



[One Art](#), by Elizabeth Bishop

In A Nutshell

Elizabeth Bishop's "One Art" is a deceptive poem on many levels. First of all, it appears to speak to us, the readers, in language that is conversational and clear, but *actually* follows one of the most complicated and mind-bogglingly structured verse forms known to man: the villanelle. In terms of content, its casual tone and the simple, graceful flow of its language lull us into a kind of false sense of security that's gradually eroded as we realize that the poet *does* really care about each loss she mentions – and care deeply. Finally, while it seems oh-so-transparent and non-manipulative on the outside, the poem cunningly forces readers to look introspectively at their own losses, and draws upon the feeling of individual moments of loss. Oh, Elizabeth Bishop, how *do* you do it? For these reasons and more, the poem is easily Bishop's most famous work, and it is often used to represent her whole career of thoughtful, masterful poeticizing.

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Big Picture Study Questions

- 1 What do you think the poet means by "the art of losing" and how serious is she about this idea?

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- 2 How important is the poem 's form to your reading of it?
- 3 What effect does the refrain have upon your understanding of the poem 's tone? How does the meaning of this single line change throughout the piece?

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