poetry, as a vital part of the Olympics as it once had been in ancient Greece.

Bartlett's poetry came to the attention of leading poets, writers, and critics as diverse as Marianne Moore, Wallace Stevens, Mark Van Doren, Conrad Aiken, Allen Tate, Alfred Kreyborg, Robert Hillyer, Louis Untermeyer, Rolfe Humphries, John Ciardi, Richard Eberhart, Richard Wilbur, Maxine Kumin, Robert M. Hutchins, Kenneth Rexroth, William Stafford, and others. Over the years, Bartlett maintained an active and extensive correspondence with eminent poets, writers, and literary critics; evident throughout this collected literary correspondence are strong statements attesting to the importance of her work.

Her husband, Paul Alexander Bartlett (1909–1990) was an American writer, artist, and poet. He made a large-scale study through pen-and-ink illustrations and photographs of more than 350 Mexican haciendas, published novels, short stories, and poetry, and worked as a fine artist in a variety of media. For more detailed information about his life and work, see the [Wikipedia entry](#).

Elizabeth Bartlett's son, Steven James Bartlett (1945–), is a philosopher and psychologist who has published many books and articles in the fields of philosophy and psychology. For more detailed information about his life and work, see the [Wikipedia entry](#).

FURTHER INFORMATION AND SOURCES OF ELIZABETH BARTLETT'S WORK

At the time of this writing, an informative Wikipedia entry is available which describes Elizabeth Bartlett's life, lists her creative work, and summarizes its recognition and importance, accompanied by links to additional online resources:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elizabeth_Bartlett_%28American_poet%29

A number of Elizabeth Bartlett's previously published books may now be freely downloaded in a variety of eBook formats from Project Gutenberg:

<http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/author/49768>

As noted earlier, extensive permanent collections of Elizabeth Bartlett's papers, literary correspondence, publications, unpublished manuscripts, and art have been established, one as part of the [Archive for New Poetry](#) maintained by the Mandeville Department of Special Collections at the University of California, San Diego ([detailed finding aid](#)), and the second by the Rare Books Archives and Special Collections of the University of Louisville ([detailed finding aid](#)).