

## Waving to Elizabeth

*(for Elizabeth Bishop)*

For mapmakers' reasons, the transcontinental air routes  
must have been diverted today, and Sunderland's  
stratosphere  
is being webbed over by shiny, almost invisible spider jets  
creeping with deliberate intention on the skin-like air,  
each suspended from the chalky silk of its passing.

Thready at first,  
as if written by two, four, fine felt nibs, the lines become  
cloudy  
as the planes cease to need them. In freedom they  
dissolve. Just  
as close observation dissipates in the wind of theory.

Eight or nine of them now, all writing at once,  
rising from the south on slow rails, slow arcs, an armillary  
prevented by air from completing its evidence,  
unravelling instead in soft, powdery stripes, which  
seem to be  
the only clouds there are between what's simply here as  
park,  
house, roof, road, cars, etcetera, and the wide, long view  
they must have of us there, if they bother to look.  
They have taken so much of us up with them, too:

Money and newspapers, meals, toilets, old films, hot  
coffee.  
Yet the miles between us, though measurable, seem unreal.  
I have to think, 'Here it is, June 19th, 1983.  
I'm waving from a waste patch by the Thornhill School.'  
As perhaps you think back from your trip through the  
cosmos,  
'Here where I love, it is no time at all. The geography  
looks wonderful! This high, smooth sea's more quiet  
than the map is,  
though the map, relieved of mapmakers, looks  
imprisoned and free.'

From *[Anne Stevenson: Selected Poems](#)*  
(The Library of America, 2008), pages 33–34.

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