AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF BEIRUT

# ELIZABETH BISHOP AND THE AESTHETIC EYE/I: HER PUBLISHED AND UNPUBLISHED POETRY

by
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# AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

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Generally recognized as a minor poet, Elizabeth Bishop published very little poetry in her lifetime, the whole of her poems amounting to barely one hundred in her *The Complete Poems, 1927-1979*. In 2006, Alice Quinn edited the book *Edgar Allan Poe and the Jukebox: Uncollected Poems, Drafts, and Fragments* which brought into publication Bishop's hitherto unpublished poetry, nearly doubling her published works, and creating much controversy. As her *Complete Poems* is designated as a work of extraordinary formal mastery, the poems in *Edgar Allan Poe* are often criticized as falling short of her exacting best and failing to reflect the Bishop readers have come to know and understand.

As a comparative study of selected poems from both collections, this thesis considers the creative process of writing "publishable" poetry, what it means and what it takes for a poet like Elizabeth Bishop. Approaching the text within the framework of New Aestheticism, I will be using the theories of Heidegger, Lukács, Adorno, Collingwood, and Dewey to explore the significance of aesthetic experiences (Collingwood, Heidegger, Dewey) and the particular knowledge offered by aesthetics as it differs from other forms of knowledge (Lukács, Adorno). Performing a close reading of the thematic and formal elements of the poems will help answer the question of whether Bishop's apparent faith in aesthetics as purposeful in the praxis of her life holds true in the unpublished poetry. As will be revealed, published poetry is for Bishop perfected artificiality that fails to control and order the darkness and chaos of her personal life. In the end, the personal, subjective "I" proves too powerful and overwhelming to be controlled by the objective "eye" and the aesthetic contemplation of surface.

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# CHAPTER I

# INTRODUCTION: THE POETIC EYE/I

In a letter to John Taylor on 27 February 1818, Keats wrote that "if Poetry comes not as naturally as the Leaves to a tree, it had better not come at all" (Keats 93). As Robinson points out in his review of *Edgar Allan Poe and the Jukebox*, Elizabeth Bishop views the issue of the naturalness of the process of writing poetry quite differently. In a prose piece, she writes:

> Writing poetry is an unnatural act…It takes great skill to make it seem natural.... Most of the poet's energies are really directed towards this goal: to convince himself (and perhaps, with luck, eventually some readers) that what he's up to and what he's saying is really an inevitable, only natural way of behaving under the circumstances (*Edgar Allan Poe and the Jukebox* 207)

For Bishop, the process of writing a poem is a way of behaving, a way that can be revised, ordered, and organized to finished perfection. In a way, the process may be viewed as a quest for achieving control and mastery over oneself, one's losses, pains, and sufferings, a quest for reaching a place of comfort, a home defined by stability. For Bishop, writing poetry is a process of ordering chaos in such a way that "behaving" in face of difficult, uncontrollable circumstances becomes controllable, stable, and may perhaps pass as an "inevitable, only natural way of behaving."

The possibility of the aesthetic process achieving such a goal that passes into experiential life as "natural" and effective is a question with which Bishop herself struggles. In her prose piece, **"**Writing poetry is an unnatural act…," for instance, she identifies "the problem of writing poetry" as "the difficulty of combining the real with the decidedly un-real; the natural with the unnatural; the curious effect a poem produces of being as normal as *sight* and yet as synthetic, as artificial, as a *glass eye"* (*Edgar Allan Poe* 212). Though Bishop identifies the process of aesthetic vision and writing

poetry with artifice, she nonetheless admits that its effect seems "as normal as sight" though paradoxically also "as synthetic…as a glass eye." If poetry is understood as a way of "behaving" or reacting in response to lived circumstances, then, the aesthetic process is a way of dealing with disorder and chaos. As such instability often characterizes the openings of Bishop's poetry, the poems develop from objective seeing, to imaginative contemplation, to a final completion of the aesthetic process ending in resolution, order, and more often than not, cheer. To begin this process, the eye and mind must relinquish any preconceived understandings and begin with a clean slate. The question that ensues is whether such a mental process is significant, effective, possible, and valuable when it is offered as a "way of behaving" in experiential life.

The desire for mastery and perfection, and an attachment to observable facts, may have been a way of dealing with the chaotic, unpredictable darkness in Bishop's real life, defined by a series of tragedies I will briefly recount. As an infant, her father died and consequently, her mother vanished into an asylum when Bishop was five. Mostly homeschooled, she suffered from asthma, eczema, and St. Vitus' Dance (a disorder causing uncontrollable, jerky motions) among other various illnesses. Her college boyfriend committed suicide when she refused his hand in marriage and sent her a parting postcard that said: "Go to hell, Elizabeth" (Orr). Her one great love, the Brazilian Lota de MacedoSoares committed suicide in Bishop's apartment, a suicide for which she was later blamed by Lota's family. In a letter to Robert Lowell in 1948 Bishop confessed: "When you write my epitaph, you must say I was the loneliest person who ever lived" (*The Letters of Robert Lowell* 288–89). With all of this tragedy, we nonetheless witness an Elizabeth Bishop who dedicates poemsto finicky sandpipers and mechanical toys rather than wails about the torment in which she lives. We witness an Elizabeth Bishop, who, after visually witnessing chaotic darkness in "The Bight," for

example, provides the concluding understatement: “All the untidy activity continues/awful but cheerful” (l. 35-36).

Finished perfection and controlled emotional responses in poetry, for Bishop, was quite a serious matter. In 1940, Elizabeth Bishop admitted in a letter to Moore: “I scarcely know why I persist at all. It is really fantastic to place so much on the fact that I have written a half-dozen *phrases* that I can still bear to reread without too much embarrassment” (*One Art* 94). Bishop remained self-doubtful and hesitant, even after winning the Houghton Mifflin poetry award for her first collection, *North & South* (1946), and a Pulitzer Prize in 1956 for her second, *A Cold Spring*. This quest for perfection is part of the reason why, I believe, at the time of her death, she had assembled fewer than ninety poems from four collections in her *Complete Poems*. This quest to perfection is, in other words, the writing process. Lowell’s sonnet of tribute to her asks:

> Do
> you still hang your words in air,
> ten years unfinished, glued to your
> noticeboard, with gaps
> or empties for the unimaginable phrase … ? (*Words in Air* vii)

Bishop herself claims that Marianne Moore’s greatest lesson for her was the poet’s insistence on getting every minute detail in a poem right. Bishop would go to astonishing pains to make sure that she was being accurate. Thus, the art of poetry seems to be, for Bishop, an art of mastery and perfection, of stable, observable facts. Indeed, she is quoted as saying: “I can’t tell a lie even for art, apparently; it takes an awful effort or a sudden jolt to make me alter facts” and “The settings, of descriptions, of my poems are almost invariably just plain facts---or as close to facts as I can write them” (*One Art* 408, 621).

While the published poetry has repeatedly been characterized with extraordinary formal mastery, an unwavering perfection, stability, poise, and control over bursts of

emotion, the uncollected poems allow us to see through these perfected surfaces. In these poems, readers encounter rare (and decidedly un-Bishopian) laments, bursts of melodrama, personal fears, pain, and losses. With such newly discovered territory in Bishop's works, it is pertinent to take a fresh look and examine her published poetry alongside these new poems. Instead of evaluating these poems as compared to her collected ones, I will consider them, along with the drafts, as instances in the creative process, a process that, for Bishop, requires a certain "unnaturalness" to be ready for publication.

Yet, while Bishop asserts that this unnaturalness nonetheless seems "as normal as sight," the creative, aesthetic process of vision and imagination will be scrutinized in these pages in order to trace the poetic eye as it explores the visual external world, involves the imaginative mind's eye, and turns inward into a subjective "I," an internal landscape of fear and loneliness. While the first in this series is primarily enacted in the published poetry, the last is discovered in the uncollected poems. As the eye/I searches, in all cases, it yearns for a feeling of home, for comfort and stability. While in the published poetry the poet uses the eye for objective vision to lead way to imaginative vision, to reach a final stability, the uncollected poems struggle with an eye controlled by the "I;" in other words, the poet struggles with the possibility of objective vision, and consequently also with the possibility and effectiveness of the aesthetic process, when subjectivity and personal pain are too strong to clear the way for it.

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Elizabeth Bishop's published poems are journeys of a travelling mind, quests and experiences in search of comfort and order. To embark on such journeys, one is required to have clear, objective vision of the world predicated on abandoning all intellectual and emotional baggage, the source from which the world is usually understood. Mastery, here, represents forms of knowing that are familiar and

supportive, whether religious, familial, scientific, or ideological, and that aim to define and create understandings of the world in terms of fixed modes of thought. Mastery stands for clear-cut understandings, order and control imposed on an apparently disordered and chaotic world. Achieving mastery is eliminating questions and believing answers. One may conceptualize the terms "travel" or "dislocation" by differentiating them from the concept of "home." In this configuration, home would represent mastery, orientation, order and stability, while travel would embody disorientation, disorder, instability, and instead of mastery, a type of constant questioning. Since mastery is representative of intellectual and emotional points of orientation or homes (rather than merely geographical homes) the state of mental dislocation, or separation from familiar modes of thought and perception, may be perceived as a type of homelessness or a type of travel. In this sense, travel may be regarded as the state of being homeless in perpetual search of a home.

What Bishop's unpublished poetry highlights is the situation of this traveler hoping to achieve objective, aesthetic understanding. She seems to claim that pain and loss prove to be as overpowering as the master-ideologies one had to shed to embark on this journey. As such, this fear and alienation induces the same blinding effects on objective vision and consequently prevents aesthetic contemplation. The struggle between "disaster" and "master," to use the words provided in "One Art," seems hopeful in the published poems, though disaster proves uncontrollable in the unpublished ones.

While cultural critique implies that the poet has some kind of ideological belief or political conviction that she wishes to convey through poetry, aesthetic reflection does not presume to know, but, quietly observant, seeks to contemplate and question. My thesis will first attempt to show how Bishop's poetry is predicated on an attitude defined by uncertainty and objective observation of the world in order to attempt to

satisfy a quest for understanding. In her published poetry, Bishop capitalizes on the dichotomy of stability versus dislocation and questioning versus mastery in order to reconfigure the traditional notion of home. Bishop separates between the notion of home as traditions, culture, family, education, and physical place and home as a feeling of homeliness: comfort and inner peace. To achieve the latter, Bishop's published poetry would argue, one must break free of the former which come to be understood as terrorizing, overwhelming universalities that cloud personal vision and limit understanding. Theorists such as Georg Lukács and Theodor Adorno have elaborated on the fact that historical ideologies or universal theories of understanding the world generalize the particular out of existence. For both writers, universal ideological/historical theories tend to wash away anything unique, original, personalized, and particular as such theories pass over these aspects to create universal truths, which, through framing and ordering the perception and understanding of the world, do so at a great cost. In this sense, the notion of "home" offered by universal understandings of the world offers stability sure enough, but at the cost of eliminating the beauty involved in the particular. Such beauty, as will be discussed, can only be discovered via approaching the world with the attitude of the traveler unencumbered by notions of home, and therefore capable of *seeing* the particularity of life. As such, rather than promoting "home" as a totalizing force for understanding and ordering the world, such emphases, though requiring acute awareness and the sensibility of the traveler unafraid to stray from home (ideologically speaking), engenders various "homes," that in their particularity and personal derivation from direct experience, provide a type of comfort unreachable by totalizing claims. This ultimately asserts the value and uniqueness of aesthetic knowledge.

"The Man-Moth" demonstrates the poet-artist's susceptibility to breaking from established orders using the metaphor of the "third rail" that deviates from the other

fixed two. “Paris, 7 A.M.” assures readers that though this road less travelled may be frightening; flickers of hope will always be available to the travelling consciousness. Yet, what these poems reveal is that Bishop nonetheless believes strongly in the concept of home. Though she attempts to deconstruct ideologies and traditions that pose as home, she does not eliminate the concept itself. The characters in the poems stray from “home” on an apparent quest to find an ideological *home*; in other words, the search for inner peace and comfort is the ultimate goal. This quest is the poem itself, is artistic consciousness. Using the theories of R.G. Collingwood and John Dewey on the conceptualization of art as an experience, I will argue that poetry for Bishop is an experience, a journey, with a defined goal: finding the home that stands to represent this comfort, ease, and peace. Thus, the formal structure, imagery, and thematic content of her verse reflect a struggle, a development, and a final insight that either discovers home or is one step closer to doing so. Beginning with loss, decay, abandonment, disorder, or confusion, the poems subtly develop to reach comfort implying that the process of poetry or art in general is an attempt to order and organize, confront and resolve fear and loss. While traditional notions of home are rigid and defined, the feeling of home (which I will refer to as homeliness) can neither be defined nor traced back to a source. It is a feeling engendering inner peace and quiet. Often, mastery or answers are perpetually absent, though homeliness is nonetheless attained.

If a poem is a journey, lines are experiences. For Bishop, these lines are composed of the observations of a mind at work. Free of all preconceived knowledge, she confronts the world on a direct, personal basis characterized by an aesthetic vision of the world that will allow her to find home. Aesthetic vision is the appreciation of surfaces, an objective analysis of available facts as a means to reach deeper meaning. “Cirque D’Hiver,” “The Fish,” and “Four Poems” enact this process and evaluate the meaningful depth achieved in the end. Perhaps like sequels to each other, each

respectively adds a step to the one preceding it, finally allowing for this homeliness to be attained.

These published poems, then, attribute a unique advantage to breaking away from constrained modes of thought through utilizing aesthetic vision and confronting difficult experiences with the experience of writing a poem. This experience however, is far from healing or purifying, for Bishop is quick to assure that such comforting feelings are often fleeting and brief. Yet, in the most apparently hopeless, dark, and challenging states of mind Bishop allows for the penetration of light, attesting to, though hesitantly, the possibility of aesthetic vision to allow for deeper meaning and finally have an effect on life and living. However, a close look at Bishop's unpublished collection will reveal an interesting dimension to this attitude. When poetic vision had been flight and freedom from limited perspectives towards homeliness, it becomes illusionistic, confining and limiting in its own right. When it had been so keen on objective observation to control emotion, it gives way to emotional outbursts, expression of the need of love, foolish, hopeful, and an unrealistic "echoing house" separated from reality and life.

As meaningful depth becomes illusory, poetry comes to create "depths" that will serve only as abysses into which one endlessly falls. Questioning the effect, value, and objective of poetry, Bishop extends, modifies, and adds a dimension to her published poetry, breaking the exact surface of the poems with bursts of emotional anxiety and psychological terror. The struggle between order and disorder and the impossibility of mastery become overwhelming and overbearing. As encapsulated in "One Art," the final struggle between "disaster" and "master" shakes the tightly woven tapestry of the poem surrendering artistic vision to a kind of blindness and death. What Bishop's unpublished poetry reveals is that the intense darkness and alienation of a travelling poet prove too overwhelming to be contained or controlled, so much so that they

become the subject of art and the lens through which the world is viewed. By being overpowering states of mind, they transform landscape, modify experiences, blur vision and are finally art. While in the published poetry art is used as a means to control vision and clarify experience, here it becomes the unleashing of the darkness of experience, disorder that will become art.

Instead of mastering loss through art, or attempting to deal with the heaviness of experience through aesthetic vision, loss and disaster become both the source and the consequence of art, which is a perpetual falling. The unpublished poetry says that the hopeful process underlined in the published poetry is pretentious and unreliable, that experience is often too strong and too overwhelming, that reality is hard-boiled and cruel. In a sense, the essential sadness of being separated from home and points of orientation cannot perhaps be surmounted, as it comes to invade vision and expression preventing the objective, aesthetic vision that begins Bishop's hopeful quest to homeliness in her published poetry.

Rather than merely claiming that Bishop's published and unpublished poetry make opposing claims, I would like to clarify that they each reveal a different perspective on the state of mind of the travelling consciousness and a different evaluation of aesthetic vision. Isolating the same tropes and themes in both the published and unpublished poetry, I will read Bishop's poems comparatively to reveal how the unpublished poetry qualifies many claims for the value, possibility, and effect of aesthetic awareness made with apparent confidence in the published poetry, and thereby heightens awareness of the shattering loneliness and alienation of the poet, and complicating the process of aesthetic vision involved in the journey towards personal vision and understanding.

**Theoretical Framework: New Aestheticism and the Aesthetic Process**

In Marjorie Perloff's 2006 MLA presidential address, she argued that as the growing interest in literature and poetics outside the academy has increased, (what she calls increased "otherdisciplinarity") single-author studies in literature have been the casualty (qtd. in Tomkins 412). Perloff encourages a new direction for literary studies in her call to revive single author monographs and reading practices focused on close reading. Falling under such a category, this thesis takes up the task of reading Elizabeth Bishop's poetry through a focus on the formal aspect of her verse as it reflects the aesthetic process of writing poetry. Thereby, it places attention first and foremost on Bishop the *poet* struggling with poetic expression. The most appropriate lens through which to perform such a reading is that of New Aestheticism.

New Aestheticism is a developing movement in literary criticism and theory that arose from debates about the status of aesthetics in the 1990s and started to become a literary practice in the beginning of the twenty-first century. As Peter Barry explains, it emphasizes the specificityof the literary text, "seeking dialogue with it rather than mastery over it…rather than viewing it as representative of a fixed position, or as the pre-determined expression of socially conservative views" (299). This movement can be regarded as a "fight-back" of literature after its long term "interrogation by the hermeneutics of suspicion" that aim to "unmask" the political interests or cultural concerns latent in the text (299). New Aestheticism, then, re-focuses attention on art's specificity as an object of analysis, or as an aesthetic phenomenon, a theory that is aesthetic *and* purportedly socially purposeful. New Aestheticism is the general theoretical framework in which my approach to the poetry of Elizabeth Bishop will be placed.

In "The Old Aestheticism and the New," published in 2005, Nicolas Shrimpton writes that "Aestheticism, the literary theory that dared not speak its name," has started to come back into view (1). He identifies three distinct stages in the development of the

field of Aesthetics in literature. The three stages are "Old Aestheticism," "Intermediate Aestheticism," and "New Aestheticism." Shrimpton defines Old Aestheticism as "a creative misunderstanding of Kant," arising from "the simple separation of epistemology, ethics and aesthetics in his three Critiques" and from "specific concepts such as art's purposeful purposefulness" (1). Propagated in the 1810s, aesthetics as an artistic doctrine began to take shape in the form of "poetry for its own sake" and "l'art pour l'art" (1-2). Up until the mid- to late 1800s, art and poetry had been understood as separate from history and experience, possessing a realm of their own. "Intermediate Aestheticism," according to Shrimpton's formulation, encompasses the British and American formalism practiced by the "New Critics" in the mid-twentieth century, a practice that was highly repudiated in the 1970s and 80s with the rise of ideological approaches to literature. The "New Aestheticism" of the 1990s, then, though still fairly recent to have achieved a uniform definition, nonetheless harks back to the assumptions of late nineteenth century "Old" aestheticism.

As for Old Aestheticism, it is associated with "philosophical Idealism," and identifies the realm of poetry and art with "beauty," though the concept had remained undefined in its specific characteristics (Shrimpton 2). With the world war that the first decades of the twentieth century brought along, the Modernist movement preferred the sublime and the grotesque over the "beautiful" (3). The value of beauty and the aesthetics as a theory in general had no value at this time. This, then, is primarily because this type of art was too separated from the praxis of life, too aloof and indifferent to be of value to those experiencing the horrors of war.

Yet, more recently, Shrimpton claims that modern literary criticism such as cultural materialism, gender studies, and deconstruction have all found "opportunities" in Old Aestheticism (4). For example, while Marxists traditionally disliked art for art's sake, Peter Burger, in his *Theory of the Avant-Garde* (1974), presents the possibility

that "apartness from the praxis of life, which had always been the condition that characterized the way art functioned in bourgeois society, now becomes its [art's] content" (48-49). For example, writing an essay as part of the collection *A Radical Aesthetic*, Tim Jones discusses Adorno's*Aesthetic Theory*, and argues that for Adorno, "the beautiful is…a vision of use value while remorselessly subjecting us to the false consciousness of exchange value" (qtd. in Shrimpton 12). The implications here are that art's ambiguous status via its relationship to the praxis of life may be studied to discover the re-inscription of art into life. Thus, separating Aestheticism from the realm of art for art's sake and the autonomy of the aesthetic, critics redefined the concept to finally consist of "an angle of vision that aims at the purification of vision…but which increasingly discovers the impossibility of such preternatural clarity of sight; it privileges art not as an end in and of itself, but as a focusing of sharpening of…contradictions…it problematizes…art by the same gesture with which it valorizes it" (Gagnierqtd. in Shrimpton 5). Thus, as Shrimpton points out, aestheticism was likened to the postmodern.

In arguing for the inscription of aesthetics into the praxis of life, critics of deconstruction attempted to argue how both fields had a direct effect on ideological and moral concerns in life. Carolyn Williams, in her *Transfigured World: Walter Pater's Aesthetic Historicism* (1989), sees Aestheticism as "a method rather than a movement: 'a systematic attitude of self-consciousness, a coherent stance or perspective on things, a method of attention'" (qtd. in Shrimpton 5). Further, Jonathan Loesberg in *Aestheticism and Deconstruction: Pater, Derrida and de Man* (1991), argues against the idea that deconstruction is another mode of Aestheticism, or "depoliticized close reading" in which "the stress on indeterminacy puts texts into an ineffectual realm of pure art" (qtd. in Shrimpton6). Instead, he claims that neither aestheticism nor deconstruction is disengaged from social and historical effects. Rather, and in speaking

specifically about Pater's Aestheticism, Loesberg argues that far from being "escapist," his aesthetics engages with "moral" and "theological" issues (6). Gender studies similarly took up the issue of Aestheticism within the context of commodification to interpret the theory as socially purposeful. For critics such as Psomiades in *Beauty's Body* (1997) and Talia Schaffer in *Women and British Aestheticism* (1999), the ambiguous state of the aesthetic work of art made it target to being identified as constitutive of a representation of femininity (6). Psomiadesargues that "to make the commodity a girl is to mystify its operations" (6). Ultimately, as Shrimpton makes clear, the opportunistic use of the term Aestheticism has stretched the meaning so thin "that it is in danger of collapsing" (7).

The debate about the definition and status of Aestheticism, and its relationship to life became full blown in the nineties. In 1994, George Levine edited the collection *Aesthetics and Ideology*, claiming that the aesthetic is indeed a mode "engaged richly and complexly with moral and political issues, but a mode that operates differently from others" (Shrimpton 9). With debates over the conception of beauty, the status of English studies, and the relationship of art to life, New Aestheticism became a controversy. David Hickey, author of *The Invisible Dragon: Four Essays on Beauty* (1993), claimed in a conference in 1988 that "the issue of the nineties will be beauty" (8). He argued that "beauty is not a thing—'the beautiful' is a thing…beauty is the agency that causes visual pleasure in the beholder" (qtd. in Shrimpton 8). He continued, "I direct your attention to the language of visual affect—to the rhetoric of how things look—to the iconography of desire" (8). Indeed, in 1996 the *New York Times Magazine* published an article titled "Beauty is Back: A Trampled Aesthetic Blooms Again."

In this way, the understanding of aesthetics as a distinct field separated from the praxis of life was brought back into critical debates. Andrew Bowie, author of *From Romanticism to Critical Theory* (1997), argues:

> If great bourgeois art—or, remembering Novalis' dictum that 'the only possible decision is whether something is literature or not,' any work which is judged to be art—is reduced to its identifiable historical and ideological determinations or made into the repeated demonstration of interpretative un-decidability, rather than also being understood in terms of its challenges to what we think we know, to what we think is worth doing, and to what we can hope for, our self-understanding will be immeasurably impoverished (285)

In his essay "What Comes After Art?" published as part of John Joughin and Simon Malpas's collection *The New Aestheticism* (2003), Bowie asks: "Was what an aesthetic approach saw in the best of Western and other culture *merely* an illusion from which we should now be liberated?" (70).

Bill Beckley and David Shapiro's *Uncontrollable Beauty: Toward a New Aesthetics* in 1998 expressed the idea that "conceptualism's denial of retinal pleasure seemed close to the puritanism of my hometown, from which I had just attempted to escape" (402). The next year the *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* published a symposium titled "Beauty Matters" (402). In 2000, Alexander Nehamas wrote for the *London Review of Books*: "Beauty is suddenly back" and philosophical aesthetics should not resist this return, because "the judgment of beauty is not a conclusion that cannot be justified, but a guess that might be wrong" (392, 402). Also in the year 2000, Murray Krieger wrote in his edited collection *Revenge of the Aesthetic: The Place of Literature in Theory Today*, "The essays in this volume argue for the importance of aesthetic values and formal characteristics specific to literary texts" (qtd. in Shrimpton 11). Isobel Armstrong's *The Radical Aesthetic* (2000) encourages a radical aesthetic that would modify educational literary practices based on the educational thought of John Dewey, who viewed art as "open to emotion as well as the rational" (12).

In *The New Aestheticism*, John Joughin and Simon Malpas argue in their introduction that theory has "shown…notions of universal human value to be without foundation, and even to act as representative means of safeguarding the beliefs and

values of an elitist culture from challenge or transformation," yet "what has frequently been lost in this process…is the sense of art's specificity as an object of analysis—or, more accurately its specificity as an aesthetic phenomenon" (1, 10). Then, in justifying the need for a new aestheticism, the authors call for a mode of approaching art that treats it as a "space" within which a criticism and questioning of logic and ethics can take place (3). In their formulation, new aesthetic theory would be both aesthetic and socially purposeful, in the sense that it represents a deconstructive approach to reigning methods of understanding. Yet, Shrimpton points out this view as harking back to the creative misunderstanding of Kant, whose configuration of the aesthetic did not lie on its perception as a bridge between art and life, but was more a "mental activity," an "independent mode of knowledge," separate from logic and ethics (13).

Ultimately, New Aestheticism offers an understanding of art as primarily "for art's sake;" that is, art committed tobeauty, the grotesque, or the sublime (in other words, committed to offering pleasure) without necessarily being logically true or ethically acceptable. In this understanding, Shrimpton argues, it is perfectly fine to read into a work of art for its political, ideological, social, or moral indications when it is understood that these are merely things that may have been incorporated into a work of art and do not constitute it. Their function in a work of art is of secondary importance. As Swineburne wrote in 1867, "art for art's sake first of all, and afterwards we may suppose all the rest shall be added to her" (qtd. in Shrimpton 13). The insistence here is on art's priority over what Perloff defined as "otherdisciplinariness." In the words of Auden, "poetry makes nothing happen," and likewise, as Shrimpton argues: "The criticism of poetry…makes nothing happen, though it sometimes rests (like all other discourses) on unstated social assumptions and can all too easily be hijacked for attempts at political consciousness-raising" (15).

The primary issue with aesthetics seems to be, then, its relationship to the praxis of life. Whether one admits, or rather celebrates, an art that stands separate from the praxis of life, and art that can "make nothing happen," or supports a theory of aesthetics that can affect the praxis of life, aesthetics as a mode of approaching art certainly deserves attention. In particular, Elizabeth Bishop's poetry, once viewed aesthetically, rather than imbued with cultural and ideological significance, itself provides an example of a poet undergoing the aesthetic process via writing poetry, and reflecting on the process, its validity, and whether or not it can "make" things "happen." This, for Bishop, seems to be the ultimate question. Valuing poetry as an independent form of knowledge, Bishop seeks to draw from the aesthetic experience a type of knowledge that is valuable within the praxis of her personal life, making it a "natural… way of behaving." Certainly in the published poetry, this value is both tangible and sure, as aesthetic contemplation of visual surface leads to momentary re-envisioning of the darkness of this world. Though transient, it is nonetheless there. The unpublished poetry expresses the uncertainty of an anxious being struggling for change and questioning the ability of art to initiate this change. This anxiety leads to an overall criticism of an art for art's sake, the primary complaint being the very inability of aesthetics to influence life. This brings in the whole question of the value of aesthetics all over again, especially, for Bishop, during a time when personal tragedy, alienation, and loneliness are too overwhelming either to allow for an aesthetic space of contemplation, or to be able to value an art that cannot affect life. I think, for Bishop, extracting effective and meaningful depth from the aesthetic contemplation of surface was the primary mission of her career as a poet.

In 1938 Marianne Moore wrote to Elizabeth Bishop: "I can't help wishing you would sometime in some way, risk some unprotected profundity of experience; or … some characteristic private defiance of the significantly detestable" (*One Art* 137).

Moore seems to ask of Bishop to engage in a more profound moral critique of society and culture, to engage her poetry with the time, to reach some kind of meaningful depth. Elizabeth Bishop's poems stand unique among contemporaneous Mid-Century American poetry. While the trend was Confessional Poetry or politically-motivated poetry, Bishop's reticent voice maintained a faith, in the published poetry, in the self-sufficiency of art and a conviction in the ability to gain something from the aesthetic reflection of the world around us.

Aesthetic reflection is an observation of surfaces available to the eye. As a method of approaching the world, it is allowing objects to exist without imposing any preconceived knowledge or attitudes on their being. Objective observation, appreciation of surface, then, is key to maintaining an uninformed, clear vision. According to Heidegger, the world conceals itself from us, and resists our attempts to know it, and therefore, a wise observer would admit of this integrity and place himself in the open where there are no definite prescriptions and definitions but only room for pondering. In *The Origin of the Work of Art*, Heidegger provides an example of abstracting an object from the world in his analysis of Vincent Van Gogh's *Pair of Shoes*, as he isolates the shoes from any implied environments. A peasant shoe is not what we see in our real world, because as a piece of equipment, the shoe itself vanishes into "usefulness," its substance becomes "transparent," and it collapses into the mere object that is produced and consumed. Thus to capture the essence of the shoe, Van Gogh allows it to "stand in the open," thereby opening up of a world of its own as it exists in its self-sufficiency, isolated from the facts and interpretations of the everyday world. This liberation from the preconceptions of everyday life abusing the being of the object creates an intellectual space for contemplating and appreciating the object in its integrity, a space that shows rather than tells. In this light, Bishop's verse becomes a series of tensions and movements that define her poetry as an interaction with the objects of the world

defined by Heidegger's sense of allowing a specific world to open up. Once this space is opened, the intellectual, emotional, and imaginative response of the observer serve to take this space and make of it an experience of self-discovery, in R.G. Collingwood's sense.

According to Collingwood, and as interpreted by Peter Johnson in his *R.G. Collingwood: An Introduction*, the experience of art is not a passive reception of sensory stimuli, but an imaginative engagement. Then, objective observation is not merely taking note of facts available to any observer; it is an activity particular to each observer as each specific imagination creates a different experience of the same sensory surface. For Collingwood, art is expression, and expression is clarifying one's experiences, an activity that transforms the experience as it clarifies it. Before expression, the emotion is thus nonexistent. Poetry, art, or aesthetic contemplation is therefore a process or an attempt to attain organization and understanding, and not merely express something already organized and understood. For Heidegger as well, experience is not the reception of sense impressions but a form of prospection or questioning. Thus, objective, aesthetic observation of the surfaces of the world, once understood as experiences extended by the imagination, lead to meaningful depth. In other words, this is to say that aesthetics is a gateway into attaining a particular way of perceiving the world that wither clarifies, organizes, or creates understandings. This is also to say that aesthetics is indeed effectual in the praxis of life.

In arguing for the significance of aesthetic contemplation, GeorgeLukács argues in his essay, "Specific Particularity," that this form of observation leads to the discovery of the "particular" in objects. For him, the "particular" is the middle term in what he identifies as the dialectic between the universal and the individual. Aesthetic, poetic insights, he goes on to say, "are unique and cannot be the subject of theory without being generalized almost out of existence" (711). The aesthetic becomes the site of a

mental dislocation in which the particular comes to stand in for the universal. The particular is given the opportunity to create a world as the universal, representing history and ideology in general, is eliminated. To clarify, Lukács uses Bishop's "The Sandpiper," in which the world is "minute … and clear" while retaining all the power and attributes of its unfathomable "vast[ness]" (l. 14). "It is only in this way," Lukács writes, "that the manifest indwelling presence of particularity can realize itself in every individual phenomenon [. . .] and it is only in this way that the work as a whole can embody precisely the particularity of a creatively articulated 'world' and allow us to experience that world" (231). Thus, in this light, allowing the world to open up through uninformed, objective observation will allow for a space in which both emotions and intellectual understandings are clarified, achieved, or discovered. In her published poetry, Bishop expresses an unwavering faith in this process, and an insistence on reaching a place of resolution, a place in which one feels the comfort and security of home. A place, as William Blake had imagined, can contain the confusion, chaos, and vastness of the world in a minute, controllable, and understandable grain of sand. A "student of Blake," the sandpiper is in a state of "controlled panic;" as Bishop aspires to control her own panic, she places faith in the knowledge provided by aesthetics to gain this effect in actual life (l. 4).

Yet, her uncollected poems, standing as representations of poems that Bishop wished not to publish, and also representing a flawed aesthetic process as it is defined above, become evidence of the impossibility of undergoing or accepting the aesthetic process as a viable, "natural" means of "behaving" in the face of shattering "circumstances." In such circumstances, vision is inevitably informed by an already existing emotional crisis which functions as the impediment to the aesthetic acknowledging of objects since they are deeply embedded within a matrix of emotional issues that themselves form and inform a vision of the world within which the object is

found. The object's particularity, in this case, becomes not particular to itself, but merely a projection of a mind in distress; it's "world" likewise becomes not its own, but that of the observer. That Bishop deliberately excluded such poetry from her publications reinforces her definition of poetry, or publishable poetry, as "unnatural." This artificiality, then, becomes the point from which Bishop criticizes the aesthetic process for its ineffectiveness and separation from the praxis of life. This artificiality also consequently leads to a criticism of the worlds opened up by the objects as deliberately created false bubbles of an art for art's sake that seem all too unnatural and unacceptable in the poet's world of increasing pain and loss.

Approaching the text with a New Aestheticist attitude, I will be using the theories of Heidegger, Lukács, Adorno, R.G. Collingwood, and John Dewey to place my analysis within the framework of New Aestheticism, and particularly, the significance of aesthetic experiences (Collingwood, Heidegger, Dewey) and the particular knowledge offered by aesthetics as it differs from other forms of knowledge, ideologies, and as it challenges the general flux of history and time (Lukács, Adorno). I will be exploiting these theories to read selections from Bishop's four published, collected volumes of poetry: *North and South*, *A Cold Spring*, *Questions of Travel*, and *Geography III*, and her only recently published collection of hitherto unpublished poetry *Edgar Allan Poe and the Jukebox*. Henceforth, I will be referring to poems in this last collection as Bishop's unpublished poetry.

My thesis will examine the poetry of Elizabeth Bishop within an aesthetic framework; it focuses on the poet's creation of aesthetic experiences through the construction of poetic imagery and employment of formal elements testifying to the significance of this aesthetic experience in providing the depth that Moore alluded to without necessarily resorting to cultural critique. The latter, along with the hermeneutics of suspicion described above, have been used to read Bishop's verse, eager to bring out

either the lesbian, feminist, or cultural critique embedded in her poetry. Rather, I would like to lend an attentive ear to her poems and focus on her vision of aesthetics represented through the language, imagery, thematic and formal elements in her poems. I will isolate references to the poet-artist, poetry, objective vision, and aesthetics, as well as identify significant formal elements such as rhyme, phonetics, and overall structure in both the published and published poetry. I will then compare how the representation of each aspect differs in order to reveal the relationship, for Bishop, between aesthetics and lived experience, and whether it is possible to achieve meaningful depth from the contemplation of surface.

Ultimately, I will bring out the particular aesthetic attitude that Bishop represents in her published and unpublished poetry, then, I will analyze how these poems embody (or do not) an aesthetic experience by discussing the tension between the ordering of art and the inherent pain and chaos involved in a person's living in a world of inevitable loss, abandonment, and decay. Particularly, chapter one compares the published "The Man-Moth" and "Paris, 7 A.M." to the unpublished "Three Poems" and "The walls" within the framework of George Lukács and Theodor Adorno's outlining of the difference between universal knowledge in the form of ideologies and aesthetic knowledge. In this chapter, attaining aesthetic knowledge will be likened to travel, or mental dislocation, while ideological thinking is more like home. By focusing on the trope of the poet-artist, or the creative insomniac embodying the propensity to mental dislocation, and his unique vision at large, and specifically to references to night, houses, isolation, alienation, and creatively articulated worlds of which the poet-artist is capable of producing, I will reveal how the representation of the poet-artist shifts from the position of hero, all-seeing god in the published poetry to the position of blind prisoner in the unpublished poems. This comparison will reveal how Bishop's unpublished poetry reveals another, darker dimension to her outlook on aesthetics,

clarifying her characterization of publishable poetry as "unnatural," and exposing her doubt regarding the value of aesthetic knowledge. Next, drawing on the aesthetic theories of Heidegger, Collingwood, and John Dewey, chapter two compares the published "The Fish" and "Cirque D'Hiver" to the unpublished "Luxembourg Gardens" and "Homesickness;" here, I will focus attention more closely on vision. By analyzing references to the poet's vision of the external world and her attempts to describe it, I will argue that while her published poems represent an ability for *a priori* vision, and consequently the creation of an aesthetic experience (Collingwood), her unpublished poems reveal the impossibility of this task in the face of inner turmoil as vision becomes blindness to the external world. Rather than poetry becoming a journey to ordering chaos begun by objective vision, it is an expression of an already formed subjective vision precluding objectivity.

Finally, in chapter three, I will draw on Collingwood's and Dewey's insistence on the ability of aesthetic experiences to affect life to compare the unpublished "Edgar Allan Poe and the Jukebox" to the published "Four Poems" to question Bishop's attitude towards the effect of art. Further, I will compare the published "Florida" to the unpublished "(Florida Revisited?)," along with reading "One Art" alongside the unpublished "What would be worst of all," to reveal, finally, how Bishop's poetry attests to the strength of disaster and personal loss in trumping any attempts towards mastery, objectivity, and aesthetic vision. Previously the source of freedom, art becomes a path for tortuous travel, its accentuated artificiality leading the way to absolutely nothing, to a dangerously hollow absence in place of home.

**Literature Review**

David Kalstone's 1977 essay in his book *Five Temperaments*, a critical treatment of Bishop, suggests, "there was something about her work for which elegantly

standard literary analysis was not prepared" (Schwartz and Estess 4). Describing her as an "elusive" poet, Kalstone perhaps refers to the fact that Bishop remained for all of her writing career a minor poet, one easily dismissed by critics ("Elizabeth Bishop Phenomenon"). As Thomas Travisano explains in his "The Elizabeth Bishop Phenomenon," it is only until after Bishop died (1979), more precisely around the mid-1980s, that critics began to pay closer attention to her work. Travisano attributes this change, which he calls the "Elizabeth Bishop phenomenon," to the expansion of the understanding of literary history as a history of political as well as critical and historical activity. By paying special attention to the (re)formation of canons, critics attempted to read feminism, cultural and identity politics into the poetry of Bishop. Critics' works such as Marilyn May Lombardi's *Elizabeth Bishop: Geography of Gender*, and Adrienne Rich in her 1983 review of Bishop's *Complete Poems, 1927-1979*, signify the first successful feminist readings of Bishop's work ("Elizabeth Bishop Phenomenon"). For example, Rich is concerned with "the essential outsiderhood of a lesbian identity; and with how the outsider's eye enables Bishop to perceive other kinds of outsiders to identify, or try to identify, with them" (qtd. in "Elizabeth Bishop Phenomenon"). Other significant feminist critics of Bishop include Joanne Feit Diehl, Lorrie Goldenshon, and Adrian Oktenberg who explore Bishop's outsider-hood, her relationship with her female body, and her subversion of patriarchal modes of perception.

Thus, from the mid-eighties onward, Bishop's poetry was regarded as the poetry of an "outsider," a writer whose viewpoint is fixed by her gender and lesbian sexuality. This perception extended to include Bishop's works as works of cultural critique, examining issues such as imperialism, post-colonialism, capitalism, social class, race, and ethnicity, often identifying Bishop's voice with that of the third-world Brazilian, the lower class citizen, and the open-minded traveler versus the self-centered conquistador.

Hence sprung critical attention to Bishop's representation of "Western and non-Western modes of conditioning, perception, and social behavior" (Travisano).

Before such publications, Bishop had been characterized as an "apolitical poet," dismissed, for example, by feminists, who favored the more explicit personal and confessional women poets such as Sylvia Plath and Anne Sexton. During a time when contemporaries were deriving poetry directly from personal tragedy, Bishop held to principles of artistic restraint: forcing the darkness to remain under the surface of her verse. For a long time, her work was described as coldly objective. For example, James G. Southworth writes in 1959 that "The poetry of Elizabeth Bishop…is as objective as poetry can well be," and he points to "carefully and skillfully selected objective details" as the essential feature of her style, while in 1973 Peggy Rizza claims Bishop "possesses…an objective imagination" as her poetry is absent of "pathetic fallacy" (qtd. in *Her Artistic Development* 9).

Though Bishop's published collection, *The Collected Poems 1927-1979*, has more recently been called a work of extraordinary formal mastery, many critics have fumed against the publication of the previously unpublished poems and drafts in *Edgar Allan Poe and the Jukebox*. Though many objections involve ethics, and the claim that Bishop would not have approved such a breach of privacy, critics such as Helen Vendler vehemently argue that the book is damaging to Bishop's reputation as it includes poems that fall short of her exacting best. In a piece for*The New Republic*, Vendler labels the drafts "maimed and stunted," drafts that betray Bishop's commitment to exactness, perfected excellence, and primary mode of description. Vendler argues: "The eighty-odd poems that this famous perfectionist allowed to be printed over the years are 'Elizabeth Bishop' as a poet. This book is not." Similarly, in her book review, Gillian White makes the sweeping claim that Bishop's uncollected poetry lacks "the self-awareness and depth of intelligence and even feeling that make her best work worth

returning to." In another review, Rumens argues: "it's easy enough to earmark the numerous poems that fall short of Bishop's exacting best. But, equally, there are a few that completely fail to give fleeting glimpses of her quality." *Edgar Allan Poe and the Jukebox*, thus being compared in finished quality to Bishop's already published poetry, suffers at the hands of most critics as it is evaluated as crude and sentimental, not like, as Vendler points out, Bishop's objective "descriptive" style in the published poetry.

Thus, in all of these readings, there is a separation between the objective and the subjective, the latter being a creative form of expressing ideology, emotion, and personal beliefs as they relate to Bishop the lesbian, the alcoholic, or the postcolonial. The former is endowed with a cold indifference to experiential, personal, or social life. In essence, the appreciation of Bishop's poetry seems to have depended on the emergence of hermeneutics of suspicion. Before this, her verse was considered coldly objective and indifferent. Regarding the uncollected poetry, critical response is bitter towards the exposure of the darkness beneath Bishop's perfected surfaces; in other words, the value of her poetry seems to increase with increasing obscurity of her personal tragedies as they issue from Bishop the human who struggled with explicitly voicing (or not) personal tragedy in art.

Ultimately, this thesis deals with the relationship between the subjective interior of the poet and the objective exterior (the world), a relationship mediated by the eye, and it asks whether or not this vision is motivated by predispositions of the mind, derived either from ideological beliefs or personal experience. This thesis attempts to show that while formal evidence proves that Bishop's published poetry is constituted upon a basic assumption that the poet's vision be clear of pre-conceived ideas in its aesthetic focus on visual and factual details, and cannot therefore be politically motivated (especially considering the evidence suggesting her aversion to any political and/or cultural ideologies), her *un*published poetry, when read alongside the published,

reveals how the formal nature of her verse resembles a *process* or *journey* intended to fill an emotional and/or intellectual absence, an imaginative journey whose end is often artificial and whose initiation is often impeded to begin with. The unpublished poetry reveals Bishop's hesitation and unsteady faith in the aesthetic process and imagination as personal tragedy (hard reality) becomes overwhelming. The characterization of the process as artificial is due to Bishop's intense and shattering sense of alienation that precludes any objective engagement with the world, an alienation that comes to break through and conquer her lines of verse. In this way, as the eye searches for deeper meaning through practicing objective observation extended by the imagination, the mind, providing a reality check, often interferes as personal emotion comes to alter vision. This alteration, represented as blindness, declares the victory of the mind over the eye, of subjectivity over objectivity, of disaster over mastery.

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Instead of evaluating poems in this collection as finished products, I think it is pertinent to respond to them as representations of the creative process. Once we do so, we are able, as *New York Times* critic David Orr writes in 2006, "to acknowledge the enormous patience and skill that allowed [Bishop] to hold the volcanic feeling on exhibit [in *Edgar Allan Poe*] in the poised vessels of her finished poetry." In essence, I would argue that Bishop did not mean to portray thought as much as the thinking mind. This emphasis on the process rather than the end result attests to her understanding of "reality" as something still imagined, not yet understood. Once reality is understood as unreal, then the relationship between imagination and reality becomes not a collision of fact against falsehood, but an expression of an imagined reality that may or may not qualify as fact. Whether it qualifies as fact or not is another question this thesis asks. This opportunity to gain insight into the creative process will also shed new light on the

difficulty in undergoing this process, what it means, what it takes, and what it involves for Bishop.

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Although work on Bishop's uncollected poetry in *Edgar Allan Poe and the Jukebox* remains extremely scarce, there have been several studies focusing on *The Complete Poems* that engage the themes of aesthetics, vision, imagination, and the relationship between the subjectivity of the poet and the objective world. Also, these studies, like this one, claim to focus on the poems themselves rather than bring in biographical, historical, or ideological perspectives. As Perloff asserts that single-author studies deserve reevaluation, critic David Tomkins points out three literary works that have responded to this plea. Amongst these works in Jonathan Ellis' *Art and Memory in the Work of Elizabeth Bishop*, which, according to Tomkins "unapologetically advances a single-author study that insists upon addressing the formal aspects of its subject's poetry" (413). While Ellis claims that recent studies have ignored "Bishop the poet" in favor of Bishop the lesbian, the alcoholic, or the postcolonial critic, he has nonetheless undertaken the task of reading her "art" through her "memory" of Nova Scotia, and thus investigates Bishop the Nova Scotian (413). As such, though claiming to avoid reading Bishop through a particular critical lens, a historical/biographical lens that considers the author's experience of place informs the analysis. Nonetheless, Ellis' study represents a response to Perloff's call to isolate poetry from otherdisciplinariness. The following critics, also, represent a similar perspective.

Bonnie Costello's fascinating study of Elizabeth Bishop's *Questions of Travel* in her *Elizabeth Bishop: Questions of Mastery*and her survey of other travel poems in her "Vision and Mastery" identify Bishop as a traveler, and then continue to analyze this traveler's engagement with the surrounding, strange worlds. For Costello, the failure to "master," or understand, these landscapes is the ultimate failure and loss that drives

Bishop to settle for the momentary wholeness reached through imposing her own memories and desires onto the landscape. Costello argues that the poet concerns herself with questions of mastery—"artistic, personal, and cultural" as her poems "portray both the desire for mastery and the dangers and illusions to which such a desire is prone" (2). Costello claims that throughout Bishop's poetry, one finds "a strong urge for order and dominance confronting a recalcitrant world and volatile inner life" (2). In her more detailed analyses of poems such as "Over 200 Illustrations" and "Cape Breton," Costello traces a pattern that the poet enacts: one of attempting to impose order on a particular landscape, failing to do so, and finally resorting to what she calls a "compensatory glimpse" of momentary "plentitude" and wholeness—that is, mastery achieved for a transient moment that quickly fades ("Vision and Mastery"). The darkness envisioned in Bishop's landscapes stubbornly refuse order, however, with the poet's meticulous eye for details and her own imaginative engagement, Costello argues that momentary mastery is indeed achieved, and though fleeting, assures "complete being in a passing moment, from which the human mind, denying itself that direct completeness, can nonetheless draw cheer and vicarious satisfaction" ("Vision and Mastery"). In her analysis of Bishop's representation of landscape, Costello concludes:

> Though the eye searches out a source or creative center, it finds none, nor any law but necessity, written like a curse into the generic code. But deterioration isnot so bad when she can witness a being in the moment. If living formis not serious or engravable, it is free, fluid, and iridescent. It would be amistake to privilege this cheer, for *accepting loss* means as well acceptingthe loss of certain moods and kinds of knowledge. ("Vision and Mastery," my emphasis)

As it were, Costello identifies the absence of mastery as something wholly negative, not unlike a "curse." Moments of plentitude become moments of compensation that render this negativity "not so bad." Thus, in the absence and impossibility of ordering a disordered landscape, which remains external, Costello claims that what is left is a transitory indulgence in moments of plentitude that arise

through visual attention to details in a landscape, moments that allow for a type of order to surface through the projection of internal states drawn from memory and desire. Costello maintains, however, that the inability to master certain worlds away from home (where one "masters her reality") is indeed a "failure," as this world resists the importations and attitudes one seeks to impose upon it (*Questions* 131). And this failure is an unbearable loss that the traveler "must accept" and relinquish "order and beauty in the whole," resorting to "memory" and the "beholder's desires" (150).

Thus, as Costello reveals in poems such as "Brazil, Januray 1, 1502" and "Arrival at Santos,"

> the observer's will to shape the world according to archaic or ethnocentric desires is punished with disillusion and frustration. … the observer's openness to the inscrutable world of particulars results in compensations for the weariness the poems first express. These compensations…of historical and personal awareness constitute a positive alternative to the dreams of…transparence and mastery.(152)

In a nutshell, what defines this compensation is a reliance on the personal memory and desire of the observer (as opposed to the cultural, social, and ideological frameworks) that, reflected on the world, allow the observer's failed notions of order to "adjust," like a "circus tent," to its new surroundings (129).

As such, the personal history and desires of the observer, once reflected on the landscape, allow for the invention of a reality that changes along the way. These, "the new representations," according to Costello, "arise not from the objects themselves, but from the beholder who brings 'reality' with her, yet reconstructs it with each fresh apprehension" (130). In my analysis of visions of order and disorder in Elizabeth Bishop's published and unpublished volumes, I will attempt to reveal that quite contrary to Costello's premise, the beholder in these poems does not bring "reality" along, but encounters the world with a clean slate in order to allow the landscape and the objects themselves a space in which to speak not only outside the boundaries of cultural,

ideological, and social frameworks, but also outside the realms of personal memory and desire, especially when this memory itself poses as just another aspect of life that refuses order and mastery. Bishop's attitude is one of allowing objects to emerge as self-standing illuminations of their own reality, uninformed, or rather untainted, by personal experiences. In this sense, it is not a disappointing failure to master a disordered external world that motivates the creation of a new reality, but rather an attempt to deal with internal chaos precisely by suppressing the temptation to project this chaos or darkness onto the visual landscape. Only in this way can objects exist as organic entities in a dynamic conversation with the observer in order to forge an original "reality." There are no dreams or memories brought onto the scenery because the self's reality is not yet established but always in the process of establishing itself aesthetically—always extracting rather than projecting. Further, I will argue that Bishop's is indeed a yearning for mastery, but for mastery of the self's way of confronting disaster. In this sense, mastery may not be wholesome understanding, but merely an inner sense of order or feeling of the comfort and security of home.

While the claim that Bishop values aesthetic, objective vision and refrains from projecting her state of mind on what she sees is quite evident in her published poetry, I will attempt to reveal that her unpublished poetry engages with the pain and loss involved in relinquishing order and the extent to which these may prevent aesthetic, uninformed vision. However, instead of accepting Costello's assumption that projecting memory and desire onto the landscape is an ultimately positive endeavor, my reading of Bishop's unpublished poetry alongside the published will reveal how this projection, far from being a controlled action, is an inevitable consequence of deeply overwhelming personal histories, a projection that results in modifying vision of the world into bleakness, darkness, and decay. Rather than being Costello's initiation of a positive process, the projection is precisely what precludes any aesthetic process by controlling

and modifying vision. Far from Costello's "cheerful vision" extracted from darkness, Bishop's unpublished poetry *is* a poetry of darkness.

Similar to Costello, in "Falling off the Round, Turning World: Elizabeth Bishop's *TristesTropiques*," Jeffery Gray identifies Bishop as the "only real travel poet" among mid-Century American poets, a poet defined by her travels between North and South America (24). Gray further claims that Bishop did not feel "empowered in or by travel" because travel for her was an activity of reconfiguring, stripping, and destabilizing the self (25). As Gray differentiates his study from those Postcolonial and New Historical readings that have concentrated on the "metanarratives of empire," primarily the narrative of "bringing light---cultural Christian, scientific to a benighted world," he argues that Bishop's traveller is the "quizzical and vulnerable" traveller (25). Her representation of this figure helps us understand travel in postmodernity: "neither as conquest, nor as pilgrimage, nor even as immersion in societies necessarily less spoiled and more grounded than one's own but rather as decentered, travel in which neither the traveling subject nor the visited site are stable entities" (25). The traveller, discovering the strangeness and unreality of reality, is wholly aware of the "lenses one wears, the baggage one carries, and the forms---linguistic, rhetorical, poetic---one uses to mediate experience. Memory is one of those forms, as suspect as any" (25). Unlike Costello, Gray identifies memory as just another factor that mediates experience, or alters reality. For him, Bishop's vision as a travelling poet is one that withholds judgment, emotion, *and* personal experience, one that is content to receive impressions without attempting to achieve mastery over the strange world she witnesses.

Yet, though Gray maintains that Bishop does not wish to impose her knowledge on, and therefore master, the world, he continues to argue that the end of her interaction with the world is a final likening of it to her notion of home. For example, on the one hand, Gray claims that Bishop's withholding her opinion is balanced with a

plethora of questions she asks, attesting to the incompleteness of the traveller and her tendency to ask rather than project answers. On the other hand, he insists that the ultimate goal, no matter how distant, is receiving answers that would make strange lands more like home: Gray is keen on stating that Bishop attempts to blur the boundaries between home and abroad, thereby indirectly widening the understanding of home, or in other words, re-defining and criticizing one's understanding of home. His readings of "Arrival at Santos" and "Brazil, January 1, 1502" allow him to demonstrate the "disturbance in the touristic voice" that rises "out of the awkwardness derived from the capacity for travel---the awkwardness of being outside, anthropologically…looking in" (41). Such looking in eventually leads to the discovery of difference, as in, for example, "The Waiting Room," a difference soon incorporated into one's sense of home that it becomes the "same" (45). Whether this is interpreted as dissociation from home or an association with foreign landscapes, the claim stands as a representation of familiarizing the unfamiliar and that means, controlling, organizing, and incorporating---mastering---reality according to a framework one has of "home."

In this thesis, I am dealing not with physical travel, but with travel as mental dislocation, as dissociation from familiar modes of knowledge which stand in as notions of "home." Deviating from these modes and engaging in aesthetic vision leads to a new, distinct form of knowledge and understanding that, unlike in Costello, is not derived from an emotional, historical interaction with the world, nor is it, as in Gray, grounded in a stable notion of home, but is uniquely derived from pure, aesthetic contemplation of surface. Whether this endeavor is effective in achieving the comfort and homeliness Gray and Costello refer to in the end is uncertain. If this comfort were to exist, then aesthetically viewed surface can indeed lead to meaningful depth, which has an effect in experiential life. This is a question that Peggy Samuels, Carole Doreski, and Thomas Travisano take up.

Writing in 1988, Travisano's work is "the first comprehensive study of [Bishop's] career" (3). Focusing on the larger patterns evident in her work as a whole, Travisano aims to trace Bishop's "Stylistic and expressive" changes in order to "bring into bolder relief concerns that underlay her life's work and give it artistic unity" (3). To this end, he divides Bishop's career into three phases. The "early phase" is titled "Prison," and described as devoted to "the exploration of sealed imaginary worlds" including the "introspective fable" of "The Man-Moth" and limited to the first half of *North and South* (3). The second phase, "Travel," encompasses the remainder of *North and South* as well as all of *A Cold Spring* and includes poems such as "The Fish." "Travel" is described as breaking through "early enclosures" and engaging imaginatively with "actual places and people" (3). Finally, Travisano titles the last phase "History," a phase including her last two books, *Questions of Travel* and *Geography III* and exploring "her many years' sojourn in Brazil and her ultimate return to Boston and the scenes of her youth" (4). Thus, for Travisano, Bishop began with a reticence and reluctance to engage in historical awareness. Instead, she "prefers the abstractly colored landscapes of a map to the world itself, a preference that implies a bias toward art rather than history" (4). Travisano argues that this reluctance is motivated by a deliberate avoidance of facing loss in a transient world, a motivation fed by Bishop's experiences of loss and isolation in childhood.

Travisano claims that in Bishop's poetry, a reader's task is to "probe beneath the engaging surface in search of a poem's elusive meaning," a meaning felt to be present, but seemingly obscured in the "image-making process itself" (13). Yet, Travisano assures that Bishop did not mean to hide her meaning, but rather, insists that the reader seek it through imaginative observation. As such a reader, he argues that Bishop's enumerated images "cohere at last in surprising moments of recognition," as does the whole of her oeuvre into "a rich and significant pattern" reflecting a

conversation with the self, and a final engagement with "an ominous but captivating world" (14). As such, Travisano's earliest relevant study of Elizabeth Bishop, concerning the topic of this thesis adheres to an understanding of Bishop's collected poems as a struggle for self-expression in the face of a threatening world. As imaginative engagements are limited to "sealed, imaginary worlds" that are used to avoid engagement with "history," the direct reference to traceable and tangible "places and people" from the world of actuality in Bishop's later poems mark a development in her style into an ability to engage with the world *as it really is*. Her eventual development into drawing from historical experience is for Travisano a "courageous achievement," as Bishop kept getting "richer and stronger" as she "came directly to terms with inner necessity and as the concerns of her work moved closer to the surface" (4). While imagination and formal artistic surface function as covers for what Travisano values as deeper meaning, they are also consequentially relegated into the position of means to an end, the end being what readers must be keen to discover. Then, also, the relationship between the imaginative mind and the viewed actual world is one of antagonism, as the former is merely a means to escape any real engagement with the latter. Rather than seeing aesthetic contemplation and imaginative engagement as escape methods, I will consider them, quite contrarily, as methods of confronting lived experience.

In *Elizabeth Bishop: The Restraints of Language*, Carole Doreski also discusses Bishop's engagement with visual surface and meaningful depth.Doreski distinguishes herself from other literary studies of her time by claiming to focus on Bishop's language and rhetorical strategies, thereby avoiding the popular approaches of "cross-genre comparison, biographical correlation, and gender-based reading" (Goldenshon 286). Doreski discusses the poet's "exteriorizing the unspoken and inarticulate interior" through her "domestic, pastoral, or exotic landscapes" that serve to

"cloak" this interior (3). Similar to Travisano, she argues that Bishop's perfected formal surface binds experience in a "restraining rhetoric," depersonalizing and simplifying this experience (3). While Travisano emphasizes the claim that Bishop stresses active readership, Doreski takes this to another level by suggesting that through Bishop's meticulous, physical, and sensate descriptions of visual realities, she "effaces herself by making the moment of perception the reader's own," that is, Bishop eliminates the "I" through the process of transference (4). Thus, for Doreski, language becomes the experience.

Doreski differentiates in Bishop's poetry between the "gaze of plain sight" and the "interiority of vision" (5). Using Bishop's "The Imaginary Iceberg" and "Questions of Travel," Doreski argues that the only way Bishop considers renouncing actual travel, or first-hand observation, is through her reliance on imaginative (interior) vision. For example, she cites "The Imaginary Iceberg:" "This is a scene a sailor'd give his eyes for," and "This iceberg cuts its facets from within" to claim that because of the iceberg's interiority, being exclusively imaginary, it cannot endanger the world of the ship although it is still aesthetically satisfying (l. 12, 23). As the sailor will be ready to "give his eyes," and renounce direct observation for this "vision," the iceberg is asserted in the poem as being essential to one's spiritual welfare as the soul: "(both being made from elements least visible)" (5).

Along with this essentiality of this dream-world, Doreski claims that the poet "refuses to rely on introspective vision alone," and realizes the "great peril" involved in being immersed too deeply in such a world (6). She quotes "The Unbeliever":

> But he sleeps on the top of his mast
> with his eyes closed tight.
> The gull inquired into his dream,
> which was, "I must not fall.
> The spangled sea below wants me to fall.
> It is hard as diamonds; it wants to destroy us all" (l. 25-30)

In these lines, she argues, Bishop states the danger of being immersed in the world of dreams. Doreski continues:

> Bishop believes in articulate knowledge, that which can be formed and can contain, and then imply, without recourse to abstraction, the deftly framed mysteries. She sees a responsibility to order the chaos about her through a way of seeing, an angle of vision; she foils a cruel, chaotic age with form, order, and clarity (7).

Between actual vision and the world of dreams is the world of language.

Doreski asserts that she will not mix the verbal with the visual: "such mixed media approaches draw…critics away from the obstinacy of language, thereby deflecting attention from the mediating effect of language itself" (157). After identifying Bishop's focus on the visual as an attempt to articulate the seeable world, she goes on to assert that Bishop uses this visual factor in an attempt to free the eye from the limitations of the material. From here, Doreski retreats into language to reveal Bishop's "desire to play but not succumb to the dialectical tension between simple thingness and overarching, permeating Presence" (Goldenshon 287). In essence, such a poetry aims to replace what the eye sees, finds, or imagines beyond appearances with what an intense investigation of surface can provide. Asserting that Bishop is non-symbolic, Doreski focuses on a language that creates vision through eliminating physical vision. Through language, then, Bishop is able to reach the spiritual dimension of "Presence," a world that offers "comfort and assurance, for insight and explanations through a glimpse of a dimension in which suffering does not occur" (Doreski 34-35).

Yet, in referring to another world in which "suffering does not occur," Doreski, like Travisano, risks making Bishop's poetry seem escapist. The comfort and assurance reached remain in this other dimension. By eliminating the physical eye, or direct vision, and also eliminating the "inarticulate," yet tempting, dream world, Doreski makes of language a sphere that articulates a vision of reality that is neither based on

direct observation from experiential life, nor related to the world of imaginative desire. This specific "vision," then, is wholly artificial and eliminates subjectivity.

Peggy Samuels' "Verse as Deep Surface: Elizabeth Bishop's New Poetics, 1938-39" also discusses the relationship between surface and depth. She places emphasis on language as the threshold across which the inner and outer worlds could pass, at least in the poems Bishop composed between 1938-39. Comparing this threshold to the surface of the sea, Samuels focuses on Bishop's use of language in poems that contain references to the sea such as in "Pleasure Seas," to argue that description "moves from sheer sensation to sensation with emotion, to implied conceptual categories to the explicit pronouncement of the meaning of an object" (324). In this way, she compares the verse itself to the surface of the water, "open to the world on one side and the mind of the writer/reader on the other" (324). This way, surface can be merely surface, or can open up into depths, move into meaning, or can become saturated with the emotion of the observer. For Samuels, the relationship between the mind and the surface of the world is reflective, constituted of a "large zone of in-betweeness" that allows for a back-and-forth motion between the world and the mind (325). When comparing Bishop to Wallace Stevens, Samuels claims that in Stevens' verse, the mind feels imposed on surface, and this presents him with an epistemological problem and also "a problem of loneliness" (325). With Bishop, however, the interaction between nature and the mind is more reflective. Ultimately, Samuels makes the argument that Bishop contributes to the "postmodern re-conception of surface/depth relations" specifically in the poems in *A Cold Spring* (325).

Samuels argues that "Pleasure Seas" explores the different forms the surface of the world touches the mind through metaphor of refraction, reflection, intensity, agitation, light, color and movement in water as they represent possibilities of surface opening out to depth. Hence, she is able to make the final claim that Bishop's poetry, as

surface, does not need cultural criticism to open out to depth, but being a surface, just like the water, can in itself contain depth available to the perceptive mind. Bishop's descriptive use of language functions as her way of "touch[ing] the world," with the final immersion of consciousness into the object observed represents the emotional climax. In my thesis, I will use Samuel's assertion of the ability of aesthetic surface to open up into meaningful depth, especially in analyzing the published poems, although I will be arguing that this ability is extremely conditional, and perhaps too artificial to be extrapolated into meaning that affects experiential life. This is made more obvious as I read Bishop's unpublished poetry alongside the published.

# CHAPTER II

# TRAVEL: RECONCEPTUALIZING TRAVEL AS ATTITUDE

## A. Introduction

Situating my argument within Adorno and Lukács' theories on the effect of universalizing ideologies, I will argue in this chapter that Elizabeth Bishop's "The Man-Moth" represents the susceptibility of the poet-artist to embody the will to travel, that is, the susceptibility to breaking away from established orders or fixed tracks of thought. This movement, represented by the "third rail," shifts away from the order embodied in the two set railroad tracks and becomes positively conceived as the prerequisite to reaching a higher form of knowledge than that offered by the uniformity of conventional thought. In "The Man-Moth," Bishop uses the trope of the creative insomniac, the poet-artist who, functioning at night, is able to contain the whole world in his wide eye of knowledge. This elevated figure, separated from the multitudes, gains a unique viewpoint by virtue of *seeing* an alternative to common orders, and although risking alienation and seclusion, is nonetheless set forth as a figure to be respected, admired, and perhaps even envied for the knowledge and wisdom he possesses. It is important to note that Bishop stresses the fact that the Man-Moth is never successful at physically moving, or travelling away from "home," rather, the value of his knowledge lies in his keen ability to *envision* a "third rail:" another world containing difference, appeal, depth, and meaning. In the end, this is knowledge both useful and transferable to those who pay enough attention. By being able to deviate from universalizing ideologies, the Man-Moth is able to forge his own truths that qualify for transference into the world of experience.

The Man-Moth becomes a figure associated with nonconformity in the form of straying from commonly fixed beliefs and ideologies. In other words, when such fixed

beliefs and ideologies are associated with "home," nonconformity becomes a kind of travel or mental dislocation. In my analysis, I will aim to show that Bishop aims to elevate the intellectual state of mind of the traveller as compared to the mind that accepts and conforms, that is, settles for the comfort of home. Thus, as Bishop appreciates the intellectual attitude and wandering mind of the traveller, she tends to downplay any engagement with the Man-Moth's alienation that inevitably results from such dissociation with home. By accentuating the intellectual state of mind a traveller may reach, Bishop marks as less significant the pains of alienation suffered to be there.

Further, "Paris, 7 A.M." subtly deals with the questions and concerns of such a traveler straying metaphorically from home. The poem discusses the struggle to find a meaningful home, a truth to ground the wandering mind. Using the metaphor of the clock, the traveler is held down by the center point and so circles repetitively, futilely. As the poem develops, the traveler asks whether the possibility of reaching some kind of truth through her search, or circular journeys, is precluded by the existence of the center, or whether this "truth" or "star" has been captured by the "sequence of squares" and "circles" representing time, space, and ordered knowledge; that is, knowledge/journeys dictated by a center. The poem ends with the hint that the center of home and truth cannot be grounded in stifling ideologies and representations of home. Rather, it is present in subtle, transient flickers only available to the observant traveler straying from home. Observation, keenly stressed in this poem as well, triggers the imagination to envision this flicker, a moment extended by the observer's desire. This alternate vision provides a relief from the darkness and death weighing on the poem's atmosphere. Again, this poem stresses the benefits of mental dislocation by highlighting the stifling nature of ideologies and the fresh release involved in travel at the expense of engaging with the alienation involved in such travel.

Alongside “The Man-Moth” and “Paris” from Bishop’s published collection, I will be reading comparatively “Three Poems” from her unpublished poetry that engages similar themes and tropes of the poet-artist, the creative insomniac, knowledge and mental dislocation (travel). Reading this unpublished poem will shed new light on “The Man-Moth,” modifying the way readers may perceive Bishop’s conceptualization of travelling, home, deviance, alienation, and knowledge. It is only in the unpublished poems that the traveller’s alienation is accentuated. Instead of elevating the importance of the traveller’s alternate, imaginative vision, Bishop shifts attention to the nature of this vision as essentially self-created, dissociated from experiential life, and therefore serves *not* to release the poet-artist from the confinement of ideologies but to *entrap* this figure within the mind, a world that makes him blind to experiential life and secluded from life itself. By focusing on this alienated state of mind, Bishop delves into the psychology of the traveller only to belie any claims to greatness. Bishop takes the same aspects that in “The Man-Moth” were such claims to greatness and challenges them so strongly that the characterizations of figures such as the Man-Moth and that in “Three Poems” come to be pitied rather than admired. Bishop begins with asserting the all-powerful vision of the poet-artist only to assure readers that this vision is so limited, confined, and separate from the world of experience that is nothing more than illusion and wishful thinking. Vision becomes more like blindness, “higher knowledge” more like a death predicated on the removal from the world of experience. This particular attitude is only apparent in the unpublished poetry and it allows readers to re-read the published poems in a new light that challenges the super-human qualities of a poet-artist-traveller by revealing his all-too-humanity and his shattering sense of alienation and loneliness. Again, this shift in focus from the artist’s unique abilities to his weaknesses does not offer two dichotomous representations of the figure, but rather

accentuates a different aspect of the same figure as it measures the effects of these aspects on each other.

The dark state of alienation no longer allows the travelling consciousness to search for a home because its intensity precludes any attempt to view the world with a fresh eye, free of preconceived ideas: indeed, the state of mind itself becomes as confining and terrorizing as the ideologies it had attempted to flee. This is what the unpublished poem, "The walls" comes to argue, as it represents poetry as a confining house in itself, as opposed to the houses in "Paris" that stand in for universalizing ideologies. Although this preconceived mental state may not be that which is instilled by culture and ideology, it is nonetheless a strong predisposition that both modifies and controls the expression of art, preventing both objective and imaginative vision. Revealing this side of the traveller, Bishop questions they very possibility of the aesthetic vision that characterizes the travelling consciousness when it is overwhelmingly damaged, alienated and lost. Vision becomes a kind of blindness, and the new life of the traveller a quasi-death. By questioning aesthetic vision, Bishop also questions its end, art, and criticizes its significance. In doing so, she engages the greater theme of the applicability of art to life and its effect in practical experience, although this topic is explored more deeply in later chapters.

**B. The Terrorizing General … and the Hollow Particular?**

Georg Lukács argues in his essay, "Specific Particularity," that the "particular" is the term situated midway in the dialectic between the "universal" and the "individual." For him, the aesthetic is defined by a kind of mental dislocation involving an inversion of the particular and the universal. Instead of deriving universal truths and order from general ideologies, the focus on the particular is able to offer a world of its own, so to speak, governed by its own particular order. He discusses Bishop's poem

"The Sandpiper" in which the eponymous creature is able to view the world as minute, vast, and clear: in other words, it is particular yet vast, minute, yet somehow containing the clarity offered by universalizing tendencies. It is only through such an emphasis on the particular, Lukács writes, "that the manifest indwelling presence of particularity can realize itself in every individual phenomenon [. . .] and it is only in this way that the work as a whole can embody precisely the particularity of a creatively articulated 'world' and allow us to experience that world" (231).

Harold Schweizer interprets several of Theodor Adorno's aphorisms in *Minima Moralia*as embodying such aversion to totalizing ideologies. In one of these aphorisms, Adorno claims "The whole is the false" (*Minima Moralia* 50), expressing, according to Schweizer, an "increasing disenchantment with the totalitarian claims of what he called the 'moral terrorism' of politically motivated art." "No gaze attains beauty," Adorno adds in another aphorism, "that is not accompanied by indifference, indeed, almost by contempt, for all that lies outside the object contemplated" (*Minima Moralia* 76). The particular object isdialectically opposed to "all that lies outside." All that lies outside, then, becomes the wholethat is false. Again, the "Sandpiper," who is a "student of Blake," becomes occupied with the grains of sand between his toes, which, in their ordered particularity and beautiful arrangement, "where (no detailtoo small) the ocean drains / rapidly backwards and downwards" (l. 10-11). The worldis condensed to Blake's world in a grain of sand; it is a world of intricate, particular beauty allowed to exist only as a corollary of eliminating focus on the general.

Adorno claims that the universal is unjust to the particular in that the universal is constituted by "exchangeability and substitution" (*Minima Moralia* 76). To advance to the universal without the detour of the aesthetic focus on the particular would produce an empty concept of the universal: "what proceeds to judge,without having first been guilty of the injustice of contemplation, loses itself at last in emptiness" (qtd. in

Schweizer). The "just overall view" that universal ideologies claim to possess, as a result of their objectivity and distance from the particular, risks, according to Adorno the elimination of this particular: "Indiscriminate kindness towards all carries the constant threat of indifference and remoteness to each" (*Minima Moralia* 77). Schweizer summarizes:

> If it is from the larger perspective that things are judged for their relevance, function, or usefulness, and if such a judgment would always have to bear in mind its own injustice towards the particular, then the particular would not exist for its own sake but rather for the sake of assigning history a moral, perhaps even a tragic, dimension.Adorno's dialecticbetween the particular and the universal is nothing if not passionately moral.

Adorno writes in *Aesthetic Theory*:

> Whereas in the real world all particulars are fungible, so the pictures of art stretch out to everything for an other, which it would be, emancipated from the schemata of imposed identification. By the same token, art—the imago of the unexchangeable— verges on ideology because it makes us believe there are things in the world that are not for exchange. Art must, through its form, on behalf of the unexchangeable, conduct the exchangeable to a critical self-consciousness. (123)

Without art, "history becomes monstrous, without it the universal becomes totalitarian" (Schweizer). "One might almost say that truth itself depends on the tempo, the patience and perseverance of lingering with the particular," Adorno explains (*Minima Moralia* 77). In using the word "almost," Schweizer argues that Adorno avoids "an aesthetic totalitarianism and reserves the possibility for this lingering to be only an allegorical truth, not a truth measurable in dollars and cents, or in size and significance, but a truth perhaps impenetrable even to the slowest, most patient eyes."

Thus, an opposition is set up between the particular and the universal and the types of knowledge each provides. Emphasis on the particular, then, is an emphasis unmotivated by political or moralizing ideologies, but is an aesthetic contemplation of that which is eliminated by such ideologies. This emphasis, then, though requiring a rejection of grounding notions of home in the form of fixed understandings of the

world, does not lead to absolute chaos. Rather, this emphasis provides unique insights into the world through the particular, and by nature of the latter, allows this insight to be personal rather than general, tangible rather than obscure, concrete rather than abstract.

As such, rather than dismissing the concept of home, though requiring the acute awareness and sensibility of the traveler unafraid to stray from home (ideologically speaking), the travelling consciousness discovers various "homes," that in their particularity and personal derivation from direct experience provide a type of comfort unreachable by totalizing claims. In Bishop's published poetry the travelling consciousness embarks on a journey defined by aesthetic vision, objective attention to the particular, to the visual and auditory facts of the world, and to surfaces available for contemplation. Free of preconceived ideas, this traveller is on a quest to a more personal comforting home, self-created through vision and extended by imagination. Then, in this light, the Man-Moth's "dark pupil" containing a whole world represents his elevated ability to see alternate truths (l. 42). By relinquishing "home," he is able to find another, more valuable world in which to dwell. Like the Sandpiper, this figure comes to possess a rare type of knowledge available only to a consciousness that has freed itself from universalizing, commonly accepted tendencies.

What the unpublished "Three Poems" examines is the nature of Adorno's "creatively articulated world," and its value regarding experiential life. Though defined by being able to discover valuable alternatives to established understandings of life and the world, and so endowed with the power of mental *dislocation*, "Three Poems" clarifies that this apparent movement is not actual movement by virtue of its being within the mind, enclosed, isolated, and somewhat solipsistic. The poem also stresses that this mind possesses a world that is meaningless in real, experiential life, and because of this alienation, the "travelling" mind becomes self-confined. As the alienated state of mind grows intolerably painful, it comes to function as the terror-inducing,

world-defining frame of thought that precludes imaginative engagement with the world and so prevents aesthetic vision. As such, and as the unpublished "The walls" demonstrates, it becomes more terrorizing than the ideologies it had attempted to flee. The question that the unpublished poetry brings up is whether or not it is realistic to expect an alienated, travelling consciousness to be able to engage in aesthetic contemplation with a fresh, objective eye when this eye is clouded over by the tears of pain and loss. Could this "cloud," then, not be equivalent in effect to the confining ideologies, and could it not then motivate and inform vision, making the self-created world merely, to use Lukács'terminology, a "particular" illusion?

**C. The Creative Insomniac: The Figure of the Poet-Artist**

"The Man-Moth" opens with the words "Here, above." Already, readers are confronted with a perspective from a height, separated from the masses below; from above, "The whole shadow of Man is only as big as his hat" (l. 3). Below, Man's vision is stunted: "he does not see the moon; he observes only her vast properties" (l. 5). Encumbered to the ground below and unable to look upwards, Man can only observe that which is part of his surroundings down below: not the moon, but its "queer light on his hands" (l. 6). To him, this light is "queer," "neither warm nor cold, /of a temperature impossible to record on thermometers" (l. 6-7). In this opening stanza, there is already a dichotomy set up between the vision of the Man-Moth and that of Man, the former being from a bird's eye view, and directly accessing a vision of the moon while the latter is confined to the ground and barred from any transcendent knowledge exceeding that of his sensate experience. The "queer," immeasurable temperature of the moonlight is so described because of this limitation. At the outset, the vision of the Man-Moth seems to be of a more transcendental quality than Man's, whose knowledge is merely

based on direct experience. As shall be revealed, the Man-Moth will come to stand in for the artist, a figure who possesses a unique type of knowledge.

Unlike Man, the Man-Moth is able to pay "rare, although occasional, visits" upwards (l. 9). Going upwards, however, is no pleasure ride. The Man-Moth goes up

> nervously…
> He thinks the moon is a small hole at the top of the sky,
> proving the sky quite useless for protection.
> He trembles, but must investigate as high as he can climb (l. 13-15).

As he ascends, "the moon looks rather different to him," and this difference becomes a source of terror ("he trembles") rather than comfort, as he seems to be ascending hesitatingly ("nervously"), though the impulse to ascend seems to be strong ("he must investigate"). The moon comes to represent a hole in the sky, which no longer connotes protection because of this fact. Gathering from these first two stanzas, the fact that Man is encumbered below does not seem to be a disadvantage considering that ascension is the source of trepidation and exposure to danger. Perhaps, then, the impulse to ascend—or depart from familiar territories —from the "opening under the edge of one of the sidewalks" to scaling "the faces of the buildings"— becomes an impulse to reach a higher form of knowledge, one that exceeds the limited understanding of Man confined to the limits of his experience at home (l. 12-13). Thus, from the confinement and protection of a crack on the edge of a sidewalk, the Man-Moth departs, travels, upwards to investigate. One can say that at this point, the Man-Moth refuses to settle for home.

The third stanza shatters illusions of achieving knowledge from this upward investigation:

> he climbs fearfully, thinking that this time he will manage
> to push his small head through that round clean opening
> and be forced through, as from a tube, in black scrolls on the light.
> (Man, standing below him, has no such illusions.)
> But what the Man-Moth fears most he must do, although
> he fails, of course, and falls back scared but quite unhurt (l. 19-24)

The Man-Moth at this point comes across as a stubborn figure taking up futile tasks motivated by an unreasonable sense of disillusionment. The imagery in this stanza, however, characterizes the moon as an opening from which one is released from darkness into the light. Then, the world at hand becomes a sort of dark receptacle and the moon an object of hope, desire, and release from darkness to the light of, perhaps, transcendent knowledge and understanding. Yet again, the Man-Moth "fails, of course," the latter term precluding any possibilities of success at emerging from the world of darkness (l. 24). After this vertically oriented failed endeavor, the Man-Moth "returns" in the fourth stanza to the ground and proceeds to undergo a horizontally-oriented movement in "the pale subways of cement he calls his home" (l. 26). Here, his "home" is described as "pale" and made of "cement," connoting a certain blandness and hardness derived from familiarity and anchorage. Yet, "he flits, /he flutters, and cannot get aboard the silent trains/ fast enough to suit him" (l. 27-28). The movement here seems nervous, not unlike that experienced in his moving upwards before. Following the word "home" is this anxious flitting and fluttering accentuated by the alliteration and parallel structure ("he flits, /he flutters) betraying a sense of choppiness and lack of stability intensified by the enjambment. His nervousness is due to his inability to get aboard the train fast enough. Hence, even at home, he does not feel stable, integrated, and comfortable. The stanza goes on to say:

> The Man-Moth always seats himself facing the wrong way
> and the train starts at once at its full, terrible speed,
> without a shift in gears or a gradation of any sort.
> He cannot tell the rate at which he travels backwards (l. 29-32)

Here again, sitting the "wrong way," the Man-Moth is not fully integrated at home, defying the norm. The train becomes the representation of the single-mindedness and normative discourses of home so engraved in stone that, like the train,do not divert from the defined rails. They cannot be changed nor even negotiated as the train moves at

"full, terrible speed, without a shift in gears or a gradation of any sort" (l. 28). As opposed to the nervous fluttering of the Man-Moth and his precarious ascension to the moon, this horizontal movement is confident and precise, set forward at full throttle with an identifiable destination: not unsure and resistant like the moon. Still, defying norms in his own way, the Man-Moth sits backwards and "travels backwards" (l. 32). The monotony and constructed-ness of such normative discourse of home is accentuated in stanza five as the train is described as travelling through "artificial tunnels" on "ties recur[ring] beneath" (l. 34). Interestingly, though the Man-Moth is uncomfortable and unsatisfied with his "home" and keeps "dream[ing] recurrent dreams," the train is nonetheless identified as "his," revealing a sense of belonging.

This adherence to home is precarious and does not come from an inner conviction of home's adequacy. The Man-Moth constantly checks himself from the desire to reach out to the "third rail" (l. 42). The third rail is defined as "the unbroken draught of poison …":

> He regards it as a disease
> he has inherited susceptibility to
> He has to keep his hands in his pockets, as others must wear mufflers (l. 36-38).

The third rail represents the path that deviates from the strict, defined two-rail path of the train. By regarding it as "poison" and a "disease," Bishop seems to argue that such deviance from the norm and travelling outside boundaries set by society (straying from home) is dangerous, and must be avoided. The Man-Moth keeps his hands in his pockets in attempt to curb his impulse to reach for the third rail—he does this, as "others must wear mufflers." According to Merriam Webster's Dictionary, "mufflers" may mean either a scarf worn around the neck, something that deadens noise, or something that hides or disguises. The act of placing his hands in his pockets, considering the first two meanings, connotes an act of insulation against "noise" or wind, insulation against undesired disturbances. Regarding the third meaning, the act

becomes not insulation against an outer disturbance, but a concealing of an inner deviance not acceptable to the outside world. Since the next line after "mufflers" is "If you catch him," then the third meaning is accentuated as the Man-Moth comes to be characterized as eluding apprehension and escaping attempts at being recognized. Thus, the "unbroken draught of poison" (as opposed to the train rails broken with recurrent ties), the "disease" that he is susceptible to becomes part of his inner constitution and not a separate outward entity. In this sense, the tendency to depart (travel) from monotonous and single-minded ideologies and norms (home) is an inner impulse (a self-dislocating consciousness) that alienates the Man-Moth from his fellow home-inhabitants. In this sense also, physical movement and travel become a metaphor for mental dislocation and intellectual innovation.

Finally, just like the world from which he intends to travel, the Man-Moth himself embodies a world of his own because of his deviating tendency. "If you catch him," Bishop claims, "hold up a flashlight to his eye": that is, investigate. This echoes the Man-Moth's own attempt to investigate the moon (transcendental knowledge). His eye, then, is

> all dark pupil,
> an entire night itself, whose haired horizon tightens
> as he stares back, and closes up the eye. Then from the lids
> one tear, his only possession, like the bee's sting, slips.
> Slyly he palms it, and if you're not paying attention
> he'll swallow it. However, if you watch, he'll hand it over,
> cool as from underground springs and pure enough to drink. (l. 42-48)

"Dark" like the night, "an entire night" indeed, the Man-Moth's eye comes to resemble the world of night from which he had aimed to leave through the hole of the moon at the outset of the poem. Just as the moon refuses to admit him, his eye closes to the viewer too, however, this concealment is not impenetrable, for the tear now marks communication with the investigator who is paying close attention. Here, then, the failure of the upwards ascension to the moon, or the failure to capture a transcendent

unifying truth ("light") through the act of leaving home, and the persistence of the impulse to reach out to the third rail from the confining tracks of home in search for difference, make of the Man-Moth a figure whose limitation to home is unsatisfying yet inevitable. Yet, his very tendency to deviate differentiates him from his other home-inhabitants. As a traveler, he captures his own world of *night*, rather than *light*. That is, the knowledge he possesses is not transcendent in nature, but rather defined by the world of night and tunnels. The knowledge he can impart is "cool" and "pure" derived from the "underground," not elevated heights, derived from the knowledge attained by the traveler who ascends to descend, descends to travel, and travels to transcend home without the illusion of ascending.

In other words, with the impossibility of attaining a unified transcendent discourse that would pull one's deviating tendencies into a center to provide comfort and anchorage in a sense of home, the deviating tendencies themselves come to engender the attitude necessary to reach a knowledge "pure enough to drink": that is, derived from personal imaginative flights (deviations) and easily taken in and understood once discovered. This dictate to "pay attention" to something small as the pupil of the moth is an affirmation that the small and the particular down here (as opposed to the moon up there), once observed, can impart a knowledge more valuable than transcendence. Home is confining and limited, transcendence is an illusion: what is left is the third rail. Travelling down here, although it isolates and de-anchors one from feelings of home and belonging, is the positive attribute that creates an inner sense of home, a secret honey like that of the bee, more pure and fresh than any transcendent ideology can provide. This knowledge, then, is the aesthetic knowledge produced by the artist: it is a knowledge that does not presume absoluteness and universality, but one that is pure, fresh, and personal. Hence, it is a sense of home, something powerfully

private, individual, and particular that derives from the lack of an affiliation with an ideologically dictating sense home.

Then, the Man-Moth functions within and possesses the world of night, a world inaccessible to those around him. He could be described as an alienated, secluded character. Such a figure is also described in Bishop's "Insomnia," where the setting is also at night. Similarly alienated and abandoned by the universe, the moon in "Insomnia" finds a "mirror, on which to dwell" (l. 10). There, in that "world inverted,"

> where left is always right,
> where the shadows are really the body,
> where we stay awake all night,
> where the heavens are shallow as the sea
> is now deep, and you love me (l. 13-18).

In the world of art, imagination, appearances, and "shadows" are just as valid as any other claim to truth. This world allows for the multiplicity, freedom, and comfort lacking in discourses and ideology. However, just like the moon, abandoned by the universe, seeks shelter in the mirror of art(ifice), the poet in this poem seems to seek shelter in poetry, in search of that inverted world where "you love me," in search of home. A search for things lost or missing, poetry seems to be an experience in finding or looking, through the aesthetic focus on the particular which, as we have seen, can lead to comfort through the imagination. Both alienated and active only at night, the moon and the Man-Moth nonetheless seem to posses something more, an alternate "home" created by aesthetic consciousness and imagination. Yet, the Man-Moth seems more confident with the form of knowledge he possesses, as it is a knowledge that can be passed on, that can benefit others who are watching. On the other hand, the knowledge the moon has is merely workings of her imagination, a world in which reality is transformed. Knowledge of this particular world can be nothing more than an illusion, of no use in practical life, merely a longing.

Bishop also utilizes the trope of the creative insomniac in her unpublished poems. The representation of this figure in the unpublished poems will shed a new light on the published ones, accentuating another, less emphasized feature of this character: the intense, shattering nature of the alienation and the doubt he may harbor due to the inapplicability of the "knowledge" he possesses and whether his travelling consciousness and imagination are not merely creative illusion-making. In "Three Poems,"Bishop metaphorically likens poetry to the heart. Thereby, she is allowed to capitalize on established representations of the heart as the repository of sentimentality and emotional imprudence. Sentimentality and emotion, so carefully avoided in her published poetry, become defining features of poetry here as it is increasingly identified with the heart, and with love. As "Three Poems" suggests, poetry *is* a heart, an "echoing house" confined to the world of "night," "dreams," and darkness, separated from anything real and tangible, thoroughly young and foolish. Titled "Three Poems," this sequence seems to be about poetry itself, three poems standing for nothing other than themselves, free of connotation and reference, secluded from the real world of experience.

The first of the sequence lists a variety of perspectives ranging from heights to abysses, expansive vision and close focus—quite like the versatile lens of a camera, and not unlike the Man-Moth's varied vantage points:

> From the eighth floor, from the twenty-eighth floor,
> Face to on the sidewalk or in front of a store;
> Off and below, through wires, /somewhere/ on a road;
> At the end of the sky; at the edge of the wood;
> Under a bird's eye, close to the parted hair,
> Discovered by headlamps of a speeding car,
> Sighted, a speck, from ship; sighed, a speck from shore,
> Small, as the numbers on watches; huge / / and / /
> / /; or making on the mountain
> Something as slender as a scratch with diamond;
>
> ---Infinite angles of shooting. We do not move, (l. 1-11)

These lines catalogue different perspectives and points of view, ranging from as high as a bird's eye view to as close as noticing "the parted hair" (l. 5), from being positioned on land or at sea. This all-seeing, omnipresent figure is likened to a traveler traversing roads, never stable enough for her position to be identified but is rather "somewhere" (l.3), climbing mountains, and floating on the seas, echoing the Man-Moth's inability to be confined to the two set rails. Further, this poet-traveler-god figure is at the "*end* of the sky" and the "*edge* of the wood" (l. 4 my emphasis), as if pushing limitations and treading extremities much as the Man-Moth sought for the moon. One particular pattern to note in this excerpt is the frequency of dissimilar pairs in almost every line: that is, in the first line it is high and low, in the second it is being face-down or face to face, in the fourth it is the elevated expanse of sky versus the dense forestry and woods on the ground, in the fifth it is panoramic versus microscopic perspective, in the seventh it is land versus sea, and finally it is differing size in line eight. The phrase extending from line nine until ten is quite significant, as it is the only line in the series that does not provide two different options, but elaborates one: that of the infinitesimally small scratch on a mountain. Although the "slender scratch" and the mountain pose as differing elements, this line is the only one that includes an active verb modifying the traveller himself: "making" (as opposed to "sighted" and "discovered"), which functions to describe this traveller's *activity* and not only her vantage point. After having read through the juxtapositions of large and small, among other opposites, this poet's activity of scratching mountains is heightened in its insignificance of effect, even though the significance of its attempt is acknowledged; she scratches with "diamond." This differs in tone to the activity of the Man-Moth, which is elevated to seem like a heroic journey, rare, valuable, and socially significant. After this list that yet remains the predicate-less subject of the sentence, Bishop ends it by merely pointing out that all of the above have been angles of shooting.

The final assertion that "we do not move" is quite significant. Although the cameraman, the Man-Moth, and the poet may discover whole worlds and new particulars, they do not actually and experientially move. This highlights the fact that discovering these "worlds" is only accomplished when the imagination informs vision and so remains almost vicarious in nature. Thus, the above list refers to different ways a camera shot may be composed—no one is actually physically travelling. A camera shot may be used specifically to mean the angle between the camera and the subject, or the angle of the camera relative to the subject. If we were to take another look at the list, it would become clear that Bishop had been literally listing different camera shots: eye-level, high angle, low angle, and bird's eye. It would seem, in this context, that the poet is referring to the power of camera shots to eternalize the particular, the panoramic, and the original that often remain invisible to the human eye. Her technique of zoom and shutter characterizes the form of this poem as a series of photographs capturing the world in all its variety. Perhaps just like the Man-Moth's dark pupil, the camera lens may well contain the whole world. Bishop continues:

> In this agile camera, the wide eye of love
> Fresh from the cinema, our posture is this
> Always: always the clasp, the kiss. (l. 12-14)

After line ten, the multiple perspectives, or "infinite angles of shooting" lead to the metaphor that likens the "eye of love" and the "agile camera" to aesthetic vision. In line eleven, the pronoun "we" is introduced and characterized with immobility quite contrary to the constant motion ascribed to the poet in the preceding stanza. As opposed to the shifting postures indicated by the variety of prepositions in the previous stanza, this "we" is fixed in a permanent position: "always the clasp, the kiss" (l. 14).

In Bishop's "Four Poems" from the published collection discussed in chapter two, an epistemic quarrel is resolved with a kiss, or a surface-to-surface contact. Here too, this contact is presented with the same intimate, apprehensive and emotional value,

but the difference is that the artificial and vicarious nature of this contact is accentuated. As opposed to the ideal, mobile poet in direct contact with the world, "we" real-world poets "do not" actually "move," but are relegated to a position likened to that behind a camera lens, "fresh from the cinema" (l. 12-13). The reference to cinema and cameras highlights the constructed, secondary, and separated vision of the poet, modified by the lens through which she views the world. Described as an "eye of love," this lens intervenes between the world and the poet, mediating the "kiss," or direct contact with this world. Like love, aesthetic vision is colored with a certain apprehension particular to the poet-observer, a vision whose value is to be disclosed is the second poem of the series.

The second poem in the series is divided into two octaves, the first outlining the positive values of aesthetic vision, the second highlighting the irony and paradox inherent to this vision by nature of its being inevitably separated from the real world of experience. "Love's eye" is in the first line described as "stereoscopic," allowing for a vision that encompasses multiple perspectives and is so enriched. Where love's eye decides to "dote," it "leans on abysses/ in a flat town" (l. 3-4). This line indicates that aesthetic vision is capable of discovering depth where it is most unlikely, and so is able to find such depth, meaning, and value in a "flat town," or an apparently unappealing surface. This ability is motivated by a kind of particular creativity that allows this poet to discover "interesting dissonance" in "cheapest music" (l. 7-8). Having now identified the poet's creativity and apparently privileged ability to find value and meaning, the next stanza undermines the value of this depth as it comes to identify it as valuable *only* to the poet, and inapplicable to the world of experience. The poet comes increasingly to be identified as living in his own isolated, self-sufficient world, whose depth becomes ironically illusionistic. The stanza continues as such:

He only speeds through sleeping cities,

Finding highways to the beaches,
Finding fun in dead amusement parks.
Sees nothing sad about neglected breakers
That keep in falling in the dark all night.
Flames through the Steeplechase, the Lido;
With happy mouth wide open and shut eyes
Rides the bleak roller coaster (l. 9-16)

The word "only" introduces a limit to the poet's apparently omniscient vision and understanding: it is limited to activity that takes place at night in "sleeping cities" where life is at a pause. Functioning within the gaps of life, or within the realms of the hours of temporary death, this vision finds "fun" and happiness in "dead amusement parks" and ironically "sees nothing sad" about falling into darkness. Riding the "bleak roller coaster" with "shut eyes," this poet's vision is so separated from the actual world of the living that her aesthetic vision of love and beauty cannot be evident in the world of experience, and therefore cannot be viewed through the actual eye, which being behind a lens, cannot be in direct contact with the world. With "shut eyes," this vision becomes defined by something like the mind's eye – self-sufficient and quite separate from life, and therefore, though it finds happiness and beauty, it paradoxically finds it in a quasi-death, a ridiculously detached state of stupor.

The third poem in this series identifies the poet's positive vision with the heart. Rejecting that which "meet[s] the mind's approval," the heart "rejects" all that comes from "love," "art," or "science," and confines itself to "his echoing house/ And would not speak at all" (l. 2-5). Thus, this vision lies separate from anything pertaining to the world of experience and rationality, but remains secluded, stubborn, and confined to its own "echoing house." In the following stanza, the aesthetic vision becomes more of a short-sightedness, or even a blindness ascribed to the irrationalities of youth:

The mind goes on to say: "Fortunate affection
Still young enough to raise a monument
To *the first look lost beyond the eyelashes.*"
But the heart *sees* field cluttered with statues
And does not want to *look*.

> Younger than the mind and less intelligent,
> He refuses all food, all communications;
> *Only at night, indreams*, seeking his fortune,
> *Seestravel*, and turns up strange face-cards. (l. 6-14, my emphasis)

The third line in this excerpt suggests the short-sightedness of the poet, idealizing and sustaining an attachment to a vision (raising monuments) that if extended to the actual world "beyond the eyelashes," would be lost into nothingness. Though the heart is aware of his foolishness, he "sees" it but refuses to "look." Thus, his vision is clouded with ignorance and is highly selective. Described as unintelligent, this heart refuses all contact with the actual world of experience and reason, refusing "food" and "communications" flourishing only at night, in dreams, *only there* able to practice the all-compassing mobility outlined in the first stanza. Even then, in his dreams, he merely "sees travel," rather than directly "travels," implying that this desire to uncover depth and knowledge remains nothing more than that: a desire that is never fulfilled.

In this light, one realizes that the Man-Moth indeed remains confined within the train: he is never actually able to deviate in any way other than through his *imagining* the third rail. Thus, instead of poetry being represented as the gateway to a travelling consciousness that discovers beauty within apparent chaos, a representation directly opposed to a limited consciousness reflected in the imagery of home, in "Three Poems," poetry itself becomes a confining house of its own. An echoing chamber, it reflects nothing but its own untenable desires and cries for comfort; it remains wholly separate from the world of experience. This poetic eye, becomes a source of damaging disillusionment, creating depths that will only serve as abysses in which to endlessly fall. In this light, also, the Man-Moth's possession of a "world of night," and its subsequent description as a "dark pupil" resonates with the shortsightedness underscored in "Three Poems" and undermines the Man-Moth's claims to greatness.

Further, it accentuates the apparently suppressed expression of uneasiness suggested in "Insomnia."

Thus, in "Three Poems," Bishop underlines the psyche of the alienated poet figure. The published poem "The Man-Moth" seems to harbor the belief in the knowledge and the powerful significance of this knowledge that the Man-Moth possesses. While "Insomnia" merely suggests the sadness involved in alienation, it is only in the unpublished poetry that this darkness is expressed and the adequacy and the significance of aesthetic knowledge questioned.

"Three Poems" ironically likens poetry to the heart, which is then defined as an "echoing house" that is confining and limited. This leads into the trope of the house in Bishop's poetry: while in the published poems it is the dictating cultural and social ideologies that are likened to a stifling house, the unpublished poems reveal that poetry, imagination, aesthetic knowledge, and an alienated psyche work together to form a confining house of their own. The difference is that this house has no practical application in the social world, and thus becomes the source of greater alienation. In the following analysis, while the published "Paris 7 A.M." compares ideologies to houses and a travelling consciousness as the hopeful escape therefrom, the unpublished "The walls" ponders the possibility of this consciousness leading itself to a more dangerous house, strictly separate from the world of experience.

**D. The House of Terror**

"Paris, 7 A.M." opens with the poetic persona making a "trip" to "each clock in the apartment" (l. 1). We begin with a journey confined to the walls of the apartment, though the "hands" of the clocks "point histrionically one way/and some point others" (l. 2-3). The poet continues:

Time is an Etoile: the hours diverge

so much that days are journeys round the suburbs,
circles surrounding stars, overlapping circles (l. 4-6).

In this configuration, the face of the clock becomes a metaphor for space: the hours diverging around the center of the clock and constituting "days" come to resemble "journeys round the suburbs." These journeys seem to circle around a center point, a "star," and "overlap" one another, suggesting that the journeys repeat themselves always held down by a controlling center. The next image we get is one of death and decay: it is winter, a winter that "lives under a pigeon's wing, a dead wing with damp/feathers" (l. 9-10). While the pigeon's wing should stand for freedom of movement in the form of flight, it is instead dead and damp intensifying the image of heaviness and encumbering. The access to heights is hampered. As such, the world of winter lives under this dead wing: it is dark and colorless (composed of "half tone scales"), held down heavily by death. Hence, the next stanza implores readers to "look down into the courtyard" (l. 11). The houses there are "built that way," built as well under a dead pigeon's wing. Like winter, the architecture of the houses is stifling and confining, reminiscent of death and stagnancy. On the rooftops are "urns" later described as holding the ashes of the pigeon that once flew (l. 30). Speaking of the urns, Bishop writes:

It is like introspection
to stare inside or retrospection,
a star inside a rectangle, a recollection (l. 14-16)

Staring into the urns that contain death is both a reflective examination of one's own thoughts and feelings and a travelling back in time to survey the past. These receptacles containing death, then, contain a truth applicable to each individual throughout time that it comes to resemble a "recollection," a personal memory. It seems as though death is a unifying truth, the metaphorical center of the clock rendering all journeys to anything futilely repetitive. After this bleak thought, the dash caesura transfers readers to the

"snow-forts," and begins to relate imagery of forts, homes, and shelters as defying death or the fear of it as they offer protection and safety:

> the mighty snow-forts, four, five, stories high,
> withstanding spring as sand-forts do the tide,
> their walls, their shape, could not dissolve and die,
> only be overlapping in a strong chain, turned to stone,
> and grayed and yellowed now like these (l. 20-24)

After contemplating the death and decay involved in the world, Bishop shifts to the comforting walls of home that resist death or provide a comforting knowledge against the chaos and darkness characteristic of the world at large. Here, walls of home "overlap" like the circles of the journeys above, but, instead of being futile, they form a "strong chain" of "stone" that is able to survive time and decay. The center of the clock, the single truth that grounds time, however, is never quite captured. Just like the journeys, the houses' walls go around this truth albeit providing protection. In this sense, traveling and staying at home are the same, essentially, as the "star" elides both.

Though offering protection, the houses themselves, like the urns, seem to be receptacles for death, even though they themselves survive, like ideologies. Bishop asks of the snow-forts: "Where is the ammunition, the piled-up balls/ with the star-splintered hearts of ice?" (l. 25-26). The "mighty snow forts" are devoid of life and movement. The image of "star-splintered hearts" suggests that the star stands in for life and energy, the life and energy missing in the apartment, the houses, the forts, the urns, and the world of winter: all closed receptacles. Of course, as Bishop continues:

> This sky is no carrier-warrior-pigeon
> escaping endless intersecting circles.
> It is a dead one, or the sky from which a dead one fell.
> The urns have caught his ashes or his feathers.
> When did the star dissolve, or was it captured by the sequence of squares and squares, circles, circles? (l. 27-32)

It seems as though life has been depleted by the suffocating circles and squares defining both homes and circular journeys. The journeys described above are futile because they

continue to be held down by this limiting notion of home and safety, connoting death. The winter sky cannot escape these confining layers because it is a dead bird, deprived of freedom and flight. In this sense, home becomes detrimental to the freedom of the spirit and clips a bird's wings. It also comes to be represented as a coffin, harboring death and consequently lack of motion, life, and energy represented by the brightness of a star.

The poem, however, does not end on such a bleak note. The fact that confinement to "home" in the broad sense is represented by entrapment within "intersecting circles" without the ability to fight through them does not necessarily mean that the "star" has "dissolved" or has been inevitably "captured" by limiting ideologies of home. The poem ends with these two lines:

> Can the clocks say; is it there below,
> about to tumble in snow?

"It," referring to the "star" in the preceding line, is on the verge of tumbling in the snow, that is, it is on the verge of becoming hidden and covered with layers of obscurity—the snow that has descended from the "dead" sky and has been used to build the "mighty forts." These last two lines, juxtaposed with the long and repetitive line before them ("or was it captured/ by the sequence of squares and squares and circles, circles?") seem refreshing in their simplicity and rhythmic pattern. The line before, in its repetitive use of "and" and repetition of "squares" and "circles," along by its exceeding length compared to other lines in the poem is quite suffocating in itself, confined and limited. These last two lines, the shortest in the poem, and the only two lines following each other that have the same end rhyme ("below"/ "snow"), provide a fresh release from the confining circles and squares. The fact that there is a flicker of light ("star") in this dark winter landscape, transient and slight as it may be, suggests that there is something within the "courtyard below" that has life in it. Thus, one does

not need to be a "carrier-warrior-pigeon" to escape the "endless intersecting circles" by the act of flying upwards, echoing the journey of the Man-Moth. It is "there below" that one can discover particularity and life if one is attentive enough to capture this precariously brief glimmer. This is not asserted is the poem, however, because it is offered in the form of a question. The speaker questions whether "clocks can say," or in other words, if time can reveal, this brief glimmer. Further, the star about to tumble stands at odds with everything described in the rest of the poem: while the poem had been describing death, closed receptacles, and stagnancy, the star shines with light and energy, as well as it is in constant motion: "about to tumble."

The poem seems to question more than assert; perhaps its only assertion is that there is a certain idea of life, spirit, and energy, represented by the star, that has been lost by the strictly defined (geometrical) transcendent discourses composing the metaphorical notion of home, the discourses that anchor people within a fixed framework for understanding the world. Uncovering flickers of the star, also, may involve nothing more than attention to the particular in world "there below," the world regarded as containing beauty despite its living under a "dead pigeon's wing," the archaic ideologies "damp[ening]" the feather of flight and weighing upon the spirit like the "grayed and yellowed" walls of the houses that survive their inhabitants.

Interestingly, Bishop's representation of houses in her unpublished poetry remains the same; what changes is to what these houses refer. As Bishop carefully distinguishes the freedom involved in aesthetic vision from the limitations associated with ideological thinking, her unpublished poetry belies this goal by directly associating poetry with confinement and limitation through the image of the house. The value attached to travelling is diminished as it comes to resemble aimless, disillusioned wandering instead—especially when it is more of a mental kind of travel that does not involve actual movement and experience. "The walls" likens poetry to a house and

travelling to nothing more than the imagination leading consciousness from one wall to another without progress, destination, or apparent purpose.

The poem sets up a dialogue between what is natural and what is artificial, lending the greater significance to the former at the expense of the latter. The first three lines open the poem with a tone of dull repetition and heaviness:

> The walls went on for years and years.
> The walls went on to meet more walls
> &travelled together night and day.

In these lines, the sense of repetition is reflected in the limited choice of sounds—particularly that of the "w" accompanied by long vowels—lending the phonetic character of the lines a kind of dull, prolonged slowness. The words themselves seem limited to "walls" and "years" and the phrasal structure in the first two lines is blandly similar. As the walls extend in time ("years", "night and day") and in space ("to meet more walls"), monotony and lifelessness seem to reign. Though the next three lines introduce variety,

> Sometimes they went fast, sometimes slow;
> sometimes the progress was oblique,
> always they slid away.

they nonetheless stress the inevitable sameness of orientation in line six: "always they slid away."

Line eight introduces the written word, and creates an unstated equivalence between words and walls: as the walls are described as "slid[ing] away," words are similarly "gone the next morning," indicating the ephemeral and shifting nature of both terms.

> In passing
> one could write down a word or two
> a whole page or a joke
> gone the next morning.
> Think of them sliding edgewise through
> the future holding up those words
> as something actually important

for everyone to see, like billboards. (l. 7-14)

In these lines, references to time seem to indicate that once regarded within the matrix of passing time, poetry, or words, seem to be almost ludicrous, as the image of holding them as billboards through time points out.

As the poet asks us to "think of them…as something actually important," she seems to be saying that the only way that they *can* be important is in the imagination. As Bishop summons the imagination to save poetry from its trivial status, the following line seems to limit the breadth of the imagination by providing a barrier:

> The ceiling was tiresome to watch
> overburdened with fixtures and burning lights
> but the floorboards had a nice perspective.
> They rose a little here, sagged there
> but went off alas under a wall.
> Did they flow smoothly on or meet
> in the next room in a crash of splinters? (l. 15-21)

As such, the imagination is not only characterized with a visible limitation, the limitation itself is characterized as being "overburdened" with "fixtures and burning light," that is, perhaps, with mere artificial adjuncts providing "light," knowledge, and understanding. Line seventeen implies that the poet is stuck within these wall-words as the ceiling with "heavy fixtures," a direct reference to limitation and encumbrance, limits the poet to a downward perspective to the "floorboards." Though this downward perspective in her published poetry is endowed with positive value, here it results in nothing as the floorboards "went off alas under the wall" and the poet is unable to observe anymore rendering her partially blind and merely able to, again, use her imagination. As her ability to observe the world aesthetically declines into an inability, and with the confining character of the wall-words, the poet is only able to find beauty outside these walls, in nature rather than in artifice. The artificial lighting is immediately counteracted with the following line's introduction of natural "morning light":

The morning light on the patches of raw plaster
was beautiful.
It was crumbled & fine like insects' eggs
orwalls of coral, something *natural*.
Up the bricks outside
climbed little grill-work balconies
all green, the wires were like vines.
And the beds, too, one could study them,
white, but with crudely copied
plant formations, with pleasure.
The clothes we wore like angels' clothes,
angels are no more bothered with buttons. (l. 22-33)

In this excerpt, an opposition is set up between the natural and the artificial. While the artificial lighting is rendered "overburdening," the natural light is "beautiful." Line twenty-five re-envisions the walls in the beginning to being "walls of coral," endowed with life and naturalness once the morning light is cast upon them. Further, this natural light has the ability to transform that which is artificial, like "wires" into something lifelike, like "vines," "all green." This power of transformation, or perhaps influence on personal vision also allows the poet to see herself dressed as an angel, without the button that remind readers of the overburdening fixtures in the beginning.

The first time the world beautiful is used is in reference to "the morning light…something natural" (l. 22-24). Privileging the naturalness of the world outside the house to the artificiality inherent in constructed structures, whether words or walls, the aesthetic observer is relegated to a passive position rather than an active one. Lines thirty-three to thirty-four designate the active observation to the natural landscape:

One day a sad view came to the window
to look in,
little fields & fences & trees, tilted, tan and gray.
Then it went away.
Bigger than anything else the large bright clouds
moved by rapidly every evening,
rapt, on their way to some festivity.

Functioning as a liminal space between indoor artificiality and outdoor nature, the window, instead of allowing the observer to look out, provides a space for the natural

scene to actively look in. Instead of staying and observing, “it went away” and the clouds “moved” rapidly, endowing the landscape with a sense of motion and life absent inside the house. Yet, as the poet assures in the last three lines, the motion still leads to final darkness:

> How dark it grew, no,
> but life was not deprived of all that sense
> of motion in which so much of it consists.

Alive, the landscape is never deprived of the motion that comes to define life. That is, while what is natural is continually alive, what is artificial is deprived of life and organic being. Hence, Bishop’s confidence in the power of observation and aesthetic vision dwindles to very little in this poem. Indeed, this vision becomes a kind of blindness and death, confined to its self-constructed walls.

# CHAPTER III

# AESTHETIC VISION, SURFACE, AND MEANINGFUL DEPTH

## A. Introduction

Elizabeth Bishop reveals, in her published poems, a positive attitude towards travel and dislocation, primarily in the sense that these terms form a certain mindset, one that expresses criticism and rejection of ideological thinking, of mainstream normative thought and discourses, and in doing so, sheds light on the significance of freedom in thinking and the individual imagination. Thus, in the poems discussed in the previous chapter, the stability and single-mindedness of "home" as a concept become overpowering, indeed, overwhelming and often terror-inducing and confining. At the same time, deviation from standard modes of thought in "The Man-Moth" and "Paris, 7 A.M" is presented as both personal and socially valuable. Accepting this kind of attitude, however, will not provide the comfort and certainty that accompanies master-narratives, and so, as seen in "The Man-Moth," risks seclusion and a quiet melancholy. As "Paris, 7 A.M." asserts, finding flickers of light outside the boundaries of "home" is not guaranteed, however, it is possible. This possibility derives from the close, direct observation advised in "The Man-Moth" and suggested in "Paris."

Although the traditional sense of home is re-conceptualized, there is still a longing for a feeling of "home," characterizing the quest of the traveler, ironically, as a quest for home. The concept of home in these poems is re-configured, but never deconstructed *as a concept*. One can find beauty and one can reach a real home, Bishop seems to say, setting herself off a hopeful traveller keen on going *somewhere*, aware of a goal. Bishop's published poetry would argue that the transiency and uncertainty of this "home" become the only way for it to qualify *as* truth, and also, the only way to

formulate a just and acceptable understanding of the world and the self. "Just" and "acceptable," here, are used to signify the justness of the truth as it relates to the observed, and the acceptability of this truth to the observer. By virtue of its being personal and private, the observed is allowed to open up its own world as it is separated from the civilized discourses that obscure its presence. The observer is allowed to interact with the observed on a personal level and attempt to reach a place of understanding, no matter how flimsy, that is solely personal. As such, this understanding is direct, free of constraint, and personal (and so carrying a kernel of truth for the observer) rather than indirectly dictated by discourse, constrained by frameworks of understanding, and precluding personal engagement on account of being universal.

In the following pages, I will capitalize on Heidegger's aesthetic vision in *The Origin of the Work of Art* to support the argument that civilized discourse obscures the presence of objects and prevents personal interaction with objects. Further, I will utilize the framework set up by John Dewey in *Art as Experience* and R.G. Collingwood's aesthetic point of view to highlight the significance of aesthetic vision in leading to meaningful depth and to evaluate the nature of this depth. Bishop's quest for a "home" is characterized, then, by an aesthetic analysis of the world around the poet, her particular aesthetic vision becoming the journey to reaching a personal sense of home. Then, reading the unpublished poetry alongside these published ones would qualify Bishop's claims to the power of aesthetic vision in paving the way for "home." Instead of diminishing the value of aesthetic vision itself, Bishop's unpublished poetry stresses the alienation of the figure of the poet-artist that *prevents* aesthetic vision. In the unpublished poetry, this dark state of mind becomes Heidegger's dictating, absolute knowledge and Adorno's universal terror blocking ability to perform Collingwood's and Lukács' objective, *a priori* observation of the world. Although producing the same

*effect* of blinding and stifling as these concepts, this state of mind does not provide any kind of comfort or consolation grounded in understanding. In the absence of safe (although paradoxically terrorizing) universal truths there is a darkness and discomfort so intense that a state of stagnancy and blindness does not merely provide an obstacle to aesthetic vision, but precludes it precisely because the source of terror is internal rather than external. In my analysis of the unpublished poetry, then, I will show how vision comes to be defined by this state of mind, which is then transposed onto the world preventing the world from revealing itself and in turn transforming the observer's state of mind. Thus, objective, aesthetic contemplation of surface is impeded, and consequently, cannot be the source of meaningful depth.

**B. In the Absence of Universal Truths**

According to Heidegger in *The Origin of the Work of Art*, the world conceals itself from us, and resists our attempt to know it, and therefore, a more truthful truth is one that admits of this integrity and places objects in the open where there are no definite prescriptions and definitions but only room for pondering. This confession that things cannot be known or understood is not a defect, rather, it is a "clearing" or "lighting" that allows for variety and multiplicity, and in this way it speaks to all people at all times. Then, with the absence of the absolute knowledge bound up with the notion of home discussed in the previous chapter, there comes a Heideggerian "clearing"; there is room for a contemplation defined by abstracting the specificity of the observed outside universal discourses and engaging with it on a personal, emotional, intellectual level. Thus, in his analysis of Van Gogh's *Pair of Shoes*, Heidegger points out that the artist aims to abstract the object from the world of consumption in which it is usually found in order to allow it to stand in the "open" and open up its own world of knowledge, a knowledge that is often ignored, elided, or unrecognized when embedded

in its environment. As will be revealed, Bishop similarly performs such abstraction through her representation of the mechanical toy in "Cirque D'Hiver" and the fish in "The Fish."

For Heidegger, a peasant shoe is not what we see in our real world, because as a piece of equipment, the shoe itself vanishes into "usefulness," its substance becomes "transparent," and it collapses into the mere object that is produced and consumed. Thus to capture the essence of the shoe, Van Gogh allows the painting to be a "self-standing illumination and unveiling" and preserves the "object's integrity" by allowing it to "stand in the open" (90). The painting's opening up of a world of its own is the abstraction achieved, as the object is allowed to exist in its self-sufficiency, isolated from the facts and interpretations of the everyday world. This spaciousness is the liberation from misconceptions and preconceptions of everyday life abusing the being of the object and it is the creation of an intellectual space for contemplating and appreciating the object in its integrity.

Although Heidegger focuses on items such as shoes, whose essence is obscured because of its utility value, the same absorption into the world of everyday life diverts attention from the particular objects of the world and nature by plunging one into the regular flow of everyday life; we take the objects for granted. Since they exist as objects that become bound up with meanings, values, and dispositions, often culturally or socially distributed, there has to be conditions that allow them to "come into being" or appear before consciousness. The five senses are a good illustration of Heidegger's concept of "disclosure," and a way to approach objects directly (*Continental Aesthetics Reader* 86). When we see, it is not a passive reception of what is out there. Rather, the optical and neural processes that take place within us open up the world for us in a certain way, that is, they allow us to interpret the world on our own terms, rather than through the lens of universal discourses (87). From here stems Bishop's loyalty to

objective (visual) observation of an object that is out there in order to allow it its full existence and allow interaction with it on a personal level.

**C. Visual Surface and Personal Depth**

According to Collingwood, as summarized by Peter Johnson, art can be a remedy to what he calls the "corruption of consciousness," defined as the tendency of individuals to evade or dissociate themselves from experiences, thoughts, and feelings that are frightening, confusing, and inapprehensible. On the contrary, art is a direct confrontation with confused, frightening, and inapprehensible feelings and thoughts. Art is an attempt to order and organize internal disturbances, acknowledging them as our own, and allows us to undergo a journey of self-discovery. In this sense, the experience of art is not a passive reception of sensory stimuli, but an imaginative engagement. For Collingwood, art is expression, and expression is getting clear about one's experiences, an activity that transforms the experience as it clarifies it. Before expression, the emotion is unknown. Poetry is therefore a process or an attempt to attain an organization and understanding, and not an expression of something that is already organized and understood. Thus, in the context of this analysis, art is not the expression of an understood home but is rather the experience, or the journey, through which a sense of home is reached, discovered, or recognized. Similarly, for Heidegger, experience is not the reception of sense impressions but a form of prospection or questioning: to have experience is to be in an active state of finding out about the world, and just like the question we ask affects the answer, the way in which we approach reality affects how it appears. Art, in this sense, is an experience in itself; it is a way of approaching reality that consequently affects how that reality appears. Art is an interactive experience with the world: it questions rather than presumes answers, it observes rather than defines, and it is the *process* of the production of ideas and not

ideas in their completeness. In this sense, it is both intensely personal and deeply meditative. Lukács and Adorno argue that the work of art offers knowledge of the particular that is obliterated by universal discourses that tend to generalize and universalize. Utilizing Collingwood's understanding of the personal in art, this particularity of objects observed becomes tied to the particularity of the observer (in terms of personality, imagination, or desire), both of which inform the aesthetic process of creating meaningful depth outside the realms of civilized discourse.

Similarly, John Dewey's *Art as Experience* proposes such a view of art. Dewey proposes a theory that perception is the method by which one may attain depth in experience. He argues for a philosophy that "accepts life and experience in all its uncertainty, mystery, doubt, and half-knowledge, and [in imagination and art]turns that experience upon itself to deepen and intensify its own qualities" (41). Meaning is regarded in his framework as that which "accumulates by the observer's successively taking in new observations and reinterpreting what came before" (Samuels). In "Verse as Deep Surface: Elizabeth Bishop's Poetry 1938-39," Peggy Samuels analyzes Bishop's "Pleasure Seas" by drawing on Dewey's theory of poetry and highlighting how Dewey offers a conception of depth that does not derive from politics or moral statements, but is rather the product of interacting with a surface. To accomplish this, he differentiates between "perception" and "recognition," "doing" and "undergoing." Recognition is defined as "a kind of nodding off, a way of avoiding experience because one applies the previously known too imperiously to new phenomena" (Samuels). In Dewey's terms, imperiousness emphasizes "doing" as opposed to "undergoing," where the latter contains the sense of "suffering" or "taking in" while the former focuses too much attention on the surface of things (47-48). Undergoing, then, involves creating depth in experience through an interaction between mind and object. Dewey writes:

> There is no such thing in perception as seeing or hearing plus emotion. The perceived object or scene is emotionally pervaded throughout. When an aroused emotion does not permeate the material that is perceived or thought of, it is either preliminary or pathological. (59)

Then, intellect and emotion permeate objects and create depth. Perception is construed as an interaction between the inside of the observer and external objects:

> Perception is an act of the going-out of energy in order to receive, not a withholding of energy. To steep ourselves in a subject-matter we have first to plunge into it. When we are only passive to a scene, it overwhelms us and, for lack of answering activity, we do not perceive that which bears us down. We must summon energy and pitch it at a responsive key in order to take in. (60)

Thus, depth is created from objective observation while avoiding moral pronouncements or political statements. It is a kind of meaning derived directly from experience. Dewey's position on emotion is that it does not enter upon a scene fully-made, but rather claims that "experience is emotional but there are no separate things called emotions in it" (48). Thus, it is the objective observation that leads to intellectual and emotional interaction that creates meaningful depth in poetry.

In the following published poems, I will trace a recognizable pattern whereby close, objective observation of the object's visual appearance leads to personal, imaginative engagement with the object, which consequently paves the way for a meaningful vision of the world and a sense of home. It is an assertion of the significance of visible surfaces in paving the way towards meaningful depth as it is an aesthetic acknowledgement of their particular presence and what they have to offer. While in "Cirque D'Hiver" this meaningful depth is vague and undefined, "The Fish" extends it so as to give it value. The analysis of "Four Poems" will highlight the significance of the value described in "The Fish." Then, an analysis of the unpublished "Luxembourg Gardens" and "Homesickness" criticize this attainment of depth because they portray a mind too overwhelmed by its own emotions that it is unable to provide a "clearing"; in this sense, emotion modifies perception of the scene, rendering aesthetic observation

obsolete and thereby questions the possibility of such a process in creating change when the mind is too troubled to be able to undergo it.

The poem "Cirque D'Hiver" demonstrates the power of observation not only to allow the object to reveal its Heideggerian being as it is separated from the world of production and consumption, but also to develop a personal relationship between the observer and observed extended by imagination. The poem opens with a careful description of the appearance of the "mechanical toy" at hand. Bishop writes:

> Across the floor flits the mechanical toy,
> fit for a king of several centuries back.
> A little circus horse with real white hair.
> His eyes are glossy black.
> He bears a little dancer on his back.
>
> She stands upon her toes and turns and turns.
> A slanting spray of artificial roses
> is stitched across her skirt and tinsel bodice.
> Above her head she poses
> another spray of artificial roses (l. 1-10)

Thus we are presented with a minute description of the horse in visual terms, and the dancer perched on his back. The stanzas are composed of short sentences, as if presenting visual facts in the form of an objective list. The rhyme scheme *abcbb*also gives it a light, matter-of-fact tone suggesting that the poet is not interpreting the object through already established lens of understanding, but is merely using her vision to objectively relate what she sees. Further, the adjectives provided such as "glossy," "slanting," "artificial," "real" are merely descriptive rather than charged with value or allusion. The focus is on the way the object is *seen*.

Similarly, "The Fish" utilizes the same method as "Cirque D'Hiver" in its objective observation of what is available to the eye. Almost prose-like, Bishop describes the fish's appearance:

> his brown skin hung in strips
> …
> He was speckled with barnacles,

fine rosettes of lime,
and infested
with tiny white sea-lice,
and underneath two or three
rags of green weed hung down (l. 10, 16-21).

His eyes are described as "far larger than mine/ but shallower and yellowed,/ the irises backed and packed/ with tarnished tinfoil/ seen through the lenses/ of old scratched isinglass" (l. 34-40). As such, we are presented with purely visual descriptions of color, arrangement, and a precise attempt to remain faithful to visual detail. The complete lack of rhyme gives the poem an objective, prose-like tone, as if delivering facts without value judgments. Indeed, Bishop describes her aesthetic methodology in this poem as "The tipping of an object/ towards the light" (l. 43-44).

The third stanza of "Cirque D'Hiver" introduces an interpretative lens that is largely personal rather than originating in society and culture:

His mane and tail are straight from Chirico.
He has a formal, melancholy soul.
He feels her pink toes dangle toward his back
along the little pole
that pierces both her body and her soul

and goes through his, and reappears below,
under his belly, as a big tin key.
He canters three steps, then he makes a bow,
canters again, bows on one knee,
canters, then clicks and stops, and looks at me (l. 11-20)

These stanzas are interpretative in the sense that they deviate from objective observation and introduce adjectives that constitute value. First, the soul of the horse is described as "melancholy" without any visual signs to support the claim. The poet claims to know that the horse "feels [the dancer's] pink toes dangle towards his back." These descriptions can only derive from the poet's imagination which is, as the next four lines reveal, peculiar to the poet. When the pole is described as "pierc[ing]" the bodies and souls of the dancer and the horse, the poet is projecting her own personal interpretation onto the object. In this way, by first allowing the object to exist separate from the world

at large and by focusing on its particular existence (even endowing it with a soul), the poet is *only then* allowed to interact with this object, almost on an equal level. This attests to the value Bishop places on objects of the world: like Van Gogh's shoe, the mechanical toy has its own story, realized by the space opened through the viewers' contemplation and observation, and extended through her imagination.

"The Fish" also demonstrates a moment of close observation of a fish that allows the poet to individualize the animal, and extricate it from the cycle of consumption. Interestingly, Bishop claims that in catching the fish, it "didn't fight. He hadn't fought at all," demonstrating how objects lend themselves to being observed (l. 5-6). Bishop continues:

> I admired his sullen face,
> the mechanism of his jaw,
> and then I saw
> that from his lower lip
> --if you could call it a lip
> grim, wet, and weaponlike,
> hung five old pieces of fish-line,
> or four and a wire leader
> with the swivel still attached,
> with all their five big hooks
> grown firmly in his mouth.
> A green line, frayed at the end
> where he broke it, two heavier lines,
> and a fine black thread
> still crimped from the strain and snap
> when it broke and he got away.
> Like medals with their ribbons
> frayed and wavering,
> a five-haired beard of wisdom
> trailing from his aching jaw (l. 45-64).

Closely observing the fish, Bishop comes to individualize and humanize it. It is no longer a fish that is caught and sold to be eaten, but it is a fish with a personal history of being caught five times, evident from the "five big hooks/ grown firmly in his mouth." We are presented with a scenario of the fish's struggles of breaking lines, and the "wisdom" attained from such experiences. It is described as "sullen" while its jaw is

"aching," humanizing the animal and endowing it with a unique existence, complete with a history.

The last three lines of the fourth stanza of "Cirque D'Hiver" seem, in their intense motion, quite nervous. Finally, the mechanical toy looks at the observer. At this moment, Bishop writes:

> The dancer, by this time, has turned her back.
> He is the more intelligent by far.
> Facing each other rather desperately—
> his eye is like a star—
> we stare and say, "Well, we have come this far."

Here, there is an echo of the "star" mentioned in "Paris, 7 A.M." and here, like there, the star seems to represent some kind of vague knowledge after which one seeks. Like "Paris" as well, the poem contains an act of "staring," as if through staring (direct observation), one may catch a glimpse of something "like a star." And though the observer and the observed do not reach anywhere transcendent, they "have come this far," noting that *something* valuable has been accomplished. The desperation described is best surmounted, according to the poem, through facing the world and allowing for a space of contemplation that paves the way for understandings, or almost understandings, and it is because of this that the horse is "more intelligent" than the dancer (also with a pierced soul) that turns away.

Likewise, in "The Fish," it is objective observation that paves the way for first individualizing the object to allow interaction, and consequently developing a relationship with the object defined by contemplation that allows for a new understanding of the world, or at least, a momentary re-interpretation of it, perhaps a reaching of the place described in "CriqueD'Hiver" as "this far." Interestingly, as we will see, "this far" in "The Fish" constitutes a kind of home. After objective observation, Bishop develops an imaginative relationship with the fish:

While his gills were breathing in
the *terrible* oxygen
--the *frightening* gills,
fresh and crisp with blood,
that can cut so badly--
*I thought of* the coarse white flesh
packed in like feathers,
the big bones and the little bones,
the dramatic reds and blacks
of his shiny entrails,
and the pink swim-bladder
like a big peony (l. 22-33, my emphasis)

With the words "terrible" and "frightening," the descriptive adjectives shift from being objective and value-free to interpretative. The poet's own perception is introduced. Then, it is no longer what they eye sees, but the imaginative thoughts triggered by this vision. Here Bishop imagines the inside of the fish, complete with bones and entrails. Then, following the pattern in "Cirque D'Hiver," this imagination leads us to a more developed "this far." It shifts from being limited to the fish to being transferred onto the world around it, transforming ugliness to beauty. Bishop states that she "stared and stared" (recall the staring in "Paris" and "Cirque") until "victory filled up/ the little rented boat" and images of the "pool of bilge" became "a rainbow," the "rusted engine" is isolated for its "rusted orange," and "the sun-cracked thwarts" along with the "oarlocks" and "gunnels" all become "rainbow, rainbow, rainbow!" As such, the act of staring allowed objective observation to lead to contemplative thought, finally resulting in the discovery of beauty. Of course, the last line of the poem is "And I let the fish go." One may wonder if the beautiful perception of the world was consequently lost as well.

The uncertainty and transiency defeat the capture of any form of transcendent knowledge or absolute truth, or even a clear vision of the world. Coming "this far" with the circus horse, and the fish, is a place of almost home. In this sense, the fish itself is described as "homely" in line nine, and its gills are likened to "ancient wallpaper," as if it is a safe repository like a house. However, this home is not like the notion of "home"

and houses criticized in the beginning. This homeliness derives not from its rigid stability and confinement, but from the abstract feeling of comfort that it has the power to induce. Regarding the argument in the first part of my essay, the notion of home is re-defined, and in "The Fish," the knowledge that "The Man-Moth" discusses and the flicker of light mentioned in "Paris" is reached and its consequence provided. Close observation and attention to the particular, then, provides not the absolute definiteness of transcendental knowledge, but is able to, though temporarily, transform the vision of this world through personal imaginative interaction with the objects in the world. Allowing these objects space to exist in their own right and allowing them to open up a world of their own is an aesthetic acknowledgement that leads to an inner *feeling* of home, though fleeting, that social, cultural, or ideological "homes" or centers of orientations cannot instill. This is the lesson the Man-Moth teaches.

This "allowing" for a space in which objects of the world are observed is, in Bishop's unpublished poetry often skipped. The poet jumps into personal interpretation of the world around her, not beginning with observable facts. Instead, the poet's state of mind clouds her vision, rendering her blind to the objective, observable facts and only able to transpose mental states upon the world. Thus, while Dewey and Collingwood would claim that emotions do not enter upon a scene fully-made, in these cases, the emotions create the scene as it is perceived through them. In "Luxembourg Gardens," Bishop begins by observing architecture:

> Doves on architecture, architecture
> Color of doves, and doves in air---
> The towers are so much the color of air,
> They could be anywhere. (l. 1-4)

This description is far from precise; indeed, it almost erases the object being observed into an absence. Later on in the poem, fountains are observed as such:

> Stock-still, the fountain, a half-gone candle,
> With wax-white drops fallen to one side.

Then: with an ingenious puff of wind,
The wick begins to bend;
It snaps, and scatters itself
In a broken string of glass beads.
The puff came from Guignol
Over there among the trees,
And what he meant to mock was not the fountain
But the Pantheon. (l.12-21)

The first couple lines seem to be based on observation: a concrete or marble fountain will be "stock-still," and may observably be compared to a "half-gone candle." However, line three immediately brings in imaginative play. The fountain cannot bend, snap, and scatter from a puff of wind, and certainly not from one blown by "Guignol," the main character of a French puppet show that carries the same name. The poem continues with Guignol puffing and attempting to "set" the Pantheon "free," until one puff creates "the big, half-filled balloon" that will probably "get to the moon" (l. 22-26). Wholly fantastic and imaginative, this poem fails to objectively observe anything. The object pointed out in the beginning, the Pantheon, disappears into "air" and creates an empty stage hosting characters from the poet's imagination. Thus, what is seen is seen through the mental eye as it eliminates the vision of the physical eye. Physical blindness, then, takes the place of careful, objective attention to the world. Instead of allowing the Pantheon, in this case, to open up a space of being by paying careful attention to it, it diminishes into non-existence. In this way, the experiential world is erased by the imaginative world.

The reason for the difference in vision between the published and the unpublished poems is clarified in the following unpublished poem titled "Homesickness":

So she put up her hair & went to teach
…
at River Phillip, thirty miles away
The pupils were---
Cousin Sophie---
The salt pork & the buckwheat pancakes
smelling like frying---

*headaches*

the oil lamp--- the sloping bedroom
ceiling---in a low tent of sadly
matched wall-paper
*Finally*
She missed
her father her fretful mother &
the jealous sisters---
*The family dog to keep her company.
clenched
sleeping
not even realizing she was weeping
her face [her] nightgown drenched---
It was too late---for what, she did not know. ---
Already---, remote,
irreparable.
Beneath the bed the big dog thumped her tail.

This poem details the experience of someone separated from home, and suffering because of this separation. In the beginning of the poem, attempts at describing surroundings are initiated but stopped short. The pupils, cousin Sophie, and the food, along with other sensory details, are briefly mentioned followed by caesuras, and no attempt at paying anymore attention to them is made. What follows then is an attempt to describe the room, although it falls short of objective observation and lends itself to an imaginative vision of sloping walls in the shape of a tent, more true to the observer's state of mind rather than her objective eye.

The word "Finally" hints at the surrender of the poet's emotions and the giving up of observing. After this point, the poet discusses her feelings, emotions, and makes obvious her loneliness and alienation: even the family dog cannot sense her tears. Thus, it the strength of such emotions prevent this poet from *seeing* the world around her. To reach the home promised by objective observation, Bishop expresses faith in facts available to the senses, and observes them in a careful, accurate manner: an aesthetic acknowledgement that proves rewarding to her. Indeed, the observer's vision of the whole world transforms momentarily into something valuable. Yet, the unpublished poem attests to the fact that this seemingly immaculate process may be impossible when

overwhelming emotions such as alienation and loneliness induce a state of mind that blinds the eye to the world.

In attempt to master loss, a Collingwoodian confrontation of disorder, art in Bishop's published poetry struggles to objectively view and order the world. From Elizabeth Bishop's published collection, "Florida" is a poem that engages the theme of naming and careful, precise (exact?) description. It can be said, perhaps, to pay allegiance to Poe's definition of poetry as "exact." Delicately "ornamented," this portrait of Florida focuses heavily on visual and auditory features of the landscape through careful, accurate description. This poem enacts the same process suggested in "Cirque D'Hiver" and "The Fish." Bishop describes the rich landscape:

> The state with the prettiest name,
> the state that floats in brackish water,
> held together by mangrove roots
> that bear while living oysters in clusters,
> and when dead strew white swamps with skeletons,
> dotted as if bombarded, with green hummocks
> like ancient cannon-balls sprouting grass. (l. 1-7)

This stanza begins with Florida as a name, a word, "pretty." It also "floats," introducing lightheartedness to the state, as if it can float on water without danger of falling apart, for it is held together by "mangrove roots." When alive, these roots harbor life (oysters) and even in their death, Bishop asserts that what they leave behind resembles "ancient cannon-balls sprouting grass" implying that they offer life and growth to death and murder. It seems as though the state "Florida" lives up to the prettiness of its name. Names, here, or words, are adequate representations of reality. Then, in the following lines, Bishop further expresses a faith in words as they are used to distinguish birds:

> The state full of long S-shaped birds, blue and white,
> and unseen hysterical birds who rush up the scale
> every time in a tantrum.
> Tanagers embarrassed by their flashiness,
> and pelicans whose delight it is to clown;
> who coast for fun on the strong tidal currents
> in and out among the mangrove islands

and stand on the sand-bars drying their damp gold wings
on sun-lit evenings. (l. 8-15)

In this excerpt, the types of birds are distinguished specifically according to the name of bird they fall under. “S-shaped birds,” “hysterical birds,” “tanagers,” and “pelicans” are all different based on color and behavior. The observable characteristics of the birds seem to be appropriate to their nomenclature, or species. Further, later on in the poem, Bishop more clearly reveals her faith in precise naming:

The tropical rain comes down
to freshen the tide-looped strings of fading shells:
*Job’s Tear, the Chinese Alphabet, the scarce Junonia,*
*Parti-colored pectins and Lady’s Ears*,
arranged as on a gray rag of rotted calico,
the buried Indian Princess’s skirt;
with these monotonous, endless, sagging coast-line
is delicately ornamented. (l. 21-28, my emphasis)

The emphasized lines, a list of exotic plants (Job’s Tear, Lady’s Ears), animals (Junonia butterfly), and intricate details within plants (pectin), reveal Bishop’s interest in and insistence on precise terminology and nomenclature regarding that which ornaments the Florida coastline. It is not only a faith in nomenclature, but also an allegiance to observable, describable features that characterizes Bishop’s poem with an air of confidence in words and vision:

*Thirty* or more buzzards are drifting down, down, down,
over something they have spotted in the swamp,
in circles *like stirred-up flakes of sediment*
*sinking through water.*
Smoke from woods-fires filters *fine blue solvents*.
On stumps and dead trees the charring is *like black velvet*.
The mosquitoes
go hunting to the tune of their ferocious *obbligatos*.
After dark, the fireflies map the heavens in the marsh
until the moon rises.
*Cold white, not bright, the moonlight is coarse-meshed*,
and the careless, corrupt state is all *black specks*
*too far apart, and ugly whites*; the poorest
post-card of itself.
After dark, the pools seem to have slipped away.
The alligator, who has *five distinct calls*:
friendliness, love, mating, war, and a warning--

whimpers and speaks in the throat
of the Indian Princess. (l. 29-47, my emphasis)

In these lines, there is a precise subscription to the five senses: a list of colors, textures, sounds, and similes that aim to scientifically describe. Animals and plants are scientifically engaged with: the five calls of alligator. Further, the description aims at accuracy: "cold white, not bright," and buzzards compared to "stirred-up flakes of sediment/ sinking through water." It will suffice to say that in "Florida," Bishop presents unshaken faith in words, terminology, and the power of poetry to be, as Poe is quoted to say in Bishop's unpublished "Edgar Allan Poe and Jukebox," "exact." What is fascinating is that this faith only seems shaky in her unpublished poems, and by comparing the attitude in "Florida" to the one in the unpublished "(Florida Revisited?)" the contradiction is exposed.

The poem opens with the following lines:

I took it for a bird---
Just at the water's edge I picked it up---not a bird
a dead, black bird, or the breast of one, It was light,
coal-black, glistening, each wet feather distinct too light to be a bird,
that turned out to be a piece of [charred] wood, *weightless*---
feather-light, feather marked a surprise like
but not a bird at all---dead, delicately graven, dead wood missing a step
light as the breast of a bird in the hand---
feathers (l. 1-9)

Although "Florida" begins with a description of a Florida that floats, this opening also speaks of lightness, and also engages birds and death although in quite a different atmosphere. The birds that had been so precisely named and observed are here one bird that falls short of being one: it is a piece of charred wood that *resembles* a bird. This piece of wood floats "at the water's edge," perhaps like Florida itself, though this time, instead of being full of life, it is characterized as "dead, black." The lightness in this poem ("feathers," "weightless," "light") is more of an emptiness, hollow wood where there was assumed to be life.

This sense of heavy burdensomeness pervades Bishop's unpublished poems. In "Hannah A.," as Bishop describes birds making their nests, it seems as though she is creating a metaphor for the creation of art: "Of former birds… who tore their breasts/ for lining for their nests" (l. 1, 9-10) and continues to describe this process as "endless worrying/ at such discouraging/ details with small result" (14-16). In this poem, Bishop creates a likeness between "love" and "heavy flight":

> [Love, heavy flight & heavier
> the body to manoeuver
> as necessary over
> the foil-tipped leaden waves
> &frost tipped feather
> through the frost clouded air (l. 25-30)

As in "(Florida Revisited?)," a sense of heaviness imposed on usually light objects permeates: the waves are "leaden," the feather is "frost-tipped," and the air is "frost clouded." In this case, maneuvering in difficult, and one gets the feeling of encumbered weightiness. It is interesting to note that the Florida poems, like "Paris, 7 A.M.," are geographically fixed, and also temporally in the case of "Paris." This fixity to one place underscores the difficulty in maneuvering, especially when compared to the ideal, though precarious, image of the travelling artist that refuses to be located in poems such as "Three Poems" and "The Man-Moth."

As life fails in "(Florida Revisited?)," everything falls into a monotonous stillness. In "Florida," life is characterized by purposeful activity: mosquitoes hunt, buzzards search for food, smoke rises, and fireflies light up the night. In this poem, however, life dwindles into a repetitive, pointless motion:

> The coconut palms *still* clatter;
> the pelicans *still* waddle, soar, and dive.
> Tall, sickly-looking willets pick their food. (l. 9-12, my emphasis)

The word choice in these lines is telling. "Clatter" and "waddle" seem to give off an atmosphere of pointless motion, while the willets looking for food, instead of being

nourished, are "sickly-looking." Further, the pun on the word "still" hints at the idea that though there is motion, it is a paradoxically still because of its pointlessness. This nervous, empty activity is accentuated with imagery of downward movement, as if everything seems to droop uneasily:

> At night the "giant dews" drip on the roof
> and the grass grows wet and the hibiscus drops blossom
> folded, sad and wet, in the morning
> [And it] still goes on and on, more or less the same. (l. 15-18)

While in "Florida" the only downward motion is that of the rain that "*freshen*[s] the tide-looped strings of fading shells" (l. 22, my emphasis), the second stanza of "(Florida Revisited?)" is replete with images of descent, which accentuates the idea that the feathery lightness in the beginning is more of a heavy emptiness. The '"giant dews"' seem heavy with their own weight, leading them to "drip" on the roof while both the grass and the hibiscus are burdened with the weight of water, transforming "weightlessness" into unbearable heaviness that makes the hibiscus "folded, sad." The fact that the words "giant dews" are presented with quotations is telling of Bishop's uncertainty and perhaps even sarcasm related to words. Had they been "giant" based on her own observation, there would have been no need to place the quotation. The adjective "giant" modifying the noun "dews"is not accurately and individually chosen to highlight a particular feature, rather it seems as if it is already there before perceptual experience, ready for re-use. This is quite at odds with the exact similes and modifying adjectives in "Florida" that accurately describe vision: "Thirty or more buzzards are drifting down, down, down,/ over something they have spotted in the swamp, /in circles *like stirred-up flakes of sediment/ sinking through water",* "Smoke from woods-fires filters *fine blue solvents*" or "On stumps and dead trees the charring is *like black velvet*" (l. 29-32, 33, 34, my emphasis).

Line 18 ends this excerpt with an assertion that everything remains this way,

even as morning arrives. The sense of monotonous sameness weighs heavy on the poem as a whole, making it seem wet and damp, as opposed to the crisp freshness of "sprouting grass" in "Florida." While the "sun-lit evenings" in "Florida" provide the sunshine needed for the bird to dry its damp wings, here, "The sunset doesn't color the sea; it stains/ the glaze of wet receding waves instead" (l. 13-14). By evading the drying effects of the sun and choosing to focus on its effect on the ocean, which is impossible to dry, Bishop maintains the wet heaviness of the poem. These two lines further highlight the absence of the joy in sensual perception stressed in "Florida." The sunset fails to "color" the sea, but "stain[s]" it instead. As color may add something not only acceptable to a scene but perhaps even desirable, staining is an undesirable addition—a burden, a blotch, a heavy intrusion. A stain falls upon a surface, much like the music in "Edgar Allan Poe" discussed in chapter three.

Much like a heavy intrusion, the paradoxical eternal change that blotches this poem is death. Interestingly enough, deep sentimentality and emotional lamentation are absent from Bishop's published poetry, leading one to surmise that it is her deeply set personal tragedies and unique, dark experiences of life that inform her unpublished poems, deliberately concealed from the public eye, and carefully evaded in her published poems. The following lines of "(Florida Revisited?)" reveal this:

> [And it] still goes on an on, more or less the same.
> It has, now apparently, for over half my life-time--;
> Gone on after, or over, how many deaths, many deaths by cancer,
> how many deaths by now, [and] love lost, lost forever.
> &suicides---
> friendship& love
> lost, lost forever---

(l. 18-23)

In this excerpt, there are references that seem to come from personal experienceattesting to heavy visibility of the "I" that tells its own story. In lines 18-19, Bishop seems to confide in the reader a recent realization that more than half her life has been defined by

the heavy sadness described in the lines preceding these. The general heaviness projected on the world around the poet in the previous lines now comes to contain personal meaning, a heaviness defined the personal experience of deaths (by cancer) and love lost. Projecting her own psyche, the artist seems to be using the visual landscape as a metaphor for her own state of mind. Unlike my previous analyses, this poem marks the particular blindness defined by not objectively seeing what is there, but by interpreting it and representing it based on preconceived biases: that is, not *a priori*. The following lines from the poem continue to reveal this point:

> The sun sets, & a man is making a movie of it
> (this is hard to believe but true)
> and directly opposite
> a full moon [rises], covered with tears. (l. 24-27)

Lines 24-25 reveal an interesting variation. In "Three Poems," Bishop uses the trope of the camera and the metaphor of the cinema to assert the vicarious nature of aesthetic vision and knowledge. Here, by referring to the man making "a movie" of the setting sun and characterizing it as "hard to believe," Bishop distances herself this time from the cameraman, whose objective observation excludes her emotional interpretations. As he films the setting sun, she instead sees the rising moon "covered with tears"--- which is also coincidentally "directly opposite" to the cameraman's direction of vision. The next lines differentiate Bishop's vision from the one coming from behind the lens as she continues to write a narrative for the crying moon, apparently projecting her own state of mind onto nature:

> The moon can't stop crying now but, one supposes---
> it will eventually,
> &look down
> clearly& composedly
> bravely---
> day& /bright/, on all
> this earthly dew---
> Oh now, stop crying--- (l. 28-35)

Anthropomorphizing the moon in this way, creating a story for it, and attempting to postulate how the story will end sets the poet off as an interpreter rather than an objective observer. It is as if Bishop creates a personal history for the moon like she does for the fish and the mechanical toy in "The Fish" and "Cirque D'Hiver" respectively, but completely erases the role of the eye in the process. Instead, imposing her own subjective vision of the moon on the moon itself deviates from her usual perceptions of nature as surfaces that appeal to the senses, surfaces that if contemplated thoroughly could reveal deeper meaning. Here, however, the "meaning" is reached before any objective observation takes place. Finally, the poem ends with an assertion of what pains the poet:

> Change is what hurts worst; change alone can kill
> Change kills us, finally – not these earthly things.
> One hates all this immutability,
> Finally one hates the Florida one knows,
> the Florida one knew.
>
> Oh palms, oh birds, and over-exaggerated sunsets---
> oh full and weeping moon why do you weep?
> ---oh unendurable [world] Well, loneliness is always
> an excuse. (l. 36-45)

Death, the ultimate change, can kill those who still live as life becomes harder to endure and experience too much to handle. Lines 36-37 come off as a confession, a final understanding of life that the poet has achieved, the epiphany that only "change" can "kill" in the end. If the experience of change has metaphorically killed the poet, then her experience of life and everything in it becomes an expression of death. Dead by virtue of its "immutability," Florida is then not a state-object "ornamented" with things visible to the eye, it is merely an expression of the poet's state of mind, and so becomes "hateful," empty and meaningless. The final stanza of the poem is a rareBishopian lament; the intense loneliness and sense of depression in this poem have transformed the landscape into an object of lamentation and fear.

In the unpublished poetry, then, the doubt in objective aesthetic vision leads to a surrender of the emotions, too strong to be controlled and strong enough to control vision. Aesthetic vision suffers from being associated with artificiality, as in the unpublished "A lovely finish I have seen…" in which Bishop engages the theme of surfaces, but again, in these unpublished poems it is always an engagement that questions their nature: "Can one accuse of artifice/ such finishes and surfaces?" (l. 5-6). The surfaces in this poem are reflections: "a sand-flat glassed with sky" and "a gold-leaf film of sea/ re-brushed, re-grained by random cloud" (l. 3-4). "Re-brushed" and "re-grained" emphasize a repetition to perfection characteristic of the art of writing poetry. Just like these surfaces, poetry is a perfected art reflecting the real world—which makes sense for Bishop, the poet so true to perceived and sensual reality. Yet, these unpublished poems are not so confident in the authenticity of aesthetic representations always interjecting with the comment that in the end, it is "artifice."

# CHAPTER IV

# THE END OF ART

## A. Introduction

The future
sinks through water
fast as a stone,
alonealone. ("The past" l. 9-12)

In Bishop's published poetry discussed in chapter one, one recognizes a pattern of associating flight with a failed attempt at transcendence, and descent with a positive connotation of noble and elevated understanding of what is available in this world to be understood. As ascension comes to represent ultimate mastery in its vantage point of viewing the whole as a complete and ordered entity while descent increasingly symbolizes fall into oblivion, darkness, and spiritual decline, this same descent gradually develops into the more valued movement in its privileged freedom and personal engagement with the world. With this inversion of values, descent becomes a metaphorical gateway into a kind of engaged and free consciousness of the world. Poetry, or art in general, functions as the critical point from which such a consciousness is created and expressed. In light of my previous analysis identifying the confinement and limitations of mastery through an analysis of images of houses, poetic imagination came to serve as the vehicle for travel, or flight from limited perspectives via an acute sense of visual and personal interaction with the world, a flight that in turn provided an opportunity to discover a unique sense of homeliness. Bishop's unpublished "Key West, Washington D.C., Yaddo, Nova Scotia" (1937) concisely defines poetry as such "air transportation" and goes on as such:

> It is hard to get heavy objects up into the air; a strong desire to do so is necessary, and a strong driving force to keep them aloft.

> Some poets sit in airplanes on the ground, raising their arms, sure that they're flying.
> Some poets ascend for a period of time, then come down again; we have a great many stranded planes. (l. 4-9)

This metaphorical flight so keenly stressed in her published poems is in her unpublished poetry diminished into a Platonic illusion. As the poem suggests, if this discovery of knowledge is not an illusion, a futile flapping of the arms, it is still doomed to suspension at a certain point leading to its own downfall. My previous chapters have argued that though poetry does not offer transcendent knowledge, it nonetheless offers something more valuable and noble, and that is a type of knowledge that offers inner comfort and a sense of home unavailable in transcendent discourses. Though, as we have seen, this is quite apparent in Bishop's published poetry, it is quite fascinating to discover that in her unpublished poems, the writer seems to betray a deep-seated anxiety and doubt regarding the valuable nature of poetry, a doubt most often clouded over and belied in her published poetry, and perhaps due to an intense feeling of alienation and isolation on the poet's part. To accentuate this anxiety and doubt is the shattering sense of loneliness, darkness, and misery that accompany these unpublished poems, which, interestingly enough, do not offer the satisfying alternative of finding comfort in imaginative flights and aesthetic knowledge. In these poems, the travelling consciousness is not at an advantage in finding her personal homeliness; rather, she is too overwhelmed by darkness to envision (aesthetically) a personal home—perhaps even too down, drunk, and lonely to care for one. Where poetry had been a journey with a goal, it becomes an expression of a dead-end, a clear expression of continual falling. The positive looking down in the published poetry becomes a hopeless descent into darkness. Such a descent prompts the question: could this emptiness be filled with the ideological understandings the poet discarded? In any case, the final poetic product is

not the end of an aesthetic, objective journey of visual and imaginative discovery; rather, it is the expression of the "creatively articulated world" of the alienated figure.

More than merely practicing and showing faith in the process of objective, aesthetic observation, Bishop's published poetry is assertive of the positive effect this vision may have on one's experiential life, which allows the process to provide meaningful depth.Peggy Samuels capitalizes on imagery of water primarily in "Pleasure Seas" and occasionally in other of Elizabeth Bishop's poetry written between the years 1938 and 1939 and argues that water resembles Bishop's verse lines as both become a kind of "deep surface." She claims that Bishop "imagines themind and nature as having depths created by crossing into one another'sintricacy of density." She concludes by saying that:

> Bishop habitually imagined the sea as lines of verse and, conversely, imagined verse as a kind of liquid contained by walls. The walls can bethe edge of the line, the use of rhyme, the shape of a couplet or stanza. Thelines are wavy with motion and momentum but also fixed in place onthe page in their stanza or sentence forms; Bishop imagines verse lines as simultaneously but ever-variously wavy and stable.

The definition of poetry as "ever-variously wavy and stable" resonates with the way I attempted to define poetry in the previous chapters as providing a meaningful sense of "home" and yet avoiding being absolute and rigid in nature. Here, I will use Bishop's "Four Poems" to demonstrate how this unique type of knowledge is able to provide stability and comfort, but is not rigid enough to be confining and stifling because of its waviness, or loose form that allows for difference and personal freedom. I will read "Four Poems," intended on being a unit, as they relate to each other by connecting the indirect suggestions they offer in light of the claims of John Dewey and R.G. Collingwood, instead of attempting to draw an overarching narrative among them. In these poems, meaningful depth is achieved through the personal and imaginative interaction with surface. More specifically, it is the intimate relationship with the human

body that leads to a meaningful relationship, providing a metaphor for the intertwined nature of surface and depth, and signifying the instinctual, private, and personal nature of the knowledge attained that consequently provides comfort and stability. Again, this comfort remains wavy in the sense that neither it nor its source can be defined, which becomes something much more valuable than that knowledge which is defined and inherited.

Then, I will go on to read Bishop's unpublished "Edgar Allan Poe and the Jukebox." This poem will seem almost as a direct retort to claims made in Bishop's published poetry, particularly the claim that the "wavy stability" of the verse line, like the "wavy stability" of the feeling of home reached after aesthetic observation, will eventually lead to meaningful depth. As both poems engage with the theme of the effect of aesthetic vision and so also the significance of the process itself, "Edgar Allan Poe" presents the eponymous poet's characterization of poetry as "exact." As Bishop questions this description, she does not present her own account of a wavy yet stable poetry. Rather, she claims that since poetry is supposed to be "exact," one then expects an exact result to come about because of it: anything short of that is practically useless. Continuously negating the ability of poetry to be *effect*ive, "Edgar Allan Poe" deconstructs any possibility of finding a wavy-stable home due to an overpowering state of mind, as well as diminishes the value of this home. This psychic reality of an alienated, lonely figure is so intense that objective observation is impossible; a wavy-stable home as Bishop outlined it in her published poetry is as unreal as the thought of it is intrusive, and so finding homeliness via art and aesthetic vision is not an available option. The figure in this poem comes to show that when a psychological state is overwhelmingly strong, when the sense of homelessness and alienation is overpowering, it comes to function like the "terrorizing" ideologies of culture, clouding vision and controlling perception. So encumbered, the figure in the poem cannot but

look with a derisive eye at those who claim aesthetics has an "effect." Lastly, the comparison between "One Art," in all its drafts, and "What would be worst of all" will reveal the overpowering nature of loss as a terrorizing state of mind.

**B. A State Half There**

The first of the series "Four Poems," "Conversation," identifies what is meant by lack of rigidity in the forms of knowledge attained when absolute knowledge is sacrificed. Highly abstract, the poem is as follows:

> The tumult in the heart
> keeps asking questions.
> And then it stops and undertakes to answer
> in the same tone of voice.
> No one could tell the difference.
>
> Uninnocent, these conversations start,
> and then engage the senses,
> only half-meaning to.
> And then there is no choice,
> and then there is no sense;
>
> until a name
> and all its connotations are the same.

The first two lines open with questioning and a palpable disorder within. According to Collingwood, confronting this disorder, or "tumult in the heart," is the function of poetry for poetry is an art of questioning. It is assumed then, that the experience to be undergone in the poem will clarify such disorder. After questioning, the heart attempts to answer, though with the "same tone of voice," suggesting that there is no essential difference between questions and answers, and also suggesting that the experience of poetry is actually not a clarifying endeavor. The next line describes this conversation (of questions seeking for answers) as "uninnocent" at the beginning, and as only regaining its innocence as it comes to "engage the senses." Thus, the attitude of uncertainty triggers questioning and yearning for answers. According to Bishop, this in itself in

"uninnocent" (note that she did not use "guilty," for it is a natural desire to know, yet it is not "innocent") though it does lead to direct, sensuous interaction with the world. This heightened awareness becomes so pronounced that it negates itself and becomes not merely one-way observation defined by the observer imposing her thoughts on the world, but rather all "choice" and "sense" melt, along with "name[s]" and their "connotations." In other words, all hitherto attained knowledge, whether intellectual (names), personal (choice), or experiential (sense) diffuses into sameness. The experience of interacting with the world, then, must first eliminate the "uninnocent" goal of finding absolute answers and the assumption that there is a "difference" between questions and answers (l. 5). Engaging the senses is the way to lead to a form of knowledge that promotes "same[ness]" (l. 12).

Differentiating the terms "difference" and "sameness" in this context is differentiating between knowledge that seeks to "name" and differentiate things from one another, the observer from the observed, the inside from the outside, and consciousness that melts these rigid boundaries until the questions themselves become the answers. This type of final stability attained in the poem (through the fact that the questions are finally put to rest) is indeed an end of tumult, though no answers are provided. The two five-line stanzas that set up the state of internal debate are brought to a close by the final rhyming couplet: debate is quieted, though remains unresolved. In this sense, the wavy stability is achieved, and according to the poem, involves innocence, or a fresh, uninformed vision of the world. What may be asked at this point is how?

The next poem in this series, "Rain Towards Morning," provides a possible answer to this question. Focusing on the main theme of release, this poem is more saturated with imagery than the previous one, though no less obscure. The poem is as follows:

The great light cage has broken up in the air,
freeing, I think, about a million birds
whose wild ascending shadows will not be back,
and all the wires come falling down.
No cage, no frightening birds; the rain
is brightening now. The face is pale
that tried the puzzle of their prison
and solved it with an unexpected kiss,
whose freckled unsuspected hands alit.

The first line opens with an act of breaking that has already taken place. From the perspective of the observer down below, the effect is the "freeing" of "about a million birds," though this is belied by "I think," again perhaps asserting the uncertainty of knowledge attained by looking upwards (transcending), but more specifically, complicating the effect of this breaking. "Freeing, I think" suggests that they may not have been released into freedom, but into something else. The third line describes the birds as "wild ascending shadows" that "will not be back." The adjective "wild" and their description as "shadows" sets them off as unknown and strange, and the fact that they will not return precludes any attempt at knowing them. What the observer is left with, however, is the "all the wires" that "come falling down." Yet, even these, are too destroyed and the observer is left with "no cage, no frightening bird." Yet again, what is falling down as well is the rain. The enjambment in line five swiftly moves the reader's attention from the confusion, uncertainty, and no-thingness in the previous lines to the rain "brightening now" in line six. This seems to be the end of a thunderstorm and as the sun returns, there is also the introduction of the "pale face." At this point, the poem is indeed in its own epistemic prison: looking upwards has not been satisfying; the downward gaze has merely witnessed destruction. This seems to be the state of affairs introduced in "Conversation," where both ideological/intellectual and experiential knowledge are eliminated. In "Conversation," nothing is resolved but tumult is quieted nonetheless. Here, the pale face "that tried to solve the puzzle of their prison" succeeded with "an unexpected kiss,/ whose freckled unsuspected hand alit." The imagery in this

last line is illuminating. At the point where knowledge fails and the puzzle remains unsolved, the solution comes in the form of a kiss coming from a freckled hand, unexpectedly. Earthly in nature rather than other-worldly, erotic, and touched with a particular detail of humanness ("freckled"), the final solution resolves the epistemic quarrel. The question of "how" posed earlier is answered: the quarry is resolved through the human and the physical, a kiss, a surface to surface contact leading to epistemic resolution.

"While Someone Telephones," the third poem in the series, adds a dimension to the personal engagement with the world, and that is imagination. In the poem, one recognizes the same movements and tensions as in "Rain Towards Morning":

> Wasted, wasted minutes that couldn't be worse,
> minutes of a barbaric condescension.
> --Stare out the bathroom window at the fir-trees,
> at their dark needles, accretions to no purpose
> woodenly crystallized, and where two fireflies
> are only lost.
> Hear nothing but a train that goes by, must go by, like tension;
> *nothing*. And wait:
> maybe even now these minutes' host
> emerges, some relaxed uncondescending stranger,
> the heart's release.
> And while the fireflies
> are failing to illuminate these nightmare trees
> might they not be his green gay eyes.

The opening word "wasted," repeated for emphasis, introduces emptiness and futility. The entire poem is possibly the time spent waiting on one end of the telephone line for the other person to reply, hence the "minutes" of "condescension." Along with emptiness, one is confronted with a failed attempt to connect with an other. The caesura (dash) at the beginning of line three introduces what is being used to fill the empty minutes, and that is, as is usual in Bishop, "star[ing]." The act of staring allows for objective observation of the appearance of things. At the outset, the "needles" of the trees are "accretions to no purpose" and the two fireflies are "only lost," indicating the

lack of purpose and emptiness reflecting that which the poet feels holding at the end of a telephone line. Complimenting lack of purpose is the image of the train, with a strictly defined purpose: it "must go by." Here, everything described, whether purposeless or purposeful, leads to "*nothing*."

However, this emphasized "nothing" is not left to hang on its own, but is complimented with "And wait." This last term introduces the workings of the imagination, and continues with the unassertive "maybe." Only in the imagination is the poet able to find "the heart's release," echoing the release of the birds from the cage in "Rain" which was accomplished through a kiss. In the imagination, the fireflies that actually fail to "illuminate the nightmare trees" become the "green gay eyes" of the "relaxed uncondescending stranger." As common in the Bishop poems analyzed here, the act of staring finally leads to meaningful depth with the help of the imagination as all else fails. After interpreting these three poems, this meaning, the "heart's release," is now a product of direct, personal contact and imaginative engagement with the world. The "heart's release" is a product of aesthetic contemplation. Art, then, is synonymous with release. Release from what? Release from Heidegger's tyranny of the ordinary, from Collingwood's corruption of consciousness, from Adorno and Luckas' limiting generalities, and a refreshing release into Dewey's rewarding experiential aesthetics that find depth and meaning in observed surfaces and surprising emotional developments during the artistic process. It is because of this surprise factor that the observer's kiss in "Rain" was "unexpected" and the hands that sent it "unsuspected." Regarded as an aesthetic claim, it resonates with Dewey's assertion that emotions are tied up with objects rather than separate from them (and so imposed upon them), and so the act of observing (staring) and aesthetic contemplation effectively lead to the resolution of tumult by discovering ideas and emotions, by uncovering meaningful depth.

The final poem in the series evaluates the nature of such resolutions. Ungrounded in absolutist ideological thinking, transcendent knowledge, or discursive frameworks, the meaningful depth attained through artistic experience is stable but wavy. This waviness, giving it its value in freedom and room for personal engagement is more personal and instinctual (and so wavy) than universal and intellectual (rigid). The poem "O Breath," by far the loosest in formal structure and the most fragmented of the four, connects the physical, erotic realm (surface) with unexplainable meaning (depth). The poem is as follows:

> Beneath that loved  and celebrated breast,
> silent, bored really  blindly veined,
> grieves, maybe  lives and lets
> live, passes  bets,
> something moving  but invisibly,
> and with what clamor  why restrained
> I cannot fathom  even a ripple.
> (See the thin flying  of nine black hairs
> four around one  five the other nipple,
> flying almost intolerably  on your own breath.)
> Equivocal, but what we have in common's  bound to be there,
> whatever we must own  equivalents for,
> something that maybe I  could bargain with
> and make a separate peace  beneath
> within  if never with.

On the level of form, the poem is composed of fifteen lines with no apparent rhyme scheme and a series of inserted spaces between words perhaps reflecting gaps in understanding, or the tensions between a "celebrated" surface and a more obscure depth beneath (the heart). Of this depth there is nothing known: what is there is "silent," "blindly veined," "grieves, maybe," it is invisible, "restrained," the "clamor" in which cannot be "fathom[ed]." After line seven, the speaker returns to the surface parenthetically, indicating observed facts, meticulous, numbered. Then there is the mention of the "breath," which, interestingly, is the mode through which the inside interacts with the outside. In this sense, the title of the poem seems to be an apostrophe to "breath," to that which permeates the impermeable surface of the human body. The

desire to go through the physical body is not physical (that is, the poet does not wish to view internal organs) but is rather emotional, as the poet desires to reach that meaning concealed within the surface. The hairs "flying intolerably" are probably so described because of the "clamor" carried on the breath from the heart, symbolizing the meaning being transported from concealment to being visually present and observable.

"Equivocal," the depth in essence cannot be reached; however, the last lines claim that it does not matter. What is "equivocal" is also "equivalent" in the sense that what cannot be discovered in the other cannot be discovered in the self, but by virtue of having it in "common," it can still be touched or recognized if not completely grasped and identified. Bishop writes that the peace can be made "beneath/ within  if never with" the depth. As such, intimacy with the surface and observation of the breath and its effects lead to something *better* than a full grasp of what exists in the depths. Though knowledge of what is inside cannot be fathomed, and remains equivocal, and so consequently peace "with" it cannot be made, the physical intimacy leads to a more basic, instinctual recognition of what is "beneath" and "within" the depths: of the stuff that precedes knowledge and exceeds it.

In "Cirque D'Hiver," "We have come this far" indicates that "we have not yet reached what we desire." Like the sought-for star in "Paris," what is desired is never captured and kept, but merely glimpsed and lost. In "O Breath," what is desired is never captured and identified, but merely suggested and recognized.  What is interesting, however, is that this longing that is never fully satisfied is in itself celebrated when compared to wholesomeness and stability derived from a relationship with the world defined by discourse, shaped by ideology. Its "waviness" is the prerequisite for its ability to provide an inner feeling of home. When the Gentleman of Shallot claims that "half is enough," he is extending the critique of master-narratives and claiming that

knowing all is never possible; there *must* be Heideggerian room for contemplation, and this room is home.

As "The Gentleman of Shalott" asserts, the value of this knowledge lies not in its rigidly defined claims to absolute truth, but in its half-truths, personal and unique. Half-truths, then, are paradoxically the only possible Truth by virtue of their allowing for contemplative gaps, for variety, and for change. The room created by the aesthetic methodology outlined above, then, according to both Heidegger and Dewey, can only lead to uncertainty. Yet, being uncertain is being open to truths (akin to the attitude of the traveler in chapter one), whereas certainty, like home, is limiting and can only hide truths. "The Gentleman of Shalott" demonstrates the beauty of uncertainty by celebrating it.

"The Gentleman of Shalott" is composed of short lines with an alternating rhyme scheme, creating a light-hearted tone for a serious subject matter: the uncertainty involved with not knowing. When Heidegger claimed that the absence of an overarching Truth allowed for a space for multiplicity, and when Adorno claimed that the "whole is false," they were by implication claiming that "half is enough," and the consequent uncertainty is truth in itself. Deviating from single-minded modes of thought, this attitude accepts uncertainty as a fact of life, and indeed comes to celebrate it in its own right. Thus, Bishop's use of a light formal structure is a method of celebrating this uncertainty that is most usually regarded as a set-back. The first stanza is as such:

> Which eye's his eye?
> Which limb lies
> next to the mirror?
> For neither is clearer
> nor a different color
> than the other,
> nor meets a stranger
> in this arrangement
> of leg and leg and so on.

To his mind
it's the indication
of a mirrored reflection
somewhere along the line
of what we call the spine. (l. 1-15)

In the opening, readers are placed in a world of uncertainty. Beginning the poem with unanswered questions, Bishop continues the next for lines with negations rather than affirmations. The Gentleman of Shalott is looking at himself in the mirror unable to gather an understanding of himself. The stanza ends with diction that lends itself to doubt and impreciseness: "it's the *indication* of a mirrored reflection," "*somewhere along the line* of *what we call* the spine," "leg and leg *and so on*" (my emphasis). With these phrases, respectively, clarity, preciseness, faith in inherited knowledge, and meticulousness is abandoned for their opposites. Humorously, the next stanza deals with the consequences of this uncertainty involved in not being able to distinguish what is true and what is false (merely a reflection). Again through her diction, Bishop mocks the preciseness of scientific knowledge: "There's little *margin for error*, / but there's no *proof*, either." The Gentleman ponders that if "half his head's reflected, / thought…might be affected," but the seriousness of this possibility is belied by the next comment: "But he's resigned,/ to such economical design," and similarly, though the he worries momentarily that if the glass slips, he will be half a person, nonetheless:

The uncertainty
he says he
finds exhilarating. He loves
that sense of constant re-adjustment.
He wishes to be quoted as saying at present:
"Half is enough." (l. 40-45)

The doubt and the uncertainty, instead of being a weakness or a disadvantage, become a source of exhilaration. It becomes an opportunity for healthy, exciting change, for constant re-definition of the self and a method of thought that accounts of difference, multiplicity, and change. Then, objective observation of surfaces is used as a means

(journey) to discover personal depth and homeliness which themselves cannot be objectively, scientifically described. What the *unpublished* poetry reveals is the unsettling possibility that this indefinable, intangible space of home is an absence rather than a presence. In other words, whereas the published poems contemplate the significance of the presence of a half-truth, a wavy-stable home, the unpublished poems accentuate the absence implied in such configurations. A half-truth is logically a half-untruth, and something that is wavy-stable is also not fixedly *there*.

**C. A Perpetual Falling**

Questioning art and art's purpose is most saliently observed in the unpublished poem, "Edgar Allan Poe and the Jukebox," also the title of the entire collection. From the title of this poem, readers are prompted to ponder the relationship between a poet and a jukebox. While both elements may be assumed to produce art, one is a thinking mind as the other is a mechanical music player. Perhaps, then, the comparison is not between the subjects, but rather between that which they produce, and that is art: music and poetry. "Edgar Allan Poe and the Jukebox" as a whole is saturated with images of falling, as if a continual sense of falling both triggers the production and dictates the consequences of this art: it is an art informed by absence and loss. The poem opens with the following lines:

> Easily through the darkened room
> the jukebox burns; the music falls.
> *Starlight*, *La Congra*, 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. (l. 1-7)

*Starlight* and *La Congra*, bars that offer musical entertainment ("honkey-tonks"), are described as "cavities," which explains how might the music be able to "fall" into them. Images of coconuts and conches remind readers of sunny islands, imagery quite

incompatible with the darkened cavity of the dancing hall. Hence, we are presented with a gap between what the dance-hall is, a hollowness or an emptiness ("cavity") and what it decks itself up to be, a sunny island. Further, since the music "falls" into this empty space, it can be assumed to have occupied a higher place before, perhaps within the jukebox, and its release into publicity is a kind of falling. In other words, art seems to lose its status once it is brought into experiential life.

The second stanza illuminates the nature of this falling:

> 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 descend,
> descends, falls,--- (l. 8-15)

In this stanza, the music is characterized as beginning and ending with falling: the fall of the nickel triggers the music; it then falls in turn. According to Webster's online dictionary, one definition of "to fall" is "strike, impinge <music *falling* on the ear>." Interestingly, falling music is music striking, or sharply colliding with, its listeners. The continuing list of things that fall makes readers aware of the nature of this falling: it is not a mechanical response to gravity or nature, rather, Bishop uses the word particularly to stress the sadness involved in otherwise natural occurrences. Usually, nickels do not freely "fall" into slots, rather, they are consciously placed there. Likewise, drinks do not fall into throats, they are swallowed; hands do not fall but are placed on one another, and finally, tablecloth does not "descend," it merely hangs. Yet, Bishop chooses the word "fall" to describe these actions, taking advantage of the precise definition of the word as "to suffer ruin, defeat, or failure." In the unpublished "I had a bad dream," Bishop similarly describes loneliness as a falling: "that loneliness like falling on/ the

sidewalk in a crowd/ that fills [one with shame], some/ slow, elaborate shame" (l. 26-29).

In this way, the dark world Bishop describes is characterized by falling, by defeat, failure, and emptiness, resonating with its characterization in the previous stanza as a "cavity." In this world, the poet's psyche is reflected on its surroundings, and so measured by the extent of horror evident in this psyche; everything in the room assumes this same horror and so "falls." Stressing the loneliness of the drinks by comparing them to "lonely water-falls" at night aggrandizes the measure of this individual falling to disproportional levels. One person's darkness and loneliness, his falling, is set into a matrix of many things that fall, into a world that is defined by descent and decline, into a room that responds to falling:

> ---much as we envision
> the helpless earthward fall of love
> descending from the head and eye
> down to the hands, and heart, and down.
> The music pretends to laugh and weep
> while it descends to drink and murder. (l. 15-20)

Immediately, the natural tendency to fall is compared to love, which, in light of my previous analysis, is aesthetic vision itself. Here, this vision "helplessly" falls from the admirable loftiness of the head, eye, and heart to the earthly, perhaps less pretentious biological feelings. In this sense, "to fall" may come to mean, "to decline in quality." As such, the poet sets up a world defined by descent: nothing is meant for greatness or nobility, but seems to fall into death, darkness, "drink" and "murder." Thus, the music, or art, merely "pretends" to have gracious dignity of singing to life when all it really does is collide with personal knowledge by revealing the gap between its lofty ideals and measured perfection and the darkness and disorder of living. Once these affectations are revealed, Bishop continues to reveal the irony in music:

> The burning box can keep the measure
> strict, always, and the down-beat. (l. 21-22)

The musical notes, precise, regular, and organized, seem to evade the irregularity and disorder defining this world, and so tend to come across as artificial and pretentious, ironically always beginning with a "*down*-beat."

Finally, the last stanza introduces the figure of Poe:

> Poe said that poetry was *exact*.
> But pleasures are mechanical
> and know beforehand what they want
> and know exactly what they want. (l. 23-27)

In this stanza, Bishop challenges the idea of poetry as a representation or reflection of emotions or states of being. Not only this, but Bishop also questions the end of poetry. If Poe claims poetry is exact, Bishop retorts that "pleasures are mechanical," implying that even if poetry is exact, what is it exact for? Certainly, for Bishop, the effect of poetry is questionable for exactness of expression is never quite in harmony with being:

> Do they [pleasures] 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 horror
> half as exact as horror here? (l. 28-33)

Quite the pragmatist, Bishop ponders that the effect of poetry is perhaps not as exact as is its expression. Though alcohol is chemically proven to alter the mind, and though a nickel unconditionally produces music from a jukebox, poetry seems to provide no such immediate satisfaction, and perhaps that is the difference between Edgar Allan Poe and a jukebox. Not only that, but Bishop asks "how long does the music burn?" suggesting the transiency of the effect of music or poetry on the beholders: a song ends, and a poem ends. Line 28 continues in line 32: "Do they obtain that single effect/ that can be calculated…like poetry"? Once read this way, it is clear that Bishop lines poetry up with nickels and alcohol, however, while the latter two have calculated effects, poetry is itself calculated as part of its production. Calculated, artificial, poetry cannot include

experience. Line 28, continuing with another option in line 32-33 becomes: "Do they obtain that single effect/ that can be calculated like…all your horror/half as exact as horror here?" This bleak question, in its deep-set dark irony, reveals the pretentiousness of a poetry that believes it can "calculate," capture, (in "exact" terminology) "all your horror." Quietly caustic, Bishop paradoxically provides a grim mockery of poetry's exact representation of "all your horror" by sarcastically stating that your horror is only "half as exact" as "horror here," or in the poem.

In the end, Poe's poetry and music, or the artistic process in general, can only be said to impinge on being rather than affect it positively or even merely claim to represent it. Thus, falling in the sense of declining in quality, suffering from defeat, or being lowered from a higher state of being comes to be the defining factor of life and the world. On this falling world art falls, and impinges on its natural motion by unrealistically forcing order. In this way, art can be said to *fall* short of representing, affecting, or creating reality. Another poem in the unpublished collection, "To the Admirable Miss Moore," is a lighthearted commentary on Marianne Moore's poetry that touches upon the claim that poetry is "exact." The poem itself is concise, measured, and rhyming:

> To the Admirable Miss Moore,
> of whom we're absolutely sure,
>
> knowing that through the longest night
> her syllables will come out right,
> her similes will all flash bright,
>
> what can we give, yet not be rude,
> to show the proper gratitude?

Though lighthearted, it seems like a slight jab at the power of "syllables" and "similes" to really trigger positive change.

**D. The Art of Losing**

Thus, in these unpublished poems, Bishop doubts her own faith in aesthetic contemplation and the comfort of a wavy-stable home. She seems to claim that wavy-stability is unsatisfactory when one's psyche is too damaged to handle a partial absence. Her call for exactness in effecting change is not echoed in music or poetry, and so her vision as a poet is not altered through the aesthetic journey of a poem, but rather, her psyche controls and modifies her vision which in turn controls the output of lines of verse. Like a slice of mind, "Edgar Allan Poe" does not enact an aesthetic journey that reaches depths through the contemplation of surfaces. Rather, just like an unsettled psyche, it admits the inadequacy of half-truths of the imagination and is unable to view the world objectively. The world becomes clouded over by this state of mind that controls and attaches meaning to apparently neutral, ordinary happenings. As such, this state of loneliness and alienation prevents aesthetic vision much like the ideologies described in the previous chapters. The question that Bishop asks then, is how rewarding or how possible is aesthetics when one's state of mind is too dark and down in the world of experience? Perhaps, art and loss are the same: while loss in the world of experience involves absence and emptiness, so art, as "Edgar Allan Poe" asserts, is an art of loss, motivated and informed by emptiness, resulting in absence and homelessness. Perhaps art is the art of losing, which comes to be too hard to master.

Perhaps, also, this is the reason Bishop titled her only published villanelle "One Art." At risk of apparently portraying Bishop's poetry as sets of opposing, perhaps contradictory outlooks on art and life, it is pertinent to ask how the two can be reconciled into the profile of one poet, and what it was about the published poetry that made them eligible for publication according to Bishop. "One Art" identifies the art of losing with art itself. The title seems to say that there is only one art, the art of losing, which implies that art is informed by loss. The question I will engage in this section is whether Bishop's quest to "master" art through formal perfection is not itself a

mastering of her own experience of loss, leading her to characterize her art and her loss as "one." It is important to note that in this case, art is an attempt to master loss, and this prompts readers to ask, then, what is lost in "art," and what does mastery, if it is successful, evade? What the unpublished "What would be worst of all" reveals is precisely what "One Art" tries to evade, and that is a direct expression of the darkness, fear, and loneliness controlling the production of art. In other words, while "One Art" is an (failed?) attempt at proclaiming the victory of order, control, and artistry over the ungraspable, uncontainable experience of loss, "What would be" instead allows this experience to *be* art. What the unpublished poem reveals, then, is that Bishop's control and strict measure in writing her published poetry limited, contained, and controlled her expression of personal depth. If mastering her loss is an art, then, like the process of writing publishable poems, it is a meticulous and taxing attempt at ordering the disorder, clarifying the confusion, and downplaying the shattering impact of loss and loneliness. Perhaps for Bishop, loss without the art is never publishable, never "*write*[able]" for public view.

Written in the tight form of the villanelle, "One Art" consists of a tight rhyme scheme (aba/aba/aba/aba/abaa) and limited word choice in the struggle between "master" and "disaster." The two stanzas of the poem are as follows:

> The art of losing isn't hard to master;
> so many things seem filled with the intent
> to be lost that their loss is no disaster,
>
> Lose something every day. Accept the fluster
> of lost door keys, the hour badly spent.
> The art of losing isn't hard to master. (l. 1-6)

These lines seem to convey a sense of loss as something all too common and trifling that it does not deserve to be designated a disaster. By mentioning the loss of keys or time "badly spent," Bishop seems to deemphasize the impact of losing. The stanzas contain relatively short, pithy statements: confident, precise, and simple. On the other

hand, the opening stanza of "What would be worst of all" presents an interesting variation to that of "One Art:"

What would be worst of all
Would be to be lost from you
As in a dream it often is---
---In a crowd, or a forest, or [some] national disaster---

The laws of chance to
Horrible, horrible
Knowing that you were looking for me
Not able to stand still & wait ---
And you, kindness itself, helping the refugee,
Taking the other /lost/ to the people
they loved
Amusing them

And you and I missing each other

I have no home neither have you

I feel we best prepare some scene like
This

Unlike the tight form of the villanelle, this poem is scattered and interrupted with a plethora of spaces, caesuras, and incomplete sentences. Instead of being limited to a rhyme scheme or choice of words, it seems more like a free thought, though less confident and more hesitant and shaky. As a freestanding thought, its form mimics its content. While Bishop seems to force herself to be constrained to the villanelle in both form and content (evident in the parenthetical interruption), this poem is more flowing and expressive rather than constrained and matter-of-factly.

The opening stanza of "What would be" begins with asserting that it is not losing someone per se that is the source of fear, but rather "being lost from" that person (l. 2). "To lose" implies that the poet is the *subject* of loss, that is, the poet directly suffers from loss. "To be lost from," on the other hand, indicates that the poet is the *object* of loss, a loss from which someone else suffers. Whereas in the first the poet is concerned with her own experience of loss, in the second the poet suffers from merely

thinking of someone else's loss ("what *would be* worst" rather than "what *is* worst") and not being able to bear even that. In this case, while "One Art" engages the issue of losing, "What would be worst of all" engages that of being-lost-from; the first was almost controlled by art but the second seems to take control over art by affecting its form, visual organization and content.

The poem does not contain a caesura that ends a sentence, but merely consists of hyphens, dashes, and commas indicating a flowing consciousness. Bishop does not bother here with completing sentences, rhyming, or modifying the content to fill a certain form, like the villanelle. Contrarily, the form stands freely in a way that expresses the content. For example, in the following lines the empty spaces will illustrate this point:

> And you and I missing each other
> I have no home neither have you
> I feel we best prepare some scene like
> this (l. 13-16)

The gap between lines 13 and 14 expresses the physical space between the two people in the poem. Also, the space in the middle of line 14 indicates the distance and heightens the loneliness. The line ending the poem suggests that the poet is extending the thought posed in the poem to her real life, that she should "prepare" for such a scene. The isolated "this" may refer to the situation itself or to the poem representing the situation. In this way, the two seem to come down to the same thing. On the contrary, "One Art" is preoccupied with grasping the "situation" into the grips of rhyme and meter, and even molding the meaning to lighten its heaviness.

The third stanza in "One Art" introduces a slightly more unsettling tone into the piece, creating an atmosphere of tension and gravity, though the latter has yet to be accentuated:

> Then practice losing farther, losing faster:
> places, and names, and where it was you meant
> to travel. None of these will bring disaster. (l.7-9)

At this point, the poem seems like a how-to-deal-with-loss instruction manual. As the first two stanzas reassure the reader that loss "isn't hard to master," the third stanza propels readers to "practice losing farther, losing faster" (l. 7). Since mastering loss is an art, there are ways to go about doing it. First, like the opening stanzas indicate, once must place their experience of loss into the matrix of "loss" as whole, realizing that it happens everyday and to everyone: it is not a big deal. Then, as this third stanza instructs, mastery is now a matter of extrapolation: one also realizes that one can lose "places" and "names," which unlike the keys and hours, are things unique to each individual. Still, the pithy ending line asserts, "None of these will bring disaster." From mentioning unique, personal forms of loss, the poet continues to bring in her own personal experience, perhaps to reassure the reader that though their experience is unique, everyone has similar experiences nonetheless:

> I lost my mother's watch. And look! my last, or
> next-to-last, of three beloved houses went.
> The art of losing isn't hard to master.
>
> I lost two cities, lovely ones. And, vaster,
> some realms I owned, two rivers, a continent.
> I miss them, but it wasn't a disaster. (l. 10-15)

Here, the loss of time (her mother's watch), places, and keys to homes are personalized into the life of the poet, providing a direct example of how loss is not a disaster, and formally portraying how she herself has mastered it. Stoically, Bishop mentions her losses in a casual tone merely admitting that she missed them, "but is wasn't a disaster." The playful "And look!" also lightens the mood, and makes the poem seem to describe the task of the poet as a comforter for those not yet as experienced, like a wise woman speaking to a child.

The following caesura beginning the final stanza finally introduces the major source of the feeling of loss, and that is the loss of a loved one:

> -- Even losing you (the joking voice, a gesture
> I love) I shan't have lied. It's evident
> the art of losing's not too hard to master
> though it may look like (*Write* it!) a disaster.

This stanza in particular exposes the repressive qualities of mastering loss, revealing that perhaps loss is never really mastered, and "art" remains artificial. The unique memories for "you" appear only parenthetically, as if of secondary importance, as if they are being repressed. The claim that "it's evident / the art of losing's not too hard to master" introduces the superlative (not *too* hard) and the "evident" coming across as quite an understatement. The final parenthetical command to "*Write* it" ultimately characterizes the exercise of mastering loss through art as a form of repressing the actual feeling of loss. As if despite herself, the poet claims that loss is easily dealt with, that it's not a disaster.

Alice Quinn's inclusion of the sixteen drafts written for "One Art" in *Edgar Allan Poe and the Jukebox* before Bishop decided it is publishable is, as many critics agree, one of the most valuable items in the collection. Indeed, for the purposes of this thesis, the drafts stand as a tangible example of the artistic process. While Bishop's first draft titled the poem "How to Lose Things" or "The Gift of Losing Things," it is only in draft fifteen that the title becomes "One Art." While the first title implies that losing can indeed be mastered, and prompts readers to expect a process detailed in the poem, the second title takes the understanding of loss to a new level by implying that losing is a "gift," and so prompts readers to expect a poem about how wonderful loss is. Another development in the drafts is the last stanza. In the final version, the stanza is as such: "Even losing you (a joking voice, a gesture / I love), I shan't have lied. It's evident/ the art of losing's not too hard to master/ though it may look like (Write it!) like disaster."

In the first draft the stanza is more heavy and dramatic: “a good piece of a continent/ and another continent – the whole damned thing! / He who loseth his life, etc. – but he who/ loses his love – never, no never nevernever again.” This accentuation of the pain and loss of control involved in losing love develops in draft nine to become more controlled, though nonetheless admissive of the control being wholly feigned. After asserting once more that the art of losing isn’t hard to master, Bishop continues: “All that I write is false, it’s evident/ The art of losing isn’t hard to master. / oh no. / anything at all anything but one’s love. (Say it: disaster).” In draft ten, the line “All that I write is false” becomes “I’ve written lies above,” and in draft eleven, “I wrote a lot of lies.” After a messy, almost unreadable draft twelve, draft thirteen finally removes any admission of falsity: “I haven’t lied above,” Bishop asserts. In draft fifteen, Bishop writes: “these are not lies,” though the word “are” is crossed out and replaced by “were.” In this process of revision, Bishop seems to struggle with her own conviction that she has mastered her loss, and her ability to write controlled verse that truly reflects her state of mind, a verse that comes across as “true” rather than “false” and artificial. The final version of the poem mentions lying in the form of “I shan’t have lied;” in using the future perfect tense, Bishop is describing an event that took place before another event that had then been the future, and which is now the present. That is, the logical continuation would have been “I shan’t have lied…if only I knew what I know now.” Thus, losing love, for Bishop, was what finally convinced herthat controlled poetry is not a realistic way of behaving in lived experience; it is not a realistic form of dealing with disaster. It is this realization, expressed in the forced demand to “Write it!,” to publish disaster, that makes art an activity of loss, rather than a process of controlled confrontation of loss.

The Bishop in the unpublished poems, or unpublished versions of published poems, seems to deal with her uneasiness in easier terms: instead of trying to find order

externally (in nature or art) and transpose it onto her own feelings, she rather takes these feelings and transposes them onto her art and vision of the world. Thus, the unpublished poems question the assertion that poetry is an experience and a journey by demonstrating the inability of powerful feelings of loss to be altered by these "experiences." Further, they question the reward of aesthetic vision when it is informed by a personal, imaginative, and particular intellectual attitude that seems incompatible with the real world of experience. Bishop's poetry seems to have been more of a struggle to control losses, a struggle to bring loss to level of the ordinary. The unpublished poetry reveals, with passion, the un-ordinariness of loss, its overwhelming intensity and power.

# CHAPTER V

# CONCLUSION

Writing in the Mid-Twentieth century, Elizabeth Bishop wrote with a rare and reticent voice compared to her contemporaries. Unlike Bishop, poets such as Robert Lowell and John Berryman would explicitly wail about their internal states of being. In "Skunk Hour," Lowell writes:

> One dark night,
> my Tudor Ford climbed the hill's skull;
> I watched for love-cars. Lights turned down,
> they lay together, hull to hull,
> where the graveyard shelves on the town. . . .
> My mind's not right.
>
> A car radio bleats,
> "Love, O careless Love. . . ." I hear
> my ill-spirit sob in each blood cell,
> as if my hand were at its throat. . . .
> I myself am hell;
> nobody's here--
>
> only skunks … (l. 25-36)

In these lines, Lowell claims to "hear" his "ill-spirit sob in each blood cell," a strong, even perhaps a little melodramatic cry of pain. In a similar spirit, Berryman expresses his loneliness in "Dream Song 40" as such:

> I'm scared a lonely. Never see my son,
> easy be not to see anyone,
> combers out to sea
> know they're goin somewhere but not me.
> Got a little poison, got a little gun,
> I'm scared a lonely.
>
> I'm scared a only one thing, which is me,
> from othering I don't take nothin, see,
> for any hound dog's sake.
> But this is where I livin, where I rake
> my leaves and cop my promise, this' where we
> cry oursel's awake.
>
> Wishin was dyin but I gotta make
> it all this way to that bed on these feet

where peoples said to meet.
Maybe but even if I see my son
forever never, get back on the take,
free, black & forty-one.

For Elizabeth Bishop, loneliness and internal struggles were similarly something she had to struggle with all her life. As quoted in my introduction, she admits in a letter to Lowell that she views herself as "the loneliest person who ever lived" (*The Letters of Robert Lowell* 288-289). Yet, she believed in the refinement of an art that could control and frame such overbearing, seemingly uncontrollable feelings into understandable and easily manipulated proportions. The way Bishop went about achieving this sense of control is through placing emphasis on the physical eye over the subjective "I" when the latter, representative of personal experience of difficult circumstances, is too chaotic, overwhelming, and shattering to control. The physical eye, in this case, is able to control the "I" in its objective observation of the external landscape and objects and is thereby granted the free space to develop, and perhaps reach a place of comfort. What the unpublished poetry unravels is this internal sphere of darkness often repressed and contained beneath a perfected formal surface.

"The Armadillo" is an example of the poet's withholding of a subjective "I" and an aesthetic reliance on the eye. Depicting the Brazilian custom of floating celebratory fire balloons on saints' days and festival days, the poem illustrates the beauty of these objects as they rise in the night sky, resembling stars and planets. Simultaneous with their fragile beauty, Bishop makes sure to mention the danger they pose; though they rise majestically, they may also fall flaming to earth, destroying natural life. The animals in the poem emerge from their burnt nests shocked and afraid. Even the armadillo is described as defenseless. Attesting both to the cruelty and the beauty of these balloons, Bishop's subjectivity remains obscure as she maintains objectivity and is only an aesthetic observer of the scene.

The last stanza of the poem introduces a dramatic quality in the verse lines, although carefully avoiding sentimentality and the subjective engagement of the "I." Bishop writes:

> *Too pretty, dreamlike mimicry!*
> *O falling fire and piercing cry*
> *and panic, and a weak mailed fist*
> *clenched ignorant against the sky!*

Panic and misery here, are a quality of the animals, and not the poetic persona herself. Surely humans are not "ignorant" regarding the balloons, yet, like the animals, they are vulnerable and helpless in the face of greater disaster. It is significant that Bishop dedicated this poem to Robert Lowell, at the time he became a conscientious objector when the Allied command began fire-bombing German cities. Pointing directly to these bombings, this stanza expresses the helplessness involved in facing terror. Yet, it refrains from any direct references to the events of the world (history), from expressions of the self (subjectivity), and from self-pity. Unlike Berryman's and Lowell's respective voices in the excerpts provided above, Bishop comes across as controlled, refined, and sophisticated, despite any strong feelings of helplessness, loneliness, and vulnerability she may be feeling.

As mentioned in my introduction, critics such as Helen Vendler rage against the publication of Bishop's uncollected poetry, primarily due to their being less formally refined and thus fall short of her exacting best. I would attempt to rephrase Vendler's statement in the context of this thesis to say that she actually objected to the surfacing of Bishop's "I" at the expense of her objective eye. In other words, as Bishop's voice resembles Lowell's or Berryman's in these excerpts, it seems to have lost its value in the critical sphere. This thesis has attempted to reveal the relationship between the "eye" and the "I;" it has attempted to trace Bishop's creative, aesthetic process of composing "publishable" poetry, a process that reveals the immense control that went

into writing poetry for Bishop, which should both increase the appreciation of her published poetry and re-evaluate the significance of the unpublished poems.

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